

Graham creek nature preserve educational program

Executive Summary

The City of Foley owns and manages the Graham Creek Nature Preserve. This almost 500 acre nature preserve is situated just off the western banks of Wolf Bay in southeast corner of Foley, AL. With Graham Creek traversing the property, wetlands are plentiful encompassing over 300 acres. Passive recreational amenities have been developed to include a kayak launch, multiple trails, picnic areas and disc golf. Plant diversity is spectacular boasting over 700 species including over 10 Alabama endangered plant species.

With an average of 1000 students touring the Preserve annually, a concept of an educational program was developed. The idea was to educate students of all grades on aspects of the local environment. A grant was received through the Coastal Zone Management Program through the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, State Lands Division, Coastal Section in part with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The grant provided funding to the City of Foley to design an outdoor classroom and learning stations and to develop coastal educational curricula for use by students at Foley's Graham Creek Nature Preserve. Implementation of the project included the Nature Explore landscape architect-educator team, the Foley Nature Parks Committee and the City of Foley Environmental Division staff.

The Graham Creek Nature Preserve Educational Program is divided into three sections.

The Explorers include children up to 8 years old (3rd grade). These children will learn about the natural elements through stories, art, activities and play. The program will exclusively use the Nature Explore Outdoor Classroom for learning. Local and seasonal themes are incorporated into a program for the children. This program will be offered as a field day for school children. For pre-school children the program will be offered as "Explore and Observe at Graham Creek Preserve" events twice a month. Imagination and the outdoor environment play key roles in childhood development. This program will highlight these elements.

The Discovery program includes 4th through 6th grades. Following the Alabama Course of Study for each grade level, the program was developed to include science objectives. Two learning stations and at least two activities per grade level will educate students on wetland topics. Learning station topics include bug assessment, groundwater, heritage (forestry), soils & air,

watershed, and carnivorous plants. Students will visit the Preserve for a full day of activities and leave with a general knowledge of their environment.

The Elements program includes 7th through 9th grades. This program also follows the Alabama Course of study for each grade level. Some activities will be repeated from the Discovery program but with much more detail for the Elements program. It is divided into the elements of the Earth. Water and Air curricula are full days of activities. Earth, Fire and Spirit curricula are half days of activities. Students will gain a much more in depth knowledge of their surrounding environment through this program.

Following the construction completion of the Nature Explore Outdoor Classroom and Learning Stations, this program will be implemented through the City of Foley Environmental Division and volunteers.