

WETLAND

EXPLORER'S GUIDE

CLUES

1. The moving water is on your right but you cannot see its source.
2. Walk eight paces along the boardwalk and look for skunk cabbage, water parsley, and duckweed living in the mud-like water.
3. Walk ten paces more and you'll be in the Forest of Ferns. Do you see daggers reaching from the top of a dead tree trunk?
4. Continue on until you find a large wooden platform.
5. Now face the giant fir tree, which many insects call home, and here you'll find our special stone!

WHAT IS A WETLAND?

Marshes, swamps, bogs, sloughs, and tide flats are all wetlands. They have several characteristics in common:

- The area is low in relation to other features of the landscape.
- If water is visible, it is standing or barely moving, without a defined channel.
- The soil is wet all year just below the surface.

Intermediate students at the Islamic School of Seattle and their teacher, Carol Wehbe, provided the framework for this unit.

Funded by King County Water and Land Resources.

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WHAT TYPE OF WETLAND IS THIS?

A wetland that is connected to a creek, river, lake, or pond is called a "freshwater wetland." We have four types of freshwater wetlands. Choose a partner or form a small team and look around you. **Which type of freshwater wetland do you see?**

- This is a **forested wetland**. It has trees scattered throughout that are at least 20 feet tall. They include alder, western red cedar, willow, and other species that don't mind having their roots damp all year.
- This is a **scrub-shrub wetland**. It has bushes scattered throughout, including red-osier dogwood and other species that don't mind having their roots damp all year.
- This is a **deep marsh**. It has *at least* a foot of standing water during wet seasons. Plants include arrowhead, pondweed, and other species that like to have their roots in the mud.
- This is a **shallow marsh**. It has wet soil all year and *up to* a foot of standing water during wet seasons. Plants include small-flowered bulrush, water parsley, and other species that like to have their roots in very damp soil.
- This is a **wet meadow**. It does not have standing water most of the time but the soil is waterlogged just below the surface all year. Plants include sedges, skunk cabbage, and other species that like to have their roots in moist soil.

WETLAND STEWARDSHIP

A wetland is probably the most fragile habitat in a watershed ecosystem because all living things in a wetland depend on having plenty of clean water, day after day and year after year. Here are ways you can help protect this finely balanced place:

- ✓ Stay on the trail. Going off on your own may cause erosion and damage fragile wetland plants. If others follow, your path could become a "rogue" trail that destroys plants and sends dirty runoff into the water.
- ✓ Pack out any litter you find - and don't add to it.
- ✓ Take only memories; don't pick wildflowers or dig up plants.
- ✓ Help others understand how things they don't think twice about doing can harm the wetland.

Plant: _____

Location: dry damp in standing/slow-moving water

Contributions to habitat: A B C D E F G

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THE MARKER

WHERE WATER IS PART OF THE LAND, A FRAGILE HOME

reminds everyone who sees this stone that the wet, muddy world of wetlands is a finely balanced habitat.

Skunk cabbage dominates the wetland with its early, brilliant flower, giant leaves, and attractive (to some insects!) scent.

The **alevin petro glyph** emphasizes the importance of healthy freshwater habitat to growing salmon and ties this site to other links in the chain of water-based habitats.

Overall design and petro glyph detail by Tom Jay

PLANT IDENTIFICATION

Regardless of season, plants can help you identify the type of wetland you've found. Follow these steps to fill in the column at left:

1. Use the drawings and a field guide to identify up to six plants and write each one's common name in the blank.

2. Check the location of each plant. Remember: Soil that looks dry may be wet just below the surface. Scrap it with a stick to see.

3. Circle the contribution(s) you see each plant making to the habitat:

A = Helps cool the water

B = Provides shelter for wildlife

C = Makes oxygen

D = Provides food for wildlife

E = Holds the soil

F = Filters pollutants out of the water

4. In the space provided, sketch any plant for which you don't find a drawing.

5. Note anything that especially interests you about each plant or that you want to ask about later.

WETLANDS

HELPER'S GUIDE

GETTING THERE

Park on the south (uphill) side of SW Barton St. at the entrance to Fauntleroy Park. By bus, take Metro 54 to the stop just beyond the entrance. Enter the park and, at the Y, take the trail to your left. Walk east until you reach the big bridge over the creek. The clues begin at the spur of boardwalk that meets the bridge. To combine a visit to the wetland with a stop at the pond, use the big bridge as your reference point.

PREPARATIONS

1. Preview what you will be doing on this field trip, go over the "Explorer's Guide," and answer any questions.
2. Assemble for each youngster
 - a copy of the "Explorer's Guide" for this site
 - a copy of "Plants Common to Pacific Northwest Wetlands"
 - a pencil
 - a clipboard or heavy cardboard for support
3. Bring one or more **field guides to wetland plants** in the Pacific Northwest to help answer questions.

SEASON AND SAFETY

Visit this site during late spring or early fall; avoid the wettest, coldest months. Advise youngsters to dress for the weather and wear comfortable walking shoes or boots.

To help explorers focus in a very stimulating setting, we suggest **one adult for every five youngsters, fourth through sixth grades.**

APPROXIMATE TIME

Walk in: **15 minutes**

At the wetland: **40 minutes**

Walk back to entrance: **10 minutes**

At this site, young "explorers" will

- distinguish types of freshwater wetlands.
- become acquainted with plants commonly found in Pacific Northwest wetlands.
- see how plants contribute to wetland habitat.

WHAT TYPE OF WETLAND IS THIS?

Before starting this activity, remind youngsters that wetlands are essential pieces connecting to other pieces of a watershed and that watersheds are integral parts of a natural environment.

After teams have reached conclusions about what type of freshwater wetland they have found, take a show of hands to vote for each type. Designate someone to explain their decision when teams report, either during the field trip or back in class. Highlight similarities and differences in reasoning.

WHAT TYPES OF PLANTS ARE HERE?

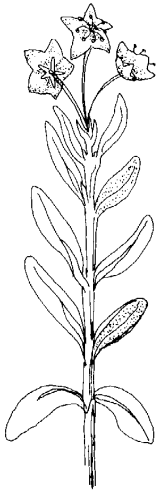
The page of drawings ("Plants Common to Pacific Northwest Wetlands") has many of the plants you are likely to find. You will discover others, though, which is why we advise bringing field guides. Using them will demonstrate their value for providing information on the spot *and* enhancing a nature experience. During this activity, assist youngsters, as needed, in finding plants and completing basic information about them.

After everyone is finished, discuss these or similar questions:

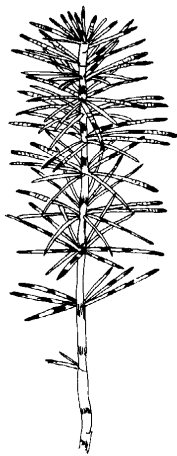
- Which plants did you see the most of here?
- Have you changed your mind about what type of wetland this is?
- What contributions did you most often see these plants making to this habitat?
- What kinds of wildlife did you see here or see evidence of? (Note: Wildlife may be limited to flying insects.)
- What would you add to the stewardship advice on your worksheet?

PLANTS COMMON TO PACIFIC NORTHWEST WETLANDS

Use these drawings to identify plants that grow in moist or wet soil. (Drawings are not to scale.)



BOG LAUREL



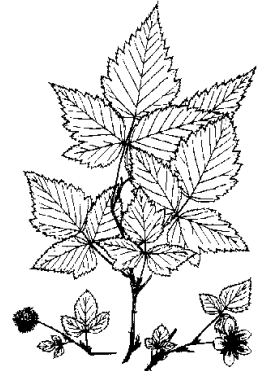
HORSETAIL



INDIAN PLUM



DOCK



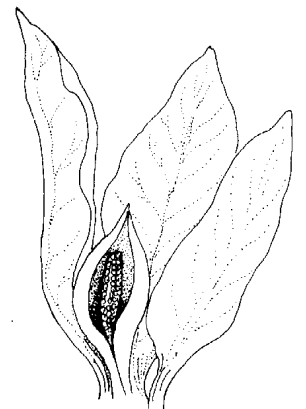
SALMONBERRY



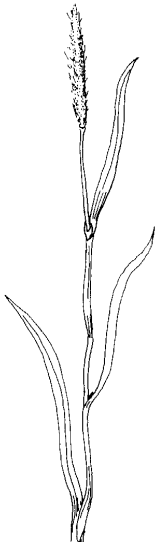
REED CANARY GRASS



WATER PARSLEY



SKUNK CABBAGE



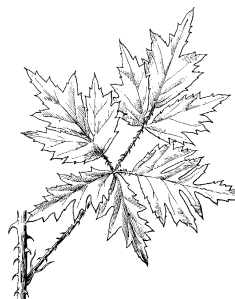
FOXTAIL



RED ELDERBERRY



SALAL



DEWBERRY



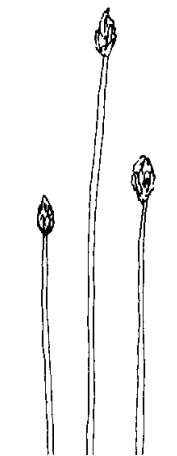
WESTERN BUTTERCUP



BRACKEN FERN



LEAFY MITERWORT



SPIKE RUSH



RED ALDER



HERB ROBERT



WESTERN RED CEDAR



RED-OSIER DOGWOOD