

MEDIA STORY

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Camps introduce kids to possibility of futures in forestry

School's out, summer is upon us, and kids across the province will be stuffing their backpacks with mosquito repellent, sunscreen and sleeping bags, and heading to one of many wilderness camps for an adventure. There's a broad range of forest-based camps in BC, all providing unique outdoor experiences, three of which have ties to a woodlot licence.

With the pending crunch in forestry labour (according to BC government's Forest Sector Strategy as many as 25,000 forestry job openings are projected in the next 10 years as existing workers retire) and the growing concern that young people are becoming separated from nature, these camps – some of which are open year-round – provide a vital environmental service to our communities.

Gavin Lake provides programs year round and is supported by a number of forestry sector donors, the Cariboo Woodlot Education Society (Woodlot Licence 552) being the largest, providing \$20,000 in funding in 2013. It provides programs year-round. Forest education is a core part of its mandate, so it's an added benefit that Gavin Lake shares its footprint with the UBC/Alex Fraser Research Forest. During the school year the camp offers broad-ranging modules including: archery, map-reading/orienteering (geocaching), wetlands, species-at-risk, and trout habitat. After learning about riparian health the kids are tasked with building the "perfect stream" for rainbow trout.

At Gavin Lake you'll find retired teachers and foresters who turn their individual interests into engaging modules centred on forest education. Visitors to the Forest Discovery Trail will find themselves on a one-hour hike with a volunteer forester who teaches species identification, explores the dynamics of the ecosystem, even logging practices if the trail intersects an experimental clearcut.

Camping in a "working forest" is part and parcel of the experience at Silver Lake Forestry Centre in the Okanagan Valley. Woodlot Licence 345, operated by the Kamloops Woodlot Education Society, surrounds the camp, and kids are given the chance to hike through this managed forest.

For the past four years Silver Lake has been managed through a partnership between the YMCA-YWCA Central Okanagan and the Silver Lake Education Society, and offers both school programs and the traditional summer camp experiences. The

lodge was rebuilt in 2006 after a fire and the water system upgraded from financial contributions from Woodlot 345. The grounds include a Forestry Education room equipped for school groups, physical challenges like high-rope courses and watersports, as well as outdoor educational opportunities such as interpretative trails and geocaching treasure hunts, during which campers have to find, for example, certain kinds of trees.

The faculty is made up of university students who receive training from retired forestry professionals, and they promote a “no trace” camping ethic. Kids learn to build shelters and fires and understand, and respect, their natural environment.

Kids get a comprehensive forest-based education in the Kootenays, as well, at the Blue Lake Forest Education Camp, adjacent to a woodlot managed by the East Kootenay Woodlot Education Society (Woodlot Licence 445). In addition to support from local forest companies and the federal government, profits from the operation of the woodlot licence also go to support the camp.

Thanks to the support of the East Kootenay Woodlot Education Society one of the camp faculty is a dedicated Woodlot educator. The successful candidate is generally a student in forestry or environmental sciences who takes campers on guided tours through the active woodlot. Children learn about the full scope of operations, seeing silviculture, planting, and harvesting practices in person.

BC's wilderness is a rich learning environment for future foresters and global citizens, and we're very fortunate to have this “environmental service” in our backyard.

**For more information:
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