

## **Animal Science Abstract: Wild About the Outdoors**

### **Scope and content of the program:**

The Wild About the Outdoors camping program was initially crafted to ignite a love for the native wildlife and the outdoors among young participants. Designed by two agents with backgrounds in agriculture and natural resources, the program is especially pertinent in Florida, where ecosystems, habit loss, and land management are major concerns. Camp activities encompass animal encounters, field trips across North Central Florida to get hands on experience with industry experts, soil and water science, land management and mapping, orienteering, and critical thinking activities. Geared towards youth aged 8-13, this age group is chosen for its inherent curiosity and receptiveness. The program aims not only to deepen their understanding of these subjects but also to instigate behavioral shifts towards preservation, sustainable practices, and conservation advocacy. Participants engage in diverse field experiences including kayaking on the river, fishing in University ponds, dip netting in fresh water ponds for invertebrates, learning to read and follow maps to find different points, navigate their way around the wilderness, leave no trace on hiking programs, identify native and invasive wildlife, learn which agencies to report wildlife sightings to, how to engage with citizen science projects in their communities, participate in conservation activities like building shelters for wildlife and restoring coastlines, catch and identify insects, build soil layers to learn about run off and soil varieties, explore the aquifer and learn how it works in Florida, and have the opportunity to engage with expert speakers who meet with our group from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission, Land Trust and other advocacy groups, Soil and Water Board members, agriculturalists, state park rangers, University faculty members, and other environmental educators. By week's end, youth depart with newfound skills, a profound appreciation for nature, and the capacity to champion responsible land use and preservation.

**Number of people reached by the program:** This program has been taught in 4 counties to 194 individuals.

### **Collaborative efforts with natural resources agencies/organizations.**

Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission- tours/ animal encounters  
Nature Coast Biological Station- Sea Grant State Agents- tours/ animal encounters  
UF Fisheries Department- dip netting, invertebrate ID, fish ID  
Otter Springs rangers & Hart Springs department head- swimming and safety talks  
Santa Fe Zoo- animal encounter  
Local agriculturalists- animal and land management discussions  
The Nature Center at Omni Amelia Island Plantation- scavenger hunts on the beach  
Itchnutucknee Springs Department Head- kayak trip and animal ID ispy  
Alachua Land Trust- kayak trip and conservation discussions  
Gilchrist Soil and Water Board- water use and development speaker

Florida Forestry Service- tree and insect discussions  
Homosassa Springs Wildlife Park- native wildlife encounters  
Florida Friends of the Springs- springs tours  
Wild Bill's Alligator Tours- alligator tour and citizen science  
Lubee Bat Conservatory- bat conservation and development activities  
North Florida Falconry- animal encounter and food web activities  
Florida Farm Bureau- land management and conservation speaker  
Florida Department of Agriculture- Soil and water sciences- water and soil speaker

### **Educational value and the significance of the effort on the environment:**

#### Objectives:

- Youth will engage with animals and industry professionals to help them learn more about native species, land management, and preserving Florida so that ecosystems can thrive
- Knowledge gain in a variety of natural resources topics as documented by pre and post surveys
- Develop life skills in science communication as evidenced by observation in discussion topics during camp
- Increase resiliency, teamwork, communication, and self confidence through annual 2 person team kayaking trips

Utilization of multiple teaching methods: lecture, small groups, guest speakers, field trips.

Complimentary Activities: crafts, games, books, public speaking, videos, etc.

### **Impact of the educational program on the community and or 4-H program:**

Pre/ Post Camp Questionnaire was distributed, observational analysis was conducted.

96% reported increased science communication skills

100% increased their score on the post evaluation for natural resources knowledge gain

100% of youth reported increased safety knowledge, confidence, and teamwork life skills as reported in the post camp assessment

Youth increased natural resources awareness and conservation efforts by learning about leave no trace trips.

Youth learned to identify native species of plants, trees, and animals. They also engaged with industry professionals and increased their knowledge about ecosystems and land management.

7 youth who attended camp have since reported selecting college majors or pursuing careers post high school graduation in the major areas of fisheries, wildlife, soil science, agriculture, and forestry.

**Description of innovative teaching and learning strategies used:**

The Agents planned these programs with the primary focus on hands on, experiential learning. To achieve this, students participated in small group and paired activities where they worked together to critically think about impacts on native wildlife. They learned about food webs, food chains, native species identification, invasive species issues and negative impacts we utilized arts and modeling to have students present their findings. Additionally, several field trips were planned and students had the opportunity to travel to various locations to boat, kayak, collect specimens, participate in citizen science data collection, learn to geolocate species through tracking units and orienteering, practiced land management and conservation advocacy talks and even got to encounter some animals with guides from the FWC, UF faculty from fisheries and wildlife, falconry guides, etc. Students worked on ispy activities and scavenger hunts to work on their observation and identification skills.

**Involvement of adult and teen volunteers and other youth (if applicable) in key leadership roles:**

Intermediate/Senior 4-H youth volunteers – assisted with activities by working directly with participants, mentored participants, and served to demonstrate when needed. Return campers led orienteering and served as team leaders in the team kayaking adventures each year. Youth volunteers also helped younger youth as group leaders on field trips, they led activities like land management/ecosystems creation, small space games, and identifying species.

Adult volunteers – Educated children during activities in the field and within the classroom, lifeguarded on water trips, chaperoned and helped foster an environment of belonging for youth to feel safe and be engaged. This camp is extremely hands on and quite a bit of time is spent on outdoor activities that require close safety instruction and small group teaching/ observation.





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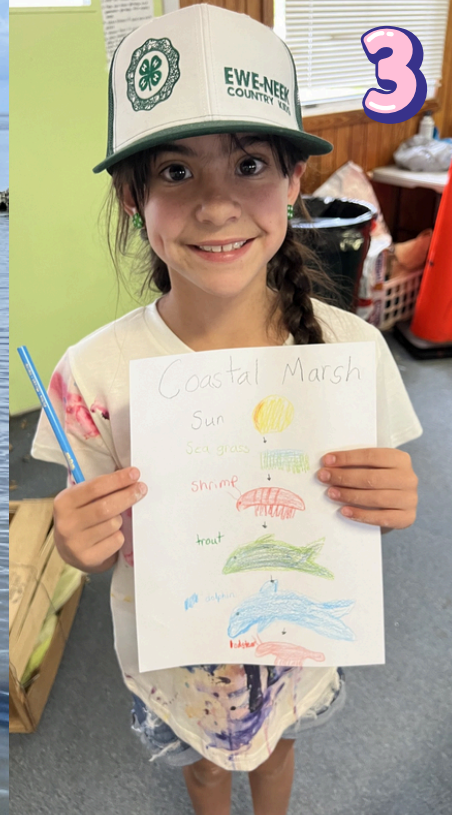
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1. Orienteering challenge
2. Visiting Santa Fe Zoo and doing a keeper talk to learn about the animals
3. Casting animal tracks with plaster after learning to identify various animal prints
4. FWC presenting about their monitoring work with deer, panthers and other native wildlife at the water discharge site
5. Learning about and making soil profiles, then testing the time it takes to filter water and how well different soil substrates do
6. Learning about snake sheds
7. Touching an invasive monitor lizard and learning about ecosystem threats and damage





# Wild About the 6 Outdoors

**JULY 10-12**  
**AGES 8-13**  
**COST IS \$65**

A 3 day camp focused on soil and water science, native and invasive wildlife, and orienteering where youth will explore the outdoors and gain a further appreciation for natural resources.

To register or for questions please call (352) 463-3174

1. Fishing at the university fresh water research center after learning how to identify native fish.
2. Exploring Cedar Key oyster beds and learning about coastal erosion research
3. Drawing food chains and learning about webs and ecosystems
4. Observing a young alligator on a pad on the Rainbow River during a kayak trip ispy game
5. Dip netting for invertebrates
6. The promotional flyer used to advertise this 4-H program





1. Dip netting and learning to identify invertebrates in the field
2. Taking a closer look at field specimens caught during dip netting, then learning about their impact on the ecosystem.
3. Kayak clean up trip removing trash from the Suwannee River with the Trust
4. Taking an air boat tour to see alligators and help with a population study monitoring alligator movement in the Withlacoochee River
5. Team kayaking and practicing resilience and teamwork while building self confidence and communication life skills on the Chassahowitzka River/ tributary area.