

Sheldon Lake Environmental Learning Center

Texas Parks and Wildlife

PROCEDURE

In order to provide a safe, yet natural experience in our state park, we ask your group to follow the following guidelines:

NATURE WALK/ECOLOGY PROGRAM

- 1.) A **group leader should visit the Learning Center before your field experience** to “get the lay of the land” and learn the best route to the site. (Key Map 42nd ed., pp. 417, 457)
- 2.) To maximize safety and a positive nature experience, **group size for the nature walk should not exceed 25 children.** (An additional 25 children may participate in another activity, such as fishing, at the same time. One group will take a nature walk/ecology program for 60-90 minutes, then switch with the fishing or other activity group for the same amount of time).
- 3.) **At least one participating adult per 10 children is required!** If park staff lead the nature walk/ecology program, active participation by teachers, adult leaders and chaperones is still necessary to supplement them. **“Active participation”** includes maintaining discipline, keeping children on the trail, reinforcing vocabulary, helping with binoculars, etc.
- 4.) **Safety rules for nature walk include:** **a).** No running. **b).** The leader is always in front of the group **c).** Poison ivy and thorn bushes are present. Ask the group to **not** touch the trees or plants unless directed by the leader. **d).** Stay on the marked and maintained trails at all times.
- 5.) **Prepare your group for the trip.** Remind children that their best behavior is expected. Go over park rules. Food, candy and drinks are allowed in the picnic area only, **not** on the trails. Collecting or harming plants or animals is prohibited. **The group must leave the areas they use clean!** Please recycle aluminum cans and plastic bottles in the barrels provided.
- 6.) Remind the group that they are visiting a state park, not a zoo or amusement park. The park’s animals are wild and must obtain their own food. They are not in cages or fed by the staff. **Alligators may be present in the ponds** and ditches. Do not feed or tease them! Venomous snakes are seen occasionally. **Fire ants and poison ivy are abundant.** Respect and learn about our wild animals, but don’t fear them.
- 7.) Emphasize that group members should **dress appropriately for the weather** including jackets and hats when necessary. **No open-toed shoes, please!**
- 8.) Restrooms will be in the classroom or portacans as indicated by the staff person on duty,
- 9.) Tell the staff if any of your students have special needs such as limited mobility, limited English or are not feeling well.

OVER ►

VOCABULARY

Adaptation—An adjustment to environmental conditions; a structure or behavior which helps a plant or animal survive in its environment.

Algae—Simple one-celled or many-celled aquatic plants capable of photosynthesis.

Community—Populations of plants and animals that live in the same space at the same time.

Diurnal—Active during the day.

Food chain—A sequence of plants and animals in a community in which each member of the community feeds on the member(s) below it in the chain.

Food web—Interconnected food chains in an ecosystem.

Fresh water—Clean, unpolluted water without salinity.

Freshwater marsh—A wetland dominated by grasses, sedges and reeds where standing water usually exists year-round.

Habitat—The arrangement of food, water, shelter and space suitable to an animal's needs. The home or place in which a plant or animal lives.

Niche—The "job" of a plant or animal.

Nocturnal—Active during the night.

Plankton—Very small organisms suspended in an aquatic habitat that control their own movements including bacteria, algae, protozoan, rotifers, larvae and small crustaceans.

Swamp—A type of wetland where the soil is saturated or covered with water and trees are the dominant vegetation.

Wetlands—Any land area that is usually wet or saturated with moisture such as a marsh or swamp.

