Exploring Nature Together

Kids, this colored insert is for the grown-ups. Carefully remove it and give it to them.

Welcome to the Wisconsin Explorer * (WE) program! This insert explains the program and gives you the information you need to help kids explore and discover Wisconsin's State Parks.

WE program grows with kids

There are three age levels in the WE program (3 - 5 years, 6 - 8 years, and 9 years and up). Three themes (see chart below) help kids explore different parts of the great outdoors. With a total of nine booklets, a three-year-old can begin the program this year and participate until age eleven without repeating a booklet.

Kids collect patches

Over nine years, a young Wisconsin Explorer can collect nine different patches featuring Wisconsin state symbols.

Themes	Ages 3 - 5	Ages 6 - 8	Ages 9+up
Discovering Secrets	Robin	Muskie	Wood violet
Exploring the Extremes	Honeybee	Deer	Badger
Solving Mysteries	Sugar maple	Red granite	Trilobite (fossil)

* The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources offers the Wisconsin Explorer (WE) program at state parks, forests, trails, and recreation areas. Children visiting a state property with family members or friends may request WE booklets and earn patches. While teachers and youth leaders are invited to use the materials and may request one copy of each booklet, children in organized groups cannot earn patches. Booklets may be copied as long as copyright information remains on each page.

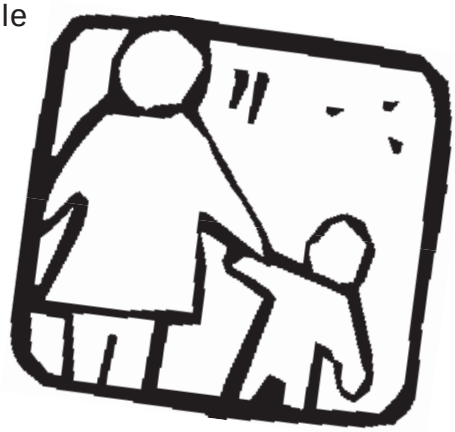
Families explore together

To encourage families to explore together, the first four activities in each booklet share common themes. For example, a preschooler might be watching birds while a 7-year-old is looking for feathers and a 10-year-old is trying to identify birds. Encourage children to help and learn from each other.

Grown-ups play key role

As you explore the outdoors, let kids lead the way. You will discover amazing things together. Keep these things in mind:

- It's OK to say "I don't know." Look for answers together, ask park staff, go to the library, or search the Internet later.
- Rediscover your own sense of curiosity. Kids will be more excited about nature if you are interested in it, too.
- Be honest about any fears you have, but don't let your fears stop kids from exploring.
- Model respect for living things and the places you visit. Remember, actions speak louder than words.
- Invest in some simple tools such as magnifying lenses, binoculars, aquarium nets, or simple field guides.
- Make spending time in wild places an essential part of your outdoor vacation.



Playing it safe

While you are hiking and playing outdoors, here are a few things to remember.

Dress defensively!

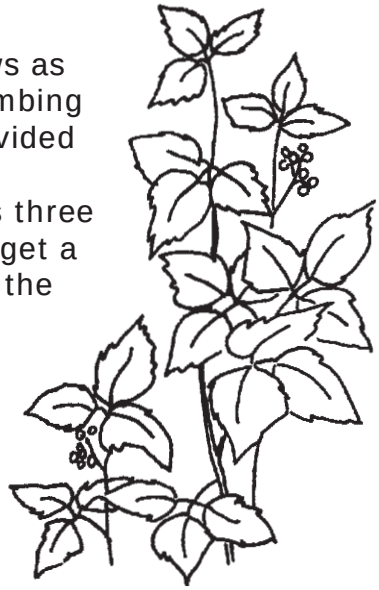
When in areas with poison ivy, wild parsnip, ticks, and mosquitoes:

- Stay on the trails.
- Wear covered shoes (not sandals).
- Wear light-colored long pants and a long-sleeved shirt to cover your skin. Mosquitoes are more attracted to dark colors, and you can see ticks better on light clothes.
- Tuck your pants into your socks and tuck your shirt into your pants to keep ticks out.
- Use repellents labeled with an EPA registration number. Always follow product directions and use all repellents with caution, especially around young children.
- Brush off clothes after hiking. Take a shower if possible.

Wild parsnip

Wild parsnip is related to Queen Anne's lace and dill. It has tiny yellowish-green flowers and light green leaves. If plant juices get on your skin, they can cause a burn (rash). Be especially careful on hot, sunny days. If you think you have touched wild parsnip, wash with soap and water right away. If that isn't possible, stay out of the sun, cover the area, or apply extra sunscreen until you can wash.

Poison ivy



Poison ivy (PI) grows as a low shrub or a climbing vine. Each leaf is divided into three leaflets. Remember, "leaflets three - let it be." You can get a PI rash by touching the plant, by touching clothes or pets that have brushed against the plant, or by breathing smoke from burning poison ivy. If you think you have been exposed to PI, scrub with strong soap and water immediately. If a rash develops, try anti-itch lotions or cold compresses. Be sure to see a doctor if the rash spreads or becomes infected.

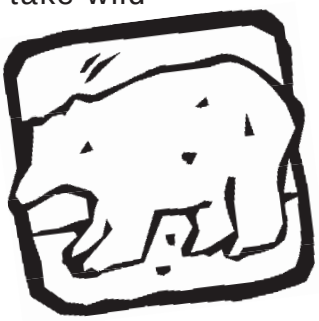
Ticks

A few deer ticks carry the bacterium that causes Lyme disease. Routinely check for ticks on people and pets, since removing ticks promptly greatly reduces the chances of contracting the disease. If you develop symptoms of Lyme disease, contact your doctor and be sure to explain that you've been in tick country. Visit <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/tickborne/lyme/index.htm> for more information.

actual size

Wild animals

Observe wild animals from a safe distance. If you see orphaned or injured animals, report the location to property staff. Remember, it is illegal to take wild animals home.



Check property websites, newspapers, or bulletin boards for information about other wildlife or plants to watch out for on the property.

Things to do

Take a nature hike

Dress in layers, wear comfortable shoes, pack some water and snacks, and choose an exciting destination. Along the way, plan rest stops and take time to enjoy nature. A family walking stick is a good tradition. Whoever is carrying the stick leads the way, sets the pace, and decides where to stop.

Keep a nature journal

Use a notebook to remember your hikes and nature explorations. Record who, when, how, and where. Ask each person to record the most and least favorite parts of the experience. Add wildlife sightings, scenic views, or memorable moments. Some day your journal will be a reminder of the experiences, joys, disasters, and fun that make visiting state parks a wonderful tradition.

Plan ahead

Encourage kids to explore on their own, but set age-appropriate limits. If you have wanderers, equip them with whistles. Teach them that if they get lost or separated from the group, they should stop moving, sit down, and blow their whistles. Take a cell phone (turned off, of course) on your hike. You can't count on good reception, but it might help in an emergency.

Connect to nature

Today, many kids are growing up in structured environments that don't allow much time or freedom to play outdoors. By helping them connect to things they discover in nature, you nurture values of good stewardship and build strong bonds that will last for a lifetime.

Cut along this line and return form when requesting a patch.

Evaluation form (Discovering Secrets - Ages 9 and up)

Please fill this out with your child.

Date _____ Age of child _____

Name and mailing address (only needed if requesting patch by mail)

_____

Place(s) where most of the activities were completed _____

Grown-ups: **Initial each patch requirement that your child completed.**

Booklet Explorations (minimum of 7 to earn patch)

____ Flashed a code to a firefly (p. 3)
____ Fooled a cricket (p. 4)
____ Searched for insects "talking" (p. 5)
____ Detected puzzling patterns (p. 7)
____ Found numb3rs in n8ture (pp. 8-9)
____ Exposed birds' identities (pp. 10-12)
____ Explored the moon (p. 14)
____ Watched the moon's phases (p. 16)
____ Untangled spider mysteries (p. 17)
____ Witnessed WI's wonders (pp. 20-23)
____ Found the hidden animals (p. 24).
____ Hid at the campsite (p. 25)
____ Read a milkweed plant (p. 26)
____ Looked at lichens (p. 27)

Program or Hike (minimum of 1 to earn patch)

____ Attended a nature program.
____ Took a family nature hike.

Action (minimum of 1 to earn patch)

____ Picked up litter in the park.
____ Shared nature secrets that I discovered with at least two people.
____ Will ride a bike or walk to help keep ozone levels down (see p. 26).

Wisconsin Explorer

Evaluation continued on bottom of next page.

Wisconsin Explorers, Get Outdoors! Wisconsin and EEK! are brought to you by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

Wisconsin State Park System

If you enjoyed this park, you will love the variety of parks, forests, trails, and recreation areas in Wisconsin's State Park System. Get the details by visiting <www.wiparks.net>

EEK!

Find answers to some of your questions, fun things to do, and great photos on EEK! Visit <www.dnr.wi.gov/eek>

Get Outdoors! Wisconsin

Watch for opportunities to explore the outdoors with your family and friends. Being active in the outdoors reduces stress, helps fight obesity, increases creativity, and may alleviate symptoms of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Watch for the Get Outdoors! Wisconsin compass shown on the right. It will point you to opportunities to attend programs, visit parks, go on explorations, build lasting bonds with family and friends, and connect to Wisconsin's great outdoors. Visit <www.wiparks.net> and look "GetOutdoors! Wisconsin."

Evaluation continued

Kids: **What is your favorite part about being a Wisconsin Explorer?**

Grown-ups: **What did you enjoy most about this program?**

Grown-ups: **As a result of completing this program. . .**
Do you think your child is inspired to explore outside more?

Yes Probably so I'm not sure Probably not No

Do you think you will spend more time outdoors with your child?

Yes Probably so I'm not sure Probably not No

Do you plan to participate in the program again?

Yes Probably so I'm not sure Probably not No

Please share your thoughts or suggestions for improving this program. Attach an extra page if needed.

Thank you! Instructions for requesting a patch are on the inside cover of your child's booklet. Remember to include your name and address if requesting your patch by mail.