

FIELD NOTES

Summer 2025

A Note from Canuche



Summer at the Wenatchee River Institute (WRI) is full of happy voices, laughter, wet shoes, and sandy hair. Kids come together to lap up the sweetness of summer on the banks of the Wenatchee River. Our talented Field Educators, Jack, Mikey, and Fern, grab the

attention of squirrely groups of campers, captivating them with everything from making bird calls to exploring the river. These experienced educators teach outdoors year-round and truly know our local kids and schools.

The puzzle is a looming lack of funding to keep the programs going. We're working on a plan to make sure we can continue to get these kids outside and keep putting on meaningful programs. In tumultuous times, focusing on local impact is good medicine. Making sure every kid grows up with the chance to see themselves as a naturalist is what motivates me to come to work every day. I'm excited to share one of my favorite programs with you, and I hope it resonates with you, too!

A stylized, handwritten signature of Canuche Terranella in black ink.

Canuche Terranella
Executive Director



Traveling Naturalist Program

Not all students and schools have the resources to visit the WRI campus to walk our trails, watch birds, explore the river, and get up close and personal with nature. The Traveling Naturalist in the Classroom (TN) Program was created to reach more students and increase access to environmental education in North Central Washington, with a special focus on schools serving low-income populations and a high percentage of students of color.

Since 2019, the TN Program has connected countless students with nature, enabling them to explore science and their local environment. Generously supported by the Williams International Fund, Fordham Street Foundation, Washington State Recreation & Conservation Office, and a local family, this work has allowed WRI to serve students who might not otherwise have these experiences.

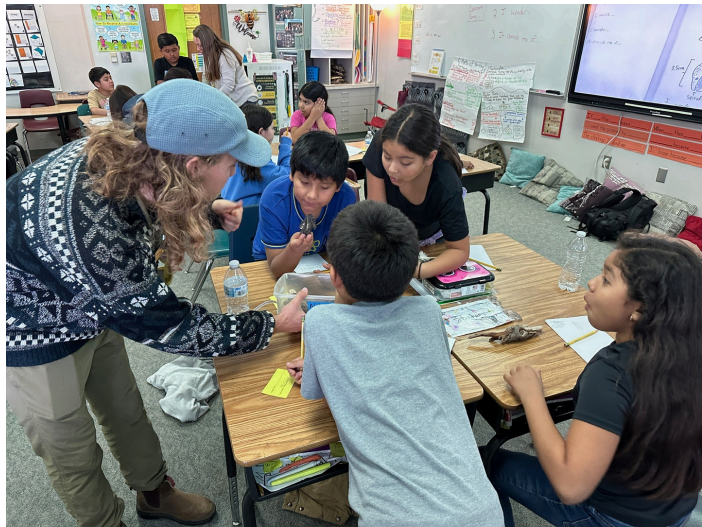
"These types of exposures to science are rare for our students."

Local School Principal

As you may know, this was a rough year for outdoor education funding in Washington State, which directly impacts WRI. Many of the funding sources are no longer available, putting this vital program at risk for the upcoming school year. We are deeply committed to continuing this work, but we need your help to keep the program alive. Read ahead to learn more about the impact this program makes!

Outdoor Education On-the-Go: Traveling Naturalist

Do you remember the magic of exploring outdoors as a child? For countless students in our region, genuine outdoor experiences beyond a city park or playing field are a rarity. That's where WRI's Traveling Naturalist in the Classroom (TN) Program steps in, bringing nature's wonder directly to 4th and 5th grade students across eight schools in six North Central Washington school districts!



*In the 2024-2025 school year, WRI Field Educators, like Jack (above), spent **84 school days** visiting 4th and 5th grade classrooms – that's **over 250 classroom visits!***

WRI Field Educators are welcomed into each classroom for a lesson every month, and students also embark on at least one Field Day to the WRI campus or a natural area around their school. Kids become explorers: whether studying erosion on a fall hike, identifying birds in spring, or journaling about their nature discoveries. Every

experience is an adventure designed to spark students' curiosity and kindle a lifelong love for the environment.



WRI Field Educators, like Mikey (left), build relationships with these students throughout the year!

The air buzzes with excitement as students playfully uncover the secrets of the natural world, one lesson and one season at a time. They become nature detectives, spotting subtle changes, unraveling the mysteries of the world around them, and marveling at the delicate balance that keeps our ecosystems ticking.



Students from Pioneer Elementary learned from Indigenous educator, Julie Edwards, about her culture and basket weaving during their Field Day at WRI this spring!

As they learn about their environment, they also learn the importance of preserving the cultural heritage that has shaped their region. A 2-year Outdoor Learning Grant from the Washington State Recreation & Conservation Office allowed WRI to amplify the TN Program by including Indigenous voices and knowledge in all Field Days. Three incredible Indigenous educators joined us in the last two school years to lead engaging activities like beading, basketry, and storytelling.

"I loved that we got to do cool activities that we normally don't get to do"

Bailey, 5th Grade Student

For many of the students, these outdoor adventures are their very first! By working directly with schools, WRI can ensure that every student is reached, no matter their background. Averaged across the schools served in the TN Program, 82% of students are BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), nearly 90% receive free or reduced meals, and 50% are multilingual learners.

"The Traveling Naturalist in the Classroom Program provided our students with opportunities they wouldn't have had otherwise."

Local School Principal

For many students, the TN Program is the highlight of their school year. Just last year, WRI Field Educators made nearly 10,000 impactful interactions with students across all of WRI's Youth Programs, with the TN Program accounting for more than half of those! As a dedicated WRI volunteer since 2009, Tim (affectionately known as Turtle Tim to students) shared:

"This is a prime age to get these kids aware about their environmental impact, how to take care of the place they live, and truly get that awareness into their heads, hands, and hearts."

Turtle Tim, Volunteer

The TN Program's impact goes far beyond the educational benefits. It addresses a real need in our communities: as kids struggle with anxiety and loneliness, the time they spend outdoors becomes a powerful antidote. The TN Program builds confidence in kids, who might not otherwise see themselves as people who enjoy nature, to explore the world outside like a naturalist just like the WRI Field Educators that they look up to all year.

"Thank you so much for teaching us about birds and bugs, now we're experts about that stuff. We hope to see you again!"

Emma, 4th Grade Student

Every lesson, every Field Day, and every shared story builds a foundation for something profound. Students don't just learn about nature; they learn from it. They develop critical observation skills, a sense of wonder, and a profound appreciation for their local ecosystems and the cultural knowledge intertwined with them. This hands-on, culturally rich education transforms their perspective, empowering them to become curious stewards of our shared natural world.

We'll be sharing more soon about how you can make a difference in these students' lives. Thank you so much for your continued commitment to WRI's mission!

Right: Fifth grade students hopped on a bus from Manson Elementary for a Field Day at WRI! They learned from Indigenous educator, Amanda Keewatinawin, about her culture and made new beaded creations.



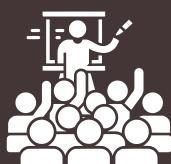
In the 2024/2025 School Year...



3 Indigenous Educators



8 Elementary Schools



34 4th & 5th Grade Classrooms



755 Students



5,454 Interactions with Students

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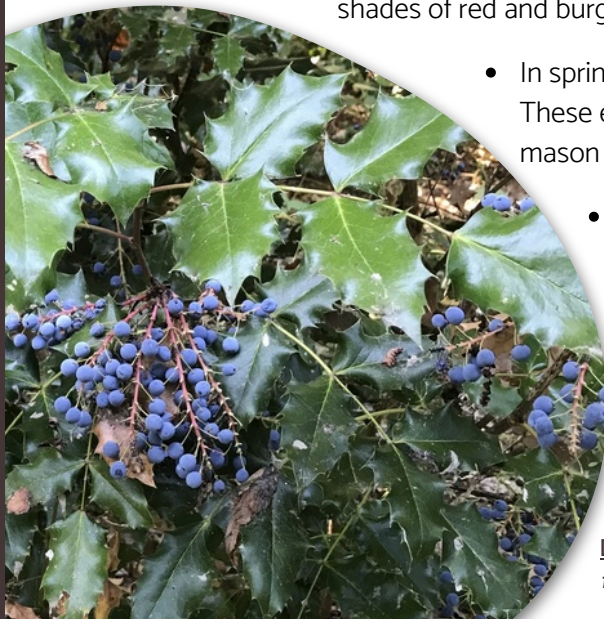
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WRI's Nature Journal

Entry No. 7: Oregon Grape (*Berberis sp.*)

You either love them or or hate them, but Oregon grape really is an awesome native plant that you can find all over the WRI campus. We have 3 species here: tall Oregon grape, Cascade Oregon grape, and creeping Oregon grape. Keep reading for some fun facts!

- The shiny, stiff, leathery leaves have sharp points and look similar to holly leaves. They turn lovely shades of red and burgundy in the fall and winter.



- In spring, they boast clusters of small, bright yellow flowers. These edible blossoms are a favorite of butterflies and mason bees, and can even be used for teas and lemonade!
- By late summer, you will find their dark purple-blue berries which are a favorite for many local critters. They also make a delicious jelly or syrup when combined with sugar or other sweeter fruits.
- The roots and inner bark are a bright yellow color and can be used for creating bright yellow dye and have many medicinal uses!

Disclaimer: Please refer to an official guide while foraging for edible materials. Eat foraged items at your own risk.

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- A Note from Canuche
- Traveling Naturalist Program
- Outdoor Education
- On-the-Go