

[From Fall 2000]

Refuge Reaches Out

Chincoteague Refuge's public use staff is constantly trying to provide new and exciting materials to our audiences. Outreach has always been an important aspect of our education program and when we discovered an excellent outreach in Delaware, it was not long before we set out to tailor it to Chincoteague.

The wetland kit's origin was a direct result of the 1993 Needs Assessment for Aquatic Resource Education in Delaware. In the survey, teachers at all grade levels throughout the state were able to choose from a menu of options listing various types of materials they needed. The teachers selected hands-on learning kits as their top priority and identified wetlands as the preferred topic for program development.

The kits are designed to provide teachers with a comprehensive, classroom-ready, hands-on, tool to introduce and enrich educational efforts in area schools. The kits can also be learning stations where people can view them at special events. The learning objectives include:

- (1) Increasing awareness and appreciation of the benefits of wetlands;
- (2) Imparting knowledge of characteristics that define wetlands, both in general and by type;
- (3) Promoting the understanding of ecological concepts and processes relating to wetland environments.

These objectives are taught through small group, hands-on learning using a variety of game-style formats to make the discovery process fun and engaging. The kits also provide problem-solving challenges that inspire creative thought and investigation, offer opportunities for cooperative learning and decision-making, and present "learning centers" that can be used in various ways and situations.

Presently, Chincoteague Refuge's prototypes are complete, and the boxes are nearly constructed. Within the next month all the kits will be completed and ready for use.