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Natural Inquirer Reader Series



Visit the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests

Natural Inquirer Reader Series

Visit the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests

Table of Contents

Visit the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests. . . .1

Woodsy Owl® Wonders 27

Woodsy Owl's® Words 28

Try This! 29

U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree 30

Possibility Possum Poem. 33

About Woodsy Owl® . . . . . Back Cover



Woodsy Owl's® words are in **bold.**

https://www.naturalinquirer.org

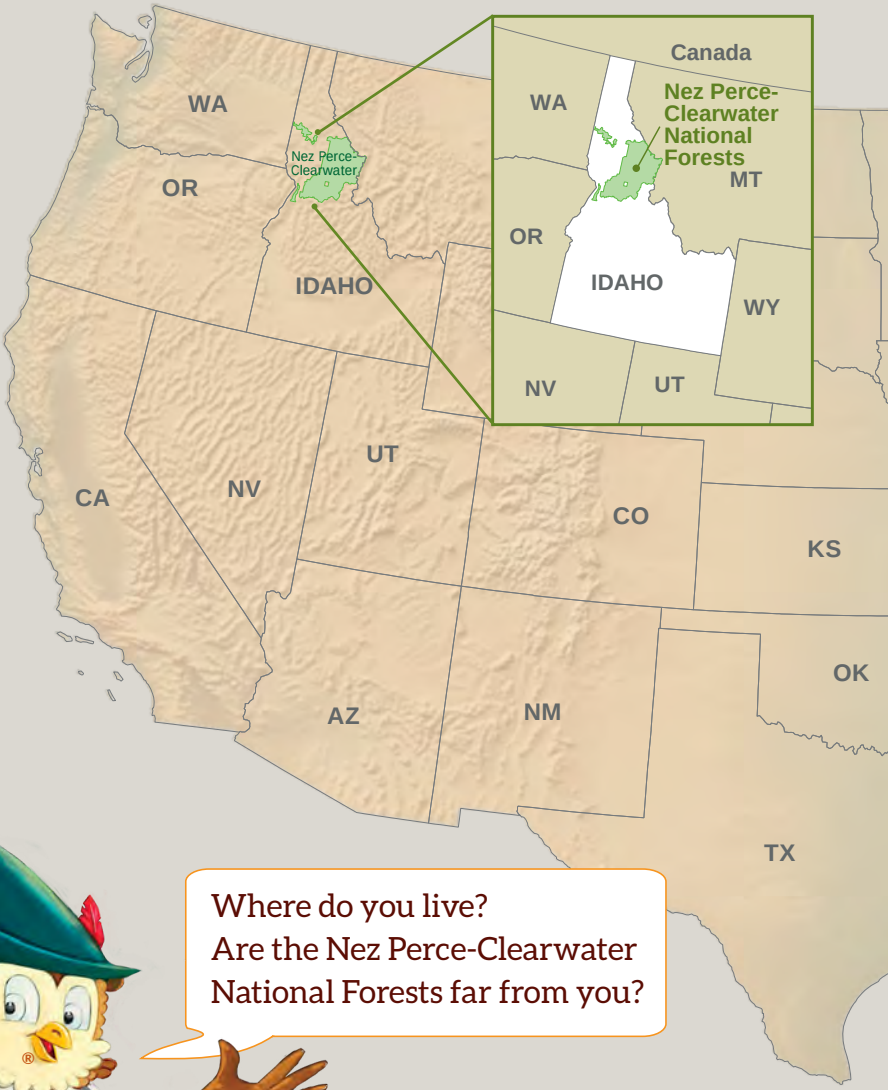
https://www.fs.usda.gov/learn/kids/woodsy-owl

Hi! I'm Woodsy Owl. Every year, a tree is chosen from a national forest to be the U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree.

This tree is a gift from the national forests to all the people of the United States. It stands on the lawn of the U.S. Capitol building in Washington, DC, during the holiday season.



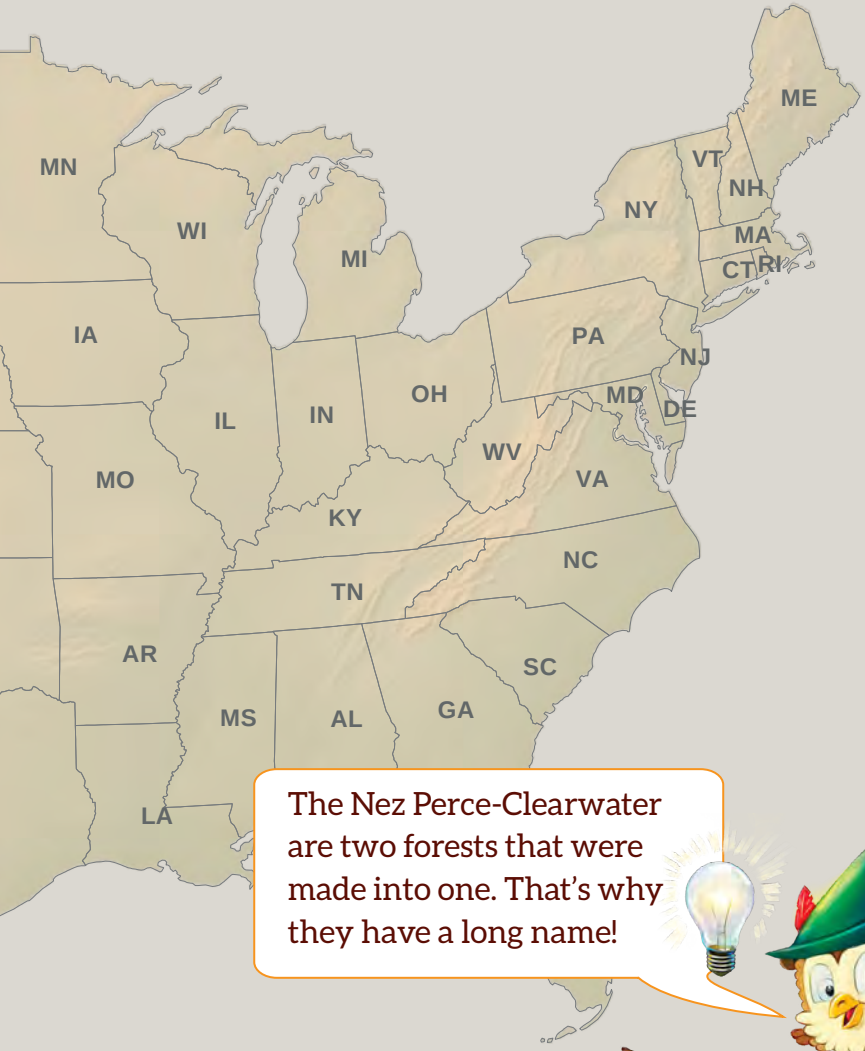
The Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests are in Idaho. Look at this map. The Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests are colored green.





Where do you live?
Are the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests far from you?

A national forest is a special kind of forest. It is owned by you and me. It is owned by everyone in the Nation! Anyone can visit a national forest.



The Nez Perce-Clearwater are two forests that were made into one. That's why they have a long name!

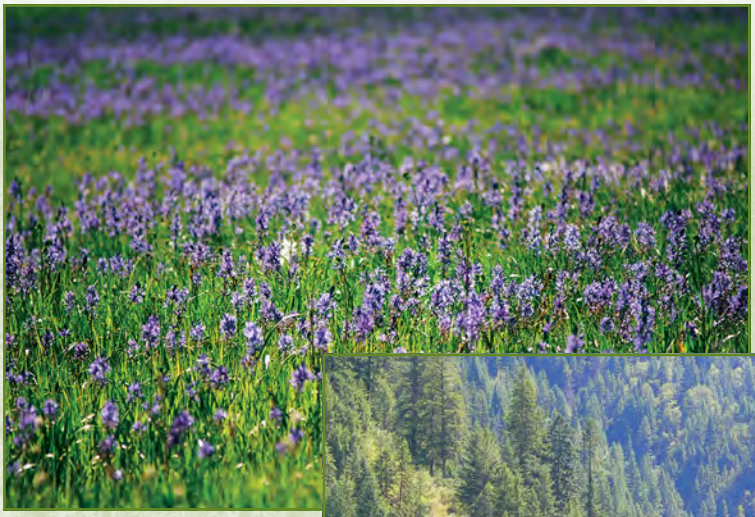


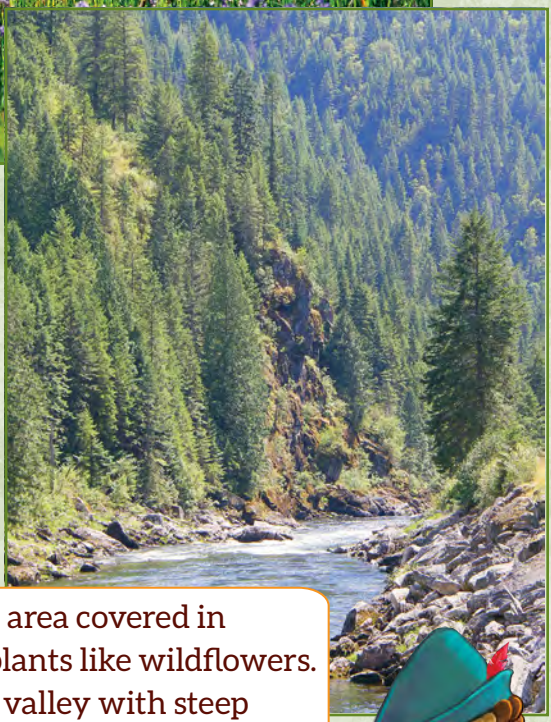
These forests have very tall mountains. It's a good thing I can fly!



This is a photo of the Bitterroot Mountains. The mountains are part of the Rocky Mountains. The Rocky Mountains are a chain of mountains that stretch across many States.

These forests also have **meadows** and **canyons**.

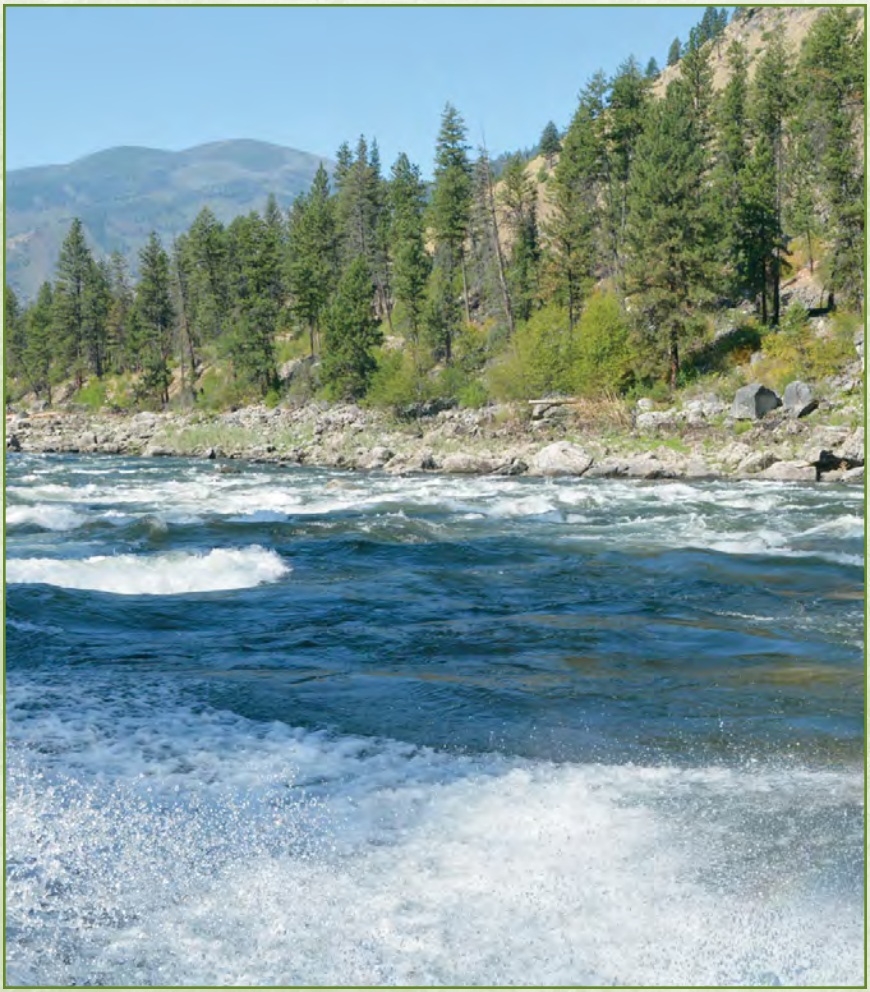




A **meadow** is a low area covered in grasses and other plants like wildflowers. A **canyon** is a deep valley with steep sides. Canyons are often made when a river cuts through the rock.



The Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests have beautiful rivers to visit.



These forests also have **wilderness** areas. We won't see many other people there.



Wilderness is a place where people haven't built many roads or buildings.

The Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests were the homeland of the Nez Perce Tribe. The Tribe lived there. They took care of the land for hundreds of years. That's why the forest is named after them!



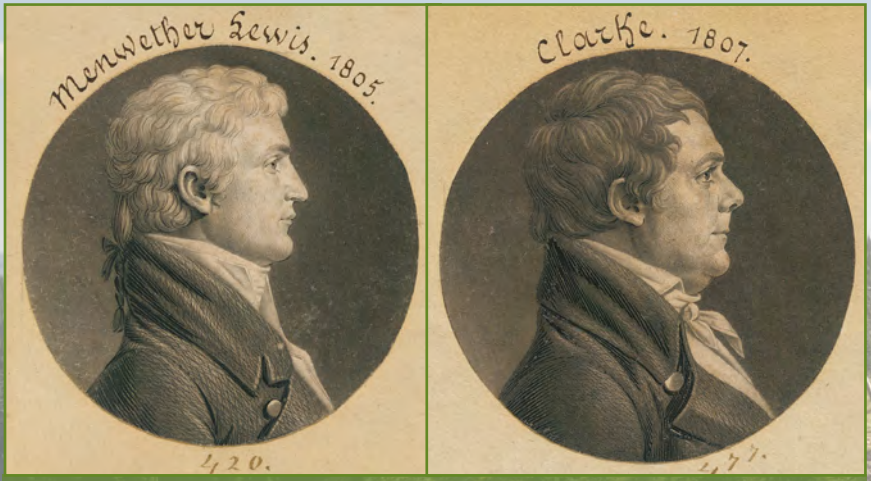
Members of the Tribe still use the land and help take care of it today.



The people in the Tribe call themselves the Nimiipuu which means "the people" in their language.



The Nez Perce helped Meriwether Lewis and William Clark. Lewis and Clark were explorers. They traveled through the area in 1805. They were making maps of the Western United States for the President.



Meriwether Lewis | William Clark

Smokejumpers made their first jump in the Nez Perce National Forest in 1940. Smokejumpers have an important job. They still help fight wildfires today.





A **smokejumper** is a person who helps fight fires. A smokejumper jumps out of a plane to fight fires in places that are far away from people.

There are many animals that live in the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests.



This mountain goat and her baby live in the mountains.

A baby mountain goat is called a kid.

This moose and her baby live in the forest.

A baby moose is called a calf.



Gray wolves live in the forest, too.



Baby gray wolves are called pups. They live in a den.





Many kinds of birds live in the
Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests.



Golden eagle



Great gray owl



Spruce grouse

Other animals live in the rivers.

Chinook salmon





Nothern river otter

Steelhead trout



Many plants live in these national forests, too.



Camas is an important plant to the Nez Perce Tribe. They cook and eat the bulbs of the plant.



Syringa is the state flower of Idaho. It grows along the rivers.



Beargrass can survive some fires.



Some people like to look for mushrooms,
like these morels.



Many different trees live in the
Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests.



Western redcedar can grow to be
1,000 years old!



Western white pine is Idaho's State tree.

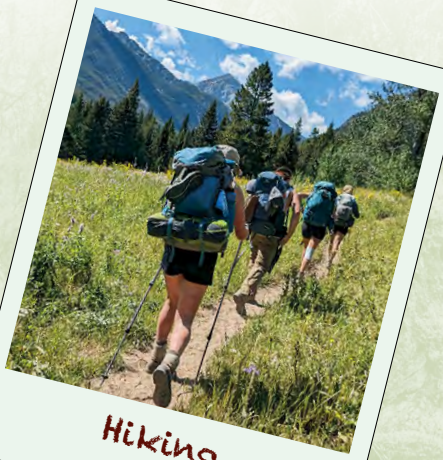


Western larch turns bright gold in the fall.



Subalpine firs also grow
in the forests.

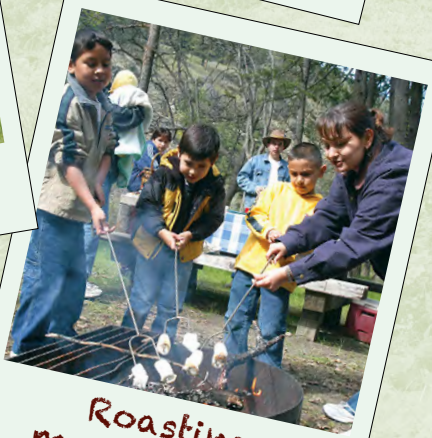
Visitors like to do many different things in the forests.



Hiking



Playing games



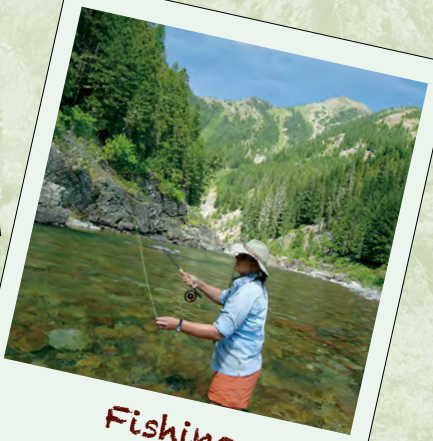
Roasting marshmallows



Smokey Bear here, reminding you to always be careful with fire!



Rafting



Fishing



Riding horses

People also get important products from the forests.



In the past, people looked for gold in the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests.



People cut down trees to use the wood for buildings. New trees are planted in their place.



People can also cut down their own Christmas trees from the forests.

Every year, a very special tree is chosen to be the U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree. In 2026, the special tree is a 76-foot-tall Engelmann spruce that came from the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests.



Engelmann spruce trees can grow to be 200 feet tall or more! That's like five school buses lined up in a row.

The Engelmann spruce will travel across the United States to Washington, DC. When the tree gets there, it will stand on the lawn of the U.S. Capitol building. The tree will be decorated with lights and ornaments. Many of the ornaments are made by kids like you!



This special Christmas tree reminds us of all the wonderful trees that grow in our national forests. The tree is a gift from the national forests to all the people of the United States.





We've learned a lot about the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests. Here are some questions to help you think about what you learned.

WOODSY OWL® WONDERS . . .

1. What is one of your favorite things you learned about the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests? Why is that your favorite?

2. Forests can also be in our neighborhoods and our backyards. What do you like to do in a forest?

3. What are two important things that forests give us or do for us?



Here are the new words we learned in this Reader! Woodsy Owl's® Words can also be called a glossary.

WOODSY OWL'S® WORDS

canyon (**kan** yən): A narrow, deep valley with steep sides, usually made by a river cutting away the rock on either side.

meadow (**me** dō): A low area covered in grasses and other plants like wildflowers.

smokejumper (**smōk jəm** pər): A person who jumps out of a plane to fight fires in places that can be far away from people.

wilderness (**wil** dər nəs): A place where people have not built many roads or buildings.

TRY THIS!



We've learned a lot about the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests. Draw or write what things you would like to do if you visited the forests.

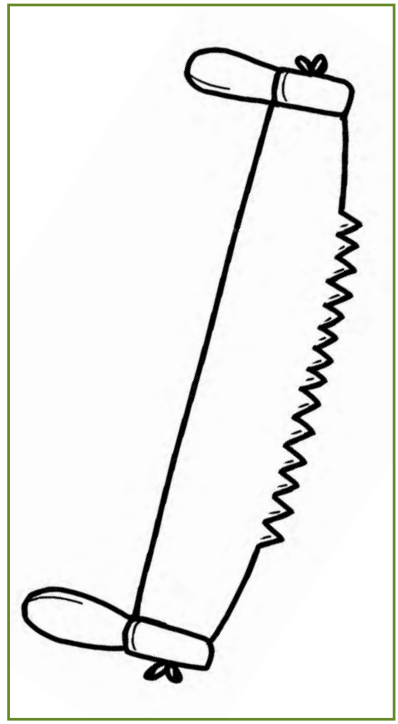
THE 2026 U.S. CAPITOL CHRISTMAS TREE



Here is a special drawing for the 2026 U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree. You'll see many important parts of the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests in the drawing. Color in the pictures below.



Camas is an important plant to the Nez Perce Tribe.



People use the crosscut saw to help take care of the forests.

AN ORNAMENT FOR THE TREE

As the U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree travels across the country, people help make ornaments to decorate the tree. What ornament would you make? Draw it below.

Natural Inquirer Reader Series

Number 15
Grades K–2
Word Count: 1,200
Genre: Nonfiction

Background: This Reader teaches students about the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests, including their geography, cultural significance, history, wildlife, forest products, and recreation opportunities. This Reader is also part of the U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree series, highlighting the forests that grow the national tree and the importance of public lands. The Forest Service's U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree initiative is a 56-year tradition in which one of America's 154 national forests provides a tree for the West Lawn of the U.S. Capitol for the holiday season. The project is made possible with support from partners including the Society of American Foresters and the Nez Perce Tribe, along with contributions from companies and volunteers across America. To learn more about the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests, visit https://www.fs.usda.gov/r01/nezperce-clearwater. To learn more about the U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree, visit https://www.uscapitolchristmastree.com/. To learn more about Woodsy Owl, visit https://symbols.gov/.

Note: For more background information and lesson plans, visit https://www.naturalinquirer.org and choose the "Educators" tab.

All photos are Forest Service images unless otherwise noted.

Pages 2–3: map by Leslie Shaw Design; pages 4, 8, and 10–11 (background): Forest Service photos by Roger Peterson; page 5 (camas meadow): Forest Service photo by Joni Packard; page 7: Forest Service photo by T.C. Peterson; page 9: National Park Service photo; page 10: National Portrait Gallery photos; pages 12 (mountain goats) and 20 (hiking): Forest Service photos by Ellen Butler; page 12 (moose): U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service photo by Buck Domitrovich; page 13: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service photos by Hilary Cooley; page 14 (golden eagle): U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service photo by Tom Koerner; page 14 (great gray owl): Forest Service photo by A. Power; page 14 (spruce grouse): Forest Service photo by Erika Williams; page 15 (chinook salmon): USDA photo; page 15 (northern river otters): U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service photo by Grayson Smith; page 15 (steelhead trout): U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service photo by Ryan Hagerty; page 16 (syringa): licensed photo by Dave Powell, Forest Service, bugwood.org; page 17 (morels): licensed photo by Chris Evans, University of Illinois, bugwood.org; page 18 (western redcedar): Forest Service photo by Jennifer Becar; page 18 (western white pine): licensed photo by Chris Schnepf, University of Idaho, bugwood.org; page 19 (subalpine fir): licensed photo by Mary Ellen Harte, bugwood.org; page 21 (riding horses): Forest Service photo by T. Jones; page 22 (gold mine): Forest Service photo by R.E. Benedict; pages 24–25 (truck): Forest Service photo by Tanya Flores; page 25 (decorated tree): Forest Service photo by David Kosling; page 26: Forest Service photo by Ian Grob; page 30 (camas and saw): illustrations by Stephanie Pfeiffer Rossow.

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Be a Possibility Possum

Scientists make things possible;
They ask and answer questions.
You can make things possible
If you follow these suggestions.

Observe your world and wonder;
Ask how, what, why, and who?
Ask and answer questions
To make things possible for you.

Wonder is a good thing;
It is very plain to see.
When I ask and answer questions,
I make things possible for me.



Woodsy Owl® has invited children of all ages to explore and care for the natural environment since 1971. Woodsy Owl®, in partnership with the *Natural Inquirer* Reader Series, helps introduce children to science and the natural world. In this Reader, children will learn about the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests and the U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree.



Woodsy Owl's® motto is "Lend a Hand, Care for the Land!"® As children read, they can look for ways to lend a hand and care for the forests.