Knowledge about our local environment helps us understand our connection with the world. These days, outdoor recreation and venturing into natural areas can provide us with peace and a healthy escape from more stressful daily events.

There are many books with beautiful pictures of Florida’s birds, mammals, fish, insects and wild plants so you can learn about nature while sitting in the air conditioning without rain, sunscreen or bugs prayed. You can read about it in books, but it is so much more fun playing and learning as you go.

There are many opportunities to learn hands on by visiting local natural attractions. Contact the Kissimmee-St.Cloud Convention and Visitors Bureau at 407-847-5000 for an informative color nature and heritage guide that includes more detailed information on local natural and historic sites, fishing, hiking, nature trails, boat ramps and tour guides to help you learn while you experience the outdoors.

I will be offering a series of programs called Woods Walks; discovery education experiences to help participants learn more about native ecosystems, plants and animals and their interactions. Call 321-697-3000 or email me at efoe@osceola.org to sign up for more information.

The Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission’s Becoming an Outdoors Woman has become extremely popular. Women 18 and older meet at the Ocala Youth Camp in the Ocala National Forest or at the Everglades Youth Camp near West Palm Beach for a weekend in the woods. Programs are offered in the fall and spring each year.

Registration for B.O.W. is $150 including meals from lunch on Friday through lunch on Sunday. A limited number of partial scholarships are available for low-income females who would like to take part in BOW workshops.

Participants select four activities from nineteen different topics relating to outdoor recreation, hunting, fishing and wildlife viewing. Accommodations are available in air conditioned cabins or participants can borrow tents for a more rustic experience. The weekends fill up fast so request a brochure for the upcoming workshop and register right away. Contact the FWC’s West Palm Beach regional office at (561) 625-5126 or go online to the Becoming an Outdoors Woman link.

Both of the FWC camps offer week long summer programs for youth. I got my start in environmental education 30 years ago when my parents saw a notice in the Commission’s Florida Wildlife Magazine. I learned about conservation, archery, fishing, and canoeing. I ate rattlesnake and drank pine needle tea. I earned my hunter safety certificate and learned how to safely shoot rifle, shotgun and an old muzzleloader. I learned about Florida wildlife and the ecosystems surrounding the camps. I met other kids with similar interest and we still stay in touch.

All youth are required to have the hunter safety certificate before they can go hunting in Florida. Parents are required to attend local hunter education classes with students under 16, but they can earn the certificate at camp instead.

The camps cost $250 for a week, which includes room, board, snacks and activities. More information is available online at floridaconservation.org/huntered/camp/ or call the Extension office at 321-697-3000 for a brochure.

Our Florida 4-H program offers summer ed-venture camps to all youth even if they are not currently enrolled in our 4-H program. There are several camps around the state and topics include fishing, shooting sports, bears, aquatic ecology and marine science. Contact me for a brochure or go to 4h.ifas.ufl.edu/camping/edventures2003.htm.
I am looking for sponsors to send kids to natural resources camps this summer so let me know if you would like to make a tax deductible donation to help youth experience the outdoors. Stay at home kids may want to check out some online activities such as the 4-H Bug Club and FWC kids fishing activities that are linked through our county web site at the 4-H web Page.

The FWC’s Wings Over Florida Junior Birder Program was developed to help teachers introduce younger students (3rd - 4th grade) to bird watching but parents and grandparents will enjoy using the information with children at home for the summer. Find it online at floridaconservation.org/educator/.

Natural escapes can calm the soul. If getting into the wild woods is a little too rough for you, you can create a place of serenity at home through landscaping. Contact our University of Florida/IFAS Osceola County Extension office for more information on home gardening and landscaping tips at 321-697-3000

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