

PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Wildlife Leadership Academ. making positive impact on youths

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The woods around Powdermill Nature Reserve hold grouse, to be sure. Last year, they also held a dynamic group of kids interested in learning about them.

The Wildlife Leadership Academy held its inaugural "Pennsylvania Drummers" school at the Rector facility last summer. It was a weeklong program that gave teens, ages 14 to 17, the chance to learn about grouse, wildlife and habitat conservation, nature photography, the role of hunting in conservation and more, all from some of the top professionals in those fields.

Students also studied communications and leadership, since the primary hope of the program was that students would take what they learned and share it with others as "ambassadors for conservation."

"The goal of the Wildlife Leadership Academy field schools is to provide the students with the tools and knowledge to become informed leaders for wildlife conservation, now and in the future," said Michele Kittell, the academy's program coordinator.

And share their knowledge they did.

In the years since the academy has been around . it's run a "Pennsylvania Bucktails" program focusing on deer in Huntingdon County for at least three years — students have given more than 200 public programs

The program has made an impact on its students, too. One of those who attended the Drummers program last year, Spencer Rhoad, said he wants a career in the wildlife field.

"This academy will always be remembered as a great chapter in my book of my life," he said.

The academy is seeking students interested in its 2011 Drummers and Bucktails programs, as well as adults willing to serve as volunteer leaders at each.

The Drummers program will be June 21-25 at Powdermill. The Bucktails program will be July 5-9 at Stone Valley Recreation Area in Huntingdon County. In each case, tuition for students is \$400, which includes food, lodging and materials.

Applications — due by April 1 — and scholarship information can be found by

clicking on the "youth programs" link at www.PICEweb.org.

Adults interested in being a part of the program can find an application on the same site or contact Kittell at mkittell@piceweb.org or 570-245-8518.

Mark Banker, regional biologist for the Ruffed Grouse Society in Pennsylvania, served as an instructor last year, and came away impressed.

"We had a bright, fun, mature group of kids that made me feel better about the future of natural resources and shattered most of the stereotypes we have about teenagers these days," he said.

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