



American Institute Of Marine Studies

Press Release May 28, 2004 AIMS Works to Establish a "FOR-EVERGLADES"



Fred Kraft, President of the American Institute of Marine Studies (AIMS) sponsors a student-led program that promises to help preserve the Everglades forever

A Seminole wind blew freshly across the glades, cooling the faces of campers that sat "Indian" style listening to AIMS students tell the story of the Caloosa Indians and the Big Cypress Swamp. A campfire blazed warmly near-by as the students gave a slide show projected onto a wooden screen in the park's outdoor amphitheater.



The students are part of a service-learning group that follows the waters of the Southern Florida Watershed. The concept is unique. AIMS students camp for 3 days in five parks located in the divide. They do some volunteer work and leave with an education about life in the everglades. Fred Kraft says "The parks love it when these kids show up for the week end. Together, 30 students and five teachers are like a small army of workers. What amazes me is that the kids basically run the show."

Big Cypress National Preserve is just one location in the Kissimmee – Okeechobee – Everglades – Florida Bay system," says teacher Sharon Thomas. "Last month we were in Everglades National Park and Biscayne National Park. Earlier this fall, we were up at Lake Kissimmee State Park, Kissimmee Prairie State Park (by the Kissimmee River) and Pahokee State Park on Lake Okeechobee. Our students meet with park naturalists and plan their activities before hand. They monitor water quality as they go to each park. The information is entered on the Internet through www.globe.gov. They enter real time data onto their laptops in the field, take pictures of the wildlife and create a power point presentations for weekend campers and school children in their classrooms"



Park Naturalist and Education Coordinator for Big Cypress, Lisa Andrews said "We don't have enough time to monitor the water quality everywhere in this giant preserve so we really do appreciate the data that the kids get. In turn we teach them about the fragile environments and a little history to give them some insight to the past."

"You have to know a little about where you come from before you can know where you are going." said AIMS Everglades student Scott Simpson. "In Lake Kissimmee State Park we learned about the history of the Florida "Crackers" and about the old cow camps of the Kissimmee River Plane. I never knew "Crackers" got their name from the sound that the bull whips made when they used them to get cows out of the scrub after the Civil War" "How about the ghost of Black Cesar who (campers think) still haunts the island of Elliot Key (Biscayne Bay) from the pirate days? They all seem so real when you tell people about them around a campfire." said student Adam Davis.



AIMS Everglades Watershed students will begin the program again next year and every year starting in November. Your contributions will help to preserve the Everglades and enrich the cultural education of our community. If you wish to get involved with helping kids help our Florida State Parks, please contact Fred Kraft at AIMS.

"Education is forever when you help the efforts to restore our Everglades. Our kids are the leaders of the future and they will always remember what they have learned." says Kraft.