



Photo: Wayne Steer

# My Experience at Pennsylvania Brookies Field School

by Sarah McTish

*The field school wasn't all work. In a great show of support, members from the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission, Spring Creek Chapter of Trout Unlimited and Lloyd Wilson Chapter of Trout Unlimited helped Brookies students enjoy some time relaxing and fishing on the stream.*

This summer, I attended the Wildlife Leadership Academy's (WLA) inaugural Pennsylvania Brookies Field School. The mission of Wildlife Leadership Academy is to empower youth to become ambassadors for wildlife conservation in order to ensure a sustained wildlife legacy for future generations.

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail." The Wildlife Leadership Academy created a path for me as well as many other youth in Pennsylvania. Each of us are leaving our own trail in wildlife conservation. I arrived at the camp nervous about how the week would challenge me. I had some prior knowledge about Brook Trout and cold water habitats, but I was worried that I did not know enough. I soon learned that this did not matter. Not only did I learn about wildlife conservation but also about life. I built a new confidence in myself and acquired the ability to create strong team bonds, and I discovered how to connect with others to make a difference in their lives and my own.

At the Brookies Field School, which is a part of the Wildlife Leadership Academy, we took classes on Brook Trout and cold water conservation, went on field trips to fish hatcheries and sink holes, participated in hands-on activities like a Brook Trout necropsy and more. However, all of our activities were not necessarily academic. Each morning at 6:45 a.m., we would go into the parking lot and march around screaming cadences about Brook Trout. At the end of the day, each of the teams would compete against each other in a game of trout trivia. Many activities during the week were competitions, like trout trivia. And, the winning teams of each activity would get points. At the end of the week, the team with the most points received a special trip.

During the week, we completed seven projects either individually or as a team. Our projects included a Marcellus shale town hall meeting, a tri-fold display, PowerPoint presentations, nature journals, nature photography, plant and invertebrate collections and habitat assessments and recommendations.

These projects were the highlight of my camp experience. They involved many hands-on experiences including collecting macroinvertebrates from the stream and wandering through the woods and stream looking for the perfect place to take a photograph. The projects helped build strong team bonds and prepared me for future outreach opportunities.

The Wildlife Leadership Academy gives students the skills needed to complete outreach activities in their own communities and spread the work of wildlife conservation. As soon as I got home, I began planning my first activity. For this activity, I decided to set up a display at my church's annual chicken barbeque on the conservation of macroinvertebrates. I used the tri-fold display that I made at WLA with some information that I had gathered. I created many engaging activities like educational coloring pages, an insect collection and a macroinvertebrates collection. On the day of the event, I manned the display for 10 hours and was able to teach both adults and children. Peter F. Drucker once said, "The best way to predict your future is to create it." I have begun to blaze my trail to my future, and I plan on reaching my dreams. I believe that this camp has been a life changing experience for me—as well as many others—and will definitely play a role in my future as an entomologist.

WLA is a cooperative initiative involving state agencies and conservation organizations and is administered by the Pennsylvania Institute for Conservation Education (PICE). Expert instructors at the field schools include representatives from Clinton County Conservation District, Dickinson College, Kutztown University, Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission, Pennsylvania Game Commission, Pennsylvania State University, Quality Deer Management Association, Trout Unlimited, United States Army Corps of Engineers and many more.

For more information, visit [www.PICEweb.org](http://www.PICEweb.org), or contact Wildlife Leadership Academy Director Michele Kittell at [mkittell@picweb.org](mailto:mkittell@picweb.org) or 570-245-8518. □