

# CRITTER SEARCH



**Grade Level:** K-12

**Alaska State Content Standards:** SA14, SA15

**Subject:** Science

**Skills:** Classification, Observation

**Duration:** 1 class period

**Group Size:** 2

**Setting:** outdoors

**Vocabulary:** edge

## OBJECTIVE

Students will identify what animals have frequented a local ecosystem and how they have used the environment.

## TEACHING STRATEGY

Students will explore a local ecosystem to observe the evidence of animal activity.

## MATERIALS

- Animal track field guides
- Hand lens
- Critter Search Treasure Hunt worksheet

## TEACHER BACKGROUND

By observing the evidence left by animals in an area, more can be learned about the ecosystem as a whole. Animal tracks can be a relatively easy indicator of animals living in a specific

habitat. Other signs are scat or pellets, plant shoots nipped cleanly by hares or torn and crushed by moose, bark stripped from spruce by porcupines, or bark nibbled from willows by moose. All of these indicators are easily observed by students of all ages.

## PROCEDURE

1. Locate an area where students can find animal tracks, scat or pellets, and/or evidence of browsing.
2. Divide the class into teams of 2. Explain that students will be working together to locate evidence that animals have been in the area. Discuss what these signs may look like and how to use the animal track field guides.
3. Have students follow the Critter Search Treasure Hunt worksheet to locate different animal clues.

4. Students then compare their findings, sharing them with the class. Ask the following questions:
  - a. What was the most interesting thing you found?
  - b. How many different types (species) of animals live here?
  - c. How many animals total do you think live here?
  - d. What were the easiest things to find? What were the hardest?
  - e. Do you think your findings would be different at a different time of year? If so, why?
  - f. How do you think studying animal signs may help wildlife biologists?

## **EVALUATION**

Ask the students to write a detailed answer to the following:

If you were an animal living here, who would you be and why? (Make sure students include something about the food, water, and shelter resources in the area).

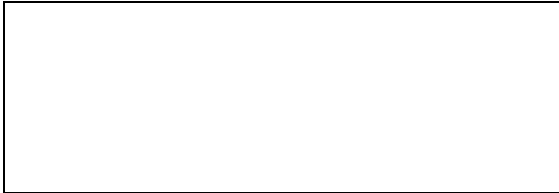
## **EXTENSION**

To extend the activity, choose an ecosystem **edge** as a location for study. An edge is an area where two (2) or more different habitats meet such as the border of a meadow and forest. Edges are usually more diverse than other areas as they provide a larger variety of food and shelter for the local animals. After studying an edge and a non-edge ecosystem, students can compare the two.

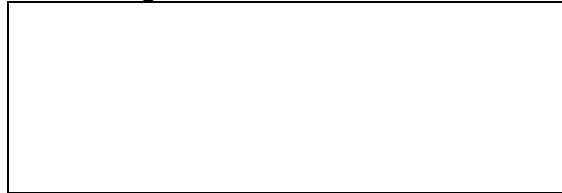
# CRITTER SEARCH TREASURE HUNT

Locate the following and then draw a small picture of your finding next to the listed item. You don't need to find all of the items on this list.

1. The track of a bird.



6. Evidence of a moose or caribou eating here.



2. Evidence that a bird ate here.



7. The track of a mouse or lemming.




3. The track of a small animal such as a fox, hare, porcupine, lynx, or squirrel.



8. Evidence that a lemming ate here.




4. Evidence that a small animal ate here.



9. More than one animal eating off one plant.



5. The track of moose or caribou.



10. Something interesting that is not listed here.

