

# The Waterline

Division-wide Newsletter from Goose Creek State Park

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MAR 8 2002

OPERATIONS

## ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

By Ranger Jay Greenwood



*Hello everyone. Well, it has been about four years since NC State Parks opened its first environmental education center here at Goose Creek. Over these past years the staff has been working hard to develop programming opportunities for the public and for our schools that would enhance the use of the center and the understanding of our resources. We feel the years have been a great success. Now that we have a foothold on our mission, we feel it's time to provide a quarterly newsletter on the events of the Environmental Education Center and information on what we do and how we do it.*

The Environmental Education Center has definitely proven to be a different animal than a visitors center. Most of the difference is in the type of the programming that takes place. Our facilities provide us with a unique opportunity to provide in-depth programming that raises the interest of not only our visitors but also our staff. For those of you who have not been to Goose Creek, let me tell you about our facility.

- We have a lab in which students are provided wetland studies. The students tour different habitats of the park learning the importance of wetlands and return to the lab with water samples to study under our microscopes. They are mesmerized by the amount of microscopic life and its importance to our lives.
- We also have a discovery room with dozens of mounts, animal signs, sounds, aquariums, and terrariums. This room is popular with every age group. It is always open when the center is open. This room allows the public and school groups to see our local wildlife up close and understand their role in the habitats. We discuss predator prey relationships, camouflage, their habits, their adaptations to our environment and their important roles in our environment.
- Our resource room is filled with field guides and many other resources that explain our natural environment. It also contains five Macintosh computers for which we have dozens of interactive cd-ROMS containing information on many natural resource issues.
- The center also contains an auditorium which holds up to 100 visitors. This provides us with an area to show films, do power point presentations and host a wide variety of educational events.
- We also have some impressive interactive exhibits that address wetland function and identification.

## **BOY SCOUTS**

By Ranger Debo Cox



I had forgotten what it was like to be a cub scout. Eyes full of wonder, excitement and unbridled enthusiasm. Running around with absolutely not a care in the world, but starting to realize that I was part of something bigger and more exciting that I just didn't understand yet.

Recently I had the chance to remember my cub scouting experience, and witness in others the fulfillment and gratification that comes from giving back something meaningful to the environment. It started, as most of our programs do, with a phone call. The leader of Cub Scout Pack 99, Den 3 located in Washington, NC wanted a program dealing generally with natural resource management - possibly tree planting of some sort. We agreed upon a date, and our staff began pulling together the necessary materials and equipment to make it happen.

First, we needed a good spot. Luckily, as part of our burn plan, we were scheduled to burn a small plot located directly in front of the Environmental Education/Visitor Center. The weather cooperated, and we were able to burn the area within the first few days after scheduling the program. Next, the staff spent the better part of an afternoon clearing the area of brush, and making it suitable for longleaf pines to take root and grow. With a generous donation by our local Weyerhaeuser nursery of about 50 longleaf seedlings and several planting bars, we were getting close to being ready.

As scheduled, the big day soon arrived, and 15 wild-eyed young boys piled out of three mini-vans on cue, and into the Environmental Education/Visitor Center auditorium. We spent some time discussing what we were about to do, how to do it, and more importantly, why we were planting trees today. We discussed what trees need to grow big and strong, and what keeps some of them from doing so. Soon, it became time to stop talking, and start planting.

The boys split up into several smaller groups with their leaders, and I distributed seedlings among the eagerly awaiting crews stationed in the freshly burned planting area. As we had discussed, perfectly proportioned holes were dug, and young trees were placed in the ground to start a new life. Every once in a while, you have moments in this job that confirm that you're doing the right thing. This was one of those moments. We were not merely talking about environmental education; we were living it.

I tell this story for two reasons. The first one is that I'm a huge believer in experiential education. I believe that the best way to learn something is to submerge yourself in it and soak up all that the experience has to offer. There's no better way to learn about natural resource management than going out and doing it.

The second reason is that I think this program perfectly illustrates how our mission, teamwork by the park staff, and partnership with members of the community can come together to realize greater benefit with our programs than we initially appreciate. Too bad cub scouts don't sell cookies.