

It's Academic

*V*olunteers come in all shapes and sizes—and in all ages too. Students from elementary through graduate school have been making a real difference through their volunteer efforts on public lands. It only takes a few examples to demonstrate the impact that energetic and enthusiastic young people can have.

Take two University of Alaska archaeology students who conducted a survey of features along the historic Davidson Ditch north of Fairbanks. The ditch is on the National Register of Historic Places and dates to the 1920s and 1930s, but it has never been properly inventoried. The students gathered detailed descriptions of features associated with the ditch and logged GPS coordinates, all of which will contribute to better management of this historic resource in the future.

Students at Mattole Elementary School in California have been taking part in Adopt-a-Beach and Coastal Cleanup projects for nine years. In addition to science activities and a beach cleanup, this year fourth, fifth, and sixth graders put up a new mural at the Mattole Campground in the King Ranch National Conservation Area. As part of their learning while volunteering, the children each did an in-depth study of a particular sea creature, which they then painted on the mural.

Students come from foreign countries, too, to learn and volunteer on public lands. Experience International, a non-profit organization in Everson, Washington, sponsored several students in 1999, who worked with BLM resource professionals one-on-one. BLM benefits from the work of bright and eager volunteers, who in turn receive training and experience in their chosen fields.

They say that teachers “touch the future.” Thanks to a teacher in Florida, the future may yield a crop of young people pursuing careers in natural resources. At Jupiter Community High School, Environmental Research and Field Studies Academy, one teacher has served as a volunteer recruiter for BLM special projects for three years. He and his students participate in National Public Lands Day events that often evolve into year-long projects. This past year, student volunteers assisted with a wetlands restoration project that included re-planting more than 7,000 mangrove seedlings in Jupiter Inlet Natural Area.

The future for Jupiter Inlet looks brighter, and so does the future at many BLM sites across the country—thanks to the work of our many student volunteers.