

Nature University classes

All classes are from 9:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. Tuesdays, from late January through mid April. There is one additional class in late September.

Volunteer naturalist training orientation

Get to know Metro naturalist staff and other volunteer naturalists at this overview. Learn about Metro and the goals of the nature education program. Review the topics and schedule of training, the commitment and the benefits offered to you. Take a quick introductory walk at a Metro natural area and get your volunteer naturalist training manual.

Nature awareness

Our discovery of nature is based on observation, and good observation requires keen sensory skills. In this nature awareness class, you will practice new ways of using and combining your senses to heighten your awareness and increase the amount of information you absorb from any environment.

Tracking

Tracking is the science and the art of the detective naturalist. By learning to read the signs and trails that living things leave behind and by asking questions, we train ourselves to be naturalists in any environment. Tracking teaches us to piece together clues and gradually uncover the unseen lives of animals, as well as deeply understand the ecological principals and interconnectedness with the environment that governs their lives. This class will cover the fundamentals of identification of animals from clear, individual tracks and signs. We also will introduce animal identification from patterns of tracks or trails.

Common wildlife and how animals work

If you were randomly beamed down to Earth by aliens, how would you know right away that you were in Oxbow Regional Park or Smith and Bybee Wetlands Natural Area? Common characteristic plants and animals define the natural communities of our region; can you recognize them? Get your study of native Northwest fauna

organized with the basics of animal classification. We also will discuss how animals work in terms of how they get the food, water, oxygen and proper environment they need to survive.

Teaching techniques

This class is an opportunity to set your mind at ease regarding the anxieties you may experience in anticipation of teaching a real, live group of students. Topics and practice sessions include group management and safety, communication skills, teaching by asking questions and dealing with questions when you don't know the answer.

Site-specific field trip training

Naturalist students learn the specifics of leading school field trips by shadowing programs led by experienced volunteer naturalists in the first weeks of the season. These four field classes introduce you to the sites where our programs take place. School field trips currently occur in two locations: Smith and Bybee Wetlands Natural Area and Oxbow Regional Park. The next four classes (plus first aid/CPR) introduce volunteer naturalists to the basic ecology of the sites and the topics of the field trip programs.

Ecology of Oxbow Regional Park

Oxbow's abundant yet elusive wildlife reveal their life histories in the tracks and sign they leave behind as they hunt, browse, hide and rest on the banks of the Sandy river. This class will focus on further developing the core tracking skill sets in the morning, then shift into ancient forest ecology and the aquatic life of the Sandy river in the afternoon. Topics include identification of trees and plants, geology of the mountain and river, hands-on experience catching and identifying aquatic insects, and reading the signs of the abundant wildlife including deer, elk, coyote, and bear.

Ecology of Smith and Bybee Wetlands Natural Area

Only a few miles from downtown Portland, this 2,000-acre freshwater wetland has lakes, riparian forest, and wet prairie. It is well known as one of the best bird watching sites in the region and is home to Oregon's largest population of Western painted turtles. Other residents that are occasionally seen include rabbit, beaver, muskrat, nutria, raccoon, and deer. In this class you will start to become familiar with the common plants and animals of Smith and Bybee and visit the water control structure that allows Metro to regulate the water level in the wetlands.

First Aid/CPR Training

Metro wants all volunteer naturalists to have current First Aid and CPR certification before they start leading school field trips. You can take this training class or one to be scheduled later in the spring. These options will be explained at the first class.

How to lead a school field trip at Smith and Bybee Wetlands

We will model a typical school field trip program. Volunteer naturalists lead the "water bugs" activity and look for animal tracks and signs with their group of kids. While doing the water bugs activity there are opportunities to see frogs, ducks, herons, other birds, and the always-exciting banana slugs and forest snails. The alternative activity that takes place when the water bugs are not at their best (summer and fall) is looking at our collection of pelts of the common mammals at Smith and Bybee and talking about their natural history.

How to lead a school field trip at Oxbow Regional Park

Volunteer naturalists will be trained to help guide a group of students on a richly multi-faceted journey through the ancient forest in search of edible plants, natural shelter, animal signs, bird alarms and other essential knowledge needed for the "survival" of their group. Learn tips for inspiring students to discover nature through this fun field trip. Later in the year, volunteers also will

learn how to lead activities that focus on salmon and river ecology.

Mystery class and graduation

Exactly as it says . . . we're keeping this class a mystery! After class, we will have a potluck lunch and graduation ceremony.

Salmon field trip training

Autumn is the time we celebrate the return of fall Chinook salmon to spawn in the Sandy River at Oxbow as they have done for thousands of years. Our fall schedule is packed with school field trips about salmon. At this training, the last of your core classes, you'll learn to lead the fall field trip activities including guided salmon viewing walks, macroinvertebrate "critter catch" and river ecology hikes.

To apply or learn more

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