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Local Partners Host Students At Ichetucknee Springs State Park For Day Of Hands-On Learning



Students gather at the Ichetucknee Head Spring to hear from Dr. Marc Minno, District Water Resource Coordinator on the role of macro-invertebrates in Florida's springs and the importance of water quality efforts.

Live Oak, FL, November 22, 2016 – Over 200 Fort White Middle School sixth grade students recently experienced a dynamic outdoor classroom at Ichetucknee Springs State Park in Columbia County, FL. Students participated in experiential education activities for topics including: water conservation, macro-invertebrates, prescribed burning, enviroscares and pollution awareness, alligator biology, archeology in the springs, snake species and birds of prey.

“The goal of the event is give kids a taste of the outdoors and to expose students to the natural systems that they will be learning about throughout their middle and high school curriculum,” said Sam Cole, event coordinator and environmental specialist with the Ichetucknee Springs

State Park. “We’ve found that many students from the local area have never even visited the park, but only live a few miles away.”

Lead by staff at the Ichetucknee Springs State Park, partners from the Suwannee River Water Management District, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, educators at Fort White Middle School, volunteers, and O’Leno State Park staff, each expert mans a station on a specific subject matter to provide information and answer questions.

“Collaboration with our schools and District water and environmental experts allows students to experience not only physical access to these priceless areas but also opens the window to experiential learning and life-long impacts,” said Noah Valenstein, executive director of the Suwannee River Water Management District.

Since 1999, the event has hosted more than 1000 students from Fort White Middle School. The event has expanded over the years and included more topics to ensure students received a well-rounded experience. Students complete work assignments and essays as part of the event.

“Every year our students look forward to the event,” said Trini Johannesen, sixth-grade teach at Fort White Middle School and director of the Fort White Parknership. “Students have produced project-based displays, videos, power point presentations and story books based on the event that have been presented at various school and community functions.”

The Fort White Parknership was created between the state park and school to formalize the relationship and provide organized opportunities for students to experience the outdoors. The Fort White Parknership is part of the state-wide Learning in Florida’s Environment (LIFE) program that is operated by Friends of Florida’s State Parks organization.

The Suwannee River Water Management District manages and protects water resources for the support of natural systems and public use. The District operates on the tenants of sustainably managing water quality, water resources, natural systems and flood protection. The District is committed to the belief: water for nature, water for people.

For more information and to learn more about the District, visit www.mysuwanneeriver.com or follow us on Facebook and Twitter, search @SRWMD.

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