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## Science Education Goes Outdoors at GSU

University Park, IL, November 9, 2007 - The crisp fall air did not deter more than 300 students from Wilson Elementary School in Chicago Heights from enjoying a day outside, learning in one of the South Suburb's most extensive outdoor laboratories on the ground of Governors State University in University Park. The ponds, prairies, streams, and wooded areas surrounding the university create the ideal outdoor science classroom.

The students were participants in two-days of outdoor activities investigating everything from what damages trees, to the life cycle of salmon, to which plants and animals live near by. The young students learned about science and nature while their teachers learned about how to teach, how to direct and communicate with young students, and how to create an effective lesson.

The teachers instructing the elementary school children were actually students themselves. They are currently studying science teaching methods at Governors State University in University Park as part of their Elementary Education bachelor's degree program.

"Our university students gain valuable experience working with elementary school children in an outdoor classroom and the children learn about the intricacies and wonders of the natural world," explained Bruce Ketcher, assistant professor in the GSU College of Education.

Under the guidance of Ketcher and Dr. Colleen Sexton, a professor in the College of Education, the university students developed lessons using the environmental treasures and wonders present on the expansive grounds of the university. Just as the university's chemistry and biology students use this natural laboratory in their degree studies, so did the young students from Chicago Heights.

According to Shirley Fuller, seventh grade teacher at Wilson Elementary, "It is always good to help students realize how important the environment is. Moving the classroom outside takes learning to another level. They touch, smell, and dig like real scientists. This is a great learning experience."

"Science education is very important. These elementary school students learn about environmental issues and awareness when they come to GSU," said Renee Watkins, of Minooka, one of the university students teaching the science lessons.

Many of the science teachers were also learning important lessons. According to GSU student Amy Ebeidalla of Homer Glen, "this experience helps us as teachers in dealing with students and how they learn outside of the classroom. It is more challenging and we as teachers have to be more assertive."

"Our college students get a lot of experience teaching in the classroom," said Dr. Sexton. "But this outdoor education opportunity gives them a very different view of teaching and managing students.

They learn how children react in a new setting. It is a unique and beneficial educational opportunity for everyone involved. Experiences like this create better prepared and more effective educators."