



PHOTO BY ALLAN GODSIFF

A whirlwind destroyed a shed on Willows Ranch last week.

Nature throws a fit at Willows Ranch

By Kathryn Godsiff
Correspondent

Last Wednesday at 2:20 p.m., Mother Nature let loose with a small hissy fit at the Willows Ranch on Indian Ford Road.

Ranch manager Allan Godsiff was working near the ranch buildings and the afternoon wind was blowing as it often does. Godsiff became aware of an unusual noise and looked toward the outdoor arena near the boundary with the forest. A whirlwind was kicking up dust at the south end of arena near a small shed.

"I couldn't see the shed," he said. "Then there was a big crash and I thought crikey, what was that? When the dust settled a few minutes later, I saw the shed 25 feet from where it had been, smashed to bits."

The shed, which had been built by ranch owners Jim and Judi Knapp many years ago as a playhouse for their children, took out several arena rails and came to rest against another fence. It just missed the electric fence unit that powers fences around the large ranch pastures. Two of the walls were flung about 10 feet farther and lay flat on the ground, with their glass windows intact.

Godsiff said he spent the rest of the afternoon looking around the ranch and wondering about the what-ifs. There were no livestock, people or machinery near the site. Had the whirlwind hit anywhere else on the ranch it would have meant major destruction or injury.

The Knapps, while harboring sentimental feelings toward the old playhouse, aren't planning on rebuilding.

WHYCHUS: Workers took on wide variety of projects

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obviously constructive, a lot of it requires demo work — which seemed to be the most popular type of project for the young forest stewards.

Asked about his favorite aspect of the work, Jacques said — "Breaking stuff."

He got an opportunity to break stuff that he himself had built. The crew took down an elaborate BMX course in the woods — one that Jacques had helped create a while back.

"Some naughty kids built one and we had to take it down," he said with a grin.

Megan Calarco said her favorite aspect of the job was "any time we worked with Mark McCracken."

McCracken is a field ranger with the Sisters Ranger District.

"He made the projects fun," Calarco said. "He didn't talk to us like we were kids. He treated us like ... another employee."

The COYCC foresters can earn \$2,600 in wages over eight weeks, in addition to high school credit and the opportunity for scholarship funds.

The workers were drawn to the program for a chance to do physical work outdoors.

"I really wanted to work in the outdoors and I wanted to get some high school credits," Chelsea Bradley said. "I always like being outside. I grew up in the woods, practically."

The work is more appealing to them than many traditional teen summer jobs.



PHOTO BY JIM CORNELIUS

COYCC workers planted willows and cottonwood along Whychus Creek.

"I'd rather work here than in McDonald's or something," Jacques said.

Some are interested in the potential of a career in forest-related fields.

"I love biology," Anicka Hicks said. Ms. Gillespie, a student teacher in Rima Givot's Sisters High School biology program, recommended the program to her. The program was "beyond my expectations," Hicks said. "It's awesome."

Her favorite project was the Whychus Creek habitat restoration effort.

"I like working for animals and stuff," she said.

The COYCC participants work hard. They agreed that the most challenging aspect of the work was working in high heat with no shade in full PPE (personal protection equipment), which includes long pants, boots, a hard hat and reflective vest.

In the end, they get the satisfaction of many projects completed, leaving their homeland in better shape than they found it. And they have some money in their pockets, credits on their record — and for some a new sense of direction. Some COYCC participants go on to further education and careers in natural-resources fields. At the end of the program, they attend a College Engagement Day where they explore possible next steps.

“ I like working for animals and stuff. — Anicka Hicks

And all of them come away with new-found teamwork skills and a sense of accomplishment.

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