

# **Learning in Florida's Environment (LIFE): LIFE – Ichetucknee (Columbia) Program**

## **A Partnership Agreement**

### **Summary**

The Learning in Florida's Environment (LIFE) Program is a statewide network of environmental-science, field laboratories on existing state lands (e.g., State Parks, Aquatic Preserves, etc.). Individual "LIFE Centers" are designed to support the needs of small, rural school districts and improve the quality and continuity of educational support from the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). As classrooms without walls, the LIFE Centers provide an opportunity for the exploration of Florida's most unique natural communities and a place to practice and apply science.

### **Characteristics of the LIFE Program**

The LIFE Program represents a systematic effort to combine the unique assets of the DEP (namely, conservation lands and the scientists who protect and study them) with the needs of Florida's students, teachers, and schools – with special emphasis on FCAT Science. LIFE Programs may involve one or more schools; however the partnership agreement will be between DEP and the particular school district in which the partner school(s) reside.

Each site designated as a "LIFE Site/Program" will use the local environment as the entry point for inspiring students through hands-on, field-based investigations. Students will spend a minimum of eight hours (and up to 20 hours) per year conducting field-based investigations that reinforce, enrich, and provide real-world relevance to classroom studies as well as provide opportunities for service learning.

The goals of LIFE Program are to improve student achievement, support teacher professional development, increase participation of underrepresented populations in environmental science, promote the use of technology, and enhance stewardship of the region's unique natural communities and resources. Teachers – together with DEP educators - will play a lead role in designing and implementing field labs to address the priority needs of their students. The LIFE Program will also provide regular professional development opportunities for teachers including Project WET workshops, internships with DEP staff, and the establishment of an internet-based, environmental science, learning community.

Each LIFE Program will share the core characteristics outlined above; however, each Program will be the unique product of the local teachers, DEP staff, and other resources available at the site.

### **The LIFE - Ichetucknee Springs State Park Parknership Program: Roles and Responsibilities**

The Department of Environmental Protection, through the Office of Environmental Education (OEE), will provide program development support and technical assistance in

order to transition the existing 7<sup>th</sup> grade Parknership Program between Ft. White High School and Ichetucknee Springs State Park to a LIFE Program. The OEE will make available professional development opportunities for teachers, design assessment and evaluation components for the program, help secure equipment for the program, involve other personnel from throughout the agency, and provide or help identify supplemental financial support needed to adequately implement the Program.

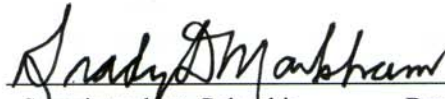
The Department of Environmental Protection, through the Ichetucknee Springs State Park, will work with teachers and OEE staff to facilitate the field-based learning investigations, coordinate scheduling of field labs, and provide the necessary infrastructure and supplies for field activities.

The Columbia County School District will ensure district-wide support for the LIFE Program by providing the following: 1) identification of the academic priorities for the program content; 2) transportation for students and teachers to and from the field sites; and 3) per diem and substitute teachers, if necessary, in support of the active participation of teachers in various aspects of the LIFE Program including professional development training, and curriculum integration workshops.


Other partners – including nearby school districts, state and federal agencies, colleges and universities, extension offices, local businesses, local foundations, and local non-profit organizations – may be added to this partnership when their participation is agreed to by the primary partners described above.

This partnership agreement is designed to clarify the shared interests of the primary partners and to guide their good faith efforts to achieve the stated goals of the LIFE Program. It does not commit the partners to any specific financial obligations; however, it encourages each partner to ensure implementation of its roles and responsibilities as described above.

 9/2/05  
Secretary, Florida Dept. of Environmental Protection      Date

 9/2/05  
Superintendent, Columbia County School District      Date

 9/2/05  
Manager, Ichetucknee Springs State Park      Date

 9/2/05  
Director, Office of Environmental Education      Date