Environmental Education Programs

**Interpretive Hiking  All Seasons**

Environmental staff lead groups both on and off site introducing and connecting participants to our unique and diverse southern Illinois landscapes. Introductory programs on our brand new trail section and in nearby scenic Giant City State Park provide quality experiences packed with information catered for groups of varying populations and hiking abilities. Varying levels of advanced opportunities include our Wilderness walk exploring our property beyond our central campus and into areas in Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge including the “ghost town” of Progress, Illinois and our Native American Hidatsa-style earth lodge/wilderness station. We can also meet you in your local area at some state and federal managed lands depending on your group size and permitting requirements. Geology, watersheds, flora and fauna, natural divisions, ecosystems, ancient, pioneer, and recent history, environmental ethics, day hiking 101, arts and crafts, self-expression, journaling and literature, and many more of our other activities can be woven into these programs. Explore and connect to beautiful and fascinating southern Illinois!

**Interpretive Paddling  Three Seasons**

Perched on the undeveloped shores of Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge’s Little Grassy Lake our property provides the opportunity to put groups of paddlers of varying size and experience on the water. Programs start with paddling instruction for canoe or kayak (or both) depending on program length, group size and needs/goals. We have a new fleet of kayaks we are excited to be using for groups of up to fifteen at a time. After practicing our skills in a protected cove we venture out onto the lake to explore the shoreline and watch for wildlife which may include bald eagles, great blue herons, deer, beaver, coyote, fox, raccoon, turtles, or migratory birds like prothonitary warblers, osprey, and even loons depending on the season! Interpretation can include wetland ecology, lake history, land management, among other subjects. Areas to visit can include native American rock shelters, a lotus (lily pad) field, a quarter mile stretch up lake tributary No-Name creek, Rocky Ledges (where we can swim and jump in the lake), and more. Paddling is an excellent skills, interpersonal, and self-confidence building exercise in
addition to being a great nature connecting experience! Learning to paddle can enable a lifetime of paddling enjoyment and connection to landscapes across the globe!

**Aquatic Investigation** Three Seasons

Play Macro-invertebrate Mayhem! on the beach to learn about macro-invertebrates as water quality indicators. Then hike down the cove to dip net and identify a variety of macro-invertebrates living in our healthy watershed as well as other interesting critters like baby catfish, newts, frogs and more! This program is hands on and exciting for participants as they work to identify the things they catch themselves and decide if they are indicators of good or poor water quality. Teachable moments also occur with land animals at the waterline as we are in the forest while dip netting and lessons on watersheds, land and waterways management, aquatic invasives, pollution, and life cycles of aquatic/terrestrial amphibians can be discussed.

**Mammoth Tracking** All Seasons

Our “clan for a day” considers historic and present day relationships to animals and the land through the lens of the Pleistocene people, animals, landforms, climate change, and human/group endeavors. A series of activities related to hunting and gathering skills and group work, combines with information about glaciation, changing climate, extinction, ancestral skills and technologies, modern day mammoth hunters and big game poachers, etc. and all rolls up into a metaphor and lesson on human/animal survival and relationships no matter what the period. Skills discussed and exhibited to “track the mammoth” form into a metaphor for the need for us to work together to achieve our needs as we identify goals, prepare our tools, gather and utilize our resources wisely and responsibly (including other humans), plan our “attack”, practice our skills, and learn to account for the fact that our goals are always on the move. Introduction to and practice of atlatl, rabbit sticks, throwing spears, bullroarers, primitive paint, stalking, and other skills like fire are practiced depending on length of program and group goals. Keep an eye out for Arctodus Simus, short face bear!

**Maple Syrupin’** January through February

Join SIU Forestry students/Environmental Education staff for winter tree identification and physiology, maple sap collection, syruping demonstrations, history, process, and lore. Additional activities including interpretive hiking available depending on your length of visit as well as possibly assisting us with the Syrup process depending on the timing of your visit, where we are in the process, and if the sap and weather are cooperating. A sweet program for certain!