

# Heil Valley Ranch Ecology Hike

## Large Group--50-60 Students

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

Location: Heil Valley Ranch Open Space: Group Picnic Shelter and Lichen Loop Trail

Program Theme: The ponderosa pine ecosystem provides a habitat for many plants and animals.

Possible Concepts:

- Ponderosa pine ecosystem
- Habitat (food, water, shelter, space)
- Food chains (wildlife examples: mountain lion, black bear, Abert's squirrel, Great-horned owl)
- Predator/Prey relationships
- Herbivore, carnivore, and omnivore feeding strategies
- "Nature detective" approach for the hike (looking for evidence of wildlife: tracks, scat, nests, tree cavities, etc.)
- Sensory experience (group quiet time with eyes open/closed)
- Trail safety (e.g. lions, bears, weather, rattlesnakes, etc.)
- Geology
- Forest management and fire mitigation

Staffing: Divide the VNs into four groups of 2 VNs each. There will also be at least one teacher or parent with each group of students.

Program Resources and Set-up: Four picnic tables in the group shelter will be set-up as interpretive stations (Feel free to substitute stations as necessary to tailor the program to the needs of the group):

- o Table 1: Mountain lion (lion skull, pelt, track, scat, and deer antler, track, and scat)
- o Table 2: Black bear (mount, skull, pelt, track, and scat)
- o Table 3: Abert's squirrel (mount, "feeding sticks," and ponderosa pine cookie)
- o Table 4: Great-horned owl (mount, skull, and pellet display)
  - o Note: If conditions are windy at HVR, do not expose GH owl to the wind; keep owl out of the wind in VN vehicle adjacent to the picnic shelter and use vehicle as one of the interp stations.

## Program Procedures:

\*After introductions, form into four groups and make restroom stops. Two of the groups (~12 students per group) will hike the Lichen Loop Trail first; one group in a clockwise direction, the other group counter-clockwise (~ 1.5 hour hike).

\* The other two groups will remain at the picnic shelter and can be split into four smaller groups with one VN per group, or can remain in two larger groups with two VNs per group. Each group will move between the tables (lion, bear, squirrel, owl), interpreting each animal and reinforcing the concepts of habitat and food chains. About 7-8 minutes should be spent at each table, or about 30 minutes total. (A timer should be used to facilitate movement and maintain the 30 min. program.)

\* After all of the small groups have visited each of the tables, the students will be re-formed into two groups of ~12 students and hike the Lichen Loop Trail, one group clockwise, the other counter-clockwise.  
(~1.5 hour hike)

\* The two groups that initially hiked the trail will return to the picnic shelter, divide into smaller groups, and visit each of the interpretive tables. Hike should take about 90 minutes. Be sure to return in time to visit the shelter stations!

\* Interpretive materials should not be left unattended at the picnic shelter.

## Tips for programming

Ask the teachers to divide the students into four groups prior to their arrival at Heil and to have them wear name tags if possible.

Check with the teacher to find out what concepts need to be stressed and what background the students have. Draw out this information from the teacher, if possible--are they doing units? What topics? Is the hike an introductory or culminating activity?

Remind teachers that kids should wear closed toe shoes, and should bring water, snacks, jackets and rainwear if necessary.

**REMINDER!** The contact naturalist is the facilitator of the program and will contact the other naturalists and the teacher. Program planning is collaborative and input from all naturalists is important!