

**New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
Division of Operations**

Five Rivers Environmental Education Center
56 Game Farm Road, Delmar, NY 12054
Phone: 518-475-0291 • **Fax:** 518-439-8044
Website: www.dec.ny.gov



Dear Teacher,

We're happy to welcome you and your students to Five Rivers Environmental Education Center for an exciting, hands-on **Here Comes Winter** program. This 90 minute program begins indoors with activities on the winter lives of animals in the northeast before moving outdoors for an exploratory walk. To prepare for a successful visit, please read this letter thoroughly and let us know if there's anything we can do to make your visit go more smoothly.

Keep in mind that we can accommodate a wide range of physical challenges or learning disabilities. Please let us know in advance if any of your students have special needs. Contact the Guided School Program Coordinator via e-mail at gsp5rivers@outlook.com to provide complete information about your needs and those of your students.

Program Overview:

During the Here Comes Winter program, we will introduce your students to animal life in winter. Your students will discover that:

- Animals have special **adaptations** for meeting their needs, some of which are specifically for survival in cold weather.
- We can learn about the activities of animals by recognizing and interpreting the **tracks and traces** they leave behind.

Preparations:

To prepare for your visit, please attend to the following items:

- **Dress for the outdoors.** Students will be outside for a large portion of the program. A "Dressing for the Weather" guide is included in this packet. Please review this guide with your students before sending a copy home.

Dressing for the weather is essential this time of year, for students as well as for chaperones. Warm, waterproof boots are a necessity. Two pairs of socks may be worn for extra warmth, but toes should still be able to wiggle inside the boots. (Cramped feet become cold feet.) Wool socks are best; avoid cotton. A warm hat is a must, as are well insulated mittens. (Typically, mittens are warmer than gloves.) Layered clothing allows for maximum flexibility as students can add or remove layers before becoming chilled or overheated.

In the event of severely cold temperatures, the instructor may decide to come back early and conclude the program with an indoor activity

- **Prepare parents/guardians** by sending home the "Dear Parent/Guardian" letter included in this packet. Copy the "Dressing for the Weather" guide on the back of this letter to save paper!
- **Complete the Pre-Visit Classroom Activities** prior to your visit. These activities provide background information for your students, presetting them for a successful visit.

- **Assign at least two adult chaperones to each group of 12 students.** All chaperones must be prepared to assist the instructor and participate in the class, as well as administer any medications needed by the students. Chaperones are responsible for discipline, though this is not usually needed. Chaperone guidelines are listed in the “Dear Parent/Guardian” letter.
- **Plan to bring a snack for each child** to be eaten immediately before or during the class. This is especially important if the students’ normal snack or lunchtime will be delayed.

Guided School Programs are provided by DEC in partnership with Friends of Five Rivers. Should you have any questions regarding your upcoming visit, please call or email Friends of Five Rivers. We look forward to your visit, and to sharing a unique environmental experience with your students.

Sincerely,

Friends of Five Rivers
Guided School Program
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Pre-Visit Activities for Here Comes Winter

Classroom Preparation Activities

Your forthcoming visit to Five Rivers Environmental Education Center will be much more enjoyable if you prepare your students with these insightful pre-visit activities.

Let's be scientists!

Students get the most out of an outdoor lesson when they understand what is expected of them. Please remind your class that when we are in the field we behave as the scientists we are, collecting data, making observations, and doing so in a manner that is serious and focused on the task. Of course, we have lots of fun along the way, too. Please talk with your students and encourage them to come up with a list of expected behaviors while at Five Rivers. Remind them that if we are loud and rambunctious we are unlikely to see many animals.

Since we will be learning about wildlife in winter, we suggest you take part in one or more of the following:

Warm up to Winter – Discuss the different ways animals stay warm in winter, and relate this to how to dress for your visit to Five Rivers.

What is a Habitat? – Talk with your students about what an animal finds in its habitat by comparing it to their own homes. If you have a dollhouse, point out where a family might find food, water and shelter. Where might a wild animal find food, water and shelter within its habitat?

The Thicket Game – The Thicket Game, from *Project WILD*, demonstrates the value of camouflage in a modified game of hide-and-seek. In a setting with plenty of places to hide, select one student to be "it." Blindfold this player and have him/her count to 20. While they count, have the remaining students hide. All hidiers must be able to see "it" from their hiding place. At the end of the count, "it" removes his/her blindfold. (S)He may only turn around and move up or down; they may not step to the side, forward or backward. "It" looks for hidiers. When they see someone, (s)he calls that person's name or describes what they are wearing. Once caught, the hider comes to join "it" and waits quietly for the next round. When "it" can no longer see any hidiers, (s)he covers his/her eyes again and counts to 10. Any remaining hidiers who have not been caught must move to new hiding places, closer to and from which they can see "it." "It" repeats the search for hidiers. The rounds continue in this format until only one student remains in hiding. That student is declared the winner.

Words to Discuss:

Adaptation – a change in an animal or plant that helps it live in a particular environment

Camouflage – protective coloration or shape that helps hide an animal from its predators or prey

Hibernate – to pass the winter in a state of inactivity that is similar to sleep

Migrate – seasonal movement from one region to another

Books about Wildlife in Winter:

Burton, Robert. *National Audubon Society North American Birdfeeder Handbook* (Dorling Kindersley Publishing, Inc., New York, 1995)

Books about Wildlife in Winter continued:

- Cvancara, Alan M. *Exploring Nature in Winter* (Walker and Company, New York, 1992)
- Dendy, Leslie. *Tracks, Scats and Signs* (Take Along Guides Series, NorthWord Books for Young Readers, Minnetonka, MN 1995)
- Murie, Olaus J. and Mark Elbroch. *A Field Guide to Animal Tracks* (3rd edition) (Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 2005)
- Sanchez, Anita. "A Long Winter Nap" in *New York State Conservationist*, December 2006, pp 22-23.
- Stokes, Donald. *A Guide to Nature in Winter* (Little, Brown & Company, New York, 1976)
- Stokes, Donald and Lillian. *Animal Tracking and Behavior* (Little, Brown & Company, New York, 1986)

Picture Books and Poetry about Wildlife in Winter:

- George, Jean Craighead. *Dear Rebecca, Winter is Here* (Harper Collins, New York, 1995)
- Brett, Jan. *The Mitten* (G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1989)
- Sidman, Joyce. *Winter Bees and Other Poems of the Cold* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Books for Young Readers, Boston, 2014)

Websites:

- www.dec.ny.gov/education/40303.html New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's *Conservationist for Kids* magazine. Winter 2007: Winter Wildlife Detective
- www.dec.ny.gov/education/62487.html New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's *Conservationist for Kids* magazine. Winter 2010: Cold-blooded in the Cold—Hibernation
- www.exploratorium.edu/frogs/woodfrog/index.html The Exploratorium, San Francisco, CA "Cold-blooded Solutions to Warm-blooded Problems"
- www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/satoyama/hibernation.html "Bear Essentials of Hibernation" by Peter Tyson (PBS, Nova Online, 2000) (focus is on bears)
- www.si.edu/encyclopedia_SI/nmnh/buginfo/winter.htm Smithsonian Institution "Where do Insects Go in the Winter?"

Resources for Teachers from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation:

- Workshops for Educators*—Free workshops are regularly offered to introduce educators to curriculum and activity manuals, including Project WILD, Project WET, Project Learning Tree (PLT), Growing Up WILD and PLT's Environmental Experiences for Early Childhood. For more information, including a list of upcoming workshops, go to www.dec.ny.gov/education/1913.html.
- Tails by Mail*—Study kits on a variety of themes may be borrowed for up to two weeks. The kits are available for free if you pick them up from us and return them yourself. If we must ship them to you, you must cover the cost of postage. Go to www.dec.ny.gov/education/38095.html for complete information.

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Dear Parent/Guardian,

Your child will soon be visiting Five Rivers Environmental Education Center to learn about the natural environment. We're delighted to welcome you and share these ideas to ensure an enjoyable visit.

Help your child dress for success.

- Trails may be wet or muddy, so students should wear appropriate footwear.
- Long pants are recommended throughout the year.
- Bring rain gear if there may be rain. The lesson is geared for the out-of-doors!
- Bring a water bottle.
- In cold weather, hats, mittens, coats and warm boots are a must.
- In warm weather, a sun hat is a must and short sleeves are suggested. Close-toed shoes are required; no flip-flops or sandals.
- Insect repellent is not needed, and is harmful to the wildlife we study and encounter at Five Rivers. If you feel strongly about using repellent, please read all warning labels and follow all directions. Do not apply to face or hands. Wait to apply repellent until you are certain it is needed.

Chaperones are an important part of this program.

- Encourage all students to participate in class activities and be part of them yourself.
- Your help with discipline and safety is vital for a successful visit.
- Dress appropriately for the weather. Follow the guidelines provided for the students.
- Remain attentive to the lesson, and please save personal conversations for outside the class.
- Do not use cell phones except in an emergency.
- Above all, enjoy this experience along with the students.

Reminder: After all outdoor activities—whether at home, school or Five Rivers—a thorough tick check should be performed on children and adults.

Guided School Programs are provided by DEC in partnership with Friends of Five Rivers. We look forward to seeing you and/or your child at Five Rivers and hope it will be a fun-filled and exciting experience. Please contact us if you have any questions, or if you or your child have special needs. We will be happy to talk with you.

Sincerely,

Friends of Five Rivers

Guided School Program

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DRESSING FOR THE WEATHER

