

JUNIOR RGS

MY WILDLIFE LEADERSHIP ACADEMY EXPERIENCE

By ZARA MOSS



This summer, I was nominated to participate in a rigorous five-day Wildlife Leadership Academy (WLA) field school outside of Ligonier, Pennsylvania, at the end of which, I became a certified conservation ambassador. WLA is a program dedicated to teaching teenagers about wildlife biology and conservation to enable them to go out into their communities and teach others the importance of saving our environment. The camps offer a variety of lectures and field work which offer teens a chance to apply their knowledge. To do this, WLA offers five field schools a year that are focused on wildlife species native to Pennsylvania.

I attended the camp focused primarily on the ruffed grouse, which happens to be Pennsylvania's state bird. Along with about 20 other teens, I dissected a grouse, studied about habitat management and learned to identify plants that are important to the grouse's diet. I also learned ways in which I can positively impact the environment in general. I was taught how to promote habitat management and that cutting down trees can be beneficial to a forest when done properly. I learned about safe hunting, which



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is, surprisingly, also important to wildlife management. I also learned the necessary leadership skills I will need to communicate to others the importance of conserving our environment.

I came away from my week at WLA with two very important messages to share, the first being the importance of teen involvement in conservation. I'll admit, before attending WLA, I knew that conserving the environment was important, but I didn't grasp the full extent of it. Now, I realize that I need to not only do my part in conserving wildlife, but I also need to involve other teenagers in my efforts.

Teenagers need to realize that the resources of our planet are limited, and soon, we will be the generation responsible for taking care of our environment. And while it may seem meaningless, if an animal species goes extinct, we don't know how it will throw off the balance of our ecosystem.

Now that I understand the sensitivity of this issue, I am trying to reach teens around Pittsburgh to inform them about the importance of conservation and team up with them to make a difference. This brings me to my second take-away from WLA: I can make a difference. Before my week at camp, I didn't believe there was much I could do to save the environment. Sure, I could



recycle and turn off the lights, but was that really making an impact? The answer is yes. If everybody does just a little bit, it will add up to be a lot. I am more convinced than ever that conservation is crucial to the future of our wildlife. It has become my personal challenge to recruit other teenagers to join the efforts of my peers who attended WLA. I am currently volunteering weekly at a bird banding lab, organizing a presentation for school-aged children about the ruffed grouse and the importance of conservation and I've contacted local newspapers to share my story with them. Teenagers can make a difference, and it is up to us to conserve our wildlife, protect our environment and save our planet.



The Wildlife Leadership Academy has opened its exclusive Youth Conservation Ambassador nomination process to the public and is currently seeking referrals of motivated students ages 14 to 17 to become Certified Conservation Ambassadors. Nominations are now being accepted online at picweb.org/nominate (<http://picweb.org/nominate/>).

Nominated students should have demonstrated interest in wildlife and/or fisheries conservation. Accepted nominees will become certified conservation ambassadors through attending one of five, five-day residential summer field schools which will focus on white-tailed deer, brook trout, ruffed grouse, black bear, and one species to be determined. Students in each field school will gain extensive knowledge about wildlife/fisheries and conservation, leadership experience, and communication skills. Applicants may be nominated by an adult who knows them well but is not a relative (teacher, school counselor, employer, youth group leader, etc.). 



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NOMINATE A TEEN TODAY!

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