

Title: Georgia 4-H Environmental Education

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Summary: The Georgia 4-H Environmental Education Program provides a network of learning experiences across Georgia that allows youth to learn science and other content in the context of the real world environment.

Situation: As raising awareness of science and the environment is more valued than ever, teachers are seeking out meaningful and educational field studies to enhance and complement the learning that occurs in the formal school classroom.

Response: The Georgia 4-H Environmental Education Program offers day and residential field studies at sites from the mountains to the sea. The locations are Wahsega 4-H Center in Dahlonega, Fortson 4-H Center in Hampton, Rock Eagle 4-H Center in Eatonton, Burton 4-H Center on Tybee Island, Georgia 4-H at Camp Jekyll, and 4-H Tidelands Nature Center on Jekyll Island. The programs use the outdoors as a classroom without walls, are aligned with the current state education standards, keep students active and engaged in classes for up to eight hours a day, are taught by well-trained and college-educated instructors, use hands-on approaches to put learning in the context of the real world environment, and help to create and sustain bonds between teachers and students.

Results/Impacts: During the 2020-21 school year, the 4-H Environmental Education Program reached 3,956 participants, which is only a fraction of the typical 40,000+ served in a school year. The COVID-19 pandemic had a tremendous impact on the 4-H Environmental Education program since many schools were unable to travel for field studies. The program supplemented this limited in-person audience with a continuation of the very successful virtual series, "From the Mountains to the Sea." Another fall, winter, and spring series of five sessions each was provided on a assigned day of the week: Mondays at the Mound (Rock Eagle 4-H Center), Tuesdays on Tybee (Burton 4-H Center), Wahsega Wednesdays, Thursdays with Camp Jekyll and Tidelands, and Fortson Farm Fridays. As recovery from the pandemic continues, the Georgia 4-H Environmental Education program intends to foster the strong relationships and partnerships summarized by one teacher whose students participate in a virtual program until in-person is an option for their school again: "Just wanted to let you know how much we LOVED the 4-H videos you posted last spring. We spent the last couple of weeks of sixth grade remote learning doing 'Outdoors Atlanta' lessons and your videos were great starters/models for the students who then went outside to do their own tree walks, pond explorations, bug hunts, sunset watches, shelter building, etc. Thanks so much for making these available. I'll be in touch about the possibility of scheduling a spring trip as we get further into this new year."

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