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MDC's Discover Nature Girls Camp Teaches Outdoor Skills

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Wappapello, Missouri. Discover Nature Girls Camp is a three-day, two-night camp hosted by the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) across the state each year. This week, 28 girls, ages 12 to 14, from across southeast Missouri stayed at Camp SEMO at Wappapello Lake. Camp Coordinator and Conservation Agent Alan Lamb said it's important for the future of hunting and conservation that more girls, specifically, are introduced to outdoor skills -- and that's the purpose of the camp.

"As time progresses, we're losing more hunters and anglers and outdoorsmen in general. Women are a very important part of the outdoor tradition and we want to continue that," Lamb said.

Discover Nature Girls Camps teach girls outdoor skills from a young age.

"With the hunter education program, we really stress firearm safety," Lamb said. "Along with that, we teach them skills for archery and everything that goes along with that."

Lamb said the girls were taught how to climb safely in and out of a tree stand, how to use a fall-arrest system, basic water safety skills, and how to throw safety devices to a drowning victim. Other activities included duck decoy painting, a fish dissection exercise, camp fire fun, and opportunities to taste wild game.

Camp Counselors, such as Ellington High School Science Teacher Katie Neece, chaperoned and guided their groups of girls throughout the activities. Neece appreciated the emphasis on science, as well as the repeated message that girls can accomplish anything they want in life.

"We had several women from the Missouri Department of Conservation come and talk to the girls about their careers, the paths they took, and how to get there. And they encouraged the girls to not limit themselves and know they can do anything they set their minds to," Neece said. "Being a girl does not limit you in any way."

Anna Albertson, a 12 year old from Cape Girardeau, said she learned new things throughout the week that she hopes to be able to do again on her own or with her family.

"I would love to try hunting again and archery," Anna said. "I was pretty good at shooting and that made me feel good, so I'd like to keep on doing it."

Anna also learned something besides outdoor skills.

"You got to learn that girls can do whatever they want," she said.

Lamb and Neece both said they witnessed a transformation in the girls' confidence as well.

"Every year we've done this, the girls come in on the first day and they're pretty shy, not wanting to engage with the instructors very much, especially those of us in uniform. By the end of the camp, it is completely different," Lamb said.

"Seeing the girls get interested and watching them go from being very shy the first day they got here to very outgoing was a wonderful experience for me as a camp counselor," Neece said.

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