

# Field Trip to Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge Complex

## Welcome!

Thank you for planning your group visit to the Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge Complex (Complex). The Complex is made up of five refuges: Sacramento (largest, headquarters, and located south of Willows), Delevan (limited access), Colusa, Sutter (limited access), and Sacramento River NWRs. What is a Complex? Think of it as shared staff and management across different properties.

Environmental education programs are just one part of the many purposes of the refuge. Sacramento NWR was established to provide habitat for migratory waterfowl, protect endangered or threatened species, and provide breeding habitat for wildlife. The 11,000 acres has diverse habitat and can have over 300,000 waterfowl during the winter. The refuge is a wild area not a zoo nor wildlife rehabilitation site.

## Education Guidelines

The education programs are designed to provide fun, interactive, and outside learning to students. The Complex receives approximately 200,000 visitors and over 1,000 students participate in our programs annually. This keeps our small visitor services staff and volunteers very busy from October – March. Since educational programs are free and provide free entrance to the refuge, we want to ensure that the groups are considerate of the time, money, materials, and to the presenter of the programs. Groups that do not follow the guidelines below will not be able to receive programs the following year. A lot of work goes into our programs, and we want to ensure groups are appreciative of our time and programs. Staff has scheduled time for your group and your group being on time is appreciated.

## Scheduling

Programs open for scheduling on August 10. Program availability is from the third week in October through March. The highest concentration of waterfowl on the refuge is from early November through early December – however, we do not know what the birds will do or what the weather will be!

Feel free to contact us first if you need a date before submitting the reservation form. However, the reservation form is needed to confirm your date. Staff will mail you a confirmation form, vehicle passes, and information after receiving your reservation. Please send a different reservation form for each day your group is visiting. If you do not receive a confirmation form at least a week in advance please contact us right away.

Visiting in the rain is not fun! Birds are usually not on the refuge in large numbers, it is hard to see out of a wet window, and inside building space is tight. We are more than willing to work with you to reschedule your trip and we can work with the group contact. Contact us as soon as you can until 8:20 the morning of your trip to reschedule your visit. Typically the Willows area receives minimal rain compared to the surrounding areas.

## Communication

We work with many different schools and groups every year. We want to make it a great field trip for your group and simple for you to schedule. Only the lead teacher/group leader should communicate with the Complex to reduce confusion. Please share the information we send you with other attending teachers, chaperones, principals, driver, and necessary personnel.

## Materials

The environmental education budget is small and purchasing new materials is hard. Please be respectful of the materials and do not graffiti, purposely break, throw, or improperly handle equipment.

Binoculars are fun and exciting for the students to use on the Wetland Walk Trail. Some tips: put the strap around your neck, do not walk and look through the binoculars at the same time, and do not look at the sun. Since all of our heads are different sizes, students will have to move the binoculars in and out to fit their heads. Chaperones can provide great help during the binocular section since staff can only help one student at a time.

## Respect for Educator(s)

For students to get the most out of the programs, educators need to have the opportunity to present as much information as possible. To prevent any information or activities from being cut from programs, students need to stay focused and listen to the educator's instructions. Students should raise hands to answer questions, remain seated unless told otherwise, and maintain a positive attitude throughout the entire experience. Student nametags (clear and large enough to read) help staff personalize the trip.

Our visitor services assistants (interns) lead the programs. They are often learning about presenting, class management, and refuge information. Your help during the program with class management is greatly appreciated and necessary for a positive learning experience for your students. Your post program evaluations assist the interns in learning and improving their skills.

## Respect for the Refuge

At National Wildlife Refuges, wildlife comes first. Refuges provide habitat for wildlife and we can respect wildlife and habitats through the following ways: do not litter (pack-it in, pack-it out), do not pick leaves/stems of plants, do not leave food behind, and quiet voices. Do not enter closed areas. Groups should bring their own trash bags to take all their trash with them. The refuge has limited trash cans. Leave rocks, feathers, sticks, etc on the ground. Please do not have the students take brochures. Brochures can be provided to the teacher.

It is a wild place and you never know what you will see! Non venomous snakes, bugs, ticks, raccoons, skunks, etc live at the refuge. Please stay with the group. If a student needs to use the restroom, please have a chaperone accompany the student.

From November – March, the refuge tends not to have any biting insects. Contact the staff if you have concerns. In September and October and warm winter days, wasps will congregate at buildings

and restrooms. They are looking for overwintering areas. Staff try to minimize them but it does not eliminate them.

## Respect for Each Other

Students should be respectful to each other. No yelling, pinching, harassing, etc. Teachers and chaperones are responsible for student behavior. Students should stay with the group.

## Auto Tour/Platform

The Sacramento NWR auto tour is six miles and tends to take at least 1 ½ hours if you are eating lunch at the platform. The best driving speed is 10-15 miles per hour. Visitors must stay within their vehicles and only get out at the park-and-stretch areas. Driving with the door open, head out sunroofs or windows, and riding on top of the vehicle is prohibited. Staying in the vehicle keeps the waterfowl close to the road.

Use vehicle pull-outs to allow other vehicles to pass. Treat the auto tour like a road. Everyone should wear a seatbelt, keep hands, heads, bodies inside the vehicle, and doors closed. It is illegal to have passengers in the back of a pickup truck (even if it has a cover) or leaning out a sunroof/window. The auto tour can be soft with wet weather. Keep your vehicle in the middle of the road. The grass can be deceptively wet.

Staff typically are not on the bus with the groups. Most groups have difficulty listening to staff on the bus. The refuge has a narrated radio station at 93.3 (sign at the beginning of the auto tour) that can provide information. For younger students, staff suggest pointing out wildlife and just enjoying the drive without strict learning.

## Prior To Your Visit:

- Review your confirmation form!
- Share these guidelines with chaperones and let them know what their responsibilities are.
- Share the location map with drivers. Google and various digital maps do not always put you in the correct location.
- Let students and chaperones know what to bring, leave at school, and what to wear.
  - Wear warm layered clothes
  - Wear jackets and long pants (shorts tend not to be appropriate during winter)
  - Wear sturdy, closed-toed shoes
  - Most of the activities are outside. It can be windy at the refuge.
  - Technology: leave games, music devices, etc at home or school.
  - Cameras and cell phones are okay if they stay out of the way. The Complex is not responsible for any personal items.
- Pack it in, pack it out! Bring large garbage bags to pack out your trash and dispose of it at your school. Our trash bin cannot accommodate the entire group's trash. Please do not fill the platform's trashcan. *\*Tip: bring extra bags to take back your bottles and cans to recycle.*
- Make name tags for students and chaperones. We don't always know a parent from a teacher.
- Before your visit, divide your class(es) into the appropriate number of groups (2-3) to accommodate the number of activity rotations you have requested. *\*Tip: use a color to separate into groups if not separated by class.*
- Some students get dehydrated on warm sunny days. Have students bring a water bottle with their name on it so they can refill. A headache can be the first sign, contact staff if this occurs so we can get them fluids.
- The visitor center is limited on space. Most students do not need to have a backpack with them during a program. Have them leave it on the bus or at the benches/picnic table if it contains a lunch.

## Arrival

Staff will be waiting for your group in the main parking lot. Scheduled groups do not need to purchase a pass at the fee machine (first parking lot). The group leader will receive the free refuge passes with the confirmation. Place the passes on the dashboard of the participating vehicles.

Staff will either welcome the group on the bus, next to the bus, or in the benches area (depending on timing and weather). If you are having lunch at the visitor center and your schedule shows it that way, plan to bring all the lunches when you get off the bus. If you are having lunch at the platform, lunches can stay on the bus.

If the group is coming in several vehicles, please try to arrive on time as a group. Staff only have the scheduled time for your group and will have to shorten programs to fit.

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