

WEST POINT LAKE FLOATING CLASSROOM

The West Point Lake Floating Classroom (WPLFC) program is an on-the-water environmental education program that teaches science, ecology, history and math in accordance with STEM (Science Technology Engineering and Math) goals and state education performance standards. This unique program exemplifies Chattahoochee Riverkeeper's commitment to informing and educating youth and adults – with a focus on underserved populations – in the responsible stewardship of our water.

The WPLFC program takes place aboard the Miss Sally – a 42-foot vessel certified to carry up to 44 passengers – and is the only experiential program of its kind to serve the Middle Chattahoochee region. Since launching the program in 2015, more than 16,000 students, teachers and adults have participated in the program.

The Miss Sally serves as a laboratory to learn about the lake and river system. Students make a connection to their source of drinking water by using scientific equipment to monitor water quality, view wildlife through binoculars, learn watershed concepts, and gain an understanding of the importance of clean and plentiful water.

Participants gain knowledge not only for themselves, but also to teach their families and friends at home the science lessons they learned through the program. Takeaways include how to become responsible water stewards by protecting local streams and the lake from pollution and using water more efficiently. Students also learn about the larger Apalachicola-Chattahoochee River system and the economic impact it has on their community.

A key focus is to serve those who may not otherwise have the means to experience the program. Because of the generous support from public and private donors, we've provided more than 9,000 full scholarships to students from Title I schools. Depending on the number of outings in the year, our operating expenses are approximately \$30 per participant. However, all other school and community groups benefit as well from additional donor support that allows us to subsidize program costs.

Importantly, CRK operates and maintains the boat in accordance with U.S. Coast Guard Subchapter T regulations and manufacturer specifications.

Dawn Smith, a K-5 science curriculum director shared, "The WPLFC program is an experience that opens doors for 21st century problem solvers and future scientists." And Shannon Duffy, a teacher at Valley High School told us, "I am thankful this program exists to provide place-based environmental education that aligns perfectly with state standards. And when I asked my students for their feedback it was resoundingly positive."

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