



U.S. Forest Service  
Southern Research Station  
200 W.T. Weaver Boulevard  
Asheville, NC 28804-3454

# NEWS

January 11, 2016

**Media Contact:**

Annie Hermansen-Baez  
352-376-3271 – office; 352-262-6060 – cell  
ahermansen@fs.fed.us

## **KIDS IN THE WOODS TEAM GARNERS REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP AWARD** *Westwood Middle School Connects Students with the Outdoors*

GAINESVILLE, FL -- A local conservation education partnership was recently awarded the US Department of Agriculture Forest Service's Director's Partnership Award in recognition of outstanding and innovative approaches to partnerships with the Kids in the Woods Program at Westwood Middle School in Gainesville, FL. Partners include the USDA Forest Service, University of Florida, Alachua County School District, Gainesville Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Affairs, and Alachua County Environmental Protection Department.

In the fall 2015, the Kids in the Woods program at Westwood Middle School in Gainesville began its third year of connecting 6<sup>th</sup> grade students with local urban forests, creeks, and wildlife. Natural resource agency partners work closely with middle school science teachers to get students out of the classroom and exploring the outdoors. This helps them to connect with local nature, which inspires a greater curiosity, awareness and appreciation for the outdoors.

Students participate in three week-long studies throughout the year that focus on bird feeding behavior, creek erosion and deposition, and tree benefits. Many students also participate in a campout, which includes a night hike, star gazing, and a campfire with s'mores. Over one thousand sixth graders and five science teachers have participated in the program over the last two and a half years.

Kids in the Woods team members included in this award are: Annie Hermansen-Baez and Wayne Zipperer with the Forest Service; Sara Charbonnet, Elizabeth Burt, Christine Henderson, Angie Doherty, Jim TenBieg, and Lisa Peterson with Westwood Middle School; Michael Andreu, Hollie Greer, Taylor Stein, and Danielle Findlay with the University of Florida; Sally Wazny, Lindsey McConnell, and Merald Clark with the City of Gainesville Park, Recreation and Cultural Affairs; Emily Rodriguez with Alachua County Environmental Protection Department; Tony Oyenarte representing Camp Crystal Lake and Camp Lochearn; and Scott Burton representing Camp Crystal Lake.

To learn more about the Kids in the Woods program at Westwood visit:

[www.kidsinwoodsinterfacesouth.org](http://www.kidsinwoodsinterfacesouth.org) or [www.interfacesouth.org/kids-in-the-woods](http://www.interfacesouth.org/kids-in-the-woods)

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Headquartered in Asheville, NC, the Southern Research Station is comprised of more than 120 scientists who conduct natural resource research in 20 locations across 13 southern states (Virginia to Texas). The Station's mission is "...to create the science and technology needed to sustain and enhance southern forest ecosystems and the benefits they provide." Learn more about the Southern Research Station at: <http://www.srs.fs.usda.gov/>.