

Forest School

at the Gordon Carter Environmental Education Site

Bellingham Public Schools is thrilled to tell you about our new field trip for all third graders:

Forest School is an environmental education program provided in partnership between the North Cascades Institute and Bellingham Public Schools. Students will spend their time at the Gordon Carter Environmental Education site for a day of learning in the outdoors, a day that integrates natural history, science, and social studies. Students, chaperones and teachers will be transported to and from Forest School in a school district bus within the normal school day schedule.

- Your child's class will be attending Forest School on _____
- Please **sign and return two forms** to your child's teacher by _____
 - o NCI's Participant Information and Release form
 - o Bellingham Public Schools' Student Trip Permission Form
- Please review the Required Equipment Checklist and contact your child's teacher prior to the trip if your student is missing something on the list. Forest School *may* be able to assist in providing gear.
- Can you attend as a chaperone? If so, contact your child's teacher. Chaperones will travel with the class, and will participate in trail activities and assist with supervision of students.

What will your child be learning?

The central guiding idea of Forest School is: *Organisms and environments are interdependent.* Under the guidance of environmental educators who specialize in teaching young people, students will explore how plants, animals and people interact within an environment to meet their needs. They will also explore how changes to plants, animals, people and/or the environment can affect one another. They also get a positive outdoor educational experience that helps develop social and personal skills and experience academic and physical challenges in a welcoming setting.

What can you ask your child about?

This field trip will prompt a great dinner-table conversation! You might ask:

- What animal group were you a part of? What did you learn about your animal?
- You might have played bingo or done a scavenger hunt. What did you learn about what animals need to survive?
- How did you see organisms interacting in the forest?
- What is something you learned about how people and the environment affect each other?

What about bad weather?

Spring and fall weather can be very unpredictable. While we always hope for sunny and warm days, it is important to be prepared for cold, wet, and windy weather too. Rain or shine, we will attend Forest School!

What is the Gordon Carter Environmental Education Site?

This site, on the southeast end of Lake Whatcom, is also known as the conservation site. It has been the home of outdoor education for many grade levels in Bellingham Public Schools since 1973. Long-time residents may remember a pioneer field trip where students got to engage in some of the day-to-day activities of a settler in 1886.

Thanks to the generosity of our community in our recent bond, we look forward to improvements to the site to allow it to continue to serve our students' learning for decades to come.

What is the North Cascades Institute?

North Cascades Institute is a nonprofit organization and long-time education partner with Bellingham Public Schools. Since 1990, they have hosted Mountain School, a multi-day residential education program at North Cascades Environmental Learning Center that all our fifth graders attend. Offering programs for people of all ages, the Institute mission is to “inspire and empower environmental stewardship for all through transformative educational experiences in nature.” Learn more at <https://ncascades.org/signup/schools>.

FOREST SCHOOL REQUIRED CLOTHING AND EQUIPMENT CHECKLIST

Please carefully look over the following checklist and check each item as it is packed. If you have trouble coming up with any of these items, please let your teacher know *before* your Forest School visit, and we will be happy to help get you what you need. Also, please label your belongings!

When you arrive at Forest School, come dressed ready to spend the day outside. Please arrive with your daypack packed and ready to go.

Daypack—packed with the six items listed below:

- Rain jacket (with rain pants if you have them)
- Warm fleece, sweater, or sweatshirt
- Warm knit hat, preferably wool
- Warm gloves
- Water bottle (watertight, so you can carry it in your bag without leaking)
- Lunch and snacks

Students will be outside all day at Forest School. Please wear appropriate clothing including:

- Comfortable hiking shoes or sneakers—no sandals or open-toed shoes
- Long pants (no shorts, please!)

Teachers will be in charge of all medications.