

Trees do More than you “Wood” Think! Fort Dix Celebrates Earth Day

By Jennifer Tronco-Armento



Tour leaders show the oldest Sweetgum tree in NJ

On April 19, 2008 over 500 guests at Fort Dix learned how trees enhance our lives and provide us with hundreds of everyday products. With 90 volunteers and presenters, the Fort Dix Environmental Division and Natural Resource Office were able to present a variety of topics all themed around the concept of “Trees do more than you wood think.”

Guests attending the event had the chance to meet Smokey Bear, watch a sawmill in action, learn about “goods from the woods,” observe chainsaw and decoy carvers at work, take interpretive hikes with naturalists from local Nature Centers, investigate trees of the New Jersey Pine Barrens, interact with live animals, learn to read tree cookies, and even get harnessed up and climb a tree with Aspen Tree Experts.



A representative from the Forest Resource Education Center explains how a forester mills timber with this portable sawmill

One of the main highlights of the day was van tours to Fort Dix’s Champion Sweetgum tree. At 108 feet tall and over 18 feet around, this 289 year old tree has earned its title as the New Jersey Champion Sweetgum and is being considered for the National Champion as well. Visitors touring the site had a chance to learn about the biology and habitat of this species of tree, count the rings on a homemade tree cookie (yes, it had 289 rings & was made of plywood, not flour), and view a historic timeline entitled “In the life of a Sweetgum.”

The event, held at Laurel Pond, also featured a brand new puppet show written by Natural Resource Management Scientist Roger Smith, and performed by the Woodland Creature Theatre cast. During lunch guests were entertained by local musicians playing wooden instruments such as a didgerie doo and Native American style flutes.

Fort Dix Outdoor Recreation sponsored canoeing on the pond throughout the day and the Arts & Crafts Center, with Child & Youth Services, hosted an arts and crafts tent with 4 different activities. The USCG Atlantic Strike Team was also on hand to give demonstrations and showcase their new robotics.



As a part of the national Earth Day Groceries Project (www.earthdaybags.org) 2 local supermarkets donated paper bags for kids to decorate with Earth Day messages about products that trees provide. The bags were then returned to the stores and were used to bag groceries on April 22, the National Earth Day. And, if these activities didn't provide enough action guests could attend a prescribed burn led by Natural Resource Management Scientist Roger Smith and the Fort Dix Fire Department. After a discussion on wildfire ecology and the importance of fire management, the crew prescribe burned an area adjacent to Laurel Pond.

Kids learn how to read tree rings and make their own tree cookies



A prescribed burn demonstration & discussion of fire ecology

In addition to the Earth Day activities at Laurel Pond, Fort Dix Elementary School also celebrated National Environmental Education Week from April 14-19. Jennifer Tronco-Armento and Mike Dunphy from the Natural Resources Office visited the school throughout the week to give lessons for grades K-3. The kids got a chance to become a living tree factory, plant seedlings, play games about tree life cycles, and make tree cookies of their own lives. The kids also decorated over 150 bags for the groceries project.

Earth Day and Environmental Education Week are just one part of the Natural Resource Continuing Education Program at Fort Dix. The office hosts summer camp activities, a nest box monitoring program, a volunteer program, distributes brochures featuring Natural Resource related topics, and publishes a species of the month to educate the community about the flora and fauna of Fort Dix.



Aspen Tree Experts show kids a birds-eye-view of what it's like to work in a tree.