impact

University of Idaho Extension programs that are making a difference in Idaho.

Engaging youth in outdoor education at wildlife day camp

AT A GLANCE

University of Idaho Extension addresses the critical need for regional youth to build practical outdoor skills, emergency preparedness and environmental stewardship through the Wildlife Day Camp.

The Situation

In regional Idaho communities, access to structured, hands-on outdoor safety and environmental education is often limited or unavailable for youth. Post-program evaluations and strong demand from families in previous local youth initiatives have demonstrated a clear, ongoing need for accessible skill-building in the outdoors. This need was directly reinforced through ongoing planning meetings and collaborative discussions with U.S. Forest Service partners—who co-host our overnight youth camp and administer the Junior Ranger program — highlighting a clear demand for structured backcountry preparedness and local stewardship education. Without foundational knowledge in wilderness navigation, emergency first aid and outdoor safety protocols, youth face significantly increased physical risks when independently engaging in recreational activities across nearby public lands and rugged national forest areas.

Furthermore, developing an early, immersive appreciation for local ecology, outdoor recreation, and historic agricultural traditions is essential to fostering the next generation of environmental stewards and community leaders. Missing these foundational developmental opportunities during formative years can leave youth disconnected from their local natural resources and unprepared for environmental encounters



Extension Educator Chandra Vaughan teaching the youth about native wildlife with an interactive game.

Our Response

In response to this need, University of Idaho Extension, Blaine County, organized and delivered a collaborative, highly interactive Wildlife Day Camp at the Stanton Crossing Campground. The program aimed to provide a zero-barrier, experiential environment where local youth could learn critical survival skills, hands-on conservation concepts and specialized outdoor disciplines. The comprehensive curriculum blended direct, expert-led safety demonstrations with immediate hands-on practice across core outdoor disciplines, including basic wilderness first aid protocols, archery safety and body mechanics, wildlife tracking

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and local landscape ecology. To maintain high energy levels and accommodate diverse learning styles, the camp utilized engaging physical teaching aids, interactive game structures and small-group rotating stations that transformed abstract concepts into memorable, tactile learning opportunities.

Program Outcomes

Through hands-on instruction in wilderness safety, first aid and archery, the program successfully equipped 29 area youth and 14 adults with the confidence and knowledge necessary to safely navigate and appreciate Idaho's natural landscapes. To measure effectiveness, 32 participant teaching evaluations were collected and analyzed, tracking instructor clarity, audience engagement and specific actionable skills gained. Across all evaluations, 19 of 32 respondents (59%) — and 90% of those who answered the open-ended prompt — identified at least one concrete, actionable skill or safety practice they planned to implement immediately. Program leaders utilized this direct participant and family feedback to immediately assess teaching quality and identify high-interest project areas for future programmatic expansion.

The camp demonstrated an overwhelmingly positive impact on participant knowledge, safety confidence and future club engagement:

- Safety preparedness — Over 90% of evaluated participants reported strong agreement that the information shared met their immediate educational needs and enhanced their safety awareness. Specifically, nine participants explicitly noted plans to practice first aid, stay calm during injuries, or pack personal first aid kits into the woods, family campers and vehicles.
- Skill acquisition — Campers successfully mastered foundational outdoor recreation mechanics, with 10 participants listing specific hands-on practices — including archery, onsite food cooking, fishing and wildlife study — and youth noting plans to formally adopt archery as an official 4-H project for the upcoming year.
- Continued interest — The program sparked substantial interest in advanced outdoor and agricultural tracks. Youth explicitly requested future training modules in backcountry cooking, wilderness survival, fishing tactics and water ecology, ensuring a robust pipeline for future enrollment.



Youth learning about first aid in the wilderness and building a first aid kit to take home.

The Future

Building on the success of this event, University of Idaho Extension plans to host an annual Wildlife Day Camp incorporating direct participant and volunteer feedback to deepen youth engagement. Future programming will expand the instructional curriculum to feature dedicated stations for outdoor camp cooking, backpacking techniques, wilderness first aid and specialized youth fishing track. This fishing track will explicitly focus on critical water quality testing, riparian zone protection and state fishing regulations. To optimize delivery and accommodate diverse learning paces, future camps will introduce structured age-grouped cohorts, active team-building recreational games such as field tag, and an updated lunch schedule to improve campground traffic flow.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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