

SHARING OUR CAMPS WITH WILDLIFE

Spending time at GSSEF-managed properties is a magnificent way for Girl Scouts to experience the natural environment, particularly since so much of our jurisdiction has been altered by property developers. Camp Nocatee and Camp Welaka afford Girl Scout visitors a unique glimpse of “real” Florida!

When going to camp, whether at a GSSEF property, or at another campsite, it is important to remember that WE are visitors, and that many species of wildlife make these areas their fulltime homes. Just like humans, animals and birds are doing their best to make a living and raise their young, so it is important to know how to co-exist with them while in the outdoors.

With some luck, it is possible that some of the following animals may be seen by you and girls, while visiting Camp Nocatee and/or Camp Welaka:

Armadillo	Alligator
Bald Eagle	Black Bear
Bobcat	Coyote
Crocodile	Deer
Feral Hog	Florida Panther
Fox	Gopher Tortoise
Opossum	Owl
Raccoon	Snake
Wild Turkey	

General Tips for Co-existing With Wildlife:

- Walk and hike on roads and trails.
- Always walk with a buddy; this applies to girls and adults.
- Observe animals from a distance - do not follow or approach them.
- Do NOT feed wild animals.
 - Feeding them only lessens the animals' natural fear of people.
 - Some smaller animals are prey for others; feeding such animals, may attract their (larger) predators to you.
- Secure food and garbage cans in unit houses at night. At Camp Nocatee and Camp Welaka, the Camp Ranger will visit unit sites after dinner to collect garbage.
- Be certain the girls do not keep food in tents and cabins.
- Be alert from dusk to dawn – stay in groups and make a little noise. Many species are nocturnal.
- Be alert when picking up sticks and look around before taking a seat.



Co-existing with Alligators:

Alligators are an integral part of Florida's wetlands, swamps, rivers and lakes, and they are found in all 67 counties in our state. It is possible that you may see an alligator at Camp Nocatee and Camp Welaka. The alligator is federally protected and its population size is several of the following safety tips come from the Florida Wildlife Conservation Commission website; www.myfwc.com/alligator :



- Never feed alligators – it's dangerous and illegal. When fed, alligators can overcome their natural wariness and learn to associate people with food.
- Observe and photograph alligators from a distance.
- Alligators are most active between dusk and dawn.
- Be aware of the possibility of alligators when you are near fresh or brackish water.
- Do not swim in Camp Nocatee or Camp Welaka lakes, ponds, rivers or canals.
- Leave alligators alone. State law prohibits killing, harassing or possessing alligators.

Co-existing with Florida Panthers:

The Florida panther, Florida's official state animal, is one of the most endangered animals on earth, with 100 to 160 remaining in southern Florida. It has been documented by the Camp Nocatee Camp Ranger, that a male Florida panther has been periodically seen on the property.

The Florida panther is classified as *Federally Designated Endangered* and may not be injured or killed. (Note that GSSEF Policies, Section 3.0, Code of Conduct specifies, "Carrying firearms; guns and ammunition are prohibited during Girl Scout activities").

A male adult Florida panther has a roaming area of approximately 200 square miles; therefore it is not feasible that the panther is spending 100% of his time at Camp Nocatee. It is important however, to provide you with information about this beautiful animal, should your visit to the property coincide with the panther's.

The following safety facts come from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC); www.MyFWC.com/panther.



- Never approach a panther. Most panthers want to avoid humans. Give a panther time and space to steer clear of you.
- Be alert from dusk until dawn. Florida panthers are most active at night. Walk in a group and make some noise.

If you come across a panther at close range:

- Make yourself appear larger – open your jacket, raise your arms – wave arms slowly.
- Speak slowly, firmly and loudly to communicate that you are not prey and may actually be a danger to it.

- Avoid crouching or bending over – this makes you look smaller, resembling a prey-sized animal.
- Do not turn your back.
- Do not run – running may stimulate a panther’s instinct to chase. Stand and face the animal.
- Make eye contact.

There has never been a reported panther attack on a person in Florida.

Co-existing with Black Bears:

The black bear is the largest land mammal in Florida. The Florida Wildlife Conservation Commission passed a rule to remove the black bear from the list of state-threatened species, although a separate rule was adopted, stating it is still illegal to injure or kill a bear in Florida.



(Note that GSSEF Policies, Section 3.0, Code of Conduct specifies, “Carrying firearms; guns and ammunition are prohibited during Girl Scout activities”).

While not commonly seen, it is possible that you may come across a Black Bear (or bear footprints) at Camp Nocatee.

A male adult black bear has a roaming area of approximately 60 - 100 square miles; therefore it is not feasible that the bear is spending 100% of his time at Camp Nocatee. It is important; however, to provide you with information about this animal, should your visit to the property coincide with a bear’s.

If you see a bear from a distance, enjoy the experience; do not move toward the bear.

If you are close, do not make any sudden or abrupt movements – back away slowly and be sure the bear has an obvious escape route.

If you encounter a bear at close range:

- Remain standing upright, back up slowly and speak to the bear in a calm, assertive voice.
- Do NOT turn your back, play dead, climb a tree or run. Back away slowly towards a secure area.
- Avoid direct eye contact.

There has never been a reported black bear attack on a person in Florida.

Enjoy Wildlife

The opportunity to see and appreciate wildlife in their natural habitat is something you never forget. Our camp properties offer a unique environment in which to co-exist with animals and learn more about them. While it is always important to use caution and follow the guidelines above, it shouldn't prevent you from having a wonderful experience and enjoying everything about being at camp. Simply familiarize yourself with the guidelines above, be alert during your stay, appreciate the wildlife that share the grounds with you, and have fun!