

For Immediate Release

Photos available upon request

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Youth complete challenging wildlife leadership field school

Celebrating its eighth year, the Wildlife Leadership Academy provided an unmatched opportunity during a series of summer field schools for Pennsylvania teens.

This summer, the Academy offered three field schools for Pennsylvania youth. The Pennsylvania Bucktails, focuses on white-tailed deer, was June 17-21 and took place at Stone Valley Recreation Area in Huntingdon County. The Pennsylvania Brookies field school, which focuses on our state fish the brook trout, was July 8-12 and took place at the Sieg Conference Center in Clinton County. The Pennsylvania Drummers field school, which focuses on our state bird, the Ruffed Grouse, was July 22-26 and took place at Powdermill Nature Reserve in Westmoreland County.

Sixty participants, ranging in age from 14-to 17-years old and demonstrating leadership skills, were selected from a competitive pool of applications. The Academy is an exceptional program offering high-achieving youth a comprehensive study of specific wildlife species including classroom and field-based, hands-on education. Led by experts including biologists and educators from across the state and beyond, the program also engages participants in team work, friendly competition, and an awareness of their natural world.

The program guides youth through an intense but rewarding educational experience. John Felix, the principal at Donegal High School, described the program as "all encompassing."

"It involves the study of biology, botany and plant science, conservation, game management," he said. "It also provides the opportunity for students to learn from authorities in these fields."

Instructor and professional ecologist Lisa Smith also commended the program.

"The high caliber and sheer number of conservation professionals who are involved as instructors in this camp are beyond impressive, but more than that is the commitment of time, energy and passion that each of these instructors give to the students."

Academy students return to their community sharing what they have learned with their school, conservation organizations, local parks and more. They also keep a record of their conservation outreach efforts. Top outreach achievements qualify students for educational field trips, opportunities to return to field school tuition-free as mentors, and for college scholarships.

Bernie Schmader, a member of the Conservation Officers of Pennsylvania Association (COPA), said how impressed he was with a young woman from the Academy who presented at their annual meeting.

“Her article and oral report reassures our members and others that there are intelligent, interested, dedicated and understanding young people who are preparing to step up and carry on in our efforts to promote and safeguard Pennsylvania’s precious fish, wildlife and other natural resources.”

In the last eight years, over 200 Pennsylvania teens from 54 counties in the state have participated in Wildlife Leadership Academy. These youth have taken the Academy’s mission to heart. To date, graduates have conducted 932 conservation education, communication, and service projects; engaged in more than 4,000 contact hours with the public; and reached an audience of more than 20,000 Pennsylvania citizens across the commonwealth.

Academy Director Michele Kittell said the participants are “the next generation to speak for wildlife conservation.”

“We hope the leadership of Academy youth in their home communities will inspire others to care more and therefore act more on behalf of the environment,” she said.

The Wildlife Leadership Academy is a cooperative initiative involving state agencies and conservation organizations and is administered by the Pennsylvania Institute for Conservation Education. Expert instructors at the field school include representatives from Dickinson College, Kutztown University, Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, Pennsylvania Game Commission, Pennsylvania State University, Quality Deer Management Association, Trout Unlimited, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and many more.

The Wildlife Leadership Academy will announce 2015 field school offerings and locations on their website at www.PICEweb.org. Applications will also be available on the website; the submission deadline is April 1, 2015. Interested students may download the 2015 application at www.PICEweb.org. For more information, contact Wildlife Leadership Academy Director Michele Kittell at mkittell@piceweb.org or (570)245-8518.

Editor’s Note: If you would like to interview a student about their experience, email program assistant, Katie Cassidy at kcassidy@piceweb.org. Students from the following counties attended in 2014: Adams, Allegheny, Beaver, Berks, Blair, Bucks, Cameron, Carbon, Centre, Chester, Clarion, Clearfield, Clinton, Columbia, Cumberland, Erie, Indiana, Jefferson, Lancaster, Lehigh, McKean, Mercer, Mifflin, Montgomery, Northumberland, Perry, Washington, York.