

**Introduction:**

The Education Kits project at the Environmental Learning Center with the Forest Preserve District of Will County was designed to aid teachers and youth group leaders in working with their students in the outdoors. The Education Kits will create a knowledge bank within Will County youths and adults of the natural communities within Hickory Creek Preserve, the 1800-acre preserve in which the Learning Center is located.

Teachers and youth group leaders can use these kits when they are visiting the Environmental Learning Center. The kits were designed knowing that the subject areas are among the most popular requests for materials and programming at the Center. There are four kits, each pertaining to a different subject area: Pond & Stream Discovery, Orienteering, Forest Ecology, and Insect Explorations.

**Materials & Methods:**

Each kit contains enough hands-on, grade appropriate materials for a class of 30 to use. Along with materials, each kit contains instructions, suggested activities, maps of the preserve, and a user survey. Please see attached list for details on the specific materials that each kit contains. All users also have access to fields, streams, pond, and forest communities, along with over three miles of trails, and two orienteering courses for those that choose to use the Orienteering Kit.

Teachers and youth group leaders are informed that the center provides educational resource kits to all site users when they call in to make a reservation, either for day use or an overnight stay. Kits were also advertised on the Forest Preserve Districts website, along with various newspapers. Information on the kits was also added to the information packets that are sent to all teachers and youth leaders using the Environmental Learning Center.

**Results:**

As a result of the news articles announcing the receipt of the grant, several youth leaders and teachers called the center to inquire about the Education Kits. Several kits have been checked out and used within the site; both by teachers and youth group leaders.

Consequently, a total of 1,024 youths have used the Education Kits within the first five months of the project.

**Discussion:**

Teachers and youth group leaders have responded very well to the Education Kits. Materials are appropriate for all users, and suggested activities are well

received. Participants seem to enjoy collecting samples and taking part in the orienteering courses, along with creating their own.

Some teachers have provided suggestions for improvements on the kits, such as additional collecting jars and viewing jars for the Insect Explorations kit. Teachers have also suggested adding information on which state learning standards can be met by teaching particular activities.

Youth group leaders that stay overnight at the center have mentioned that they enjoy being able to use the equipment at their own pace, instead of scheduling a time slot with an educator. Some have also suggested additional kits, such as Fire Building (another popular program at the center)

### **Summary:**

In summary, site users at the Environmental Learning Center have been using the Education Kits, with a total of 1,024 participants within the first five months of the project.

Suggestions for improvements and additions to the project have been made, and staff at the Center are looking into them, hoping to accommodate all requests.

### **Educational Kit Breakdown:**

There are four (4) Education Kits: Pond & Stream Discovery, Orienteering, Forest Ecology, and Insect Explorations. Each kit will come in a waterproof plastic tub for easy carrying. Each Kit will also include a kit survey.

#### **1. Pond & Stream Discovery**

- (5) Dip Nets
- (10) Golden Guide to Pond Life Books
- (12) Hand Lenses
- (5) Viewing trays
- Aquatic insect key charts
- (1) Aquatic Plants Book
- Student Observation Sheets
- Suggested activities (these will include a variety of age/grade appropriate activities for teacher and youth leaders to do with their students)

#### **2. Orienteering**

- (30) Compasses
- (10) Course markers
- (1) Orienteering & Map Games (teacher guide)
- Various maps of the Environmental Learning Center, Hickory Creek Preserve. (maps of other Will County preserves will be available upon request)
- Suggested activities (these will include a variety of age/grade appropriate activities for teacher and youth leaders to do with their students)

#### **3. Forest Ecology**

- (1) Field Guide to Mushrooms
- (2) Field Guide to Trees
- (7) 5' fabric measuring tapes
- (1) 50' metal tape measures
- (1) Moisture Meter
- (1) 100' Measuring Tape
- (1) 200' Measuring Tape
- (2) Soil sampling tubes
- (1) Soil Chart
- (3) Soil thermometer
- (1) The Trees (book)
- Student observation sheets
- Suggested activities (these will include a variety of age/grade appropriate activities for teacher and youth leaders to do with their students)

#### **4. Insect Explorations**

- (20) Plastic collecting jars
- (10) Field Guide to Insects
- (5) Field Guide to Butterflies & Moths
- (1) Insects (book)
- (12) Hand lenses
- (12) Magnifier bug jars
- (5) Magnifier bug viewer
- Student observation sheets
- Suggested activities (these will include a variety of age/grade appropriate activities for teacher and youth leaders to do with their students)









