

# HABITAT ASSESSMENT

Assessing part of an ecosystem can reveal information about land and water and help participants gain confidence and enthusiasm for going outside. Making observations about a habitat site can also help participants discover parts of an ecosystem they might not have noticed before. In this activity, participants will fill out a field data sheet to organize their observations about the several characteristics of their habitat site, including weather, water appearance, water odor, stream surroundings, wildlife, local land use, stream bank and channel conditions.

## Outcomes

- Participants will explore part of a habitat site.
- Participants will fill out a field data sheet to organize their observations.
- Participants will draw a sketch of the habitat site.

## Audience

Youth (8+), adults

## Time

60+ minutes

## Concepts

- Assessing part of an ecosystem can reveal information about land and water.
- Getting outside and making observations about a habitat can connect participants to the environment.

## Supplies

- Pen or pencil (one per participant)
- Field data sheet available in the Appendix (one per participant)
- Clipboard, notebook or other hard writing surface (one per participant)



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## Preparation

- Select a habitat site to conduct the assessment that is close to the location where the participants will meet. The site could include part of a stream, lake or river, forest, field or other habitat.
- Read over the field data sheet to become familiar with the content before conducting the habitat assessment.
- Print enough copies of the field data sheet for each participant in advance and make sure each participant will have a pen or pencil and clipboard or other hard writing surface.

## Procedure

- Gather participants and lead them to the selected habitat site.
- Before handing out the field data sheets, have participants walk around the habitat site for up to five minutes, taking notice of any plants, water and wildlife.
- After the participants make their initial observations about the habitat site, hand out the field data sheets, a pen or pencil and clipboard or other hard writing surface to each participant.
- Have participants fill out the front side of the field data sheet one category at a time, using the checkboxes to write down their observations. If you have a large group, consider breaking participants into partners or teams to complete the field data sheet.
- Next, have participants fill out the back side of the field data sheet by drawing a sketch of the habitat site. Encourage participants to be creative and remember that the sketch does not need to look like an exact replica of the site.
- When all participants have finished filling out the field data sheet, gather the participants to have a discussion using the discussion questions below.

## Discussion questions

- What was the most interesting thing you saw during the habitat assessment?
- What surprised you about the habitat assessment?
- What did you notice while filling out the field data sheet that you might not have noticed before?
- What was the most difficult category of the field data sheet? Easiest category?
- How do you think the field data sheet would change for a different type of site?

## Additional activity ideas

### Volunteer with WHEP

- Hennepin County's Wetland Health Evaluation Program (WHEP), is an environmental monitoring program focused on assessing the condition and health of wetlands. Volunteers obtain water quality data and biological communities to assess the overall health of wetlands. Join a team of other interested citizens who are concerned about wetlands in your area. By volunteering with a WHEP team and attending informational workshops, you will gain skills to help you match your interest and commitment. You can be directly involved in collecting and submitting important, meaningful data to your community leaders. To learn more and sign up for WHEP, visit [www.hennepin.us](http://www.hennepin.us) and search: WHEP.

### Get youth involved with River Watch

- Hennepin County's River Watch program provides hands-on environmental education opportunities for high school classes and student groups. The program runs from April to August and allows students to assess water quality and learn how actions impact local water sources. Learn more and sign up at [www.hennepin.us/riverwatch](http://www.hennepin.us/riverwatch).