

[From Fall 1995]

Environmental Education Program Being Created

The Eastern shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge is in the process of creating an environmental education program with an emphasis on marine science. A Storage room at the end of an existing building was converted into a classroom/laboratory. Labeled the "wet lab," it is home to several saltwater and freshwater Aquariums.

Work began on the wet lab in 1984. A ceramic tile floor, laid down last summer with help from two high school cooperative students, added some finishing touches. My position as Recreation Assistant will be to see the continuation of work in the wet lab.

This summer has seen the completion of an equipment storage area and the purchasing of new equipment to be used for the education program. Seine nets, specimen bowls, collecting jars, microscope slides, and pond strainers have been added to the list of equipment which included microscopes, a bioscope, plankton nets, and water quality test kits.

Teachers will have the opportunity to use the lab as part of a unique exploration of Fisherman Island. The adventure begins in the classroom where students will be introduced to the Eastern Shore's national wildlife refuges and the various habitats which make this area a prime site for migrating and wintering birds. The experience continues when students "discover" Fisherman Island during a field trip and ends when they wrap up their adventure in the wet lab.

My experience as a marine science educator has given me the background to generate several marine science related programs. Factors such as surrounding accessible habitat and available equipment were taken into consideration during the creation of lesson plans. As a result, classes dealing with marine plankton, invertebrate life, salt marsh ecology, and pond life have been developed.

The collection of organisms for educational purposes is not limited to refuge property. Reaching out into the surrounding community and establishing relations is another goal of the education program. Organisms collected from Cherrystone Campground and Kiptopeke State Park have found a temporary home in the saltwater aquariums. Students will have the opportunity to study these organisms or even participate in their collection. My time of employment is growing short, however, and hopefully the ground work laid down by me and others will see fruition.

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