

ENDANGERED SPECIES CURRICULUM

GRADES 5 – 8

Post Cards from the Edge: Endangered Species

(<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/lessons/08/g68/habitat68.html>)

In this lesson, students will learn about endangered species in the United States, some of the reasons they are endangered (e.g. habitat destruction or the introduction of invasive species), and what is being done to protect them. Students will choose one species to focus on and examine the reasons it is endangered and why it is important to make an effort to save it. This lesson is best suited for grades 5-8 and adheres to National Geography Education Standards.

Overview

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is a bureau within the Department of the Interior whose mission is to work with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants, and their habitats. The bureau manages the 93-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System with more than 520 individual refuges, and thousands of wetlands and special management areas. Among its key functions is the protection of endangered species.

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Connections to the Curriculum

Geography, science, language arts

Connections to the National Geography Standards

Standard 8: "The characteristics and spatial distribution of ecosystems on Earth's surface"

Standard 14: "How human actions modify the physical environment"

Standard 18: "How to apply geography to interpret the present and plan for the future"

Time

One to two hours

Materials Required

1. Computer with Internet access;
2. Blank Xpeditions
(<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/atlas/index.html?Parent=usofam&Mode=d&SubMode=w>) (one for each small group);
3. Writing and drawing materials for group presentations

Objectives

Students will:

1. learn about endangered species in the United States;
2. identify endangered species in their state;
3. create postcards of facts and pictures about the species; and
4. analyze reasons to protect endangered species.

Geographic Skills

Asking Geographic Questions

Acquiring Geographic Information

Organizing Geographic Information

Analyzing Geographic Information

Suggested Procedure

Opening

Since the arrival of Europeans in North America, more than 500 species have become extinct. The populations of many species have declined due to loss of habitat, degradation of the environment, pollution, pesticide use, and other factors. Within the United States and its territories, 574 species of animals and 749 species of plants are listed as threatened or endangered. The U.S. took a giant step toward saving plants and animals with the passage of the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

Development

Have students work in small groups. Ask each group to create a presentation about an endangered species in Arkansas. Try to have the groups represent different types of species (e.g., mammals, birds, mussels, fish, or plants). Their presentations may be on a large piece of paper or poster board, and could include photos cut out of magazines or printed out from the Internet; original drawings; important facts about the species; reasons for the decline of its numbers; and any other information they feel is important.

All presentations should include a blank Xpeditions atlas of the U.S. showing the distribution of their species. If the species number has diminished significantly, students may want to use two colors to show the difference between the original distribution of the species and the current distribution. If a species exists only in a small area, students may wish to include a blank state outline map from the Xpeditions atlas.

The following Web sites will help students begin their research:

Endangered Species on EE Link (<http://eelink.net/EndSpp/specieshighlights-mainpage.html>)

Green Kids Guide to Threatened Species: Nine Ways You Can Help
(<http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/publications/index.html>)

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: Endangered Species Information
(<http://www.fws.gov/endangered/wildlife.html>)

WWF: U.S. World Wildlife Fund (<http://www.worldwildlife.org/>)

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: Teacher's Packet (included in this packet)
(<http://www.fws.gov/endangered/kids/pdf/TEACHKIT.PDF>)

As they create their presentations, ask students to address:

1. when and why the numbers of this particular species started to decline;
2. what the major threats to this species are;
3. what has been done so far (if anything) to save this species;
4. why it is important to save this particular species (Do other species depend on it for some reason?); and
5. what they would recommend doing to save this species from extinction?

Closing

Have students post their presentations around the room. Ask them to take turns giving a brief presentation about the species they have studied and answer any questions other students have.

Suggested Student Assessment

Have students write essays explaining why it is important to help save endangered species. They should use the species they studied, as well as some of the species studied by other students in the class as examples. Have them research an endangered species from somewhere outside the United States and include that in their reports to demonstrate why the problem of endangered species is a worldwide one.

Extending the Lesson

Get the students and community involved in helping to conserve rare, threatened, and endangered species and their habitats. Inform the community of endangered species native to your area through newspaper articles, brochures, buttons, signs, speeches, or videos. Ask your student council to make a contribution to a local organization dedicated to recovering species.

Adopt a species or adopt a habitat in your area. Join the National Wildlife Federation's Backyard Wildlife Habitat (<http://www.nwf.org/Get-Outside/Outdoor-Activities/Garden-for-Wildlife.aspx>) program.