

The Impact of Project WILD on Fourth Grade Students

Susan C. Gilchrist

Research Management Findings, Number 42, September 1999

This report summarizes the findings of a 1989 evaluation that examined the effects of Project WILD on students in Wisconsin.

Twenty-four fourth grade teachers were recruited for the study, half from schools in rural communities, half in urban. Half of the teachers had been trained in using Project WILD and employed some of the activities, while half had not. Students and teachers were surveyed at the beginning (fall) and end (spring) of the 1989-90 school year. In addition, classroom observations were conducted. To examine factors outside the classroom that might influence student learning about wildlife and the environment, a survey was sent to parents.

Student surveys measured knowledge related to seven key concepts: adaptation, habitat, food chains, carrying capacity, human impact, definition of wildlife, and interdependence. Parent surveys focused on the frequency of reading books and magazines on wildlife; watching nature shows on TV; visiting museums, wildlife areas, or zoos; and whether a household member hunts, fishes or traps.

The following results were indicated and are discussed in greater detail in the report.

- Students exposed to Project WILD know more about selected wildlife concepts than students who were not exposed to Project WILD.
- Students exposed to Project WILD know more about wildlife-related concepts than they did before exposure to Project WILD.
- There are many factors that influence student learning about wildlife and the environment, including school activities, parent interest, and reading books and magazines related to wildlife.
- Some differences exist in urban and rural learning about wildlife.
- Teacher interest in wildlife and wildlife education is another influence on student learning about wildlife.

When asked which school activity related to wildlife in the past year had been the most interesting, students in Project WILD classes most frequently described a WILD activity.

This report recommended that the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources should continue to make Project WILD available through workshops and should develop and provide more training and background information for educators.

The recommendation was also made that wildlife education efforts should focus on urban audiences because their educational need is greater and because Project WILD can make a significant difference in their knowledge.