

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:

POND ECOLOGY PROGRAM

- 1.) A **group leader should visit the education 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 pond ecology should not exceed 25 children.** (An additional 25 children may participate in another activity, such as fishing, at the same time. One group will do the pond 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!** Active participation by teachers, adult leaders and chaperones is necessary. Students will usually take turns as a “water team” and a “land team.” **“Active participation”** may include wading in the water to assist and monitor the water team, helping the land team sort and identify captured pond organisms, assisting with microscope use, maintaining discipline, keeping children on task, reinforcing vocabulary, etc.
- 4.) **Safety rules for pond ecology include:** **a).** No running. **b).** The leader will designate the part of the pond to be used **c).** Pond banks are slippery. Use caution. **d).** Lift your feet while walking in the pond to avoid tripping. **e)** Use the nets carefully to avoid accidents.
- 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 students should **dress for the weather** including jackets and hats when necessary. **Pond ecology participants should wear “beach socks” or borrow rubber boots from the park.** No open-toed shoes! A change of shoes and socks is recommended
- 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—Special characteristics that make a plant or animal more suited to its environment.

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

Aquatic—A plant or animal adapted to living in the water.

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

Ecology—The study of the interrelationship of plants and animals with their environment.

Food chain—A sequence or chain 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(salt).

Marsh—A wetland dominated by grasses, sedges and reeds with standing water usually 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.

Invertebrate—An animal without a backbone such as a dragonfly, worm, crayfish, grass shrimp, etc.

Larva—The immature form of insects and some other animals. The larva does not look like its parents at birth and must pass through one or more changes before assuming adult characteristics.

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

Pond—A wetland similar to but smaller than a lake often with floating or submersed plants.

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

Wetland—An area of land that is wet at least part of the year and contains unique soils and plants.