



Dear Prospective SLEWS Program Landowner:

Thank you for your interest in the Student and Landowner Education and Watershed Stewardship Program (SLEWS). This packet includes all the information you'll need to know about the SLEWS Program and how you can get involved.

If you are unfamiliar, SLEWS engages high school students in habitat restoration through a series of hands-on field days at real project sites that develop science skills and environmental stewardship in youth. Over the course of three to five SLEWS Field Days and associated in-class lessons, students build their knowledge, skills and personal connection to the land. Each high school class of 30 students is matched with a habitat project where they plant native trees and shrubs, build irrigation systems and participate in ecological field studies. Students see the effects of their work through multiple visits to their adopted project. These integrated learning experiences combine teambuilding, science learning, habitat restoration and reflection activities with outdoor exploration.

As SLEWS Program Manager, I match classes of high school students with suitable habitat restoration projects (planned by a restoration partner, usually an RCD) that they "adopt" for the school year and work on through three full-day field trips. Ideal sites are easy to access (students usually come by bus), have plenty of restoration work for three field days, and a good diversity of tasks so students can do different things each day. Since 2001 the SLEWS Program has helped dozens of private landowners restore wildlife habitat on farms and ranches across the Central Valley.

In the meantime, participating SLEWS students have learned about agriculture and the natural world in ways that would have been impossible in the classroom. They have seen first-hand where their food comes from and the work that goes into producing it. They have learned about the importance of wildlife habitat and experienced the work it takes to restore it.

As a prospective SLEWS landowner, you have an opportunity to join a growing community of stewards who are committed not only to improving the health of their land, but to doing so in a way that enhances the lives and learning of young people.

Thank you for your interest in becoming involved in the program, please read through the information in this packet. Should you need more information, please don't hesitate to contact me.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Allie Dumas
SLEWS Program Manager
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Landowners' Frequently Asked Questions

How did the SLEWS Program begin?

SLEWS began in 2001 when the Center for Land-Based Learning (formerly FARMS Leadership, Inc.) and Audubon California partnered on a grant to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. The program, then called the USS-FARMS program, included high school students from the FARMS Leadership Program in habitat restoration projects on farms and ranches in the Union School Slough watershed. The program has since evolved and grown to work with multiple partners in the Central Valley, as well as SLEWS Affiliate programs throughout the state.

What's the difference between a SLEWS project and the project I was already planning on doing?

The SLEWS Program adds the implementation and education dimension to the habitat enhancement or restoration project you are already planning to do. We organize the students to carry out the restoration tasks determined by you and your project partner in a way that enhances their learning in the classroom. We also strive to make the overall experience for students meaningful, transformative and fun.

What does a typical SLEWS day look like?

SLEWS field days typically begin at 9 AM with an opening circle and team-building activity. This is quickly followed by background discussion and a technical demonstration related to the primary project activity for the day, whether that be planting, irrigation installation, monitoring or any other project task. After a break for lunch at around noon the students reflect on the day's experience in a variety of ways including writing or drawing in their "field notebooks" or participating in learning activities. After a brief closing circle, the students head back to the school at about 2 PM.

How does the SLEWS program select sites?

We work closely with our project partners to select sites that are appropriate for high school students, considering factors such as accessibility, proximity to the school, diversity of tasks and project scale. Generally, we choose manageable project sites that will offer students a range of restoration experiences and a sense of accomplishment, with landowners and partners who are excited about the program and committed to maintaining the health of the property.

How many SLEWS sites are there?

The SLEWS Program typically implements between 15 and 20 projects every year. These projects are spread across the state with our flagship program in Sacramento Valley (based in Woodland), and SLEWS Affiliates run by other organizations in Northern and Southern California.



Who pays for the program?

Funding for the program is provided primarily through our project partners or landowners who contract the Center for Land-Based Learning to include SLEWS students in the implementation of their restoration projects. We also seek grant funding from a variety of private foundations, state and federal sources.

How often will SLEWS students or staff be out on my property?

Typically students will visit your site 3-5 times between October and May. And we'll make sure you are part of the conversation when we set dates for those field days. Occasionally our staff will need to visit the site between field days, to scout the area or to prepare for the work activities, but we'll be sure to clear such visits ahead of time with you.

How can I be sure the students won't come back to the site when they aren't supposed to?

We have never had a problem with students returning to their sites beyond the SLEWS field days. Many of our schools travel 45 minutes to an hour to get to their project sites. By and large the students understand that it is a privilege to be able to visit privately-owned farms and ranches and they respect the privacy of the landowner. If you have specific concerns about this, please talk to your SLEWS coordinator and we'll try to arrange for a distant school to adopt your site.

What about liability? What if someone gets hurt on my property?

The Center for Land-Based Learning provides insurance coverage at all field days. A liability certificate can be provided as needed to reflect this coverage. Liability related to transportation to and from the field days is covered by the school districts and the bus companies. The school districts' insurance also covers all school-sanctioned field trips, which includes all SLEWS activities.

If I decide to participate, what is expected of me?

At a minimum, we ask you to attend the first field day (usually in October, November, or December) and one planning meeting at the beginning of the school year. It is also important that you communicate with your restoration partner to ensure that the site is prepared for field days. We also ask landowners to show their appreciation for the work the students do in the manner they see fit. Please see the Landowner Participation Expectations located in this packet for more details about your commitment.

Landowner Participation Expectations

Your Commitment to the Program:

1. **Attend the first field day**
This is an opportunity to make a connection to the students and introduce them to your property.
2. **Attend the site team planning meeting**
This meeting in late summer or early fall will bring together the teacher, partner, SLEWS staff, and landowner to voice the interests and needs of each member of the team and lay out the schedule for the coming year. Your ideas and unique knowledge of the site are essential to shaping a successful project.
3. **Work with the restoration partner to have the site prepared for restoration work and for student involvement**
4. **Show your appreciation for the students' efforts**
Some gestures suggested by past landowners are writing a thank-you card to the class or sharing the "product" of your farm or ranch with the students.

Other Opportunities to be Involved

- Providing lunch for the students on one of the field days
- Visiting the classroom
- Attending additional field days and working alongside the students
- Participating as a mentor (attending all the field days, leading small groups of students)
- Sharing your expertise with the students (plants, wildlife, farming etc.)
- Leading tours at your site for project partners, funders, or other landowners.