

River Otters of South Florida

ROSF



Education Programming

A Science Education Program for Middle Schools

Education Program #1. “Finding Otto”

By

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“Finding Otto”

A Science Education Program for Middle Schools

I. Introduction

This is an education program that provides an opportunity for middle school students (6-8) to learn about river otters in south Florida. The program is to be developed and implemented in two Collier and two Lee county middles schools in Southwest Florida. The program will also serve as a pilot for expansion into other middle schools, and possibly high schools, in south Florida. An important question to ask is: Why is this education project being attempted to develop and implement? The answer is, the River Otters of South Florida (ROSF) website wishes to fulfill its mission “To aid our understanding and interest in the biology, behavior, ecology, and the conservation issues impacting the river otter in Florida, particularly south Florida, and to help educate ourselves, our children, and others about otters worldwide.” The “Finding Otto” Science Education Program for Middle Schools would provide a foundation for the active education programs our children need, worldwide, to gain a personal opportunity to have a lasting connection to the living world. The ROSF website realizes implementation of some education programs or activities requires the resources provided by volunteers, the support and the involvement of the academic community, and the generosity of benefactors. What follows should provide you an overview of the “Finding Otto” education program and the support that can be provided by volunteers and the academic community. To offer a strategy how involve benefactors, at this point, would be premature. Once the Collier and Lee county school districts offer their support to this education project the necessary fundraising can begin.

II. “Finding Otto”: A Science Education Project for Middle Schools

A. The name of the project is “Finding Otto”. This program is focused on a scientific investigation of otter presence and activities observed by Junior Otter Spotter II’s (job description follows)

At each middle school the students will:

1. Learn about and how to develop and implement a research investigation using the principles of the scientific method.
2. Work together and with specific teachers in the development and implementation of this program at their respective schools
3. Communicate with and visit other middle schools involved in the same project and discuss the development and progress of their respective projects
4. Then present a program, at their middle school, about the results of their investigation
5. Review the content and methodology of their completed project and provide a written proposal on how the program could more effectively developed and implemented by future Junior Otter Spotter II’s

B. Potential middle school participants will be solicited through the involved middle schools with the assistance of individuals involved with the River Otters of South Florida: Otter Research and Otter Education Programming.

C. Prior to initiating recruitment of the Junior Otter Spotter II’s the middle schools must be defined and the education program accepted for development and implementation by the selected middle schools

D. Only students living in the following cities should apply: Ft. Myers, San Carlos Park, Estero, Bonita Springs, and Naples.

E. Participating Junior Otter Spotter II's must reside in or have access to communities where river otters have been observed to inhabit or are frequently visited by river otters. A list of these communities is being compiled and will be made available to Collier and Lee county middle schools surveyed for interest in participating in this education project.

F. Due to limited supervisory resources this Junior Otter Spotter II education program will be restricted to a maximum of 6 students at each of the four participating middle schools. However, this does not eliminate middle school students, at participating schools, from assisting the Junior Otter Spotter IIs in their school. The activities of these Junior Otter Spotter II assistants will be overseen and guided by participating school educators and Otter Spotter adults involved with the River Otters of South Florida: Otter Research and Otter Education Programming initiatives.

III. VOLUNTEER JOB DESCRIPTION (River Otters of South Florida Volunteer: Otter Research and Otter Education Programming)

Note: This is a student volunteer opportunity for Middle School students (6-8) and is directly related to an education program to be developed for two Collier and two Lee county middle schools about river otters.

Name of Position: Junior Otter Spotter II (education programming)

Job Description: A Junior Otter Spotter II (JOS II), like an Otter Spotter (OS), is also an observer and recorder of river otter presence and activity. The JOS II Investigates areas near his/her residence for the presence of river otters and records their otter observations on an "Otter Observation Record Sheet". This also includes any otter observation made away from the primary area(s) where the JOS II is making observations. Depending upon the situation and needs of the JOS II the activities of the JOS II are guided by any or all the following individuals: Otter Spotter (OS), Otter Spotter Captain (OSC), and/or the Junior Otter Spotter II Supervisor (Middle Schools). The JOS II will work with other JOS II's and help each other develop a comprehensive description of otter presence and activity in the areas they are making their otter observations. The JOS II will also keep records of any otters they observe outside the primary areas in which they are making their observations. This could include any otter(s) found dead on or alongside a roadway or any other location where a dead otter is observed. A way by which the JOS II can report a mortality or any other river otter sighting will be provided to the JOS II.

Skills and Abilities:

- Is a good listener
- Can accept direction regarding how to perform the responsibilities of the Junior Otter Spotter II
- Can work with minimal supervision
- Can ask questions of individuals who may have observed river otters and take notes on what the contact has observed
- Can take notes on any river otter deaths observed either on or near a roadway or any other location and notify the appropriate individual for the recovery of the dead otter(s).
- Knows how to or can learn how to use binoculars
- Must be able to maintain written records of observations made on otters and transcribe this information onto a form entitled "Otter Observation Record Sheet" (to be provided)
- It would be of value to have basic computer skills and can: send and receive emails, download emails and email attachments and print attachments

Equipment and Supplies Needed:

- Must have access to a pair of binoculars (50 power pair would be best)
- It would be of value to have access to a computer and printer
- It would be of value to have access to a photocopy machine and paper
- It would be of value to have access to digital camera other than one on a cellphone
- Should have a "Smart Phone"

IV. The Role of the Education Volunteer and the Available Education Volunteer Positions

A. The Role of the Education Volunteer: The role of the education volunteer is to assist in the development of and to present school and community outreach education programs about river otters.

B. Available Education Volunteer Positions: The education programs, developed and implemented by the River Otters of South Florida: Otter Research and Otter Education Programming, are dependent upon people willing to donate their time to help some cause or activity that interests them. The education assistance provided by these volunteers must be organized in a way that maximizes the potential success of an education program. A volunteer must know the responsibilities and the requirements of being a volunteer. These responsibilities and requirements are conveyed in job descriptions. A brief overview of each job description is listed below.

1. Otter Lecturer I (School Outreach): Presents education programs about river otters to middle school and high school students and helps develop, write, and edit the content of these programs
2. Otter Lecturer II (Community Outreach): Presents education programs about river otter to community organizations, Home Owners Associations, businesses, and other groups requiring a program to highlight their meetings
3. Junior Otter Spotter II Education Manager (Middle Schools): Works with the Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) Education Department and the science and math teachers and students at four local middle schools in southwest Florida (two in Lee and two in Collier county) to develop and implement a wildlife science research project at local middle schools. Works with all four middle schools implementing this Science Education Program for Middle Schools and the volunteer Junior Otter Spotter II Supervisor (Middle Schools) at each of the participating schools. The opportunity for assuming this position by a graduate student may provide this student the necessary learning experience to demonstrate his/her capability to conduct the necessary research required toward an advanced degree in education.
4. Junior Otter Spotter II Supervisor (Middle Schools): Oversees the activities of the Junior Otter Spotter II engaged in learning about river otters. This volunteer position could be assumed by a middle school teacher or could be assumed by a volunteer from outside of the middle school in the participating school systems in Collier or Lee Counties.

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