

# News Release

## *DeSoto & Boyer Chute National Wildlife Refuges Visitor Services*

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### **Science Scores Highlight Promise of Blair Community Schools/DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge Outdoor Education Partnership**

**Missouri Valley, Iowa** - Imagine if your classroom for the day was the wetlands at DeSoto National Wildlife. Imagine if your lessons in science, math, social studies and languages arts all focused a natural event like the fall migration you experienced at the refuge. This may sound like more fun than school, but it is a reality for students in Blair Community Schools. The Blair Community Schools/DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge Outdoor Education Partnership is not only making school fun, it is helping to contribute to high state test scores in science.

Students from Blair Community Schools have been using DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge as an outdoor classroom for the past seven school years. Students explore the wetlands, forests and prairies of DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge as part of an innovative partnership between the refuge and the school district.

Last school year (2011-2012), three grades (5<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>) completed baseline testing for state science standards. Blair's science scores were above the state average in the each of the three grade levels tested.

"This is a first time snapshot," said Mark Gutschow, Blair assistant principal and school partnership coordinator. "It is encouraging to be above the state average. District scores are higher than the state average for a variety of reasons, however, in my opinion, the partnership with DeSoto has directly contributed to higher student achievement."

The mission of the outdoor education partnership between Blair Community Schools "Where All Students Learn" and DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge "Where Wildlife Comes First" is to create a sense of wonder through environmental education in an outdoor classroom.

Through the Blair Schools/DeSoto Outdoor Education Partnership, students meet curriculum standards in core and exploratory subject areas in an authentic, hands-on learning experience at DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge. Students in grades 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, and high school environmental science will make four or more visits each to DeSoto Refuge this school year. All lessons are extensions of classroom curriculum objectives and teach students to apply skills in a real life setting that are tested in the areas of science, math, social studies and language arts.

“Since the partnership started seven year ago, I’ve seen excitement grow as the students’ progress through the grade levels,” said Gutschow. “The outdoor classroom is now an expectation of the students that enhances learning in the areas of science, math, social studies and language arts.”

The Blair Community Schools/DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge Outdoor Education Partnership continues to adapt to meet the educational needs of students. This school year middle school students are incorporating the use of iPads into writing and science lessons on the refuge. The partnership also recently began an independent study course with the high school where students can spend part of their school day working in various departments at the refuge learning real life work skills.

A native grasses and flower area was completed last summer at the Blair Arbor Park Intermediate School. Arbor Park teachers take their classes out on the trail to study native grasses, native flowers, insects, and birds. Fifth grade students walk the trail, make observations, draw conclusions, make inferences, and record their discoveries in their naturalist journals to extend experience from the outdoor classroom at DeSoto Refuge.

An entrance permit is required for all vehicles on days other than fee free days. The regular daily entrance fee for private vehicles is \$3.00. Permits may be obtained at the pay stations near the entrances or at the visitor center. The charge for commercial vans and buses is \$20 or \$30 if 21 or more people are aboard. Annual permits including the \$15 DeSoto Refuge Pass can be obtained at the visitor center.

DeSoto National Wildlife Refuges is located north of Omaha, NE along on U.S. Highway 30 between Missouri Valley, IA and Blair, NE. Boyer Chute National Wildlife Refuge is located along U.S. Highway 75 near Ft. Calhoun, NE. For more information contact 712/388-4800 or email the refuge at [desoto@fws.gov](mailto:desoto@fws.gov). Visit our websites, [www.fws.gov/refuge/desoto/](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/desoto/) or [www.fws.gov/refuge/boyer\\_chute/](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/boyer_chute/), for refuge updates. Like us on Facebook - search for DeSoto and Boyer Chute National Wildlife Refuges.

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