

UC SANTA BARBARA

# *THE Current*

November 20, 2007

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## **UCSB Children's Education Program Receives Prestigious Governor's Award**

Kids in Nature, an innovative children's education program at the University of California, Santa Barbara, is one of two recipients of the prestigious Governor's Environmental and Economic Leadership Award in the category of Children's Environmental Education. The award will be presented at a formal ceremony in Sacramento this evening.

California's highest environmental honor, the Governor's award recognizes individuals, organizations, and businesses that have demonstrated exceptional leadership in voluntary efforts to conserve California's resources, protect and enhance the environment, and build relationships between public and private entities.

A highly regarded program of UCSB's Cheadle Center for Biodiversity and Ecological Restoration and the Sedgwick Reserve, Kids in Nature is designed to enrich the learning experiences of underrepresented and underserved youth in the community. Beginning its seventh year, the program provides fifth-grade students with a year-long learning experience that combines hands-on classroom activities, interactive custom-designed computer simulations, and field trips to the Cheadle Center, Sedgwick Reserve, and Arroyo Hondo Preserve. Activities focus on environmental science, botany, ecology, and habitat restoration.

"I am delighted that the Kids in Nature program has received the 2007 Governor's award in the category of Children's Environmental Education," said Jennifer Thorsch, Katherine Esau Director of the Cheadle Center for Biodiversity and Ecological Restoration at UCSB. She created the program in 2001 with Michael Williams who, at the time, was director of the Sedgwick Reserve, a part of the UC Natural Reserve System. He is now a faculty member in the botany department at Butte College. "This honor is a milestone in the evolution of the Kids in Nature program," added Thorsch.

"Our approach of providing hands-on science education has increased student interest in science, improved student test scores, and provided role models for young girls and boys."

At the Sedgwick Reserve each small group of students works in its own 25-meter plot along Figueroa Creek. The creek is an intact but badly eroded watershed that spills off of Figueroa Mountain just above the Sedgwick Reserve. Selecting plants for their restoration site from a native plant nursery created by former Kids in Nature classes, the students learn first-hand how their efforts will help stabilize the banks and prevent further bank erosion. In addition, they study the restoration efforts of the former Kids in Nature classes.

At UCSB and Arroyo Hondo, students learn about watersheds and environmental benefits such as pollution reduction and habitat enhancement.

The Governor's Environmental and Economic Leadership Awards program was established in 1993 and is administered by the California Environmental Protection Agency and the Resources Agency in collaboration with the State and Consumer Services Agency, the California Department of Food and Agriculture, and the Business, Transportation and Housing Agency.

For more information on the award and this year's recipients, visit [www.calepa.ca.gov/Awards/GEELA](http://www.calepa.ca.gov/Awards/GEELA)

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