



*Izaak Walton League of America
American Wetlands Month Case Studies:*

Organize a Wetlands Weekend

The Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, held its first Wetlands Weekend on November 10-11, 2001. Through educational activities and displays, more than 1,000 museum visitors learned about the importance of wetland conservation. Following the project description is step-by-step information about how the Academy organized this event along with tips for organizing a similar event in your community.

Project Description

Over the course of a weekend, museum visitors were exposed to activities and scientific research that taught them about wetland plants and animals and the importance of conserving wetlands. The total attendance for the weekend was 1,049 people including families and Scout troops. Wetland educational activities included the following stations:

Wetland Invertebrates Display

Visitors got a close-up view of live ribbed mussels (*Geukensia demissa*) and baby horseshoe crabs collected from the Delaware Bay through the research of one of the Academy's scientists, Dr. Daniel Kreeger. An experiment was conducted with a beaker that contained mussels and marsh water with added algae. Visitors could see the cleared water in just 20 minutes and witness the importance of mussels as filter feeders. Visitors could also handle a horseshoe crab the size of a quarter and learn about the significance of these living fossils.

Cattail craft

In addition, children kept busy by creating their own cattail craft. Using felt, construction paper, and pipe cleaners, they made a cattail that could also function as a bookmark.

Live Animal Show

The Academy presented two shows each day using live animals from its collection of over 100 animals. One show included a variety of wetland animals including mallard

ducks, a barred owl, and a pond turtle. Academy educators led a discussion of how these animals are so well adapted to wetland habitats. The second show used an alligator and their significance to other kinds of wetlands, including swamps.

“Sex and Gluttony on Delaware Bay” Diorama Tours

This weekend, visitors were able to visit this diorama that is usually not open to the public. They learned about the crucial relationship between horseshoe crabs and migrating birds in this tidal habitat.

Wetland Demonstration

Visitors manipulated a wetland model to learn about why wetlands are so important to people and to many other species. Visitors also compared the functions of household items, such as soap, a sponge, and a coffee filter, to the functions of wetlands. The Izaak Walton League supplied brochures about wetland stewardship that were handed out to visitors.

Steps to Take to Organize a Wetlands Weekend

1. Developing the idea.

Education staff at the Academy of Natural Sciences had a long history of watershed education initiatives including teacher workshops, summer programs for inner city youth, and classes for students. The Academy staff was pleased with these outreach programs to students and teachers and wanted to expand watershed education by reaching out to new audiences, such as families. The Academy had a base of families that visit the museum and had organized special weekend events dealing with other themes, such as dinosaurs and Egyptian history. The Academy realized that a weekend of special activities focusing on watershed components, including oceans, coasts, rivers and lakes, and wetlands, would reach the target audience of families visiting the museum.

The Academy’s museum was a great location for the Wetlands Weekend because visitors to the museum’s exhibits were drawn to the special event. Communities interested in coordinating a Wetland Workshop can work with museums, nature centers, Izaak Walton League chapters, or other organizations that have space available for the event.

2. Finding the funding.

The Academy applied for and received a two-year grant from the Environmental Protection Agency’s Region III office to further the Academy’s watershed education.

3. Choosing a date.

The Academy needed to choose a date for the first Wetlands Weekend that allowed staff at least six months to plan and publicize the event. Also, the Academy looked back at weekend attendance records for the past years to find weekends that historically drew high attendance. The Academy planned four watershed weekends over the course of a year, each focusing on a different water ecosystem. Several of the weekends were also coordinated with other events. For example, the Oceans Weekend was coordinated with a temporary exhibit called Extreme Deep, which focuses on deep ocean habitats. In 2003,

the Academy plans to hold its second Wetlands Weekend in May to celebrate American Wetlands Month.

4. Publicity.

The Academy used several avenues to invite the public to the Wetlands Weekend. Academy members received information about the event in a newsletter. Flyers announcing the event were distributed to museum visitors in the months prior to the event. A press release announcing the event was distributed to all of the local papers. For additional publicity, use email list serves, posting on web site calendars, and send announcements for inclusion in newsletters of local conservation organizations. Post flyers at nature centers and community centers. Invite local elected officials to attend. Call the environmental reporters of local papers to invite them to cover the event. Most importantly, let the Izaak Walton League know about events taking place during American Wetlands Month (May) so the League can help provide additional publicity.

5. Selecting the Activities.

The Academy chose themes for the educational stations based on the expertise and research of their scientists, resources available at the museum, and other resources that were gathered from outside the museum. A craft was included because participant evaluations of past activities held at the museum showed that crafts were popular with visitors. The Academy also wanted to provide a variety of activities to hold the interest of visitors and provide a rich educational experience.

For a successful Wetlands Weekend event, be sure to include hands-on activities and activities that include crafts and/or information for participants to take home. If possible, include outdoor activities that introduce visitors to the wonders of wetlands first hand.

6. Gathering available resources.

The Academy had many resources for the stations available on site. From museum collections, the Academy pulled together a display of wetland invertebrates and a tour of a diorama used for research on horseshoe crabs and migrating birds. In addition, the museum has a collection of more than 100 live animals, and typically has live animal shows throughout the day. Museum educators adapted the live animal shows to focus on wetland animals.

The cattail craft and wetland model demonstrations held during the Wetlands Weekend are activities listed in a wetland curriculum called **WOW! The Wonders of Wetlands**. Materials used for these activities include common household items and craft items that are readily available. [Click here](#) for information on obtaining wetland educational activities and wetland curricula. Pamphlets and other information on wetlands and wetland stewardship distributed during the event are available from the Izaak Walton League.

Other ideas for activities include wetland plant identification demonstrations, a wetland stewardship skit performed several times throughout the day, and a “touch box” of wetland items where visitors put their hands in a box and try to guess what wetland items

are inside through touch. Groups not affiliated with a museum can contact museums, zoos, state and local environmental agencies, nature centers, local watershed associations, and others to find people to help design and run activities and to borrow materials such as plant specimens or live animals.

7. Recruiting volunteers.

The Academy had the advantage of having paid education staff available to set up the program, run the activities, and handle registration. Other groups may need to rely on volunteers to perform these jobs. Good places to look for volunteers are watershed associations, local environmental organizations, and civic associations. In addition, use local newspapers to announce a need for volunteers and post requests for volunteers at nature centers.

8. Evaluations and follow-up.

The Academy asked participants to complete forms evaluating their experience. Evaluations can be used to determine the success of the activity and to make the next event even more successful. The Academy also wrote an article about the event for their newsletter. Another useful follow-up activity is to send a follow-up press release with photographs of the event to local newspapers. Many newspapers will print photos with short articles about past events. Also, send thank you notes to volunteers, funders, and others who helped with the event. Keep a mailing list of the event participants and send them announcements about future events.

For More Information

For more information about the Academy of Natural Sciences and its successful Wetlands Weekend, visit www.acnatsci.org or email Carie Szalay at szalay@acnatsci.org.