

**Description:**

Erie Metroparks was awarded \$1,500 to develop a program called the Backpack Explorer program. Erie MetroParks naturalists lead nature hikes at Osborn MetroPark and encouraged the students to use the items in the backpack to explore.

This program was offered to schools throughout Erie County grades k-6. We included the program in our program curriculum guide and emailed teachers throughout Erie County. We had a fantastic response from the teachers wanting to learn more about the program.

There were two different sets of backpacks that was used during the program. There are 15 “bug” backpacks that includes an insect field guide, coloring book, journal, a magnifying glass, a net, and two containers used to capture insects. The other 15 backpacks are “bird” backpacks that are filled with a pair of binoculars, a field guide, journal, coloring book, and a nest book.

Objectives:

- Increase school field trips during the school year
- Name examples of living and nonliving things
- Name what living things need to survive
- Name the physical needs of living things
 - o Food, water, shelter, space
- Name different types of animal homes
- Describe an ecosystem
- Give an example of an ecosystem
- Describe an amphibian life cycle
- List different habitats for animals to successfully reproduce
- Explain producer, consumer, and decomposers of an ecosystem
- Learn how to use binoculars
- Learn how to use a field guide

Cost:

We purchased the backpacks from a company called “Acorn Naturalists” for \$99.99 each and gave a 10% discount making the total cost of the backpacks \$2,833.58. The \$1,500 covered over half of the cost of the backpacks and the parks paid the difference.

Implementation:

When the schools arrived, the students were split up into two groups. One group had the bird backpacks and went on a walk to look for birds, and the other group had the bug pack packs to study and capture insects at our pollinator patch. After 30-45 minutes the groups switched so each group can explore both birds and bugs. Erie MetroParks also used the backpacks for our free public programs.

Results:

May was the best month for the backpack explorer program. We had 7 schools that used the backpacks during the month of May and Erie MetroParks used the backpacks for 2 public programs (See table 1). We also had 2 other schools inquire about the program, but the staff was not available during the dates they wanted. A total of 440 participants used the backpacks. This program was very well received by the teachers and the kids!

| Date | Program Title | School | Total Participants |
|-----------------------------------|--|------------------------|--------------------|
| 6-May | Park PALS Animal Teeth Wild Things- Migration | | 30 |
| 17-May | Madness | | 8 |
| 10-May | Ecology Adventure | Margaretta 1st | 52 |
| 10-May | Ecology Adventure Backpacks-Boy scout | Margaretta 1st | 50 |
| 18-May | troop | | 8 |
| 22-May | Backpacks | Shawnee 1st | 84 |
| 28-May | Habitats | Ontario 1st Perkins | 44 |
| 29-May | Ecology Adventure | 2nd Perkins | 81 |
| 29-May | Ecology Adventure | 2nd | 83 |
| Total participants for May | | | 440 |

Table 1. Schools participated in the Backpack Explorer program.

Conclusion:

Considering the participation and inquiries about the program, we believe this was a very successful program and we plan on offering this program throughout the school year. We will also use the backpacks for more public programming (kids programs and nature camps) as well so the backpacks will be used year-round.

The emails about the new program were sent to the teachers in January 2019 to gear up for the spring. We will be looking forward to see the interest in the fall for the backpack explorer program. Spring is a very popular time for field trips to the parks, so it was no surprise for teachers to inquire about this exciting new program!