

## Tips to prepare you, your class, and your chaperones.

A field trip to the Ridgefield Refuge can be a very fulfilling and lasting learning experience for you, your students, and anyone else that comes along. There is much to learn but not a lot of time so doing a little preparation before the trip can go a long way in making sure your learning objectives are met and things go smoothly. Below are some ideas on how to prepare, some websites you can visit, and even a sheet you can send home to your chaperones. Remember, Chapters 1 & 2 of the Educators Guide give a great introduction to the Refuge and what to expect from a field trip.

### **Suggestions to introduce your students to the idea of a Wildlife Refuge and being in nature:**

- **Discuss what a wildlife refuge is** and how it is different from a park or a zoo. See the refuge websites below for help on this.
- **Show students pictures** of native plants and animals they may see during their visit.
- **Have students discuss how to behave on the trail** in order to help them see more and scare away less. Practice this in the class or on a school trail if possible. Younger students may have fun “deer walking” or “coyote walking” (or any favorite animal) in order to practice being as quiet and observant as possible, just like the animals do when they are hiding or hunting.
- **Make sound maps** in the classroom or school yard. Have students close their eyes and listen to where they hear sounds and then draw those sounds on a map with themselves at the center.
- **Have each student create a field notebook** where they write down bird and plant observations and drawings. You can include preprinted activity sheets that help them learn the concepts and vocabulary you are working on. Have them decorate the cover so it is personalized. Practice using these before the trip and ask that they be integrated into the activities at the Refuge.
- **Use activities from the Educator’s Guide** in order to introduce the above concepts and more. You can find this on both the Refuge and Friends web pages. Most of these activities were designed for the classroom.

### **Suggestions to improve birding skills before visiting the Refuge:**

- **Visit websites** like the Cornell Lab of Ornithology (see below) to see and hear local birds they may observe on the Refuge.
- **Have each child pick a bird to research** and when they see it on the Refuge they can teach the rest of the class about it.
- **Practice identifying bird silhouettes** by hanging them in the classroom at appropriate heights. Talk about where those birds may be found (on the ground, in a tree, in a bush) and what they may be doing (pecking, collecting seeds, calling out loudly).

## HELPFUL WEBSITES

- **Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge Complex** – Here you can link to the pages for Ridgefield, Steigerwald Lake, Franz Lake, and Pierce Refuges.  
<http://www.fws.gov/ridgefieldrefuges/complex/>
- **Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge Home Page**  
<http://www.fws.gov/ridgefieldrefuges/ridgefield/index.html>
- **Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge Education Page**  
<http://www.fws.gov/ridgefieldrefuges/ridgefield/education.html>
- **Friends of the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge**  
[www.ridgefieldfriends.org](http://www.ridgefieldfriends.org)
- **Friends of the Refuge Education page** – Here you can find more detailed information about field trips and link to the Educator’s Guide.  
<http://www.ridgefieldfriends.org/education.php>
- **Cornell Lab of Ornithology**  
<http://www.birds.cornell.edu/Page.aspx?pid=1478>
- **Fish and Wildlife Service Kids and Educator’s Page**  
<http://www.fws.gov/educators/educators.html>
- **National Wildlife Refuge System**
- **National Wildlife Federation** – There is a lot of great information and activities for kids and educators on this website. It is also the home to Ranger Rick, the great science magazine for kids!  
<http://www.nwf.org/Wildlife.aspx>

## ***A SUGGESTED LETTER TO SEND HOME TO CHAPERONES***

Dear Parent/Chaperone:

Thank you helping us on our field trip to the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge! Here is more information about the trip and how you can be more prepared to help make this a fun and great learning experience for all of our students.

**Date:**

**Time to meet:**

**Location to meet:**

**Estimated time to arrive back:**

To prepare yourself and your child for this trip:

1. Please review any activity sheets and/or instructions that have been sent home so you are familiar with what the students will be doing and learning. There will be leaders for each activity but you are needed to help the students participate and stay on track.
2. Dress yourself and your child appropriately. We will be hiking on varied trail surfaces (gravel, grass, dirt, mud) so please wear closed toes shoes that you do not mind getting dirty. It is always a good idea to expect rain and bring appropriate gear. Other things you may want to bring are sunscreen and/or bug spray depending on the season. Long pants and long sleeved shirts are great protection from sun, bugs, and plants that scratch.
3. There are no water fountains or garbage cans on the refuge. You must pack in and pack out whatever you need. But do not worry; we will not be too far from the busses or the restrooms!
4. Remember: You are role model to the students and must SHOW them the proper way to act and be respectful while on the Refuge. Please listen to the presentations and participate in the activities. Talking/texting/using cell phones during activities not only show a bad example for the students, it is also very distracting for all.
5. If you have time go ahead and familiarize yourself with the Refuge by exploring the following websites:
  - Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge Home Page:  
<http://www.fws.gov/ridgefieldrefuges/ridgefield/index.html>
  - Friends of the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge  
[www.ridgefieldfriends.org](http://www.ridgefieldfriends.org)

Thank you again for volunteering to chaperone this trip. You are in important part of helping students learn about natural and cultural resources and enjoy the wonders of nature! This field trip is always a great experience for the chaperones as well as the students.