



Nature Bridge Olympic Peninsula Institute

By Jane Kelson

After much disappointment when the traditional trip to Yosemite was cancelled due to a flu outbreak in that area, teachers, office staff, and administrators turned disappointment into excitement booking an exploration of the Olympic Peninsula in Washington state.

The trip to the Olympic Peninsula included exploration of temperate rainforests, and learning from experts how climate change is affecting the ecosystems in the area. We also learned of the effects of dams on salmon populations, and then visited the site of a dam removal on the Elwha River to witness the recovery of that watershed.

While on the trip students not only enjoyed applying their science knowledge and skills, but also their art and language skills to the study of the environment. In addition to these academic ventures, there was an emphasis on reflection and social and emotional growth as teachers and students were given the opportunity to interact in an outdoor setting.

Thanks to a departmental grant from MEF, students made friends with peers they thought they had nothing in common with, and learned the joy of lifelong learning. When reflecting on the trip, one student stated, "I realize that if you are curious, you can learn anywhere and from many types of people, and there is a lot to be learned by going outside."