

Fall is in the air...

...in the coolness of the early morning, as fog envelops low lying areas
...in the leaves swirling gently towards the ground
...in the spiderwebs, stretched between trees and glistening with dew
...in the middle school kids, who have traded in their flip-flops for real shoes,
and pulled on their hoodies as they gather around the campfire for stories
and s'mores.

The prairies are magnificent, big bluestem and Indian grass 8 feet tall and reaching skyward. Sunflowers, black-eyed Susans and goldenrod accent the prairie and beckon to butterflies and other insects. Zebra striped Monarch caterpillars have filled up on milkweed and transformed from caterpillar to chrysalis to beautiful butterfly, and gather energy as they prepare for migration. Children romp through the tall grass, nets in hand, hoping to capture one of these living jewels just long enough to collect data and place a small tag on a paper thin wing. On the other end of the route, another group of people will gather in the mountains of central Mexico to study the butterflies that are successful in their journey.

The woods are alive with sound...

...woodpeckers tap tap tapping in search of a tasty meal
...cicadas, crickets and katydids creating a chorus of chirping and buzzing
...children happily discovering...

snails, beetles, Indian pipestem!

...and realizing that no matter how cool the toad is, it needs to go back into its habitat, and NOT your pocket!

A 5th grader examines the rotting log turning into forest soil almost right before her eyes. "So this is what is meant by renewable resources, I get it now!"

"It's all here! Everything we have been learning about in school...is ALL HERE!" exclaims Jennifer.

Ahhh...there is just something so perfect about the combination of kids and the outdoors...everything just seems to fall into place!