

West Hill Dam team hosts annual Wild Winter Walk

By Ann Marie R. Harvie

USACE, New England District

Despite frigid January temperatures, a dozen people participated in the annual West Hill Dam Wild Winter Walk, Jan. 15.

Excitedly clutching animal tracking cards, participants set off to see what creatures were crawling around the dam during winter time. "In addition to the animal tracking cards, we went as a group to bush-whack and go off-trail and looked for clues we could find about what animals are active in winter," said West Hill Dam Park Ranger Viola Bramel.

Paw prints were not the only clues participants found about animal activity in winter. "We studied partially eaten pine cones, cone petal piles, animal scat and nesting materials," said Bramel.

Tracking animals is hard work and the younger participants got a chance to expend some energy before continuing their hunt. "We were off trail about half a mile and found trees to swing on and huge logs to walk across," said Bramel. "Our chant similar to the Wizard of Oz, became, 'deer, skunk, humans, fox and coyotes, oh my!'"

Bramel said it was great to share information about nesting, mating and other survival habits of animals that left tracks to find. Girl Scouts were on the adventure hoping to earn badge requirements. An advanced Junior Ranger, Steven Coya, assisted with ruler measurements while tracking animals in the mud. Younger children oohed and ahed over the animal tracks and giggled about animal scat, also known as animal "poop."

After 90 minutes of tracking and playing, the group returned to their starting location to rehydrate with water and warm up with donated cocoa. Park Ranger Ron Woodall assisted Bramel in running the event.