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## Yes, fishing is free this weekend

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A volunteer with the Kittitas County Field & Stream Club, right, speaks with a young fisherman at a free-fishing weekend last year at Fio Rito Lake. *Photo by Kittitas County Field & Stream Club*

ELLENSBURG - You don't have to be a kid to have fun learning how to fish for trout this weekend: the Kittitas County Field & Stream Club will even put fishing poles in the hands of moms and dads.

This Saturday and Sunday, June 9-10, marks the third year the local outdoors club is sponsoring its free-fishing weekend event at Fio Rito Lake southeast of Ellensburg in connection with the statewide free-fishing weekend. No fishing licenses are required this weekend, but all catch rules must be followed.

Lee Davis, who coordinates the local event for the field and stream club, said club volunteers will offer kids and adults free bait, tackle and poles to fish for trout at the lake along Interstate 82. Volunteers also will give free instruction.

Although the event targets kids of all ages who've never fished or don't have equipment, it also attracts adults, mostly moms and dads accompanying their children. Davis said volunteers want to "teach them as much as we can without them knowing they are being taught."

"The big thing is to get kids outdoors, and help them see there is more to the environment than we know," Davis said. "We want to get them excited about the outdoors, and fishing is one way to do that."

The club's free-fishing weekend runs 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday at Fio Rito Lake, accessed off No. 6 Road, and 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Sunday. No. 6 Road can be accessed from Tjossem and Thrall roads and Kittitas Highway.

Those attending the event will learn fishing techniques, safety, observing fish, baiting, handling fish and cleaning fish. They also will learn how to properly release a live fish back into the water.

"I remember last year an entire family came on Saturday, mom and dad and three kids, and all caught their first fish," Davis said. "They brought their own, new poles and equipment. It was great. It gives you a very rewarding feeling."

He said the young daughter of the family won a first place in one of the age categories in the Noon Kiwanis Club's kids fishing derby that was running nearby from 10 a.m. to noon. The derby runs again this Saturday.

On top of that, one of the family's sons earned a Boy Scout outdoors merit badge for taking part in the event.

Davis said the field and stream club, as one of its outreach goals, wants to introduce youngsters to the outdoors.

"More and more we are seeing, especially among teenagers, a disconnect with the natural environment around them," Davis said.

Jim Huckabay, the club's past president and an outdoors columnist, said state fishing licenses for kids 14 and under are not required most of the year, something that can encourage families to head for lakes and streams after reading up on state fishing rules and what areas are open.

"An event like this gets parents out with their kids, and that's a big deal," Huckabay said. "It gets parents thinking about fishing, about sharing an outdoors experience with their children. If they go, they'll bring the kids, too."

He said studies have shown that the increasing lack of outdoor activities contributes to childhood obesity and some types of behavioral problems.

"We should do anything we can to get kids outside and in the woods to touch the ground, see the water, see the sky and touch a fish," Huckabay said.

Making outdoor activities part of a family's lifestyle is not only important for the well being of the kids and adults, he said, but it means future generations will have a better understanding of the importance of preserving open spaces, wildlands and wildlife.

