**Nevada County camp helps students understand climate change issues, hone advocacy skills**

Climate change has had a big impact on the planet’s water supply — and that’s particularly true in California, which has been suffering from prolonged drought, Teresa Langness told the group of kids gathered in a cabin off Lake Vera Purdon Road.

The students, teamed up in pairs, were then challenged to assume the roles of opposing stakeholders in a watershed, such as a biologist and a water manager, or a farmer and a community development worker. As part of the exercise, each member of the pair had to state how they wanted to use the water supply, listen to the other party’s priorities and come together to offer constructive compromises for sharing water.

The only way to share water is to understand the perspectives of all of those who rely on it, Langness reminded them.

“Climate change forces us to have even more empathy as we have fewer resources at certain times,” she said.

That lesson was just one of many the students experienced during their week at the Nevada County Climate Change Coalition’s Climate Change Agents camp. The overnight camp, which kicked off on Aug. 2 and concludes today, is designed to help local youth understand how climate change affects the local and global community — and what they can do to mitigate its impact.

“We make sure that we’re nurturing the younger generation to understand and care deeply about climate justice.” Teresa Langness, Nevada County Climate Change Coalition

This is the second time the coalition, a local group formed to address global warming, has hosted a youth camp. The camp was limited to 10 students in grades 5-10 who all applied to participate at no cost to their families. This year’s camp was sponsored by the Rose Foundation along with the Nevada County Climate Change Coalition, Forest Issues Group, the Audubon Society, Solar Cookers International and Nevada Irrigation District, with additional contributions from Nevada City Retreats, Mountain Bounty and Full-Circle Learning. A central priority of the Nevada County Climate Change Coalition is community education, said Langness, who is a member of the group. That includes reaching out to the area’s youth.

“We make sure that we’re nurturing the younger generation to understand and care deeply about climate justice,” she said.

During this year’s camp, students participated in a variety of activities, including studying the natural environment at Hirschman’s Pond, visiting an environmentally conscious home in the area and learning about careers that focus on helping victims of climate change at High Sierra Electronics, a Grass Valley company that designs and manufactures environmental monitoring systems.

The students also studied and built solar cookers; they’ll send the materials to replicate the project, and instructions, to a community in Tanzania.

Today, students will spend the morning showing off what they’ve learned with various displays at the Nevada City Farmer’s Market.

All of the camp’s discussions around climate change are infused with learning strategies developed by Full-Circle Learning; the nonprofit’s education model focuses on helping students hone their character strengths, academic skills and other qualities to serve a global community. During the camp, students were challenged to look at issues holistically, with empathy for alternate perspectives and situations, Langness said.

Many of the students who participated in the camp came in with an awareness of climate change, and wanted to learn more.

“It would just be a neat experience to learn about what’s going on around the globe and learn about the effects of what you’re doing to the earth,” said Kaiden Johnson, 12, a student at Clear Creek School.

He said it’s especially important for kids his age to have that knowledge.

“We’re the new generation and we can make a big difference later on,” he said. “We can have a better impact on earth than older people because we’re learning about this stuff at a young age and understand what’s happening.

Zach Damewood, 12, agreed.

Learning about climate change “is important to me because if we don’t do something about it, we won’t have a planet to be on,” said Damewood, also a student at Clear Creek. “We won’t be able to survive on the planet.

Damewood said the camp encouraged him to think more about the ways his family uses resources like water or fuel in everyday life, and how he can do more to conserve. He said there are things his peers can do to help educate others about climate change, including participating in demonstrations or making short films on the topic and posting them online.

That mindset is ultimately what the climate change coalition hopes students will take away from their experience at camp, Langness said. The week is designed to inspire students to learn more about the environment, but also to understand how their skills and actions can affect change on whatever path they take in life.

The goal is “whatever they do in the world, they have a new sense of purpose about it, and that sense of purpose feeds the idealism that we don’t need to give up, we just need to give,” Langness said.

To contact Staff Writer Emily Lavin, email elavin@theunion.com or call 530-477-4230.