

Riparian Retreat
Project Wild Aquatic Education Activity Guide
Pages 35-36

“ It is a hot summer day. You are walking in a meadow filled with knee-high grasses. Here and there are masses of tiny blue wildflowers... The ground beneath your feet is uneven, but you are in no hurry as you walk slowly toward a grove of trees. As you near the trees, you notice the changing colors of green... A breeze whispers through, showing first a shiny green, then a dull green underside of the leaves... As you step into the grove of trees, you are surrounded with a welcome coolness... You immediately feel the protection of the canopy of green above your head...A tap-tap-tapping sound breaks into your thoughts. Searching about among the rough-barked trunks, your eyes finally spot a bird, black and white with a touch of red on its head, clinging to a vertical tree trunk and bobbing its head in time to the rhythmic tapping... Your eyes fill with the beauty of the setting... Your skin welcomes the cool... As you breathe deeply, the very scent of green comes to you... The aroma of earth and growing things is strong and you detect here and there almost a memory of the sweet perfume of the flowers... Once in a while the pungent but not unpleasant odor of wet soil and last seasons’ decaying leaves and grasses catches your attention.

As you explore further, you notice that the tree trunks are not as crowded and close as before... Grass, which earlier reached to your knees, is being overshadowed by chest-high bushes. Although these bushes have no thorns, they nevertheless snag your clothing... Your arms are lightly scratched by the twig ends. Several of the bushes are covered with small berries, pink and pale green, ripening into red in the warm sun. The bushes become taller... You find yourself pulling aside thick, tangled willows taller than your head... You carefully choose a safe path along the precarious trail beneath your feet. Suddenly your left foot drops six inches and, looking down to examine the terrain more closely, you notice that, where you stepped, the tunnel of a burrowing animal collapsed from your weight. Moving on again you feel the whisper of an abandoned spider web touch the side of your face... Brushing it aside, you notice the slope of the land is steeper... you pause, listening...listening. You can hear the high drone of insects... It has come upon you so gradually you are surprised that you didn’t hear it before. Now it seems almost frighteningly loud. And beneath the buzzing drone, and lower in pitch and volume, is the sound of water gently spilling over rocks. Above the place where the water must be, you see thousands of tiny spots milling before your eyes, the creators of that high buzzing sound... the spots are hundreds of swarming insects in a cloud too thick to picture... A dragonfly flashes by with its iridescent pinks and greens, darting here, pausing, darting there, pausing, snatching dozens of the dots, relishing a meal in an unending insect buffet. You step aside, ducking beneath the swarming insects... You smile as your eyes come to rest on the splashing waters of the stream a few feet below. As you proceed, you use your arms to open a space to walk between the graceful tan and green willows that bounce back undisturbed in your wake. As your eyes comb the scene for a place to rest, you notice a hip-high rock ahead of you—gray, warm, and not yet water-smoothed... You pause before reaching the rock and bend toward the water, gathering a handful of pebbles from the stream bed. One leg anchors itself on the ground between the

willows while the other reaches over the water. With the pebbles in your hand, you swing up onto the dry perch of the rock. You settle down and look at the still wet pebbles, gray, pink, tan and cool in your warm hand. After you examine them carefully, you toss the stones one at a time into the stream, listening to the pleasing plop of stone on water. Then your eyes drift downward to the waters of the stream near the base of your rock... In an eddy you see a fish, hidden like an illusion in the stone and sit, waiting, waiting, unblinking and still, only the faint wave of a gill, a tail fin, showing any evidence of life at all.

As you continue to look downstream you notice all kinds of small insects are now dancing across and above the water... A small ripple occurs in the water, than another and another... You realize that fish are rising up from below and feeding on the surface insects... Birds dart in and out of the tangle of vegetation... Some fly through. Downstream a frog begins to croak... Much nearer, another frog offers a reply. You look around quickly to see if you can find the nearer frog. For a moment you think you spot it, but then realize that, unless it sings again, you may never find it. Your eyes search for a moment as more frogs telegraph their messages back and forth. But then it seems time to leave... You take one last sweeping look all around this beautiful setting. You slowly get up from your rock along the streamside and head back home.”

For more information on Project Wild contact **Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife** <http://www.wa.gov/wdfw/resford.htm> Ecosystems Education, 600 Capitol Way North, Olympia, WA 98501-1091