

Press Release 1/1/2023

Wildlife Leadership Academy Announces Executive Director Leadership Transition

After a decade of service, Michele Kittell Connolly stepped down from her role as Executive Director of the Wildlife Leadership Academy at the end of December. During Michele's tenure the Academy has grown into a successful state-wide youth leadership program and inspired their students and alumni, 914 strong, to be a voice for the conservation of our natural resources. These Academy students have engaged in 7,916 projects in conservation education, communication, service, creative arts, and outdoor mentorship, spending 30,000 on these projects and in contact hours with the public, reaching an audience of over 136,000 people across the state and beyond. Over the years, she added layers to support student growth from high school to college to career including volunteer and work experience with the summer leadership team, the Academy Alumni Network, and the youth-written NextGen Blog. Michele also expanded the organization into a strong leadership team of year-round staff, curriculum coordinators, and 100+ volunteer expert instructors from the state's conservation agencies and organization.

The Academy Board of Directors has appointed Sara Mueller as the new Wildlife Leadership Academy Executive Director as of January 1, 2023. Sara has been a part of the Academy team as expert fisheries instructor since 2019 and more recently the Fisheries Field School Curriculum Coordinator. Sara is PhD Candidate at Penn State University with an extensive background in wildlife and fisheries science and teaching and mentoring university students. Sara is an active leader in Pennsylvania's conservation community including engagement with the American Fisheries Society, Society for Freshwater Science, The Wildlife Society, and the Girl Scouts of the USA.

Over the next six months, Michele will continue to be involved with the Wildlife Leadership Academy as transition advisor, grant writer and administrator, and coordinating with Novalia Collective on the Academy's diversity, equity and inclusion assessment and implementation efforts.

Academy Board President, Joseph Reibman, shares, "Michele leaves the organization in a strong position, both financially and programmatically. In the fall of 2012, Michele was our sole employee. The Academy now has a talented and dedicated staff that, under the direction of board of directors and Sara's leadership, we are confident will continue to advance the mission of Wildlife Leadership Academy 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." The Academy's core staff leadership team includes Katie Cassidy as Youth and Alumni Outreach Director, Lexi Chisholm as Field School and Office Administrator, and Gary Alt as Curriculum Coordinator.

More information about the Wildlife Leadership Academy and how to nominate a teen for the 2023 field school season can be found at <https://wildlifeleadershipacademy.org/>.