



Take a working vacation at New York farm

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# Born from passion

## Pennsylvania institute built for conservation

By **JESSICA WELSHANS**  
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**ELYSBURG** — Leaving a legacy of healthy wildlife populations, functioning ecosystems, vibrant economies that are based on resource management and places to enjoy wildlife — that's the short list of goals for the Pennsylvania Institute for Conservation Education.

"We believe that education is the fundamental component, often the missing link, to conserving biological diversity and protecting ecological integrity," said Michele Richards, institute director.

The institute offers field seminars that provide a informed, intimate experience in the outdoors.

"Classes are small, ranging from six to 10 persons, and largely field-based," Richards said.

They are open to adult educators, professionals, artists, outdoor enthusiasts or any interested adult. Teachers of all grade and subject levels are encouraged to attend as are non-formal educators and youth leaders in communities.

The institute is an Act 48 continuing education provider, and teachers will receive credit hours for participating in field seminars and workshops.

Workshop students spend time in the field, enjoying Pennsylvania's natural world with a community of top-notch instructors and seasoned naturalists, according to Richards.

"Our adult field seminars take advantage of the beauty of each season and a few of the state's extraordinary natural

areas," she said.

Helping educate people now leaves them wanting to pass on what they learned and help educate others.

Richards said the natural history- or natural science-based learning has disappeared from the curriculum in all levels of education.

"The institute was created to address the decrease or lack of natural history learning and experiences; to connect people and nature through science, art, literature, hands-on field studies, stewardship; and to direct experiences in the natural world," she said.

The institute was born from a passion for this type of education. Richards and Jim Brett, former curator of Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, founded the Institute in 2002. They were concerned over the disappearance of the natural history education in the schools, Richards said.

After teaching natural history programs in the Rockies, Richards noticed many teachers

from the East Coast were traveling there for training.

She and Brett realized that a specialized school would bridge the disconnect with nature and the lack of knowledge of Pennsylvania wildlife and ecology.

The non-profit organization may be small but its effect is felt in many students and communities.

The institute collaborates with other organizations and has formed strong partnerships with them because all have the same missions and goals.

The organizations they work with help tremendously in conducting the Wildlife

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### Pennsylvania Master Naturalist program

A pilot program called the Pennsylvania Master Naturalist is held in southeast Pennsylvania, but organizers hope it will expand across the state. This is a venture directed toward developing local corps of trained "master volunteers" in natural history to offer education, outreach and service dedicated to the understanding and management of natural areas within their communities. The program emphasizes a local approach to conservation by forging vital partnerships among community members and local organizations through service activities. The success of the Pennsylvania Master Naturalist program involves collaboration among various conservation agencies and nonprofits, community organizations and educational institutions to help implement the program. These organizations ultimately will use Pennsylvania Master Naturalist volunteers in their own conservation efforts.

Top, a student captures artistic creations with watercolors during the Nature With Watercolors class, a popular field seminar that integrates art and nature. Above, a group examines a toad during an amphibian station. At right, students at a regional Master Naturalist training learn to identify birds in the field. Below, nature photography classes develop students' photography skills while giving them the chance to experience some of Pennsylvania's most amazing natural landscapes.

PHOTOS PROVIDED



## Hands-on school offers youth life lessons in conservation

By **JESSICA WELSHANS**  
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It's cliché to say the future of conservation lies in the hands of the youth, but nothing is closer to the truth.

The Wildlife Leadership Academy offers a year-round hands-on way to empower youth to become ambassadors for wildlife conservation and helps to ensure a sustained wildlife legacy for future generations, according to Michele Kittell, academy director.

It is a combined year-round training and community service experience for teens and focuses on wildlife biology, conservation and leadership skills and development.

The academy was established through the Pennsylvania Institute for Conservation Education.

The program, which is in its fifth year, has become a unique experience for youth to have an opportunity to interact and learn from the leading wildlife biologists, media professionals and educators in the state, all of whom have helped to establish the program, Kittell said.

The youth who participate in the academy leave well informed and commit themselves to serve as spokesmen and women for wildlife conservation in Pennsylvania.

Kittell said the academy begins with a rigorous summer field school. The schools combine a hands-on experience with challenging academic content.

The hands-on experiences in the field schools can range from exploring the detailed anatomy of a

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# Outdoor Briefs

## Enjoy canoe, kayak demo day

Country Ski and Sports will hold a canoe and kayak demo day from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. May 1 at the Montoursville boat dock at the end of Mill Street. Sales representatives will show more than nine brands of kayaks and canoes and visitors may try them out in the river. For more information, call the store at 368-1718.

## Outdoor activities planned

LOCK HAVEN — Rock, River and Trail Outfitters, 57 Bellefonte Ave., will hold the following events. Fees and reservations apply. For more information, call 748-1818.

- **Today** — Kayak Kettle Creek. Fee includes transportation and guide; kayak rentals are available at a reduced rate.
- **Saturday** — Kayak Pine Creek from Ansonia to Blackwell. The annual 17-mile trek down the upper reaches of the Pennsylvania Grand Canyon is not for the faint of heart. Fee includes transportation and guide. Kayak rentals available.
- **May 8** — Wapiti and Wine Tour. A special Mother's Day outing for a full-day adventure to the Benezette area for wapiti viewing and a tour and tasting at Elk Mountain Winery. The van leaves Lock Haven at 8:30 a.m. and heads to the new Elk Country Visitors Center in Benezette, then participants will ride around and search for elk. Lunch follows before the tour goes to the winery. A fee includes a guide, transportation and admission into the movie at the visitors center. Lunch not included.
- **May 20 and 27** — Lindsay's Kayaking Trips down Pine Creek. Lock Haven University student and Rock River and Trail intern Lindsay Embick will lead the way for these special Friday kayaking trips. On May 20, participants will paddle about 10 miles from Blackwell to Slate Run. On May 27, the trip will take paddlers from Slate Run to Hamilton Bottom (about 13 miles). Fee includes transportation; kayak rentals available at a reduced rate.

## Alpine Club organizes trail care hikes in May

The Alpine Club of Williamsport will hold trail care hikes for the Loyalsock Trail today and on May 15 and 22. Hikers should meet at 8 a.m. at the parking lot of the stone Sovereign Bank in South Williamsport, between Market and Hastings streets, at the southern end of the Market Street Bridge.

Workers will clear the trail of debris, cut branches that interfere with seeing the blazes and work on side trails.

Some tools will be provided, but hikers should bring lunch and water as well as gloves, loppers, clippers and folding or bow saws, if possible.

For more information, call Ruth Rode at 322-5878.

## Take a hike with regional group

The Otzinachson Regional Group of the Sierra Club's Edward Abbey Hiking Society has announced its spring and summer outings schedule. Hikes are open to the public, but those interested should call the hike leader for details.

Hikes include:

- **Today** — R.B. Winter State Park, 10 miles, moderate to strenuous, Mid State Trail south to the Fallen Timber Trail. Meet at the breast of the dam along Route 192 at 8 a.m. Bring food and water. Call Joe Rebar to confirm, 259-0134. If you can't get Joe, call Paul Shaw at 672-2389.
- **Saturday** — Gillespie Point to Bohem Run Falls Loop, 11 miles, strenuous. From Blackwell, we will climb to the top of Pennsylvania's Matterhorn, Gillespie Point with fine views of the Pennsylvania Grand Canyon. After looping back to Blackwell, we will continue on the Bohem Run Falls Trail to the West Rim Trail, then back to Blackwell on the Pine Creek Rail Trail. Meet at parking lot behind Lewisburg Post Office at 8 a.m. or boat launch parking lot in Blackwell at 9:30. Bring lunch and water. Leader, Duane Button, 596-3454.
- **May 14** — Michaux State Forest and Tumbling Run, 7.5 miles, moderate to strenuous. This loop hike features the only waterfalls in Cumberland County as well as the famous Lewis' Rocks, hideout of the notorious Lewis the Robber. On the return trip, we will follow the Appalachian Trail with a stop at Camp Michaux, a former WWII Prisoner of War camp. Meet at K-Mart parking lot along Route 15 in Shamokin Dam at 8:15 a.m. or at the store at Pine Grove Furnace State Park at 10. Bring water and a lunch. Hike leaders, Carl and Bonnie Davis, 717-532-3696 or bldavis@kuhncom.net.

## Tour a state forest

AUSTIN — The Susquehannock State Forest will hold its annual forest management and habitat tour from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. today. The tour meets at the Austin School, off of Route 872, and transportation and lunch is provided. Registration is required by calling 814-274-3600 or emailing fd15@state.pa.us.

The forest consists of 265,000 acres almost entirely in Potter County. The tour visits four sites: an active timber sale, an area with several wildlife improvement projects, privately managed forestland and Marcellus Shale activity.

Topics include evaluating and improving wildlife habitat, deer impact and habitat surveys, forest management issues, tree insect and disease update, estate planning, and impacts of the oil and gas industry on state forests.

## Set foot on River Road

LEWISBURG — Back by popular demand, the River Road Holiday will be held today. A one-mile stretch of River Road, from Lan Avon Drive to Seventh Street will be closed to vehicle traffic from 1 to 5 p.m. It will be open for people on bicycles, skateboards, rollerskates or walkers.

The free event is open to all. Limited parking will be available nearby.

The East Buffalo Township Bike and Pedestrian Committee will host the event with support from the township and its supervisors, the Local Action Network, the Bucknell Environmental Center and Bicycles Against Poverty.

For more information, see [www.facebook.com/#/event.php?eid=110949318982606](http://www.facebook.com/#/event.php?eid=110949318982606).

In addition, anyone interested in volunteering may contact Bridget Kane, communications and outreach coordinator, at [bkane@susquehannagreenway.org](mailto:bkane@susquehannagreenway.org) or 522-7275.

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PHOTO PROVIDED

Participants learn research techniques, such as bat harp netting, from biologists in the field. This Bat Ecology seminar will be offered Aug. 3-5 at Canoe Creek State Park in Blair County. A fee applies.

# Hands-on school offers youth life lessons in conservation

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wildlife species, followed by a study of their nutritional requirements; engaging in exploring the species; examining habitat in the field; collecting plants and more.

"Youth also experience what it takes to be a leader and communicator through competition, team-building activities and public speaking. Youth can also expect to reflect on their experience during the week through journaling and photography," Kittell said.

Professionals teaching the Wildlife Leadership Academy are well-versed in their fields.

About 24 instructors are established with the program. They work in places such as Kutztown University, the Pennsylvania Audubon, the state Department of Agriculture, the state Game Commission, Pennsylvania Quality Deer Management Association, Penn State University, the Ruffed Grouse Society and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

"The field schools are followed by year-round mentoring by program staff and partners as the students conduct conservation outreach and service projects in their local communities," Kittell said.

It's important that the academy is not just a one-week experience, like some summer programs.

When a youth is accepted to the program, he or she agrees to do at least three outreach activities in their community after they return from the academy. Outreach may include

## Pennsylvania institute built for conservation

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Leadership Academy program, Richards said.

"Our field seminars are held in partnership with leading experts and hosted at various facilities and natural areas across the state," she said. "In this way, we can introduce participants to a variety of wonderful natural resources in Pennsylvania and provide the greatest expertise and current information on the topic."

Richards says she hopes the institute grows and provides more programs and outreach to more of the state.

Upon request, customized programs can be designed, aside from the programs that already are set up and scheduled. Programs may provide a chance to:

- Photograph spring wildflowers with an accomplished photographer;
- Join a botanist to identify native and non-native plants of various habitats;
- Discover the shaping of our landscape with an expert geologist;
- Paddle the Susquehanna River or a smaller tributary and experience Pennsylvania's watersheds up close;
- Spend a day with an experienced fly fisherman, developing your skills and learning about stream ecology.

To garner interest and students, the institute relies mostly on word-of-mouth, web searches and their partner organizations.

"We welcome donations that will help us grow programs across the state and spread the word," Richards said.

With the state's diverse ecology, "An informed and active citizenry is the most important resource for conserving and protecting our natural resources," Richards said. She hopes the institute can help.

More information is available at [www.piceweb.org](http://www.piceweb.org).

educational presentations, media interaction, service work and participation in the arts.

"The students are supported by a network, that includes myself as well as WLA partners and comprises of communicating outreach opportunities and connecting the youth with our partners in their areas of the

state. The students also create a record book of their outreach to keep track of their accomplishments," Kittell said.

"Programs like WLA are important because what people understand and care about they then conserve. Through their educational outreach, WLA youth help people understand more about

these species and their habitats," she said.

"We hope this education will make a difference for the future of wildlife conservation," Kittell added.

After completing the school, Kittell said, students take the leadership skills they have learned on to educate the community about the importance of wildlife conservation in the state.

Those who have been through the WLA have gone onto give educational presentations in their school and even mentored at field youth days and state parks.

"Our students serve as role models for the youth and their communities," Kittell said.

To date, WLA field schools have conducted 309 education, outreach service projects, engaged in about 1,300 hours with the public, reaching more than 8,000 people across 39 counties of the state, according to Kittell.

This year, two field school are being offered: Pennsylvania Drummers focuses on the ruffed grouse, the state bird, while Pennsylvania Bucktails focuses on the white-tailed deer.

"Each program covers the specific species, anatomy and physiology, nutrition, health and diseases, behavior, life cycle and aging, and natural history," Kittell said.

However, applications for the two schools are no longer are available. The deadline usually is in April of each year.

For more information, call Kittell at 245-8518 or send an email to her at [mkittell@piceweb.org](mailto:mkittell@piceweb.org).

# Hidden population may combat Dutch elm disease

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also been persistent but dismissed rumors of trees that had fewer copies — triploids, which have three copies of chromosomes, or diploids, which have two copies.

Now botanist Alan T. Whittemore and geneticist Richard T. Olsen with USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS) have proven beyond question that diploid American elms exist as a subset of elms in the wild. Their findings were published in the April edition of the American Journal of Botany. Whittemore and Olsen work at the U.S. National Arboretum operated by ARS in Washington, D.C.

American elms once lined the country's streets and dominated eastern forests until they succumbed by the millions after Dutch elm disease arrived in the United States in 1931. Yet elms still are one of the most important

tree crops for the \$4.7 billion-a-year nursery industry, especially since the introduction of a very few new trees with some tolerance to the disease. American elms remain popular because of their stately beauty, their rapid leaf litter decay and their ability to stand up to city air pollution.

It was one of the disease-tolerant elm trees — Jefferson, released jointly by ARS and the National Park Service in 2005 — that put Whittemore and Olsen on the trail of the diploid.

"Jefferson is a triploid. To get a triploid elm, we thought there had to be a

diploid parent out there somewhere in the wild that had crossed with a tetraploid," Whittemore said.

To settle the question, the two scientists tested elm trees from across the species' eastern and central U.S. range. About 21 percent of the wild elms sampled were diploid; some grew in stands with tetraploids, while others were larger groupings of diploids.

The small amount of genetic data now available suggests that at least some tetraploid and diploid elm populations have diverged significantly from one another,

which strengthens the possibility of the diploid trees having genes for disease resistance that the tetraploids don't have, Whittemore said.

"We can't say yet whether this is a distinct race of U. americana or if we are really talking about a separate species," he said. "That's a job we will tackle this summer."



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