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For information on receiving a complete copy of the ***Corporate Lands for Learning Guidebook: Opening Private Resources to Public Education***, or to schedule a site visit, contact WHC's Education and Outreach Program Manager at ell@wildlifehc.org or call (301) 588-8994 for more information.

Planning an Effective Outdoor Lesson in the Corporate Habitat

Environmental education goes well beyond outdoor activities. At its best, it includes detailed discussion and analysis in the classroom before and after students visit the site. On-site activities should relate directly to the learners' needs and interests and reinforce concepts covered in the classroom. The best environmental education materials are correlated with state and national education

standards so that teachers are assured that the lesson will move students' knowledge and understanding forward, building a proficiency in key concepts and skills.

Project Learning Tree (www.plt.org), Project WET (www.projectwet.org), Project WILD (www.projectwild.org) and Project WILD Aquatic (www.projectwild.org) are widely recognized and fulfill many of these goals. Lesson plans begin with a set of clearly defined and measurable objectives to open-ended questions that allow students to explore what they know about a topic. The outdoor activities are rated for effectiveness and include in-class discussion designed to further understanding and provide new information for a deeper appreciation and analysis of the topic.





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Flying WILD (www.flyingwild.org), aimed at middle school students, focuses on meeting goals set forth in the national science standards, as students, teachers and community volunteers plan and conduct activities at a community “bird fair” event. Assessment instruments in all the programs help teachers measure the skills and knowledge gained by students through discussions and activities.

Extension and enrichment opportunities are provided so students can continue learning beyond the lesson plan. This fully integrated and customized approach assures teachers that the activities from these leading curricula will directly assist them in meeting their educational objectives and goals for their students. Teacher training opportunities are available for each of the recognized curricula as well, ensuring educators have the confidence and background knowledge to apply these exemplary curricula to the CLL environment.

Teaching in the CLL Habitat The outdoors offers many challenges and rewards. However, modifications must be made to traditional teaching behaviors and techniques when teaching in this environment. Fortunately there are several things the teacher or group leader can do to properly prepare. The following ideas will help ensure the outdoor experience is an enriching one for students and teachers.



- **Visit the site beforehand.** Educators should become familiar with areas of interest and potential hazards around the corporate facility, as well as locations of poison oak and poison ivy. They should also be aware of wild animals known to inhabit the site, such as snakes, wolves, bears, alligators and coyotes. Before visiting the site, students must be advised on proper behavior around wildlife. Teachers should use extra care in wetlands and ecologically sensitive areas. Look for wildlife signs that can be pointed out to students during a visit. Exploring the site beforehand allows teachers to formulate rules and estimate how much time will be spent at the area.





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- **Estimate trip duration.** How long the trip will last should be determined based on how far the site is from the school, how extensive the site is, length of the lesson plan and class period and the age and grade of students visiting the site. Educators need to consider how long it will take to reach the study area upon arriving. At some sites it may require a 10-minute walk to the desired study area, while other locations may be quickly reached from the parking lot. Each teacher knows his/her own students best, however, younger children tend to have shorter attention spans than older students. A single activity or program may only hold the attention of small children for approximately 45 minutes, while adults and older children may remain attentive for up to two hours. Don't forget to consider the number of breaks incorporated into the program when determining how much time is needed.

- **Establish rules to protect the students and the site.** Students must be aware of all rules beforehand, as well as consequences of breaking these rules. Rules should include establishing a buddy system, staying with the group, staying on the trail and designating meeting points and times. If water is present on site, additional rules will need to be adopted for student safety. Teachers should also emphasize the difference between finding and collecting. Students should not remove or damage items found; instead, they can keep a journal, draw pictures or take photographs.

Students and teachers alike should carry out of the area only items they carried in. An excellent rule of thumb is to “take only pictures, leave only footprints.” Make sure none of your group leaves litter. Finally, meeting points and times should be established in case students become separated from the group. Possible meeting points can include outdoor classroom areas, parking lots, open fields, piers or designated stations on interpretive trails.

- **Make the lesson EXPERIENTIAL.** Keep lectures to a minimum, allowing students time to experience the habitat through focused activities that generate investigative questions. Use inquiry-based teaching methods to encourage students to investigate and observe on their own. Lesson plans that encourage hands-on activities in small groups will usually do well in a relaxed outdoor environment. Besides valuable lessons about the environment, these activities will help students to build essential process skills.





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- **Bring all necessary equipment and supplies.** Students can gather and arrange equipment and supplies as part of a pre-visit activity. Refer to your planned activity or lesson plan to ensure nothing is forgotten. Field guides can be especially useful, but avoid taking papers or books near the water unless the papers are laminated or in plastic protectors.

- **Make yourself seen and heard.** When speaking, position yourself in the middle of the group where all students can see and hear you. Also, try to face the sun so that most of the students will have their backs to it and won't need to squint.

- **Emphasize the value of silence.** Most animals will hide or run when there is too much noise, silence also lets us appreciate surrounding sounds. Have students remain silent for 60 seconds or longer and ask if they notice anything new. The outdoors is a wonderful place to use all the senses, but remind students never to taste anything of which they are unsure.

Be enthusiastic and flexible. Nature is unpredictable—teachers must remain flexible and maintain a sense of humor. Take advantage of those “teachable moments” that stimulate student interest and curiosity. Sighting a deer in the woods

will excite students and teachers will find it difficult to re-focus students on original activities. Take advantage of the sighting to discuss deer and their niche in the community, look for deer tracks or discuss the status of the deer population in your area. Accept surprises as challenges and opportunities for exploration—not as distractions!

Ideas for Teaching in the Corporate Wildlife Habitat The following is a partial list of activities, facilities, features and projects that can be used as you brainstorm with your Education Advisory Committee on ways to use your wildlife habitat for environmental education. Use this list to help generate ideas. Many of these projects involve hands-on, minds-on activities that engage the students. Some programs and activities foster inquiry-based educational process. Remember that each site and program will present unique options for teaching students about the environment.





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Consider the following educational projects and activities for your CLL program:

- Map your watershed
- Learn about home conservation
- Undertake stream or lake restoration
 - Establish a WHC Wings of Wonder program to study migratory wildlife (http://www.wildlifehc.org/corporatelands/wings_of_wonder.cfm)
 - Join a stream-monitoring program (i.e., Adopt-a-Stream)
 - Conduct water quality inventories
 - Try birdwatching
 - Try creative nature writing
 - Keep a nature journal
 - Host beach/trail/site cleanups
 - Establish or care for nature trails
 - Develop interpretive materials for nature trails
 - Inventory/monitor nest boxes or restoration projects
 - Study a pond or stream
 - Develop a scavenger hunt to seek seasonal changes along a nature trail
 - Explore winter ecology
 - Study forest ecology
- Learn plant identification
- Conduct composting
- Try orienteering
- Establish an outdoor classroom
- Plant wildflower gardens for pollinators
- Track animals
- Establish erosion control demonstration areas
- Conduct school or community recycling programs (at corporate site also)
- Hold Earth Day or other special events
- Build and place bird/bat/other nesting boxes



In addition to the above, the CLL site can be used to train teachers and employee volunteers in environmental education. These training sessions should showcase environmental education in your state and promote Flying WILD (www.flyingwild.org), Project Learning Tree (www.plt.org), Project WET (www.projectwet.org), Project WILD (www.projectwild.org), Project WILD Aquatic (www.projectwild.org) and other credible, educationally sound programs and materials available to teachers.

