Somerset County Park Commission Launches New School Field Trip Program To Support Science Teachers

This winter the Somerset County Park Commission Environmental Education Center will pilot a new school field trip program called *Finding Answers in Nature.* This program was made possible through an Eco Grant from 3M and the Somerset County Park Foundation, and includes $5,000 in scholarships available to Title 1 schools for transportation costs.

*Finding Answers in Nature* uses the concept of biomimicry to teach STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) and make Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) connections, as well as meet environmental literacy guidelines. Biomimicry is an approach to innovation that seeks sustainable solutions to human challenges by emulating nature’s time-tested patterns and strategies.

Recognizing the opportunity to support teachers as they look to implement NGSS, the Somerset County Park Commission Environmental Science Department put together a plan to offer science-rich field trips in the western edge of the Great Swamp in Lord Stirling Park.

Naturalists from the EEC will lead a three-hour guided field trip that includes two hours outdoors, walking through the living laboratory of Lord Stirling Park to observe nature and learn about Life’s Principles.

“It is incredibly promising for the field of environmental education to see the environment used as a context for teaching academic standards in schools,” said Shawn McCrohan, Manager of Environmental Science for the Somerset County Park Commission. “Our hope is that all students are environmentally literate by the time they graduate high school. Imagine how that would shape our future world!”

Through the Environmental Education Center located in Basking Ridge, New Jersey, SCPC has been teaching the community about environmental education since the 1970’s. The Environmental Science Department is dedicated to stimulating awareness and understanding of the natural world in order to foster a sense of responsibility for its care and use through environmental, cultural, and recreational learning experiences.

“Environmental Education is not a magic bullet for teaching all STEM or NGSS standards, but there are some strong areas where they overlap and connect,” McCrohan said. “Our goal is to get students into the living laboratory of Lord Stirling Park to make those connections.”

To learn more about the Finding Answers in Nature school field trip program or the transportation scholarships, please contact Shawn McCrohan at 908.766.2489 Ext. 324 or smccrohan@scparks.org.

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