

An Educational Resource Guide for the “Every Kid in a Park” Program



Kevin J. Coyle and Kelly Senser

National Wildlife Federation

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BACKGROUND

On September 1, 2015, the U.S. government formally launched the [Every Kid in a Park](#) initiative, designed to give every fourth grader and his or her family free access, in the form of a pass, to hundreds of federal parks, lands, and waters for an entire year. Fourth graders were chosen by the members of the [Federal Interagency Council for Outdoor Recreation](#) because they are at a critical stage in their development and in their understanding of nature and the outdoors. The pass covers entry fees to federal areas that charge them.

Fourth graders across the United States may visit the [Every Kid in a Park website](#) to complete an educational lesson and obtain this free pass. While helping to celebrate the National Park Service's centennial in 2016 was one motivation behind the initiative's creation, it's not just national parks that are included; all federal areas are involved, including national forests, wildlife refuges, reservoir areas, marine sanctuaries, conservation areas, and other lands and waters where entry fees are charged. The government plans to continue this practice beyond 2016 so that every fourth grader in the nation will be eligible for the pass, and those with access to federal areas can make an entry fee-free visit.

In addition to offering the annual pass, the government will provide some grants to facilitate visits for fourth graders with limited means. About one in ten American families are without a personal vehicle and approximately 15 percent live below the poverty level. We know that a reason many children don't visit federal areas is because of lack of financial resources and mobility. Grants provided by the National Park Foundation, the congressionally chartered charitable partner of the National Park Service, will help sites administered by any of the seven U.S. public lands and waters agencies (Army Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, Fish and Wildlife Service, Forest Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and National Park Service) collaborate with schools and community organizations to arrange field trips and visits. President Obama has also requested new funding in his [2016 budget](#) to support youth education programs and to support transportation for school outings to parks for students from low-income areas. The government is also providing key trip-planning tools.

THE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

The selection of fourth graders for this effort is interesting. From an educational viewpoint, fourth grade children are developing intellectually and beginning to form adult cognition. They are also taking on new types of work and social experiences. But fourth graders are still children, and they may struggle with complex assignments. They are learning about teamwork and how to collaborate with their peers on group projects. They are also beginning to use research tools and are familiar with how to access information online. They gather information independently and are learning how to organize this information. Fourth graders are emerging into a broader educational realm that has them looking at their surroundings and how they fit in the world. This all makes them ready to understand more about public parks, forests, lakes and refuges.

When it comes to science, fourth graders surely beginning to understand and compare complex systems. This can mean looking at changes in the Earth over long periods, learning about the water cycle, or understanding the interactions between species and their environment. This makes them well-suited to be learning about public lands and the many complex ecosystems they contain. Students work on projects that ask them to build hypotheses and make observations.

In social studies, fourth grade students are learning about their communities and history. They can look at the longstanding relationship of people to public lands over the centuries, and see history as it played out with respect to natural resources, Native American culture, European settlement, transportation, and more.

The National Wildlife Federation is among the many public interest organizations that support the Every Kid in a Park initiative. In it, we see the opportunity for more American children and their families, as well as educators, to visit national parks, forests, refuges, and other federal land areas, and to experience the history and natural values of these landscapes. We all see the opportunity to provide introductions and remote access to these special places via the learning portals described below.

The Federation recognizes that many fourth grade children will, because of the free pass provided to them, visit and learn about public land areas. But we also recognize that many children will not be able to take advantage of this opportunity for financial and logistical reasons. This educational guide, with its many educational curricula, lesson plans and guides was compiled to help bring the public land experience to every child in every fourth grade class in America. With this guide children, families and educators can:

1. Prepare for a richer experience if they are able to use the free pass to visit national parks and other areas,
2. Learn about national parks, forests, refuges and other areas at special times such as Earth Day, and National Public Lands Day, regardless of their ability to make a visit that year, and
3. Develop a lasting knowledge of natural lands and ecosystems that will enhance their public lands experiences as adults.

The Federation hopes that this guide will be used to create a stronger tie between young people and the rich heritage that is America's public parks and lands, whether these are signature national parks or are local parks.

SELECTED RESOURCES FOR EDUCATORS

PARKS, FORESTS, REFUGES, LAKES, AND OTHER PUBLIC LANDS

Federal land managing agencies oversee one third of the land area of the United States. While much of this land in the western states and Alaska, there are remarkable public land areas in every corner of the nation. People are interested to know that the land the federal government manages was set aside for a variety of different purposes, and at different times. Our National Forests, for example, were originally established to support America's long term needs for water and trees. Wildlife refuges were set up to support wild species, and national parks were set up for nature preservation and public enjoyment. Reservoir areas under the operation of the Bureau of Reclamation and the Army Corps of Engineers were established for water supply, flood control and power, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration manages marine sanctuaries to support ocean and coastal life. One of the most fascinating of public resource agencies in the Bureau of Land Management which takes care of land that was considered too arid and barren to have many other uses or "land" that constitutes the U.S. continental shelf below the sea.

Each of these public land and water managing agencies has a deep and abiding wish for people to visit their areas, to experience them and to learn about them. All of them have developed educational resources for use in schools and other settings to familiarize young people and adults with the natural history, the ecological systems and culture of public land areas. Examples of these resources follow:

TEACHER RESOURCES FROM THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

National parks are among America's largest classrooms. This [site](#) will help you find lesson plans about these great places using a searchable database that generates results based on subject, grade level, and Common Core standard inputs.

LEARNING LANDSCAPES FROM THE BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT (BLM)

This environmental education [website](#) presents learning opportunities associated with the more than 245 million acres of public lands managed by the BLM, showcasing events and resources. The site includes information for students, teachers, and adult learners to use in schools, in informal outdoor settings, or in “virtual” classrooms.

CONNECTING PEOPLE TO THEIR PUBLIC LANDS 2015 (PDF)

This newly released [publication](#) presents narrative overviews of selected Bureau of Land Management education, interpretation, volunteer, and youth employment activities.

DISCOVER THE FOREST

A partnership between the U.S. Forest Service and the Ad Council, this [website](#) offers resources for parents and teachers to help get kids outside to explore nature. Forests provide many benefits, like fresh water, shade, and clean air. Check out games, activities, science tips, and fun facts to help you appreciate and conserve our natural lands.

WATERS

OCEAN LITERACY: THE ESSENTIAL PRINCIPLES AND FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS OF OCEAN SCIENCES FOR LEARNERS OF ALL AGES (PDF)

Understanding the ocean is essential to comprehending and protecting this planet on which we live. This [guide](#) presents a vision of an ocean-literate society—one equipped with the knowledge required to make informed and responsible decisions regarding the ocean and its resources. The guide’s companion piece, [Ocean Literacy Scope and Sequence for Grades K-12](#), is an instructional tool that shows how educators can help learners build their understanding of the seven ocean literacy principles throughout grades K-12. Both resources were created by the Ocean Literacy Campaign, “a wide-ranging, collaborative, and decentralized effort by hundreds of scientists and educators to create a more ocean literate society.”

TEACHER RESOURCES FROM THE NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARIES

This [website](#) offers resources and training to support ocean literacy in America’s classrooms—“curriculum, lesson plans, and activities that will excite your students about science and technology.”

EARTH SCIENCE

GEOLOGY OF NATIONAL PARKS

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) presents 3D and standard [photographic tours](#) featuring park geology and natural history.

USGS SCIENCE RESOURCES FOR PRIMARY GRADES

This [website](#) contains selected U.S. Geological Survey educational resources that may be useful to educators of children in grades K-6. While many of these resources can be used directly in the classroom, or in the preparation of lessons or demonstration activities, others are designed for teacher education and curriculum development.

WEATHER AND CLIMATE EDUCATION RESOURCES

This [collection](#) for K-12 educators, prepared by North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University with support from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), highlights information, activities, and games related to the topics of weather and climate.

PUBLIC LANDS AND HISTORY

FOR EDUCATORS: THE NATIONAL PARKS: AMERICA'S BEST IDEA

The lessons on this Public Broadcast System [website](#) were developed to help teachers use *The National Parks: America's Best Idea*, a six-part documentary series by Ken Burns and Dayton Duncan, in the classroom. The activities look at the rich history of the national parks, the art and photography of the breathtaking geography that inspired so many people, and the human story of politics and policy that shaped and continue to shape the parks today. The lessons address national teaching standards, which are described in each lesson plan.

EDUCATION WHILE VISITING

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE'S JUNIOR RANGER PROGRAM

The goal of this [program](#) is twofold: 1) introduce young people to the national park system through a variety of in-park activities and 2) cultivate future generations of park stewards. Offerings range from simple scavenger hunts for younger children to multi-day ranger-led activities. More than 200 National Park Service areas currently have Junior Ranger programs. Specialized Junior Ranger badges include:

JUNIOR CAVE SCIENTIST

Budding speleologists explore the fascinating and fragile underground world of caves, learn about the National Park System, and complete fun [educational activities](#). Participants who complete an activity booklet (available online) earn a badge.

JUNIOR PALEONTOLOGIST

Through this [website](#), young people discover the ways that paleontologists work, as well as the methods and tools that these scientists who study fossils use to understand ancient life. Kids who complete an activity booklet (available online) earn a badge. More than 230 national parks are known to preserve fossils.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS: MAKING THE MOST OF NATIONAL PARK EXPERIENCES (PDF)

If parks are to be successful education partners with schools, developing [curriculum-based programs](#) that aid teachers is key, says Patti Reilly, a National Park Service program manager for interpretation and education. “Providing relevant resource-based experiences for people of all ages will ensure a continuum of opportunities for citizens to support their own learning objectives through the national parks and to find meaning in their national treasures.”

PARK STEWARDS

This National Park Foundation [program](#), sponsored by the University of Phoenix, gives high school teachers and students the opportunity to explore the relevance of national parks to their lives, and enables them to become civically engaged stewards of their national parks through year-long service-learning projects.

JOIN THE ADVENTURE: RESOURCES FROM THE BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT (BLM)

Junior explorers and rangers can discover the wonders of public lands with special activities on dozens of [BLM sites](#). The agency has also created activity booklets on special topics, such as geology, native plants, and wild horses. Check them out and join the adventure.

BRINGING FEDERAL LANDS TO SCHOOLS

U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE'S SCHOOLYARD HABITAT PROGRAM

This [program](#) helps teachers and students create wildlife habitat at their schools. These wetlands, meadows, forests, and variations based on specific ecoregions are developed with technical and organizational assistance from the federal agency. [National Wildlife Federation's Schoolyard Habitats program](#) offers its own suite of planning resources and lesson plans for educators interested in establishing wildlife-friendly outdoor classrooms.

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE'S WEBRANGERS PROGRAM

This [online Junior Ranger program](#) provides a safe environment for students to learn about U.S. history, the environment and stewardship, geography, our social history, various cultures, language arts, and real-life applications in mathematics, while also gaining essential computer skills. The [WebRangers Teacher's Resource Guide](#) allows educators to quickly assess more than 50 WebRangers activities and discover how each activity meets National Standards of Learning.

A FOREST FOR EVERY CLASSROOM: LEARNING TO MAKE CHOICES FOR THE FUTURE

This [professional development program](#) hosted by Shelburne Farms helps K-12 educators of all disciplines learn to “read”-and teach-in the landscapes of Vermont. Guided by some of the best education and natural resource professionals in the state, these teachers explore how using place-based learning and education for sustainability make the Common Core State Standards and Next Generation Science Standards both more practical and meaningful.

CONSERVATION EDUCATION THAT SUPPORTS UNDERSTANDING OF PUBLIC LANDS

PROJECT LEARNING TREE

This [program](#) of the American Forest Foundation uses the forest as a window on the world, engaging the next generation of America's thought leaders and decision makers. Participating educators receive peer-reviewed, award-winning environmental education curriculum resources that can be integrated into lesson plans for all grades and subject areas.

PROJECT WILD

Presented by the Council for Environmental Education with support from state wildlife agencies, this wildlife-focused conservation [education program](#) is for K-12 educators and their students. It is based on the premise that young people and educators have a vital interest in learning about our natural world.

NATURESERVE EXPLORER

This [online encyclopedia](#) from the nonprofit NatureServe organization is an authoritative source for information on more than 70,000 plants, animals, and ecosystems of the United States and Canada. It includes in-depth coverage for rare and endangered species.

RANGER RICK'S EDUCATORS GUIDE

It's no secret that **RANGER RICK** captivates kids. But the National Wildlife Federation magazine is more than just fun. It's also a great tool for building nonfiction reading skills and conceptual science understanding. This concise [guide](#) provides educational extensions for each month's **RANGER RICK**. Delve deeper into every issue with activity ideas and student pages.

RANGER RICK'S NATURE NOTEBOOK

The natural world is full of learning opportunities. Each month, a [new notebook page](#) provides an entry point for bringing outdoor investigation into your science and language arts curricula.

IN SUM:

While the above is not an exhaustive listing of educational resources relating to our public lands and waters, it contains many extraordinary curricula, lesson plans, guides and programs. Many individual public land sites have their own, tailored, educational resources and, taken as a whole, they number in the thousands. They include formal nationwide curricula to something as simple as a beautiful-presented ranger lecture in a remote corner of a national forest. This guide is offered in support of the practice and ideals of the Every Kid in A Park program. It focuses on the simple idea that you cannot love what you do not know and that there are many ways to begin to know our public lands that can be arrayed on a continuum from the home, to the classroom, to a local park, to wilds of Yosemite and the high Sierra.

