



History of "Yellow Belly Ponderosa"

The "Yellow Belly Ponderosa" outreach program combines culture, arts and science to convey a lifelong connection to and understanding of sustainable forests, teach outdoor skills, encourage physical outdoor activity, promote interest and knowledge of the natural sciences, and connect kids with the natural world. The program provides messaging that includes forest health and restoration, stewardship of our natural resources, the value of science, wildfire mitigation and safety, and flash flood safety. More specifically, messaging includes: 1) What the forest used to look like; 2) How the forest became sick; 3) Why forests need to be thinned and burned; 4) Why taking care of native plants and wildlife is important; 5) How science helps us take care of the forests; 6) Why kids would want to be a scientist; 7) How to prevent and prepare for wildfires and flooding and; 8) Why children would want to play in the forest.

The program began with a partnership between the Greater Flagstaff Forests Partnership (GFFP), and a local charter middle and high school, Flagstaff Arts and Leadership Academy (FALA). The "Yellow Belly Ponderosa" is an exceptional program because the older kids are teaching younger kids through an interactive and educational performance. In its first year of existence, the program provided 12

performances at elementary schools and for the broader community in Flagstaff. More Kids in the Woods (MKIW) funding has allowed the program to improve and expand with shows in 10 schools/communities targeting remote populations of Native American students and their families in or near the Hopi, Navajo, Yavapai Apache, Kaibab Paiute tribal lands adjacent to the Kaibab and Coconino National Forests.

In addition, Salt River Project (SRP) also funded this program to develop pre- post-lesson plans for the fourth and fifth grades to meet Arizona State Standards. The pre- post-lessons enrich children seeing the performance by teaching key concepts to the students before they see the program and enforcing them after the performance is delivered. The reinforcement provided by the lessons as well as the actual performance, will solidify the concepts introduced in the literary, physical and environmental science disciplines. Children will be excited about scientific concepts as they watch Fox and Raven travel through the forest and learn about key messages relating to forest health and restoration through stories told by the talking trees and other animals. The students will also

participate in evaluations that will measure changes in perceptions and knowledge through creative writing and visual arts exercises. These exercises were “judged” by the older FALA students and awards will be given to schools, classes and individual students, commending their participation in the program and for producing the highest ranked evaluative product. SRP also professionally filmed the production, so schools across the State can participate in the lessons, evaluations, and performances, even if they did not have the opportunity to see it “live.”