

Student Chapter Gives Back

The University of Montana Student Chapter of AISES (UM AISES) assisted with the construction of Project Teaching Ecological Diversity (TED) native plant garden at the Arlee School located on the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes Reservation. Project TED is the demonstration project developed by the Arlee School ECOS team. ECOS is a National Science Foundation-funded partnership program for enhancing teaching skills of graduate students in the sciences and promoting hands-on science education in K-12 schools. The native plant garden will serve as a memorial for Ted Hesse, a 30-year veteran, first-grade teacher who passed away last winter.

The project will provide a permanent outdoor classroom for studying ecological diversity throughout all seasons of the school year. It will serve as a laboratory for investigations related to exploring the role of ecological relationships in maintaining biodiversity at multiple scales. Students and teachers will be able to monitor seasonal shifts in the biological community, such as variation in bird and insect species with changes in vegetation.

The garden was planted with native plants chosen for their importance as tribal resources and their potential to attract diverse insects, birds and animals. Dawn Thomas, a tribal ethnobotanist at Salish Kootenai College, assisted with landscaping the demonstration project garden. She advised the ECOS team on native plants, planting locations, and provided shrubs and 5-7' trees at very low cost from her greenhouse. The interpretive infrastructure of the garden will be focused on promoting ecological and cultural literacy. The placement of cement casts of common local animal tracks will be installed in the spring along the primary path of the garden. All plants and animal-track castings will have associated placards that will include the traditional Salish name of the plant or animal, common names and the Latin names as well.

The University of Montana AISES student members participated in this project to meet their community service requirements established by the national AISES organization. The students were proud of their contribution to a project that would promote scientific and ecological education in a reservation school district. They celebrated their efforts with the Arlee ECOS team at a potluck barbecue.

For information about the ECOS program, visit www.bioed.org/ecos