

April 27, 2005  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
Contact: Lisa Isaacs 760.934.0773

## **EARTH WEEK AT MAMMOTH SCHOOLS FOCUSES ON HABITAT CONSERVATION**

**MAMMOTH LAKES, CA** – While winter refused to relinquish its hold on the Eastern Sierra, Mammoth Elementary students were planting native shrub seeds and learning about insect habitats and conservation.

Kindergarten through sixth grade children were treated to lessons by visiting experts over the week preceding Earth Day, April 22, 2005. Students learned about habitat conservation and habitat problems in local fisheries like the Owens River. Older students learned about the New Zealand Mud Snail, an invading species in many of our rivers and streams. Fourth graders started bitter brush seedlings to place in the native plant garden at the middle school.

Since 2000, Mammoth elementary students have celebrated Earth Day by concentrating on topics of environmental concern including global warming, resource conservation and sharing habitat with wild animals. In addition to presentations by scientists and other specialists, children participate in hands-on activities and receive Earth Day gifts related to environmental issues. Earth Day art projects have ranged from making masks with recycled materials to writing poetry about protecting the earth.

Kristie Reddick, a graduate student currently working at the Sierra Nevada Aquatic Research Lab (SNARL), took her insect friends into the kindergarten, first, second and third grade classrooms to talk about habitat. Ava, a Chilean Rose tarantula, and Pies, a giant African Black millipede, illustrated Kristie's point that despite looking very different, insects like to have a safe habitat to call home just like we do. Kristie commented the students at Mammoth Elementary were fantastic to teach and had great questions about all sorts of bugs.

Sherry Taylor, an environmental education teacher at Valentine Reserve in Mammoth, worked with the fourth grade on a special project; a lasting gift to the community in the shape of a native plant garden. Funded by a grant from the California Native Plant Society, Sherry teaches children the importance of native plants and how introduced species can out-compete or smother native plants. The project continues year to year as the garden matures and more native plants are added.

Fourth, fifth, and sixth grade classes learned about habitat destruction by New Zealand Mud Snails. These tiny snails were discovered in the Owens River in 2000 and are native to fresh waters of New Zealand. The snails graze on algae. Unchecked, they will deprive native insects like caddis and stone flies of food for their larvae. Makenna Dawson, a student in Mr. Glende's fifth grade said, "Debra's talk changed my way of looking at mud snails and made me more aware of how they are destroying our native aquatic invertebrates. Aliens have attacked our county!"

Sixth graders in Ms. DeJonghe's Earth Science class at Mammoth Middle School explored a variety of current environmental issues including recycling, depletion of the ozone layer, and the greenhouse effect. Earth Day gifts of recycled temperature sensitive pencils, sunscreen, "power down" stickers and key chain thermometers reinforced the lessons on climate change and provided the students a fun way to carry their new knowledge home.

Earth Day activities are planned and directed by the Earth Day Educational Consortium; Valentine Eastern Sierra Reserve, Mammoth Mountain Ski Area and California Department of Fish and Game. Earth Day gifts for the students are supplied by Mammoth Mountain Ski Area, Banana Boat Suncare and the Natural Resources Defense Council.

# # #