

# St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge

## *Field Trip Checklist and Safety Information*

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### Field Trip

Field trips to St. Marks provide a great opportunity for your students to learn about the plants, wildlife and habitats around them. By following the recommendations below you and your students will have a more successful and enjoyable field trip. Be sure to review the items with your students and chaperones before the trip. Before the field trip it is important that you find out if any students have any allergies or health problems that may become relevant and that you should know about in advance (allergies to plants or bee stings are examples). **If there are any allergies or health issues make sure any necessary medications are provided by the parents and appropriately administered when necessary.**

### Proper Clothing

Make sure to check the weather and wear appropriate clothing. If it is projected to be cold please make sure the students and chaperones have a jacket or coat. Even in spring and summer it is advisable to wear hats, long pants, long sleeve shirts, socks and comfortable **close-toed** walking or hiking shoes. Flip flops and sandals are not recommended. \*If you are doing the coastal explorer or freshwater ecosystems it is advised to wear old tennis shoes or close-toed water shoes (the latter can be purchased for usually under \$10.00 at local discount stores). New or expensive shoes should not be worn. Shoes will most likely become muddy and may have an odor. We suggest rinsing/washing them with fresh water immediately upon return to the school or home. It is also advisable to bring a change of dry clothes, shoes and socks to make the remainder of your day more enjoyable. You can bring a small bag to put the wet clothes and shoes in. Please note that **\*\*Students and adults will not be allowed in the water with open toed shoes or no shoes. Dress clothes and high heels are also not recommended for any of the field trips.**

### Other Equipment

Items that you may find useful are sun block, insect repellent, water, binoculars, first aid kits, lunches, ices chests and cameras.

### Mosquitoes, Ticks and Other Insects

During outdoor programs participants may be exposed to various types of insects. Wearing insect repellent, a hat and tucking your pant legs into your socks will keep ticks on the outside of your clothing. At the end of the field trip it is a good idea to have the students check themselves for ticks and other insects before entering the bus. (It is advised to have them or their parents do another tick check at home.) Insect repellent, long pants, hats and lightweight long sleeve shirts are good ways to limit exposure to mosquitoes and no see-ums. ***It is a good idea to remind both the adults and students that they should NOT use perfume, cologne, hair spray or scented hair products the day of the field trip as these often attract insects that may make the trip less enjoyable.***

### Snakes and Other Wildlife

Typically, snakes and other wildlife would prefer not to have contact with you or your students. If you do happen to encounter a snake or other wildlife, do not panic. Give the animal plenty of space and a way to escape. Teachers and chaperones are expected to help in setting a good example by keeping a safe distance from any snake seen on the trails. A healthy respect for snakes, and all wildlife, is a good example to set for your students. Remember not to feed any wild animals while at the refuge. This includes birds at the picnic area. Not only is this a bad idea for the animals, it is against the law in some cases.

## Planning Your Field Trip

- \_\_\_\_\_1. Contact St. Marks at 850-925-6121 to arrange your class visit, or by email at [lori\\_nicholson@fws.gov](mailto:lori_nicholson@fws.gov)
- \_\_\_\_\_2. Familiarize yourself with the refuge trails, policies and resource information.
- \_\_\_\_\_3. Prepare your students for the field trip by completing the pre-visit materials and photo release form for your designated field trip program.
- \_\_\_\_\_4. Prepare students for the field trip by reminding them that the trip will be fun, and that school rules still apply.
- \_\_\_\_\_5. Plan your field trip. Consider time constraints, drive time, location, academic standards to be addressed (St. Marks education programs are correlated to SSS and National Science standards.), lessons and small group work. Include a back up plan for inclement weather. (Please note that we can make alternate plans for programs to be indoors in inclement weather.) However, if you decide not to come PLEASE call the refuge and advise personnel so staff will be aware of the change. Many of our volunteers have a long drive to the refuge and we like to let them know in advance if a program is canceled so they don't have to make an unnecessary drive.
- \_\_\_\_\_6. Plan for a safe trip. Investigate student allergies and other medical needs. Include a first aid kit for your trip, make sure to keep it on your person, not in the bus.
- \_\_\_\_\_7. Arrange transportation; be aware of time needed to travel to the refuge, time for the program itself, and time the bus has to be back at the school. It is a good idea to make sure the bus driver knows the exact location of the refuge (some drivers go to the town of St. Marks by mistake). A map can be sent to you to ensure prompt arrival.
- \_\_\_\_\_8. Recruit and prepare adult volunteers. When possible it is a good idea to carpool as parking space is limited. Ideally, volunteers should be comfortable in the outdoors and willing to assist with teaching or student control during the field trip. A good ratio of adults to students is 1:5. Be sure to share the field trip plan with the volunteers before the day of the field trip. This especially goes for appropriate clothing and scented items that may be used the day of the trip. If the program is to take place at the lighthouse it is a good idea for them to carpool at least from the visitor center. The parking lot at the lighthouse is small and we need to leave room for other guests to park also.
- \_\_\_\_\_9. Remind students and chaperones to dress for the weather and to wear clothes and shoes that they don't mind getting wet or dirty. \*If you are doing the coastal explorer or freshwater ecosystems it is advised to wear old tennis shoes or close-toed water shoes (the latter can be purchased for usually under \$10.00 at local discount stores). New or expensive shoes should not be worn. Shoes will most likely become muddy and may have an odor. We suggest rinsing/washing them with fresh water immediately upon return to the school or home. Please note that **\*\*students and adults will not be allowed in the water with open toed shoes or without shoes.** It is also advisable to bring a change of dry clothes, shoes and socks to make the remainder of your day more enjoyable. You can bring a small bag to put the wet clothes and shoes in. *Dress clothes and high heels are also not recommended for any of the field trips.*
- \_\_\_\_\_10. Don't forget Lunch! Bring trash bags to carry lunch back to the school. We teach the students

to “Pack It In” “Pack It Out”, therefore trash bags will be taken back to your school via your transportation. We will try to make sure a trash bag is included in your goodie bag.

- \_\_\_\_\_11. Plan for fun! Being outdoors is a great experience with learning opportunities everywhere.
- \_\_\_\_\_12. If you don't already have one it is a good idea to create a clear signal for getting your students attention and gathering them together. Practice using this signal before the field trip.
- \_\_\_\_\_13. Discuss safety. If you will be near water explain the potential hazards. If you will be walking in the heat or in the hot sun, make sure that everyone brings drinking **water** with them and that they wear hats and sunscreen. Remember to consider the physical comfort of the students.
- \_\_\_\_\_14. Discuss behavioral expectations.
- \_\_\_\_\_15. Remind students they are visiting a wildlife refuge and they are not permitted to take *souvenirs* (leaves, flowers, rocks, pine cones, feathers etc.) from the wild. There is a gift store at the visitor center if you have time after the program.
- \_\_\_\_\_16. Note that students may be allergic to some plants and not know it. Poison ivy also grows on the refuge and it is a good idea to let the students know what it looks like at the time of year they are making their field trip Suggest to students to take showers and wash clothes in hot water upon return if they were in areas where there could have been poison ivy. There are also soaps that are on the market that are good to use if you have been exposed to poison ivy.