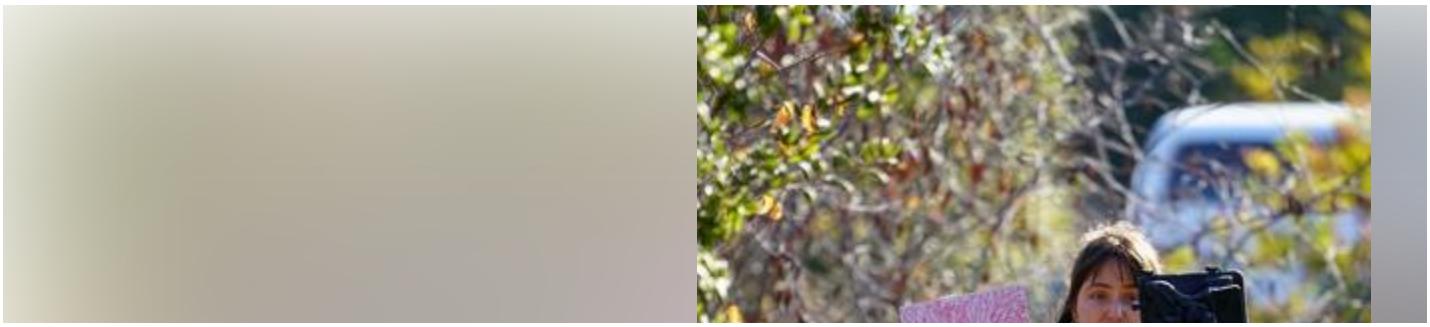

VALLEJO — Vallejo third-graders from Highland Elementary recently met some animals many of them never thought they would get to see up-close: three crabs, a pregnant goby fish, a fuzzy bumblebee and wiggly water bugs.

Their experience, which also included nature journaling, movement and making observations about the local waterways, all took place virtually as part of a live-streamed field trip hosted by the Solano Resource Conservation District at Glen Cove Waterfront Park.

The field trip program, now in its 16th year, is called Watershed Explorers. Centered on the impacts drought and stormwater pollution have on the local watershed, the program aims to connect students to what's happening with nature in their own communities.

More than 2,000 Solano County third-graders in a typical year join Solano Resource Conservation District staff at a local park to experience the program in person. Just over 2,100 students joined the program virtually this year.

"When our primary goal as an environmental education program is to bring students together in the outdoors to explore their local watershed, it's needless to say that this year certainly provided us with an interesting challenge," said Allison Martin, education manager for the Solano Resource Conservation District, in a press release.

“The pandemic prompted us to reimagine every program we offer into something that could be done virtually. Personally, I never thought I would be asking students to type their nature observations into a chat box, but it’s still better than them not connecting to nature at all. We have found that this live, virtual field trip inspires students to go out and explore nature on their own,” Martin said in the release.

The Solano Resource Conservation District will wrap up Watershed Explorers and its other K-12 programs by the first week of June.

Education Director Marianne Butler anticipates that around 10,000 students will have participated in the district’s virtual programs this school year, and that the district will work with 12,000 students next school year thanks to funding from the Solano County Water Agency.

“We hope to be back in Solano County’s parks and classrooms with students next year,” Butler said in the press release. “But just in case, we’re now prepared to do in-person or virtual programs – whatever’s needed to best support local schools, students and our county’s health and natural resources.”

The Solano Resource Conservation District is a non-regulatory special district to the state of California that works to protect, restore and enhance Solano County watersheds through its education, restoration and partnership efforts.

Its environmental education programs are funded by the cities and county of Solano, the Solano County Water Agency, the Fairfield-Suisun Sewer District, the Vallejo Flood and Wastewater District, the Greater Vallejo Recreation District with a grant from the California State Parks Habitat Conservation Fund, the Vallejo Water Conservation Program, Solano Irrigation District and Potrero Hills Landfill.

Learn more at solanorcd.org or call 678-1655.

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