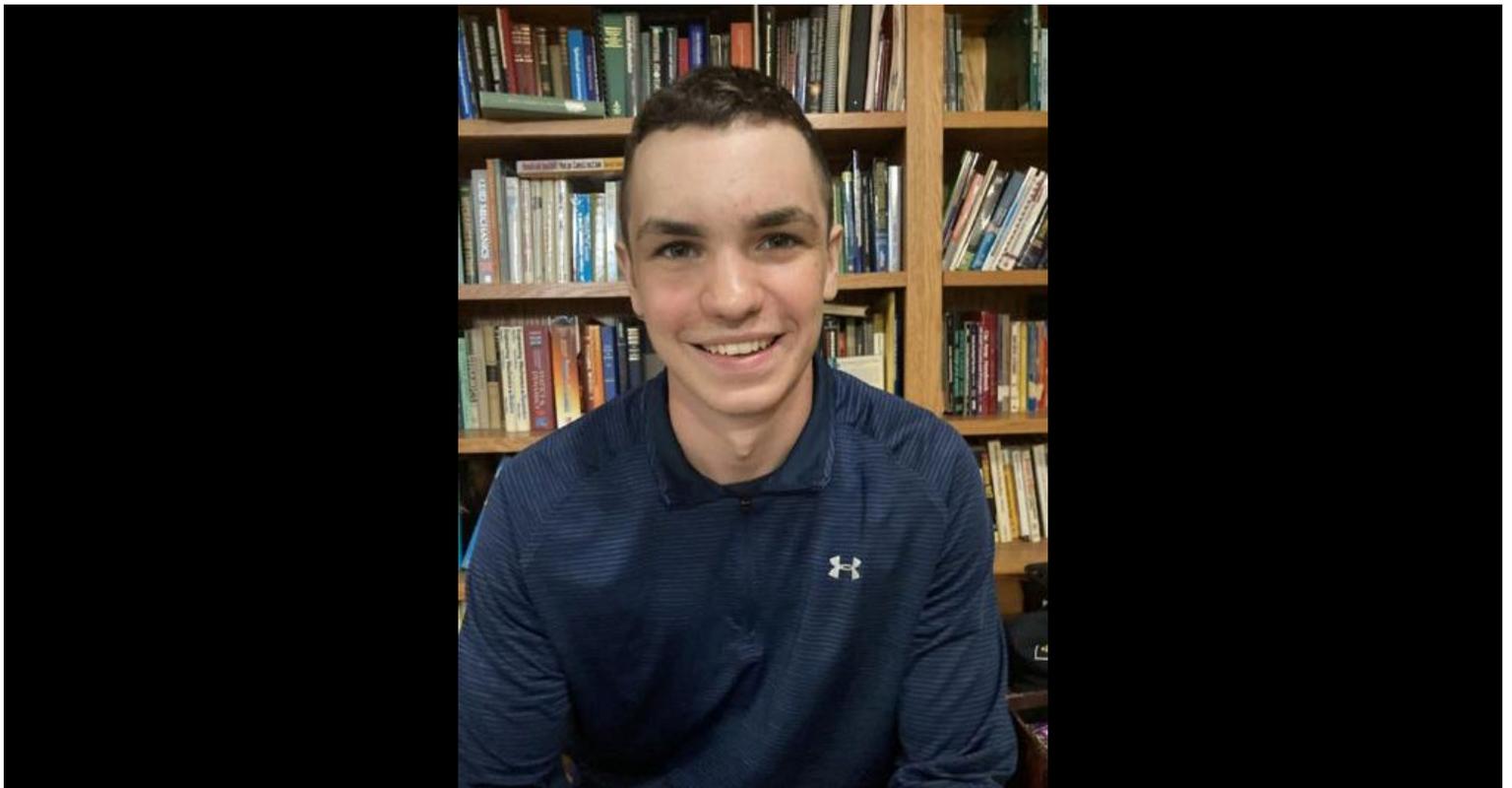




OUTDOORS: Pothering 'paying it forward' after attending Wildlife Leadership Academy

by Doyle Dietz Outdoors Editor Jan 22, 2022

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Shane Pothering, a senior at Schuylkill Haven Area High School, talks about his experiences after attending the Wildlife Leadership Academy during the summer of 2020.

DOYLE DIETZ / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

Clearly, attending the Wildlife Leadership Academy during the summer of 2020 made a lasting impression on Shane Pothering, now a senior at Schuylkill Haven High School who was a member of the school's 2021 PIAA Class AA state championship baseball team and also played football for the Hurricanes.

"Wildlife Leadership Academy's principal goal is to create awareness and to develop leadership qualities to help make a positive impact on our environment," Pothering wrote in an essay on his experience after attending the PA Brookies Camp. "Despite this being the main objective, other subtopics are taught, such as communication skills, grassroots skills and the ability to create opportunities.

"I believe these are the most important because they create change. My favorite part of the academy is the philosophy of not only teaching the students how to use the tools to create change, but also giving the students the tools.

"Leaving the academy, I have gained two essential pieces to create change: motivation and inspiration. With these, I

have the ability to build a powerful foundation and protect our local brook trout and clear water streams with a plan of action and confidence knowing I will always have the creative freedom and support of the Wildlife Leadership Academy.”

After being held virtually in 2021, the Wildlife Leadership Academy is seeking referrals of motivated students ages 14-17 to become Certified Conservation Ambassadors. Nominations are being accepted online at www.wildlifeleadershipacademy.org/nominate, and forms will be available at the Pennsylvania Outdoor Writers Association booth at the Great American Outdoor Show scheduled for Saturday, Feb. 3, through Sunday, Feb. 13, at the Pennsylvania State Farm Show Complex.

Nominated students should have demonstrated interest in wildlife and/or fisheries conservation. Accepted nominees will become certified Conservation Ambassadors through attending a five-day residential summer field school that focuses on a particular wildlife species, comprised of whitetail deer, bass, brook trout, turkey and bear.

As Conservation Ambassadors, students can receive a letter of a recommendation for college applications; certification of community service work, and a certificate designating them as Conservation Ambassadors. Students are also eligible to apply for three college credits through Cedar Crest College, return to the Academy tuition free the following year, compete for college scholarships and join an Academy Alumni Network of wildlife, fisheries and conservation professionals.

“I want to pay it forward because I am passionate for the environment,” Pothering wrote. “I do my part in picking up trash I see on the side of the road and avoiding plastics, however, this is not enough to make a large impact.

“With paying it forward, I have the ability to expand my impact on the environment, and in addition to cleaning up trash on my own time, I can generate funding for larger organizations, or even create local organizations, such as Trout in the Classroom for nearby high schools. With my graduation from the Wildlife Leadership Academy, I have been working with the organization to create outreach opportunities and implement what I have learned to spread awareness and make a difference, no matter how big or small.”

Having had the opportunity to speak at a WLA camp and meet several attendees, I've found they had the same desire to make a difference that Pothering has. Its mission 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 501©(3) non-profit organization, is a cooperative initiative involving state agencies and conservation organizations. It has multiple opportunities and gives students the ability to raise money and achieve outreach points, which promotes them to more important and influential positions.

This year, all schools will be held at Camp Krislund in Madisonburg with fully trained instructors in each field. This year's schedule is: PA BUCKTAILS — Focusing on whitetail deer, their biology, habitat and management, June 14-18; PA BASS — Focusing on bass and warm water conservation, June 21-25; PA BROOKIES — Focusing on brook trout and cold-water conservation; July 19-23; PA GOBBLERS — Focusing on the wild turkey, their biology and habitat engagement, July 26-30; and PA URSIDS — Focusing on the black bear, its biology and habitat needs, Aug. 2-6.

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