

# Best Practices for Hosting a Woods Walk

Creating an Exceptional Educational Event

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## Why a Walk?

- Makes the forest accessible
- Gets people out, experiencing the woods
- Builds the connection to the woods



Photo by Laura Kirt

## Goals for a Walk in the Woods

- Engage the public to understand:
  - The many benefits of trees and forests
  - The dynamic nature of the forest
  - Woodland professionals and foresters are uniquely qualified to help maintain the integrity of the forest, while providing many benefits for society.
  - Private woodland owners have multiple and diverse goals for their land, and that their efforts to care well for the woods result in benefits that we all enjoy.

## Goals for a Walk in the Woods

- Help people understand why we should care about the forests
- “How we care” to illustrate the concept of working woods



Photo by Laura Kirt

## Goals for a Walk: Using Forest History



- Understanding today's forests through their history of use
- Management needed because much of the forest is the same age.
- Efforts to restore young forest

## Goals for a Walk: Using Forest Values



- There is no single acre of forest that has not been impacted by humans.
- Conserving viewsheds
- Maintaining biodiversity
- Protecting/creating habitat for wildlife

## Goals for a Walk: Using Forest Products and Economics



- In Pennsylvania the wood products industry is a multi-billion dollar industry.
- We manage forests to provide a continuous stream of products
- Increase forest resilience
  - Diversity in age
  - Diversity in species
  - Sustainability
- Create conditions for non-timber forest products

## Goals for a Walk: Using Forest Ecology



- The forest ecosystem is a very complex system.
- Many challenges to its health and resilience
  - Invasive plants
  - Insects and diseases
  - Poor practices
- When caring for the woods, landowners and foresters also consider
  - Insects and diseases
  - effects of competing vegetation
  - impacts on water
  - diversity of age, structure, and species
  - wildlife habitat
  - etc.

## Planning the Message

- What do you want to share? What are ways you can illuminate the message?
- What are the different ways the woods work for you? Related to YOUR walk on YOUR land – personalize the story.
- Tell your personal “why” and share your passion behind the woods

## The Takeaway

- What is the one thing (or two things) you want people to take away from your event?
  - Repeat it



## Audience

- Assume an event would be open to the public,
- BUT, if that's not comfortable for you, consider:
  - Neighbors
  - Family
  - Colleagues
  - Scout or other organized youth groups
  - Natural resources professionals
  - Government officials
  - Local groups of which you are a member
  - Church
  - Other business leaders in your community

## Location

- Places that illustrate the story you want to tell
- Distance
- Access
- Accessibility
- Parking
- Facilities

## Location

- Your Woods
- State Parks
- State Gamelands
- State Forest
- Municipal or County Forests and Watersheds
- Woodland Owners Associations
- Tree Farms
- Conserved Lands
- Even backyard forests and urban landscapes

## Assistance

- Partner with a resource professional or organization to be sure your message and facts are accurate.



## Assistance

- Your forester or wildlife biologist
- State foresters
- Consulting forester professional organizations
  - Society of American Foresters
  - Association of Consulting Foresters



## Assistance

- Conservation Organizations
  - Audubon
  - Quality Deer Management Association
  - Ruffed Grouse Society
  - Wild Turkey Federation
  - County Conservation Districts
  - Watershed Associations
  - Land Trusts and Conservancies
- Many are willing to help





## Logistics of the Walk

- Safe
- Clear
- Hazards – avoid or mark well
- Guided walk or open house with stations in the woods
- Maps
- Timing of walk

## Logistics of the Walk

- Pets
- Use of UTVs
- Cell phone coverage
- Emergency plans
- Refreshments
- Supervision of children
- Alternative routes for near water's edge

## Insurance and Liability

- Pennsylvania's Recreational Use of Land and Water Act (RULWA 1966 – amended in 2007)
  - Limits the liability, resulting from personal injury or property damage, of landowners who make their land available to the public for recreation free of charge.
- The Act covers public and private landowners as well as organizations “in control of the premises.” To qualify for protection, the landowner must not charge a fee for the recreational use of the land. However, the Act does not cover an owner *“for willful or malicious failure to guard or warn against a dangerous condition, use, structure, or activity.”*
- PA Courts have limited RULWA immunity to land that remains largely in its natural state.
  - Undeveloped land - Covered by Act:
    - Hiking trail/footpath
    - (voluntary monetary donations or in-kind contributions (e.g. venison) can affect immunity)

## Insurance and Liability

- National Woodland Owners Association
- Tree Farm
- Society of American Foresters
- Release forms or waivers
- One-day riders under Homeowners or Farm/Woodlot umbrella policy
- **Insurance is always better**

## Activities for Adults

- Tree Identification
- Viewing different types of harvests
- Building bird/bat boxes
- Wildlife habitat
- Tree planting
- Trail clean-up



Photo by Sarah Egidi




Photo by Sue Schiemer

## Activities for Children

- Project Learning Tree (<https://www.plt.org/>)





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## WALKING IN THE FOREST

**FAMILY ACTIVITY: FIELD, FOREST, AND STREAM**  
Compare different environments to understand how nonliving elements can influence living elements within an ecosystem.  
[VIEW FAMILY ACTIVITY](#)


**FAMILY ACTIVITY: HAVE SEEDS, WILL TRAVEL**  
Observe, collect, and classify plant seeds.  
[VIEW FAMILY ACTIVITY](#)

**FAMILY ACTIVITY: EVERGREENS IN WINTER**  
Touch, smell, see, hear, and taste winter using this activity.  
[VIEW FAMILY ACTIVITY](#)

**FAMILY ACTIVITY: HOW PLANTS GROW**  
Find out what plants need to function and grow using this activity.  
[VIEW FAMILY ACTIVITY](#)

<https://www.plt.org/activities-for-families/walking-in-the-forest/>



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## FAMILY ACTIVITY: THE FALLEN LOG

It's amazing how many things live in and on rotting logs. In this activity, kids become familiar with some of those organisms by observing fallen logs. They'll gain an understanding of how decomposition takes place and a better appreciation for micro-habitats and communities.

**Doing the Activity**  
Take a walk in the woods with your family and look for a fallen log or rotting tree stump. Conduct a thought exercise by asking, "What happens to a tree after it dies?" Investigate the answer by using powers of observation:

- How did the tree die and how long has it been dead?
- Are there signs of animals, including insects, in, on, or around the log? How about plants?
- How are they interconnected?
- Where do these living things get the nutrients they need to survive?



Be careful not to disturb the habitat as you observe. You could use a digital camera—or sketchbook—to record pictures of anything you see. Use field guides or the internet to identify and research them later. Finally, brainstorm ways in which the forest ecosystem benefits from the fallen log you examined.

**Children's Book Recommendation**

- *What's Under the Log?*  
by Anne Hunter  
ISBN:0395754968  
A story book that illustrates many creatures a child could find under a fallen log.

[Download this Activity](#)

**Get the Full Activity**  
This family activity is adapted from Project Learning Tree's *PreK-8 Environmental Education Activity Guide* which can be obtained through an in-person professional development workshop or online course.

The screenshot shows the Project Learning Tree website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for "RESOURCES", "CURRICULUM", "PRESCHOOLS", "ELEMENTARY", "MIDDLE", and "HIGH SCHOOL". Below this is a banner with the text "EFFECTIVE + PROVEN" and "Our interactive trainings are customized for specific grades levels, topics, and teaching situations." A "GET STARTED" button is visible. Below the banner, there is a section titled "HIGH-QUALITY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT" with the text "Enhance your teaching skills and become comfortable teaching outdoors - in urban, suburban, or rural environments. Receive multidisciplinary, hands-on lessons aligned with state and national academic standards. Put the materials to use right away in your own classroom, playground, or nature center." Below this, there is a section titled "EXAMPLES OF OUR TRAININGS" with six icons representing different training types: "DAY-LONG IN-PERSON WORKSHOP", "AFTER SCHOOL", "SUMMER INSTITUTES", "ONLINE", "INSERVICE", and "PRESERVICE". At the bottom, there is a green bar with the text "5 GUIDING PRINCIPLES" and "ATTEND A TRAINING". A small "HFWifi Internet access" icon is also present.

<https://www.plt.org/trainings/>

## Activities for Children

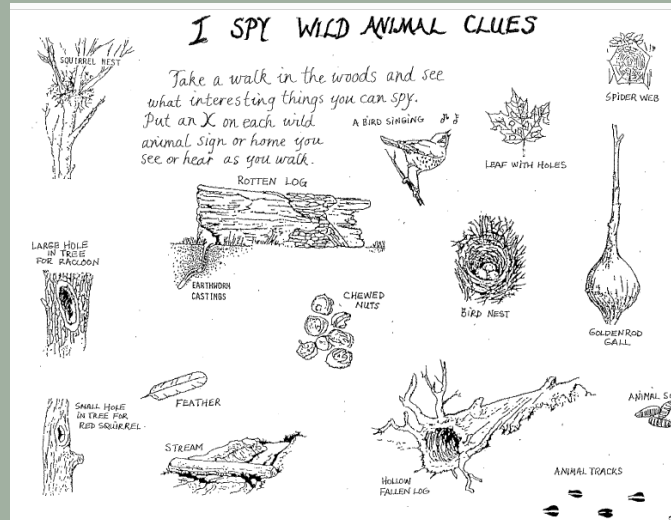
- Cornell Lab of Ornithology's BirdSleuth K-12 program (<http://www.birdsleuth.org/free-resources/>)

The screenshot shows the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's BirdSleuth K-12 program website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for "Get eNews", "Contact Us", and "Donate". Below this is a search bar with the text "BirdSleuth K-12" and a "SEARCH" button. Below the search bar, there is a navigation menu with links for "INFO FOR...", "EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES", "WORKSHOPS & WEBINARS", "GRANTS & GIVEAWAYS", "ABOUT US", and "SHOP". Below the navigation menu, there is a section titled "FREE RESOURCES" with four cards:

- Feathered Friends Lessons**: Grade Level: K-5 | Your feeder birds can help you teach science content.
- Flap to the Future Lesson Plan**: Grade Level: 6-8 | Jump, glide, or fly your way through this lesson plan.
- BirdSleuth Explorer's Guidebook**: Grade Level: 3-5 | Go on an adventure with seven fun activities.
- Investigating Evidence**: Grade Level: K-12 | Inspire outdoor investigations through citizen science!

## Activities for Children

- Other Resources
  - Homeschooling Resources
  - Penn State Extension's Resources for Teachers
    - <https://ecosystems.psu.edu/youth>
  - Scavenger Hunts



Shared by Jane Swift

## Advertising and Marketing

- Community calendars
- News or press releases (elevate with pictures)
- Extension columns in local papers
- Personal invitations
- Local radio
- Paid advertising
- Social media

## Takeaways

- Handouts
- Publications
- Mementos



## Walk in Penn's Woods

- Statewide day of woods walks on the first Sunday in October.
- October 7, 2018

[www.walkinpennswoods.org](http://www.walkinpennswoods.org)

- Rain or shine






## Walk in Penn's Woods




**2017**  
64 WALKS,  
46 COUNTIES,  
1,000+ STRONG!




## Walk in Penn's Woods



- Sign up to lead a Walk  
(<https://sites.psu.edu/walkinpennswoods/host-a-walk/>)
- Advertising
- Statewide map with walks
- Signs
- Resource guides and other handouts for walk hosts to share with participants
- Evaluations
- Facebook

