

# Clay County 4-H Innovative Environmental Experiences: Nature Retreat Day Camp

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## Affiliations

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## Situation

Access to technology continues to have a huge impact on the way we live, leading to damaging effects on youth like increased screen time and time spent indoors, as well as a decreased personal connection with nature. Parents play a large role in the development of youth's connection with nature and the environment and can help develop this connection by encouraging their children to spend time outdoors. Such encouragement includes hands-on learning, trips to parks, and environmental literacy opportunities. The Clay County Nature Retreat was developed for the summers of 2020-2021 to give families a self-paced guided adventure encouraging the exploration of local parks, natural environments, and access to physical activity opportunities.

## Objectives

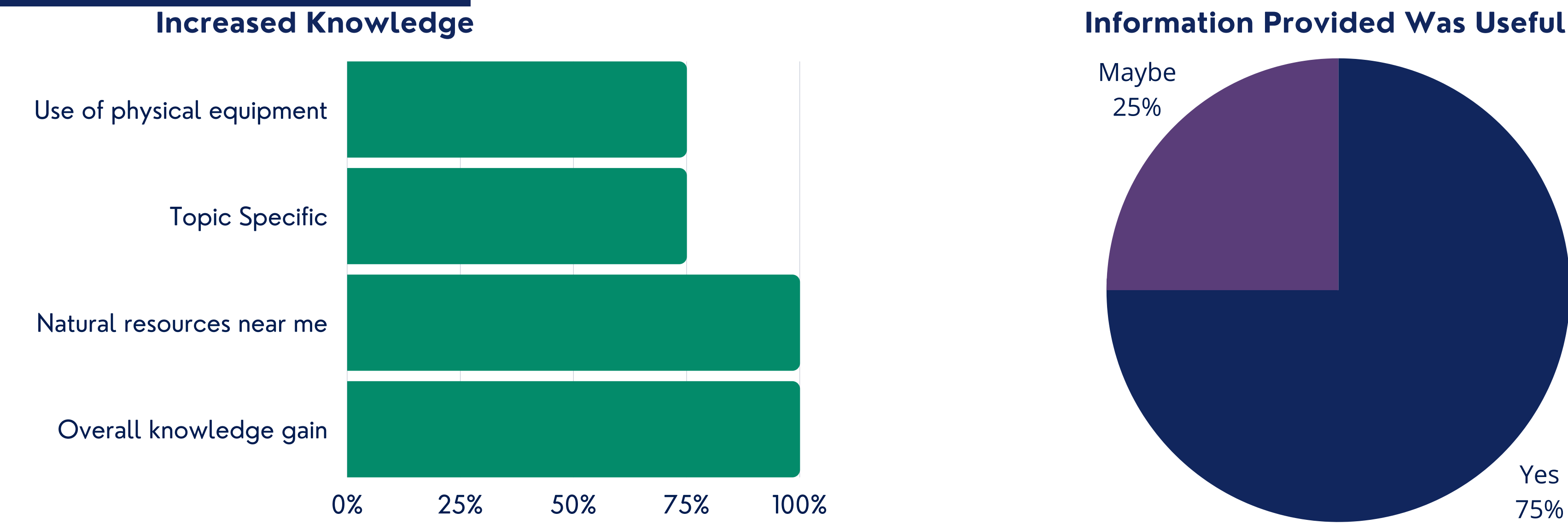
- The following goals were set for this program:
- 75% of youth will indicate an increase in knowledge related to local ecosystems and environments.
  - 75% of youth will develop skills or competencies in environmental literacy that will enable them to make informed decisions regarding the health of the environment in the future.
  - 80% of youth will increase their awareness of local opportunities for environmental exploration and outdoor activity.

## Program Activities and Teaching Methods

- To accomplish these goals, the Clay County Nature Retreat was developed by UF/IFAS Extension Clay County faculty in collaboration with Clay County Parks and Recreation staff with the objectives to build a connection to natural environments and the outdoors, build environmental literacy, and to increase physical activity and healthy behaviors among youth ages 5-11 years old and their families.
- The Clay County Nature Retreat was designed as a self-paced virtual summer adventure targeting youth and families in Clay County. Google sites was used as the educational platform and was designed to provide educational content, videos, activities, and fact sheets for each of the 6 lessons, created by extension faculty and Clay County Parks and Recreation staff. Each lesson highlighted a different Clay County park or recreational site and the surrounding natural environment and ecosystem. Participants were given access to activity materials including binoculars and fishing rods and tackle.
- The program was organized into the following lessons:
- ▶ **Day 1: Branching Out** – Youth visited the Florida Birding Trail at Camp Chowenwaw Park to view, identify, and learn about different birds. Also, youth learned about the surrounding ecosystem.
  - ▶ **Day 2: Bikes and Bugs** – Youth visited Black Creek Park and Trail, learned about bicycle safety, biked or hiked the Black Creek Trail, and identified bugs and learned why they are important to ecosystems.
  - ▶ **Day 3: Fame and Fishing** – Youth visited Ronnie VanZant Memorial Park to learn Clay County history, how to make a minnow trap, and identify different types of freshwater fish.
  - ▶ **Day 4: We are Family** – Youth visited Foxmeadow Recreational Park, packed a healthy picnic lunch for their family, and completed the family fitness challenge.
  - ▶ **Day 5: River Monsters** – Youth visited Main Street Park on Black Creek to learn about the slow-moving freshwater environment, make an underwater-scope, and do some freshwater fishing.
  - ▶ **Day 6: Fun and Fitness** – Youth headed to Moccasin Slough Park to complete an 8-station fitness challenge that took them through the entire park.



## Results/Findings



Each lesson was accompanied by a corresponding post-program survey collecting knowledge gain of environmental topics and skills, number of minutes of physical activity, and observations regarding the highlighted environmental topic of the lesson. A total of 21 youth completed 6 lessons of the Clay County Nature Retreat from 2020-2021. Participants spent an average of 37 minutes being physically active at each park, totaling 3.7 hours of physical activity over the course of the program. Youth engaged in outdoor activities, including learning about natural resources and participating in physical activities with their families. Youth increased knowledge and developed skills in a variety of natural resources topic areas, including wildlife monitoring techniques, wildlife identification, and local ecosystems.

## Impacts

- The cross-department collaborations by Clay County UF/IFAS Extension and Clay County Parks and Recreation has been the key to success in the effort to engage youth in a variety of valuable environmental opportunities through the Clay County Nature Retreat. This program effectively expanded outreach during a restriction of in-person activities, created new partnerships within the community, and engaged youth in learning about local environments.
- Youth**
- 100% of the participants reported that this was the first time that they had visited one or more of the parks/recreational sites highlighted by the retreat.
  - Youth participants developed a variety of skills and knowledge in natural resources topic areas that will help to establish environmental literacy, improving awareness of local natural resources and the importance of their protection.
- Community**
- A partnership between UF/IFAS Extension and Clay County Government Departments was secured and continues to grow, with future day camp collaborations on the horizon.
  - Collaboration within the Clay County Extension Office flourished as a result of this program that combined programs areas of natural resources, 4-H, health, and nutrition.
  - As a result of these partnerships, we have been able to extend our stakeholder reach as well as engage in new projects.