

# Pick Your Own Path



**Key Groups:**  
School groups,  
Families, Cub  
Scouts (ages  
8-11)

**Subject:**  
Wildlife

**Duration:** 1  
hour

**Abilities:**  
decision-  
making,  
problem  
solving,

**Materials:**  
sturdy shoes,  
long pants,  
plenty of water,  
backpack with  
other hiking  
equipment  
(optional)

**Vocabulary:**  
wildlife, habitat,  
ecosystem,  
vegetation,  
environment,  
aquatic,  
amphibian

## Background:

Traditionally, the term terrestrial wildlife refers to untamed animals with a backbone, including mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians. They find their own shelter, food, water, and space. There are many kinds of wildlife living in Mill Creek Canyon, including black bear, mule deer, coyotes, blue birds and tiger salamanders. No matter what species, they provide us with aesthetic beauty, food, and

much more. While it is good to enjoy and use some of these animals, it is important to remember our actions can have an adverse effect on them and their habitats. In our role in the ecosystem, it is important to demonstrate responsible stewardship.

When we learn more about the animals who share the world with us, we can grow to care more about them. When we care about something, we

naturally want to protect it. It is our job to conserve these wild and wonderful animals so our children and grandchildren may enjoy them. By learning about ecological processes of wildlife at a young age, kids will be able to develop a greater appreciation for them and make wise choices later on in life.

## **Method:**

### Pre-activity:

Kids will go on a pretend hike and make decisions along the way. They will have chances to influence wildlife along the way, for better or worse. This story will teach kids about the importance of wildlife conservation and the consequences human choices have on them. It can be read individually, in groups, or as a class. See the attached story at the end.

### Activity:

Kids can go on a real hike and discuss all their responsible actions with regards to the story they read.

## **Assessment:**

Have the kids write down different ways humans have a harmful affect on wildlife covered in the activity. Then have them list some responsible

actions humans do when dealing with wildlife

## **Further Learning:**

*These activities will allow cub scouts to earn their badge in the area of wildlife conservation (most of these can be kept in a binder):*

-Draw a food chain and explain what happens if it is damaged.

-Write about an endangered species and how people are trying to help it. Include a picture of the animal. These activities will allow cub scouts to earn their academic pin in the area of wildlife conservation:

-Make a collage of newspaper or magazine articles on conservation of wildlife found in the area.

-Make a collage of animals found in the area that are in the same class: fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds, or mammals.

-Clean up trash around an area to prevent it from harming wildlife.

## Works Cited

*Interesting Facts about Wildlife Animals and Wildlife Animal Conservation.* (n.d.). Retrieved June 26, 2013, from Kid Info:  
<http://www.kidinfo.com/science/wildlife.html>

National Wildlife Federation. (n.d.). *Learn About Wildlife and Wild Places!* Retrieved June 27, 2013, from National Wildlife Federation:  
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# *A Day in the Canyon*

Shades of vibrant color spread out across the soft blue sky as the sun inched its way up above horizon. The rays of light streaked out over the proud mountains and down to a beautiful area, where windswept grasses glittered from the mid-morning rain.

A moderate mountain stream also glittered as it bubbled past towering Quaking Aspen Trees. A warm south wind continued to swell through the leaves with a new vigor that brought a first taste of the day to the area.

You breathe in the cool, crisp air as he head out your door with you backpack slung over your shoulder and a granola bar in your hand. The sun warms your face as you skip down your driveway, and continue on until you come to the end of the road.

You see a trail leading up a slope, but you also see something shiny off in the bushes and wonder what it is. You can go up the trail and try to find other exciting sites or you can investigate what you see.

-Do you hike up the trail- Turn to page 7

-Do you walk away from the trail to see what the shiny thing is- Turn to page 9

You think the mule deer looks hungry, so you unzip your backpack and pull out a piece of bread you brought along to have as a snack. The deer watches you, but doesn't move.

Very slowly, you set your backpack down on the trail and creep forward toward the deer. The deer's ears go back against its head and it takes a step back. You can tell it is very nervous.

You talk softly to the deer, hoping you can calm it down. It doesn't work. The animal takes another step back and looks like it wants to run. Determined not to scare the deer away, you stop walking and break up the bread into small pieces. With a smile, you toss the food over to the animal.

To your relief, the deer quits backing away from you and bends its head to nibble up the bread you gave it. You crouch down and just watch it for several seconds. When it is finished eating, it looks back up at you and flicks its ears. It looks like it wants more bread.

You remember you brought your camera with you, but it's in your backpack. You can go back to get your camera and risk the deer moving away from you or you can try to get closer to the deer. Maybe the deer will even let you touch it. It didn't run away when you fed it after all, so it must have some trust in you.

-Do you try to get closer to the deer-Turn to page 8

Do you go back to get your camera- Turn to page 6

Breathing out very quietly, you inch backwards toward the trail, keeping your eyes on the mule deer the entire time. The animal freezes and watches you intently. You wonder what it is feeling.

Your progress is slow, but you don't want to spook the deer away, so you remain patient. Eventually, you reach the path and slip your hand into the backpack.

As you pull out the camera, the deer starts coming over in your direction. You hold your breath and don't believe your eyes. Maybe the deer will come right up to you.

You turn on your camera and point it at the deer, which gradually gets closer and closer to you. If you can get a picture of the deer now, you'll really have an exciting story to tell everyone when you go back home.

You decide need to move a little to the side to get a better picture of the deer. The animal hasn't tried to move away from you, so maybe it's not afraid.

As you step to the left, the deer's hooves clatter on the ground. You spooked it. Before you can snap a picture of it, it dashes away from you and disappears through the aspen trees. You growl to yourself in frustration and wonder if you can still get a photo of the deer. You are also getting hungry, though.

-Do you try to follow the deer to get a picture- Turn to page 11

-Do you stop to eat a snack- Turn to page 10

You decide you better stay on the trail, because you remember hearing someone tell you that if you go off of marked trails, you can damage habitats, get lost, startle an animal, or get hurt. You start up the path and whistle as you go along.

On either side of you, birds are fluttering about in the Cottonwood Trees. The day is starting to warm up and every critter seems just as eager as you to be up and about now. You wonder what each animal will do during the course of the morning and realize there are many possibilities, because each animal has their own role within a complex ecosystem and is connected to everything else, even humans.

You leave the birds and the squirrels behind and reach the top of the slope where the trail flattens out again. Pine trees provide shade for you and relief from the hot sun. A light breeze stirs the branches and carries a musty odor on the air. You recognize the smell as that of a deer and become anxious to find the animal.

Glancing all around you, you scan the trees and bushes for any sign of movement. Then you spot antlers and lock gazes with a large buck, who is standing a ways off from you. Both of you hold very still, wondering what the other one will do.

-Do you try to feed the deer? - Turn to page 5

-Do you try to get closer to the deer? - Turn to page 8

Do you use your binoculars to look at the deer? - Turn to page 10

Step by step, you move forward towards the mule deer, daring yourself to get as close you can to it. The animal flicks its tail and ears. It looks away from you and trots off in a new direction.

Disappointment and frustration wash over you. You had tried hard to stay quiet and careful, so why didn't your plan work? Maybe you still have a chance to catch up to the deer.

You start following the deer when all of a sudden your stomach growls in protest. You remember all the snacks you brought along with you. Perhaps you should forget about the deer and go grab some trail mix or an apple.

Can't you just wait until later, though? Surely the deer is more important. You can always get something to eat, but the deer won't always be around to snap a picture. What about your binoculars in your backpack? Couldn't you look through them to find the deer and get something to eat at the same time?

Sitting down on a rock, you wrestle with your options and listen to all the sounds around you. In the distance, you hear the deer walking through the bushes and guess you can sneak up on it if you wanted to.

-Do you follow the deer? - Turn to page 11

-Do you go grab a snack and forget about the deer? - Turn to page 13

-Do you use the binoculars to try and spot the deer? - Turn to page 10

Your curiosity gets the better of you. You reason it will be okay to go off the trail for a few minutes to take a look at the shiny thing and then come right back, so set your pack down.

Leaving the trails, you run up the rocky hillside toward your goal. As you are racing upwards, you trip over a rock and fall on the rough ground. You rip a hole in your pants at the knee and get a large scrape on your knee.

For a moment, you consider going back to the trail to get your first aid kit, but you still are too curious to stop now. You get back up and keep going up the hill.

At last, you reach the bush and kneel down to investigate what it is you saw. To your disappointment, the shiny object is only an empty tin can of soda—only liter that someone else left behind.

All of your effort has been for nothing. Now you have a dirty scrape on your knee that's beginning to sting. Now you trampled a lot of vegetation behind you and damaged wildlife habitat and food.

Just as you are about to turn around and head back down the hill, you hear a rustling sound off in the bushes and spot a deer. You are excited, but realize you left your camera back on the trail in your backpack.

-Do you try to get closer to the deer? - Turn to page 8

-Do you go back to the trail to get your camera? - Turn to page 6

You guess you'll never be able to get close enough to the deer, so you pull out your binoculars from your backpack. As you look through them, you open your bag of trail mix and munch on some raisins and nuts.

With the binoculars, you are able to bring the mule deer in close to you without scaring it or straying from the trail. You get to see the animal join other near a gurgling stream. Next to one of the does, you spot a fawn chewing on some tall grasses.

You are content to give the deer some space and observe the deer in their natural habitat. You rest for a while as you finish eating your snack and waiting for the herd to move on.

Finally, the large buck leads all of the does and the fawn deeper into the Pine Trees. You eat all you want and then stuff the bag of trail mix back into your backpack to save for the end of the day. Then you get back up and continue your journey along the path.

You hike for a long time and so your feet begin to feel tired. You come upon the same stream the deer were next to and stop at boulder. The water looks so clear and cold. Since you need to take a break and cool off, you decide to get a little wet.

-Do you throw rocks in the stream to splash yourself with water? - Turn to page 12

-Do you take off your shoes and hang your feet in the water-Turn to page 18

-Do you pick up some rocks and make a dam in the stream- Turn to page 14

You decide you can't go home without taking a picture of the deer, so you readjust your backpack on your shoulder and rush to catch up with the deer. At first, you are able to follow the deer's tracks and spot where it has broken twigs.

As time goes on, though, you lose the animal's trail and lose your sense of direction. Panic grips you once you realize you are lost and have no idea how to get back to the trail.

Glancing up at the sky, you see the sun is directly overhead. A hawk is gliding around in lazy circles and you wish you could see from the bird's perspective to find out where you are and which way you should go, but you are stuck on the ground.

Hoping you can find the trail by going in a straight line, you continue onwards, however, the ground soon becomes rocky and fallen logs slow you down. You are forced to go in another direction until you can walk more easily.

It isn't long before you come upon your own tracks and realize you are going in circles. Growing even more worried, you stop for a moment and lean against a tree trunk. What should you do now? Should you keep searching for the trail or try to get someone's attention by blowing your whistle you brought in your pocket?

-Do you keep trying to find the path? - Turn to page 15

-Do you blow your whistle to try and get help? - Turn to page 17

Throwing rocks in the water is always fun to do, so you walk away from the trail to collect some from the bank of the stream. You stash a couple in your pocket before you start tossing them in the water.

Droplets of sparkling water sail through the air and splash your legs. You want bigger splashes, so you pick up larger rocks. This time, the water gets all over your face and arms.

After your arm gets tired, you sit down on the ground and watch the swirling muddy water. It is only now that you notice there are fish called the Bonneville Cutthroat Trout, swimming in the stream and you realize what you have done.

By throwing rocks in the stream, you have scared the fish, made it harder for them to move around, altered the current of the stream, and added unnecessary dirt to the water. You also notice you have taken so many rocks from the bank that the water is washing away the soil and bugs that were under the rock don't have a shady place to go anymore.

As you let your eyes move along the bank, you suddenly notice something grayish-green leap in a marshy area. Squinting, you notice rusty-colored warts and realize you are looking at a Western Toad.

-Do you try to catch the toad? - Turn to page 19

-Do you pull out your camera to take a picture of the frog? - Turn to page 16

You are much too hungry to follow the deer. Plus, you decide it wouldn't be a good idea to leave the trail and risk the chance of getting lost or hurt. You have already gone where you shouldn't have gone, and you don't want to step on or kill any more plant that wildlife need for cover and food.

With hunger knowing at your stomach, you rummage through your back pack until you find your large red apple. Your mouth starts to water even before you bite into its juicy center.

Your snack is delicious and stops your stomach from growling at you. You have never tasted a better apple in your life.

After you are finished with your first snack, you set the core down on a boulder and pull out a chewy granola bar. Just like with the apple, you anticipate the first bite and quickly finish eating eat.

After taking several drinks from your water bottle, you make up your mind to continue hiking up the trail. Before you go, though, you have to decide what you are going to do with your apple core and wrapper. You can wrap the apple up in the wrapper and wait until you can find a garbage can, you can bury them together, or you can build a fire and burn them in the flames.

-Do you burry the apple core and the wrapper- Turn to page 20

-Do you stash the apple core and wrapper in your pocket- Turn to page 21

It's so hot outside, you decide to build a dam in the stream and wade out into the water. You will stay there until you're not tired and have cooled off.

Using large rocks from the bank of the stream and beyond, you construct a wall where the water is deepest. Once you have every rock secured into place, you wade out into the chilly water all the way up to your waist. The current tickles your arms and legs. Every now and again, you can feel a tiny insect brush past you.

You stay there for about a half hour before the breeze gets stronger and you start getting goosebumps. Walking out of the water, you wring out your clothes and sit in the sun to dry off.

As you soak up the warmth, you notice fish swimming on one side of the dam where you were. They can't get past the dam. Other fish downstream don't have as much water as they did before you put rocks in the water.

Hoping to help the fish, you wade back out into the water and tear the dam you have constructed. Your action allows the fish to get by, but you still have changed the stream's natural flow and added to much dirt to the stream.

You return as many rocks as you can to where you found them. You still feel bad about what you did after you get out of the water, but at least you have learned your lesson.

Surely you will eventually find the path if you keep looking for it. Besides, you are too worried to just sit still and wait. Determined to find your way again, you march off in a new, downhill direction.

For what seems like hours, you make your way down the slope, but never find the trail. Along the way, branches and bushes scrape your arms and face. Several times, you trip and fall in the dirt.

Behind you, you leave a trail of broken vegetation and a cloud of dust floating through the air. You are harming wildlife habitat, but you are too scared and confused to stop and think.

Before long, the sun starts to sink in the sky and you know you have been outside far too long. You are out of water and realize you dropped your whistle somewhere.

Suddenly, you hear a grunt off to your left. Your head whips to the side and you see a big black bear lumbering through the bushes. It stops and sniffs the air as if it smells you.

You remember if you run from a bear, it will chase you, so you wave your arms above head and start shouting, trying to scare the bear away. It works. The bear runs off and someone hears you shouting and helps you back to the trail. You have had a terrible scare, but at least you know what not to do in the future.

All wildlife belongs in their natural habitat, so it would be best if you just took a picture of the frog to remember it by. That way other people will get to enjoy it, too.

You are able to get several really good pictures of the frog before it jumps away and vanishes from sight. Smiling to yourself, you slip your camera back into your backpack and head back down the trail the way you came up.

A soft purple makes its way up into the sky as the sun begins to drop from the sky. Grass sways back and forth as if it is caught in a lazy trance. In the distance you can hear water murmuring as it flows to join other water sources. The air cools down glance at your watch to ensure you won't be late getting home.

You have plenty of time, so you walk slowly and look all around you. All of the birds fly over to the Aspen Trees to land in the high branches and dip their heads as if they're going to go to sleep. You see Western Tanagers, Blue Jays, and two Red-tailed Hawks. Taking out your camera again, you are able to take pictures of each bird.

You also get the chance to take picture of a mule deer walking in between some Aspen Trees and a squirrel running up a tree trunk. Now you have a lot of neat photos you can show off when you return home and a lot of stories to tell during dinner.

Not wanting to get lost any more than you already are, you pull your whistle out of your pocket and give a strong blow through it. The sound echoes all around you. You blow several more times before you stop and wait for some kind of response.

The seconds tick by, but you don't hear anything, adding to your fear. You try to remember what you have been taught. You are now determined to stay in one place and remain calm as much as possible. Seeing a large boulder off to your right, you walk over and sit down. Then you blow the whistle again.

Finally you think you hear something that doesn't naturally occur in the outdoors. Hoping you are hearing another person, you blow one the whistle and strain your ears to listen.

A faint yell in the distance causes you to perk up and shout for help. You can't believe someone has found you Maybe you want to be discovered so much you are imagining the call. You start wildly blowing the whistle until you run out of breath.

There's a moment of silence and then you hear the person's voice again, stronger this time. They are getting closer, causing your heart to race. Pretty soon, you see a person waving to you.

Too excited to contain yourself, you jump up and down and run towards them. The person helps you back to the trail and lets you have a drink from his water bottle. You could have run into a bear or worse, but you're very lucky this time.

Taking your socks and shoes off, you dangle your legs off of the boulder and let your feet dip into the crystal clear stream. The cold water cools you down and soothes your aching feet. You close your eyes and just relax for a while.

Every now and again, you can feel a leaf or an insect brush up against your ankle as the current carries it downstream. You are content and the fish and aquatic insects are nearly unaffected by your presence.

If you would have decided to throw rocks in the water or build a dam, you would have scared the fish, made it harder for them to move around, altered the current of the stream, and added unnecessary dirt to the water. By choosing to minimize your influence on the aquatic habitat, you are helping to protect it and make sure others can enjoy it.

Once you are rested, you pull your socks back on and slip on your shoes. You sling your backpack over your shoulder as you rise to your feet and head back down the trail. As your hiking boots crunch down in the dry dirt, you start whistling a tune to yourself and think about your day.

You have seen many different kinds of wildlife since you set out from your home, and all of them had moved around in their natural habitat, where they belong. It is important to always show consideration for animals when you are outside in nature, for they share your world, too, and are connected to you.

That frog will make a wonderful pet, you decide. Your friends will be very impressed when they see what you have caught.

Emptying your backpack, you silently creep forward and prepare to spring upon the Western Toad. The small amphibian seems unaware you are behind it. It looks like it has no idea what is about to happen.

With one swift motion, you bring the backpack over your head and down towards the frog, hoping to trap it inside. Before your hands are even halfway to it, though, it leaps up into the air with a powerful thrust by its back legs.

Not wanting the frog to escape, you try to sweep your backpack through the air and scoop up the frog; however, you get your foot caught on a root of a Willow Tree and trip. Startled, you lose your balance and fall face first into the gooey mud. You can taste the grit in your mouth.

Sputtering and gagging, you jerk back up and watch the frog continue to jump away from you. It looks like trying to capture the frog wasn't such a good idea after all. Wildlife belongs in their natural environment if they are to remain happy and healthy.

When you get home, you have to explain to your parents why you are all covered in mud, but at least you have learned your lesson.

You don't want to put garbage into your pocket, so using a large stick; you dig a hole into the ground and push the brown apple core and silver wrapper into the dirt. You push the pile of dirt over your items and pack it down. Then brushing your hands on your pants, you stand back up and continue on your hike.

Little do you know, a small black bear smelled what you had buried and dug it up. Hungry and not having anything else to eat, it eats both the apple core and the wrapper. Since the wrapper is not supposed to be eaten, the bear starts choking on it. He can't breathe and he can't get rid of the trash he swallowed.

The next day, a park ranger finds the bear lying on the ground and realizes it is dead. When he looks more closely at the animal, he finds the granola bar wrapper snuck at the back of its throat. He is sad, because the bear's death could have been prevented.

Later, you have a lesson about how dangerous trash can be for wildlife in your area. You remember the apple core and the wrapper you buried on your hike and start to feel guilty. You wonder what happened to the garbage, but realize there is no way for you to ever know. All you can do is learn from your experience and promise yourself never to throw any trash on the ground ever again and encourage all of your friends to do the same.

It's never a good idea to leave your trash on the ground, especially when it can harm an animal. Every year, animals get poisoned, choked, or tangled up in garbage people have thoughtlessly left behind. Everything in the world is connected, so what happens to one animal affects something else, whether you see it or not.

You put the brown apple core in the granola bar wrapper and stuff them both into your pocket. You'll find a garbage can to throw them into later.

Skipping most of the way back down the trail, you whistle one of your favorite tunes and enjoy the breeze which rushes past your face. The sun begins to sink towards the western mountains and the sky loses its vivid blue color. The air cools down and the forest around you grows quieter.

Along the way, you get to see another deer. It has large antlers, so you wonder if it's the same deer you saw earlier in the day. If it is, you are glad you made the decision to not bother it. All wildlife deserves to live in their own home and have their own space, just like you.

When you go back home, you have plenty of stories to tell your family members during dinner and a lot of pictures to show them while you spent time together afterwards.

## Wildlife

X M B F H A I W G Q B N R W R X D V Z S X F E O M  
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H C Z M T I J M L Z V T R G F C M Q Z J I J W O D  
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H R V D X N E J G I J F W Q N R S H Y P Y H M E U  
C T L A I L M V J E Z S A R K Q R T I S H N D D D  
P Q A O L J R E D S Q U I R R E L B Z X A G J E G  
Q O I E R D X R Y M Z K V K X I C A L P K W V E B  
M P R B I G Y L L I O B H A H O W A L E B D F R X  
V F E C Q B O I V Q O F N T S I F U Q N X I H W A  
P V S U U W P S V T E O D X X Z Z D Y H S I P H Y  
G J X Q P P Y F V H L H C H K V L H E H S N L G U  
P J B D Q J I F L P A O O Z Z W N U V R V N I M F  
O Z R K T G S N C M B N C K M V U Y K S I V R N M  
A K P O W P V R E O Y Y A O X L U T Z M A J L F S  
P Y J N Z W U D M I S P P A R A G U O C X E P A E  
A K R D V J B G R J Q D L F Y Y B J S H I F E V X  
U H E L V K I Q Q J N E Y X Z Q G B I O A N W F K  
P K N S A F E B K B Y B Q W L B Q I X L W L L O U  
J V E V V B F U Q M H O Q Y W F V J X M D A M Q J  
R Y F D I D G M B V W L V R X W F Z W P Q F B W K

BLUE JAY, COUGAR  
MULE DEER, PORCUPINE  
RED FOX, RED SQUIRREL