



The Environmental education program at CPAWS Ottawa Valley offers outings linked to the Ontario Curriculum for students in elementary schools:

Grade 4: Understanding Life Systems: Habitats and Communities

In Grade 4 the main focus in Environmental Studies is on Habitats and Communities; that is why we propose to organize a wilderness trip to Mer-Bleau, Foret-la-Blanche or Mac Skimming Education Center. These areas are all rich in biodiversity and show many great examples of interactions between species. A day long outing can be proposed for grade 4 students. As always, the day would be divided into two parts focusing on different aspects of the curriculum. The first portion of the day will let students investigate habitats and communities of forests, wetlands and bogs; while the second part of our outing will be devoted to analyzing the effects of human activities on habitats and communities.

Part 1: Investigating Habitats and Communities

1.1 Understanding habitats and communities and the relationships among animals and plants that live in them.

We will start our trip by asking ourselves about what we already know about habitats and communities. We will bring up the example of humans and what we consider our habitat to be: house, street, neighborhood, schools, community centers, restaurants, shops, towns, etc. We'll conclude with the fact that our "habitat" contains everything that is needed for our survival and comfort.

Afterwards we will stop near a wetland area and try to see what kinds of animals we can find. We will also count and record the types of plants that reside in this area. Students will have the opportunity to see a beaver lodge and possibly to even spot some frogs and turtles.



We'll explore what a habitat for different species consists of; this will include their diet, the materials used for their shelters, strategies that protect them from predators, and the interactions between species. We will repeat the same exercise in different environments with different species, for example

woodpeckers in forests, and blueberry bushes in bogs. Students will tally up and record the names of plants and animals that they will find near trails in wetland, bog and forest habitats.

Together we will try to formulate a list of plants and animals that make up the wetland, forest, and bog communities. We'll list species that are only able to thrive in a certain type of habitat and we will identify several other species that can adapt and live in a number of different habitats.



1.2. Changes in the environment and their impact on our well-known species.

We'll explore the consequences of what would happen if the ponds where frogs laid their eggs would dry up due to extreme heat or what happen if raccoons would eat all of the eggs that snapping turtles laid on the banks of Mud Lake. Students would make assumptions about how this would affect the environment and other species. We would also make predictions about what change this could bring over a number of years.

During our trip, we will take short stops for small snacks, rest and games. Students will have a chance to play several ecological games that we have prepared that correspond to the subject at hand: "Pyramid of Life", "Mouse Hunt", "Bat & Moth", etc. We are also always open to new suggestions.

Part 2: Analyzing effects of human activities on habitats and communities.



2.1. Species extinction: Why the Red Wolf, Blanding Turtle, Rusty Blackbird became rare?

We will bring up the issue of roads and the threat that they poses to slow moving animals such as turtles and porcupines. We will also list places where it is possible to spot the following species as well as places where the species have already been extirpated. Students will learn about other species that have been, or still are, affected by human activities. We will provide students with

examples of extinct species and the reasons for why they became extinct (ex. the Passenger Pigeon became extinct due to overhunting). We will also mention some rare species that could be found in the Ottawa Valley and ways in which we can protect them.

2.2. The dependency of humans on natural habitat and communities (flood control, pollination, recreation activity, fresh air, etc.).

We'll explore what resources humans use that come directly from the environment (food, textiles, timber, firewood, medical substances, materials for construction, drinking water, etc.). Every student will have an opportunity to come up with some natural materials that are useful in our everyday life since there are just that many.



Then, we'll investigate what other contributions habitats and communities make in our life. We will bring up the example of how everyone likes recreational activities, whether it's playing games, swimming, biking or skiing. Altogether these activities all have something in common, and it is that they become more enjoyable if they are done outside. Students will learn to appreciate parks and natural habitats because of the services that they provide; they make the air and water cleaner, and provide a more pleasant experience in general. We will also educate students about the invisible services that habitats and communities provide for humans.

Games: Afterwards students can play several games, that would help them understand the relationship between species and the environment, and between humans and the environment such as "The Web of Life", "Food Chain", and "Apple World", etc.