

Heil Valley Ranch Foothills Ecology Hike

20 to 60 Students

Time: 2 - 3 hours

NOTE: This outline is a suggested program template. Please modify or tailor your approach to be appropriate for your program and the size of the group.

Location: Heil Valley Ranch (HVR) Open Space: Group picnic shelter and Lichen Loop or Grindstone Quarry trails.

General Program theme: The ponderosa pine ecosystem provides a habitat for many plants and animals. Specific topics will vary with the teacher or school's requests.

Staffing: The number of VNs will vary with size of the class(es). There needs to be 2 VNS for the larger hiking groups (20 students +) and 1 VN for groups of 10 to 15 students. There will also be at least 2 parents/teachers for large groups or 1 parent/teacher with small groups of students.

Program Set-up:

Decide at the planning meeting whether you will include stations in the program for this group of students.

Program flow with stations:

- Two or three stations can be set up in & around the Picnic Shelter. Check with the Natural History Program Specialist for concepts that are to be stressed. This could be a station on a specific animal that lives at HVR, like the Black Bear, Wild Turkey, or Mule Deer. Resources - such as animal mounts, pelts, scat, skulls, antlers, *etc.* - are available for check-out at the VN Center. Concept stations could be a station on Fire Ecology, or the Ponderosa Pine habitat, or the herbivores, carnivores, and omnivores that live at HVR.
- One of the stations can be an activity, like *Oh Deer!* (see Project Wild) or a search for colors matching a set of paint chips.
- Schedule your time at stations for 30 to 40 minutes to allow enough time for the hike. **If the school bus is late**, shorten or cancel time at the stations to allow sufficient time for a hike on the trails.

Program flow with a trail hike and planned stops:

- If you decide not to set up stations before the hike, you will need to pre-hike the trail and plan your stops. Bring the resources along in your backpack.
- Planned stops on the trail should be related to and support concepts requested by the teacher for this school group.

Be flexible the day of your program. Program time is also dependent on the bus schedule.

Program Procedures:

- When the school bus arrives, one VN should board the bus, welcome the class, and briefly describe the program schedule.
- Review responsibilities of parents and teachers with the adult leaders at the picnic shelter before beginning the station rotation and hike. The guidelines are outlined in the field trip attachment titled *We Love Our Adult Leaders*.
- If doing station: Divide the class(es) into their groups and rotate through the stations and/or activity. Total time at the stations and/or activities should be planned to allow sufficient time for a hike. If only doing hike: Divide the class(es) into their groups and take restroom stop.
- Following the wildlife stations and/or activity, have parents/teachers take students to the **restrooms** while resources are being put away in VN vehicles. NOTE: **Do not leave interpretive props at the shelter while hiking.**
- The VN leader for each hiking group will bring a **First Aid kit** and a **radio**.
- Remind students to bring water & a snack for the hike. Organize the hiking groups and hike one of the trails. Hike for 1.25 to 1.5 hours. Include a snack stop in your hike. The Lichen Loop and Grindstone Quarry trails are open to hikers and horses only. If you take the group for a hike on the Overland or Wapiti trails, be aware that these trails are also used by bicycles.

Program Tips: The Natural History Program Specialist will contact the teacher and:

- Ask the teacher to divide students into groups prior to their arrival at HVR and have them wear name tags (first names only), if possible. Name tags help VNs personally engage students.
- Check with the teacher to find out what concepts are to be stressed and background that the students have in foothills ecology. This should be done before meeting to plan the program.
- Remind the teacher that students need closed toe shoes, water, sunscreen, snacks/lunch, and jackets or rainwear, if necessary.

Reminder: It is the Contact VN's responsibility to schedule a planning meeting and facilitate communication between all VNs. All VNs are responsible for participating in planning and leading the program. The Contact VN will also contact the teacher with any questions the team has and to set up email or text message communication for any changes the day before or day of the program (the weather, a late bus, *etc.*).