

Wetlands Ecology Program

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

Locations: Walden Ponds Wildlife Habitat, Pella Crossing, or Stearns Lake at Carolyn Holmberg Preserve at Rock Creek Farm

Program Theme: Wetland ecosystems provide diverse habitat for many plants and animals, improve water quality, and help mitigate flooding.

Possible Ecological Concepts:

- Wetland ecosystems
- Habitat (food, water, shelter, living space)
- Food chains (wildlife examples: invertebrates – fish – white pelican)
- Predator/prey relationships
- Herbivore, carnivore and omnivore animal feeding strategies
- Diurnal, nocturnal, and crepuscular animal activity strategies
- Insect and amphibian metamorphosis
- “Nature Detective” approach in looking for evidence of wildlife: tracks, scat, nests, etc.
- Sensory experience (group quiet time with eyes open, closed)

Staffing: Three or four naturalists along with parents and teachers.

Program Resources and Set-up: Interpretive stations each staffed by one Volunteer Naturalist (VN). Feel free to substitute stations as necessary to tailor the program to the needs of the group.

- Station 1: Picnic Shelter
Wildlife of the wetlands with interpretive resources (taxidermy mounts, pelts, and track, scat, & skull replicas) of wetland birds, mammals, reptiles and/or amphibians.
- Station 2: Boardwalk (Walden), along the trail (Pella & Stearns Lake)
Observations of birds & other wildlife with binoculars & spotting scope; *Bird Shapes* activity.
- Station 3: Functions of the wetlands in water storage and purification and regulation of water flow.
Water Resources activity - VN website
- Station 4: Duck Pond (Walden), Sunset Pond (Pella), water’s edge at Stearns Lake
Pond Dipping for Macroinvertebrates activity - VN website
or a station on beavers (Walden at the picnic table near the Resource Center)

Program Procedures:

- The school bus arrives and VNs meet the class at the picnic shelter. VNs should welcome the class and briefly describe the program schedule.
- Review responsibilities of parents and teachers with the adult leaders at the picnic shelter before the station rotation. The guidelines are outlined in the field trip attachment titled *We Love Our Adult Leaders*.
- After an introduction to the class, ask the teacher(s) to help divide the class into **three or four groups**. VNs and a teacher or parent volunteer will walk with their group to their station.
- Depending on the total program time, about 20 to 25 minutes should be spent at each station, allowing for a 5-minute walk between stations. **For each group, designate a parent, teacher, or VN as a timer to help you stay on time. (smart phone or watch timer; kitchen timer – available at Walden Ponds VN Center).**
- VNs will stay at their stations. Parents and/or teacher will walk the groups of students between stations.
- When the groups have visited all of the stations, the class will regroup at the picnic shelter for a conclusion. This summary/conclusion may be given while kids are having their lunch.

Program Tips:

- Ask the teacher to divide students into groups **prior to their arrival** at the park 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 need to be stressed and what background the students have. Is this an introductory or culminating activity? This information should be shared by the Contact VN with all VNs before planning the program. Also, remind teachers about name tags.
- The Contact VN should also remind the teacher that students need closed-toe shoes, water, sunscreen, snacks, jackets and rainwear, if necessary.

REMINDER: The Contact Naturalist's responsibility is to facilitate communication between the VNs and the teacher, and between the naturalists themselves. All VNs are responsible for participating in planning and leading the program.

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VN Joyce Costello