



WILDLIFE  
LEADERSHIP  
ACADEMY

ANNUAL REPORT  
2019





## Our MISSION

**The mission of the Wildlife Leadership Academy is to engage and empower high school age youth to become Conservation Ambassadors to ensure a sustained wildlife, fisheries and natural resource legacy for future generations.**

A year round program, the Academy begins with rigorous summer field schools that focus on wildlife/fisheries biology and conservation as well as leadership skills development and continues with community outreach through education, service, media engagement, creative arts, and outdoor mentorship.





## Letter from the **DIRECTOR**

While all of our lives have changed in the last year, myself and our board of directors still wanted to celebrate our 2019 accomplishments with you. Indeed, we believe that the accomplishments in this report reflect the Academy's strong foundation of high quality curriculum and engaged partners. And, along with the continued passion and dedication from our young conservation leaders, it is this foundation that led to a successful pivot in 2020 to virtual field schools.

In addition to highlighting our in-person activities, this year's report celebrates our weekly youth-written blog, also known as the NextGen Blog by featuring three posts. Each year, 8-12 Academy youth serve as Monthly Blog Correspondents writing about everything from visits to state parks, environmental issues, species' natural histories or simply their observations of nature. As I write this, 310 blogs have been published to date! We are so proud to support these young writers as they explore and expand their skill set via the creative arts.

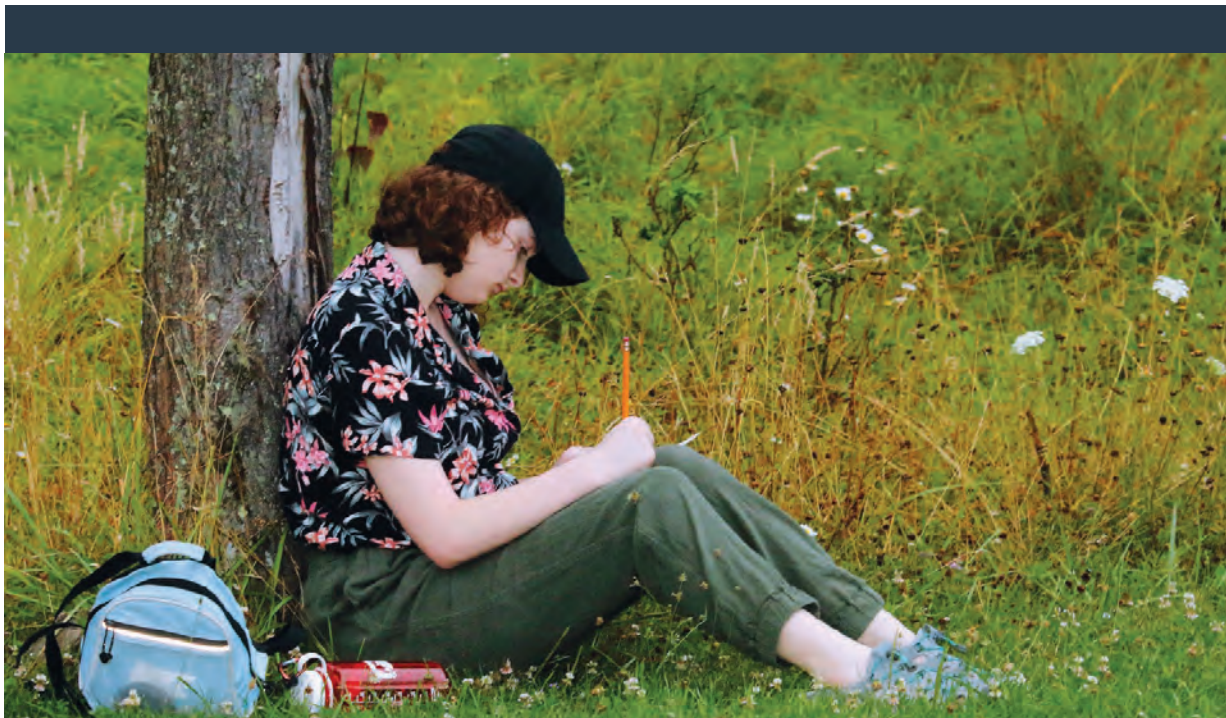
One final exciting note, through a project based internship, this year's report was designed by Academy Alum, Katie Mace. Since first attending PA Gobblers in 2017, Katie has stayed engaged with Academy working as summer staff and our Social Media Specialist. She is currently a sophomore at Juniata College majoring in Integrated Media Arts. Engaging with Katie in a cooperative effort to produce this report has been a pleasure and exemplifies our continued effort to support our students from high school to college to career.

We are so grateful you are a part of this journey with us – thank YOU!

Yours in doing what matters,

**Michele Kittell Connolly**  
**Executive Director**





"The shy and quiet girl I once was is now in my past as WLA helped me to find the confidence to talk about what matters to me and chase after what I want. WLA has been, by far, the best experience in my life to this point."

~ Hannah Gaibor  
PA Bass Alum

## YEAR ROUND STAFF



**Michele Kittell  
Connolly**  
Executive Director

Leads administration  
and program  
development for the  
Wildlife Leadership  
Academy.



**Katie Cassidy**  
Youth & Alumni  
Outreach Manager

Leads marketing and  
post-field school  
mentorship  
for our Conservation  
Ambassadors.



**Gary Alt**  
Curriculum  
Coordinator

Leads field school  
curriculum development,  
implementation, and  
assessment.



**Katie Mace**  
Guest Editor  
Social Media Specialist

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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*President*

Tim Romig

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Tracie Witter

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James Brett  
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John Kline  
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Peter Duncan  
*Honorary Director*



## Emma OLNEY



*Emma attended WLA's Ruffed Grouse Field School as a Freshman in high school. She founded an environmental service club called the Community Conservation Corps. After returning to WLA as an Assistant Team Leader the following summer, she heard about an organization called the PA Governor's Youth Council for Hunting, Fishing, and Conservation from a WLA alumnus. Emma has enjoyed being President of the organization, applying her field knowledge to make informed legislative decisions. Emma had a wonderful experience as a Team Leader this past summer virtually, and she hopes to return next year.*

### FINDING MY VOICE IN LEGISLATION

*NextGen Blog Post  
July 21, 2020*

Over the summer, I gained the wonderful opportunity of being appointed to the Pennsylvania Governor's Youth Council for Hunting, Fishing, and Conservation. The goal of this group is to advise state departments on conservation legislation from a youthful perspective, as well as to educate and involve our peers across the Commonwealth in environmental preservation. I have always been passionate about the environment and conserving its natural resources, but upon becoming a member of this organization, this spark was fanned into a burgeoning flame.

My favorite aspect of becoming an appointee of the Governor's Youth Council is the opportunity to improve my public speaking skills. Though I have always been an outgoing person, I have found it difficult to speak powerfully in front of large groups of people. Luckily, the Governor's Youth Council frequently provides excellent chances for its members to improve upon this ability. For example, at each of our quarterly meetings, we participate in active discussion of important issues across the state and must voice our opinions and plans moving forward. Aside from our regular meetings, we often attend legislative events, such as the signing of Senate Bill 147, allowing Sunday Hunting in Pennsylvania. Recently, though, I was provided the opportunity to speak about the Saturday Deer Opener at the Game Commission, an event that afforded me great growth in my public speaking skills.

To prepare for our presentation at the Pennsylvania Game Commission's public hearing on the Saturday Opener, we first surveyed the Council to create a consensus. To ensure that the entire group was properly represented, we created a survey to measure opinions and to gather points for our written and oral remarks. Eventually, we decided on a majority opinion. After that, it was time to develop our presentation!



The Youth Council picked myself and a member named Jackson to present at the Game Commission. I was extremely excited—not only for the opportunity of presenting at a prestigious organization, but also to develop my public speaking skills. I prepared my written and oral remarks and practiced profusely until the day of the presentation arrived.

As I entered the Pennsylvania Game Commission, any nerves I had previously felt were washed away by the contagious energy the building exuded; hunters, conservationists, and professionals milled around the building, eager to be represented in such an important issue. I watched citizens present, one after the other, as the meeting started. They were full of confidence and they powerfully presented their message. Watching them stand at the podium to deliver their remarks gave me more confidence.

Finally, as my turn came around, I stood tall at the podium to share my opinions on behalf of the Youth Council. I actually found it quite invigorating to be speaking in front of a large group of people this time because of how passionate I was about the topic at hand. I knew that I was knowledgeable; this understanding carried over into the firmness of my message. I was so excited and happy!

This opportunity gave me a glimpse into the world of environmental legislation and policy. I now understand how one must be comfortable speaking in front of large groups in order to more effectively spread their message. Now, I am able to say that I feel confident sharing my message about environmental conservation!





# Wildlife Leadership Academy

## CLASS OF 2019

This past summer, the Wildlife Leadership Academy offered high-achieving youth ranging in age from 14 to 17 years old a comprehensive study of Pennsylvania's wildlife and fish species and their habitats. Our nomination process, whereby teachers, counselors, and other mentors are encouraged to nominate qualified teens to apply to the Academy, resulted in **319 nominations** and continues to contribute to our recruitment success. Overall, **137 youth applied** to the 2019 Wildlife Leadership Academy program.



**BROOKIES**  
7th Year  
June 23-27

20 new Students, 4 youth mentors, and 4 adult mentors and one apprentice. Youth hailed from 20 different PA counties and one county in Maryland.



**DRUMMERS**  
8th Year  
June 23-27

20 new Students, 4 youth mentors, and 4 adult mentors and two apprentices. Youth hailed from 21 different PA counties.



**GOBBLERS**  
3rd Year  
June 30-August 3

20 new Students, 4 youth mentors, and 4 adult mentors and one apprentice. Youth hailed from 19 different PA counties and one county in Virginia.



**BUCKTAILS**  
13th Year  
June 11-15

20 new Students, 4 youth mentors, and 4 adult mentors and one apprentice. Youth hailed from 20 different PA counties.



**BASS**  
4th Year  
June 18-22

20 new Students, 4 youth mentors, and 4 adult mentors and three apprentices. Youth hailed from 18 different PA counties.





## Community Outreach ACCOMPLISHMENTS

After the summer field school, the Academy asks youth to return to their communities to conduct a minimum of four outreach projects, sharing their knowledge throughout their communities through:



### SERVICE

Youth are encouraged to participate in activities with wildlife biologists and assist local conservation organizations with field projects like stream cleaning and habitat enhancement.



### EDUCATION

Youth give educational presentations at their local sportsmen's clubs and school classrooms, share their tri-folds at local locations like libraries, businesses, and community organizations.



### MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

Youth write articles for the Academy's Next Gen Blog, their local papers, and conservation magazines. They also engage the media through interviews with their community newspapers and radio stations.



### CREATIVE ARTS

Youth are encouraged to connect with the outdoors through the arts. Students create portfolios of nature photos, write journal entries about their experiences in the natural world, sketch, paint and more!



### OUTDOOR MENTORSHIP

Youth get other youth and adults outside! From teaching other students about plants on a hike to mentoring a little brother or sister in fishing - students are passing on their passion for the out-of-doors!



# Francesca RAMOS



*Francesca attended WLA's Drummer's Field School as a Freshman, where she was awarded "Best Nature Journal". She is currently a Sophomore on a Creative Arts Scholarship at Wyoming Seminary Upper School, Kingston, PA. Francesca is an avid writer and is proud to be a WLA Blog writer, recently she authored "About Those Flowers on the Side of the Road" in PA Wildlife's Summer/Fall 2020 issue, highlighting her interest and concern of Invasive Plant Species in PA. She is a monthly writer for The Tri-County Independent Newspaper.*

## THREE CHEERS FOR BEES

*NextGen Blog Post  
November 19, 2019*

As wintertime approaches, the leaves on the trees quietly change their color, yet one thing I noticed as I was strolling outside the other day was many yellow and black bees are still buzzing about flowers that have not been affected by the cold. My mind ran off on the thought of bees on the endangered species list and how rapidly these insects are dying for a variety of reasons. Actually, The Earthwatch Institute has recently declared the bee to be the most vital and invaluable animal species on Earth during a debate at the Royal Geographical Society of London, but, as the population of these small and endangered species slowly diminishes, scientists are beginning to worry about not only our agriculture and flowers but the human race, as well.

The Science Times states, "The recent studies show a dramatic decline of the bees' number as almost 90 percent of the bee population has disappeared in the last few years." Some of the leading causes of why bees are going extinct are industrialized agriculture, pathogens/parasites, deforestation, and climate change. Loss of habitat and biodiversity, pesticides also serve as significant dangers to not only bees but other pollinators as well, such as bats, butterflies, etc.

How could such a little insect create a grandeur of importance? Well, bees pollinate and take care of about 70% of the world's food and agriculture. Imagine a world without flowers, coffee, honey, chocolate even t-shirts (bees pollinate cotton, too!)? We can have all these foods mostly because of those little insects called bees.



Not only do humans rely on bees for food and the growth of plants, but so do many birds and small mammals that feed off of plants, seeds, and berries that depend on pollination. This information leads many to conclude that if these animals start to die because of starvation, numerous larger animals -many of which we eat- will also die out, leaving the Earth's population with very little to consume.

Fret not! There are ways to help bees survive. By planting gardens, prohibiting or putting an end to the use of pesticides to treat our lawns or plants, and treating bees with the respect they deserve can make a difference in not only how we see bees and nature but our very own future. Let's rise and save the Earth together, for even Dr. Seuss once remarked, "Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not."

*Photo provided by Academy alum, Lorelei McNytte-Brewer.*





## Advanced Educational Training PLANTS

**May 3-5**  
***Chatham University's Eden Hall Campus***

Held for 10 academy alumni, the objective of this short course was to offer alumni additional training and skill set development. The course was developed by our Curriculum Coordinator, Dr. Gary Alt, in coordination with a long-time field school botany/ecology instructor, Dr. Chris Sacchi of Kutztown University. Dr. Sacchi led the course along with guest lectures from Dr. Linda Johnson, Assistant Professor at Chatham's Eden Hall Campus and botanist, Dave Jackson, forester and educator with Penn State Extension and Dr. Alt.

Curriculum for the course included pollination/herbivory, forest ecology, plant identification by using a key, plant morphology (form & function), forest forensics, field journaling, and reflection on parts of Aldo Leopold's Sand County Almanac discussing "a land ethic".



"I believe being a field biologist of any study requires an understanding of plants and how they tie in to ecological communities. As someone looking to go into field ornithology, I think being knowledgeable about plants will be very important for my career. It will help in my ability to survey places to find certain habitats and animals. It will also be useful in monitoring the health of the places I'll be working, and in my ability to understand the ecological processes enough to restore those places if needed. I intend to be a conservationist as well, and the information given in this class will certainly be valuable to that line of work."

~ Jayden H.  
PA Drummers Alum





## Winner's Weekend & ACADEMY ALUMNI PICNIC

**October 4-5**  
**Krislund Camp and Conference Center**

Winner's Weekend which included our Academy Alumni Picnic, was held at Krislund Camp and Conference Center. The individuals and parents from each field school's "Top Team" were extended an invitation for a weekend gathering that includes outdoor and team building sessions - fishing, stream exploration, a birding walk, and a ropes course. Thirty-eight parents and students attended for the full weekend.

In addition, the Saturday evening of this weekend was our *\*new\** annual Academy Alumni Reunion Picnic – with an invitation extended to all alumni to re-connect, network and have fun. Approximately 80 youth, parents, and Academy volunteers attended the evening event.

## A Lifetime of ENGAGEMENT

After attending as participants, students have the opportunity to continue to gain experience, giving them workforce experience as they are trained in program logistics, conservation education, leadership skill development, risk management and staff management.

### Student

20 new high school aged students attend each field school every year. Students are accepted into the program through an application process.

### Youth Mentor

If students excel in their outreach, they are eligible to return as an Assistant Team Leader and serve as a youth mentor to a new class of Conservation Ambassadors.

### Apprentice

Students who continue to follow through with their community outreach efforts are invited to attend in their third year as apprentices helping "behind the scenes" at field schools.

### Academy Support Team

Alumni who are interested can work for the Academy Support Team (AST) at one or more field schools each summer. ASTs provide logistical support as well as take a leadership role in team building activities and more!

### Academy Elite

Academy Elites are trained to become Lead Coordinators for a field school, taking on the more advanced roles. These include leading the week of field school, being responsible for staff and program logistics, as well as risk management and safety. Academy Elite are selected based on maturity, responsibility, and leadership potential.



# Pay It FORWARD

The Pay It Forward challenge encourages students to raise \$500 each to “Pay It Forward” to next year’s incoming class of Conservation Ambassadors.

**The Class of 2019 raised \$7,051 from 114 donors!**

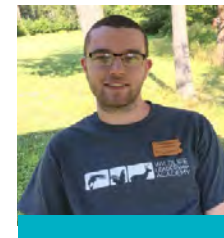


“I want to Pay It Forward because I know how crucial it is to get youth involved in wildlife conservation, as well as provide an outlet for those who already have a burning passion for it. I believe all youth who are interested should be able to attend, no matter their financial situation!”

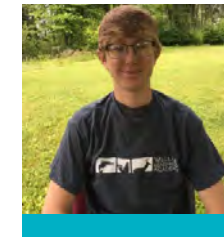
~ Autumn McEntee  
PA Gobblers Alum

## Blue Polo Society

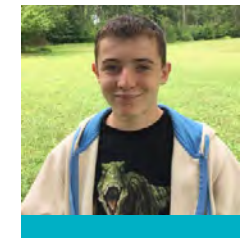
Distinguished Members  
\$500+ Raised



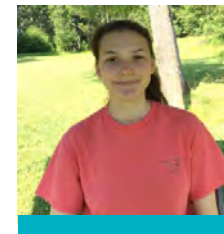
Caleb  
Dailey



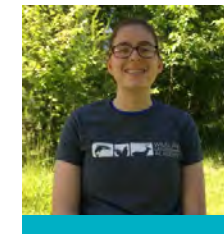
Emery  
Gunsallus



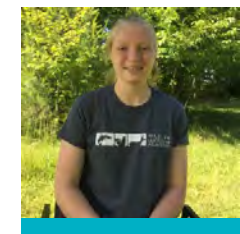
Nathan  
Johnson



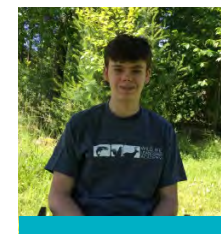
Autumn  
McEntee



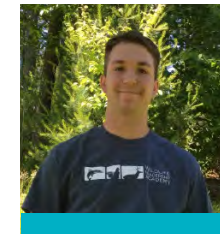
Sinclair  
Ogof



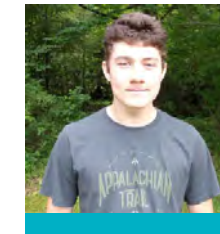
Lily  
Palfrey



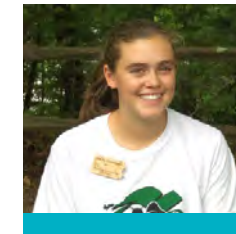
Caleb  
Bachman



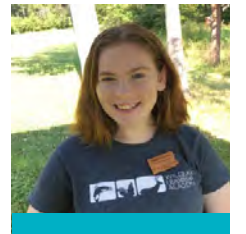
Dominic  
Cecco



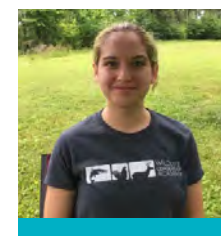
Matthew  
Coulter



Nicole  
Croushore



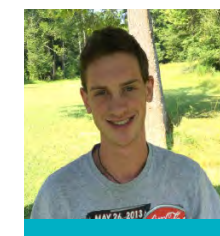
Ashley  
Dunmire



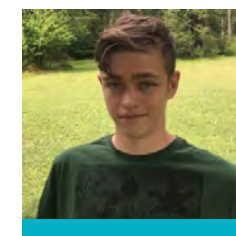
Hannah  
Gaibor



Jocelyn  
Gane



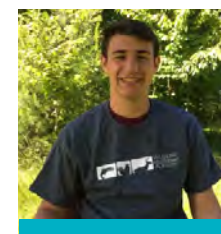
Jacob  
Knaub



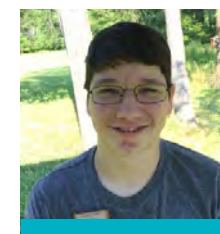
Jackson  
Martine



Holly  
Mirales



Canyon  
Moore



John  
Payne



Francesca  
Ramos



Lacey  
Swab



# Devin GEARHART



*Devin attended Bucktails camp in 2018 and then returned in 2019 as an assistant team leader. While he was there he learned so much about white-tailed deer and their effects on the environment as well as skills that biologists use in the field. These activities, along with the amazing people he met, furthered Devin's interest in wildlife biology and in the fall of 2019 he went to the University of Wyoming, majoring in Wildlife & Fisheries Biology and Management. Devin participated in a monthly blog page and submitted wildlife photos to the WLA Facebook page for Photo Friday.*

## THINKING LIKE A MOUNTAIN

*NextGen Blog Post  
December 24, 2019*

When thinking about mountains, many picture towering palisades of stone and soil, unmoving and unresponsive to the outside world. Throughout history mountains have been seen as obstacles and hindrances, simply there to be tunneled through or utilized to extract resources. These views only skim the surface of what it means to be a mountain. Mountains are eternal beings, formed before the dawn of man, and are constantly changing from the effects of time and other natural factors. To be a mountain means to be imperturbable, omniscient, and objective, while also being vulnerable to adversity. Although one cannot become a mountain, one can learn to think like a mountain.

As I learned during my class field week in the Medicine Bow Mountain Range in Wyoming, thinking like a mountain is not as straightforward as one might believe. Through the many experiences we shared as a class, I was able to see the world from a different view, the viewpoint of a mountain. When I read the words of Aldo Leopold, I was struck by how interconnected the natural world is and how, to make beneficial decisions, one must consider every aspect of nature that will be affected by your choices. This lesson was reinforced when we visited a sustainable ranch, where we learned about the processes of running a farmstead in an environmentally friendly manner. For example, water usage is becoming a greater conflict due to climate change and the ranch is considering a variety of options to combat this issue. Most of their solutions focus on the long-term conservation and storage of water which may oppose the social and cultural pressure to use less water and disrupt the natural cycles which replenish aquifers. By considering the big picture and long-term natural effects, the ranch demonstrates how to think like a mountain.



As part of the field week, we also participated in many other educational and environmental activities. We spent a morning hiking the Snowy Range, marveling at the natural beauty that surrounded us. Discussing the impacts of erosion we were able to see the effects of wind, water, and glaciers which helped shape the land around us. We also learned about the effects of human activities on wildlife migrations after attending a presentation by the Wyoming Migration Initiative. There I learned about the many obstacles ungulates face as they trek from their summer to winter grounds. Developments, oil fields, highways, and fences all present challenges to these migrations. By tracking these migrations and protecting bottleneck areas, the Wyoming Migration Initiative can mitigate these hardships.

Overall this field week allowed me to open my mind to many new ideas and allowed me to partake in new experiences that I could only dream of. The theme of thinking like a mountain means so much more than one would think. It means looking at the world as a system where every part needs to be protected. We can all take part in conserving our natural world by following the wise words of Aldo Leopold and thinking like a mountain.



# Ralph Abele Excellence IN OUTREACH AWARD

Named in honor of conservation leader Ralph Abele, each year, this award is given to students who excel as Conservation Ambassadors. For each field school a \$500 scholarship is awarded to the student who is top in their class for outreach.

## The Class of 2019 Awardees were:

Lily Palfrey  
PA Bucktails

Gave 434 hours to her community.  
Reached 8,720 people with her outreach.

Paige Fino (right)  
PA Bass

Gave 227 hours to her community.  
Reached 66 people with her outreach.

Matthew Coulter  
PA Brookies

Gave 60 hours to his community.  
Reached 178 people with his outreach.



Sofia Lathrop-Olmedo  
PA Brookies

Gave 44 hours to her community.  
Reached 735 people with her outreach.

Nathan Johnson  
PA Drummers

Gave 172 hours to his community.  
Reached 206 people with his outreach.

Autumn McEntee (left)  
PA Gobblers

Gave 21 hours to her community.  
Reached 788 people with her outreach.

# 2019 FINANCIALS

Income	Total
Government Grants	\$188,503
Foundation Grants	\$169,000
Individual/Business Contributions	\$42,565
Pay It Forward (received in 2019)	\$1,010
Camp Tuition Scholarship Fund	\$8,600
Program Service Fees	\$32,520
Merchandise Sales	\$2,539
Academy Alumni Reunion	\$906
Event Donation - Live the Stream Screening	\$2,180
Misc Revenue	\$100
Interest Income	\$144
TOTAL INCOME	\$448,068

Professional, volunteer, and other in-kind service estimated for the Wildlife Leadership Academy program in 2019 include:

**PROFESSIONAL SERVICES** (staff from our partners serving as instructors) - **274 hours** of support with an estimated cost of **\$8,220**.

**VOLUNTEER SERVICES** (i.e. adult mentors and volunteers at field school, student mentors and volunteers) - **3,703 hours** of support with and estimated cost of **\$95,250**.

**OTHER IN-KIND SUPPORT** at an estimated cost of **\$18,038** includes item such as printing of education binders for students by PGC and PFBC, fishing equipment donation by PFBC, and radio telemetry equipment loan by Advanced Telemetry Systems.

Expenses	Total
Salaries & Wages	\$142,850
Payroll Tax Expense	\$12,628
Employee Benefits	\$100
Workers Comp Insurance	\$103
Program Meals	\$33,723
Program Facility	\$29,646
Program Supplies	\$19,841
Curriculum Coordinator/Instructor Services	\$41,920
Program Transportation	\$7,342
Equip Rental/Maint	\$936
Printing	\$13,423
Postage	\$4,179
Background Checks	\$804
Fundraising Supplies	\$236
Fundraising Event - Live the Stream Screening	\$2,175
Rent	\$13,000
Event - Reward Weekend/Reunion	\$6,829
Utilities	\$788
Office Supplies	\$2,315
Telephone	\$1,562
Software & Computer Supplies	\$5,064
Internet Expense	\$1,079
Travel and Entertainment	\$9,483
Advertising and Promotion	\$4,206
Accounting and Auditing	\$11,153
Payroll Service Fees	\$326
Other Professional Services	\$2,655
Website Services	\$53
College Scholarships Provided	\$3,500
Dues & Subscriptions	\$691
Prior Year College Scholarships Provided	\$3,500
Insurance	\$4,237
Bank and Finance Expenses	\$354
Miscellaneous	\$1,848
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$382,549
Net Operating Reserve	\$65,519

Special Note: As per accounting standards, all income is reported in the year received. Therefore, our surplus not only reflects an operating reserve but also multi-year grant award surpluses that are allocated to support the operating budget.





## Thank YOU!

The Wildlife Leadership Academy is only possible because of support from every level. From sponsorships to our partners in state agencies and conservation organizations, these folks are the reason we can continue to educate and empower the next generation of conservation leaders!

### HABITAT LEVEL SPONSOR \$10,000+



**pennsylvania**  
DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION  
AND NATURAL RESOURCES



### HEMLOCK \$5,000+



### ASPEN \$2,500+



### MOUNTAIN LAUREL \$1,000+

The Pennsylvania Wildlife Federation | WHM Solutions, Inc.

### Grassroots/Scholarship

#### FUND \$250+

Black Forest Conservation Assn  
Clarion County Sportsmen  
Eastern Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation  
Lancaster County Conservation District  
Lebanon County Conservation District  
PA Chapter of The Wildlife Society  
PA Outdoor Writers Association  
Pheasants Forever, North Central PA Chapter #630  
PA Council of Trout Unlimited  
Potter County Conservation District  
QDMA, SE PA Branch, *In memory of Mike Gerth*  
QDMA Susquehanna Branch  
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation  
South Mountain Audubon  
Susquehanna County Federation of Sportmen's Clubs  
Washington County Sportsmen  
White Covered Bridge Association

### Foundation & Agency

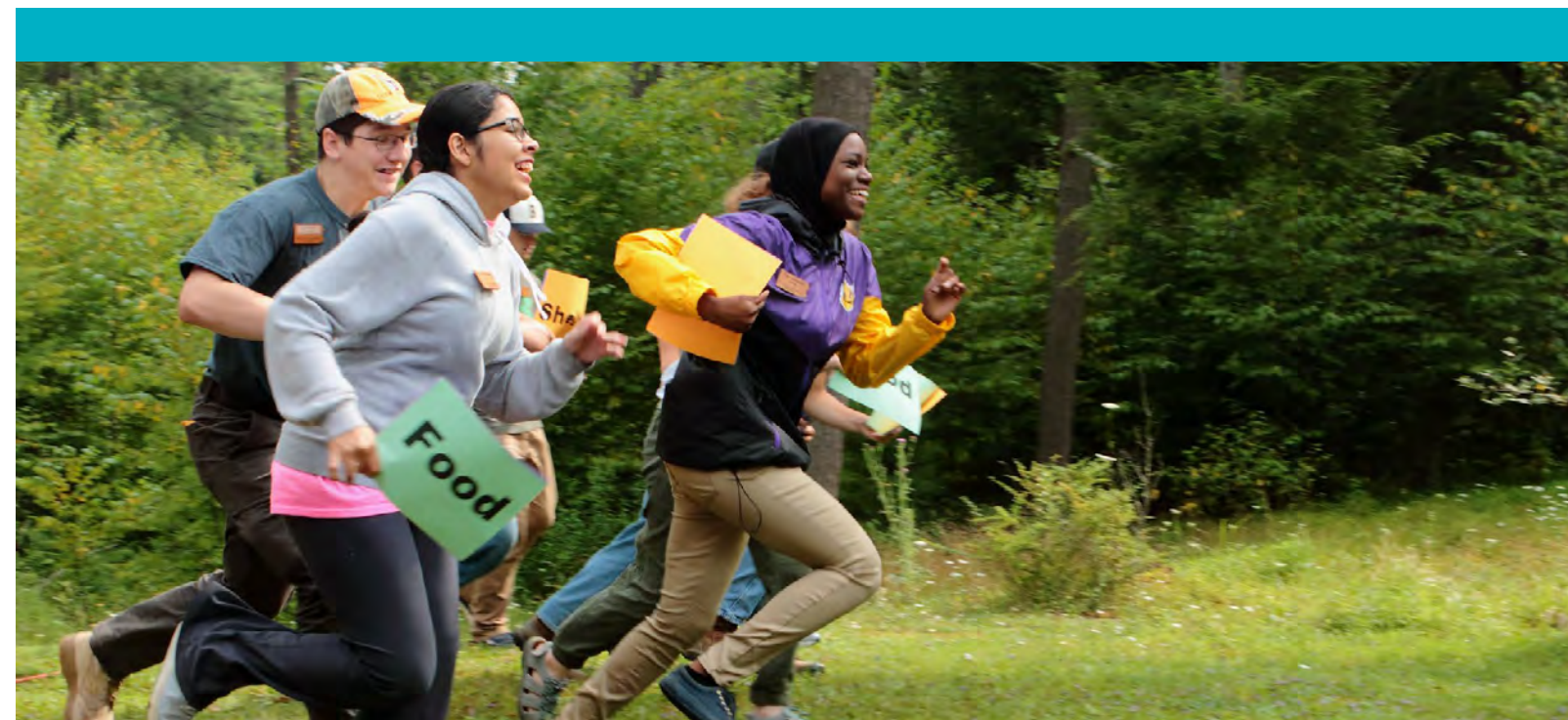
#### SUPPORT

Richard King Mellon Foundation  
Colcom Foundation  
PA DCNR Community Conservation Partnerships Program  
PA DEP Environmental Education Grant  
The NRA Foundation  
Schuylkill Area Community Foundation  
Sordoni Family Foundation  
Reidler Foundation

### Partnering Agencies &

#### ORGANIZATIONS

Advanced Telemetry Systems, Inc. | Cedar Crest College | Chester Water Authority | Clearwater Conservancy | Clinton County Conservation District | Hunters Sharing the Harvest | PA Department of Environmental Protection | Kutztown University | Lancaster County Conservation District | NWTF, Pennsylvania | Ned Smith Center for Nature and Art | Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission | Pennsylvania Game Commission | Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources | Pennsylvania Outdoor Writers Association | Pennsylvania State University | Penn State Dubois | Penn State Extension | QDMA, PA Council and Chapters | Ruffed Grouse Society | Susquehanna University | The Wildlife Society, PA Chapter | Texas Brigades | Trout Unlimited, Pennsylvania Council | TU, Lloyd Wilson Chapter | TU, Spring Creek Chapter | Tylersville State Fish Hatchery







*The mission of the Wildlife Leadership Academy is to engage and empower high school age youth to become Conservation Ambassadors to ensure a sustained wildlife, fisheries and natural resource legacy for future generations.*

## CONTACT **US**

7 East Water Street  
Lock Haven, PA 17745

570-245-8518

[wildlifeleadershipacademy.org](http://wildlifeleadershipacademy.org)

**Read about the Academy's commitment to diversity at:  
[wildlifeleadershipacademy.org/diversity](http://wildlifeleadershipacademy.org/diversity)**