

Conservation Education in F.Y. 2011-12

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CONSERVATION Education continues to be a high priority with the Game Commission. During the fiscal year 2011-12, more than 2,000 educators participated in 1- or 2-day workshops sponsored by the Commission. Ninety-one workshops were offered throughout the state and included Project WILD, Advanced WILD, PA Songbird, PA Biodiversity, Wildlife Forensics and Flying WILD workshops.

During the fiscal year, we continued the waterfowl workshop first introduced last year and added a new workshop called “WILD about Turkeys.” This training was a joint workshop of Pennsylvania and New Jersey’s Project WILD programs.

During this workshop teachers explored the national history of turkeys, conducted a turkey forensics activity and searched for turkey sign in the field. One of the highlights of the workshop was a demonstration of methods used to capture turkeys for research and trap and transfer programs, including the rocket net. Other advanced workshops offered this year included workshops on elk, owls, endangered species, peregrine falcons, biodiversity, and reading.

In addition to educator workshops, the PGC presented at several conferences, including the PA Science Teachers Association Annual Conference, PA Association of Environmental Education Conference, the Early Childhood Summit and the CAAEYC Early Childhood Conference. An additional 200 educators were reached through these conferences.

Conservation Education is also responsible for the wildlife section of the State Envirothon. PGC personnel staff all of the county events, as well as the state contest. This year, more than 15,000 high school students participated in the county events with 300 students competing at the state level.

The WILD ACTION Grant program continues to be active. This year the Commission awarded grants to five schools throughout the state. Students and teachers work together to develop habitat for wildlife on school grounds. From its inception in 1994, the WILD ACTION Grant program has provided grants to more than 235 schools and youth organizations to improve habitat for wildlife.

PGC personnel conduct programs for students. More than 100,000 youngsters participated in general conservation education classroom and youth programs. Programs include adaptations, wildlife and their habitats, predator/prey relationships, ecosystems and their interactions, mammals and birds of PA, wildlife forensics, and endangered and threatened species. All programs are correlated to state education standards. Conservation Education also worked with Howard Nursery on the Seedlings for School program. This program offers free seedlings to schools along with education resource materials.

Growing UP WILD, an environmental education curriculum supplement designed for early childhood educators, continues to grow in our state. An additional 32 facilitators were trained to conduct Growing UP WILD. The October training took place at the Winnie Palmer Nature Reserve of St. Vincent’s College and included not only environmental educators, but early childhood educators who work with the PA Keys and Pennsylvania Quality Assurance trainers. As a result of the rising reputation of Growing UP WILD, the Game Commission was asked by the Office of Child Development and Early Learning to develop a 2-hour Growing UP WILD module and train Early Learning instructors to conduct this module throughout the state.

The Commission continues to serve on the Early Childhood Education Review Committee out of the Office of Child Development and Early Learning. In addition, the Commission was also invited to be on the Standards Writing Committee for the Environment and Ecology Standards for preK-2nd grade. These standards are now in draft form.

The Commission is also a member of the K-12 committee of the Association of Fish Wildlife Agencies. As part of this team, the agency helped to develop new on-line training webinars in conservation education. Topics include Field Investigations and Core Conservation Education Principles.

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These free webinars continue to be available on the AFWA web page and can be viewed by all conservation educators throughout the country.

Songbirds continue to be of interest to teachers throughout the state. *PA Songbirds* is now more than 10 years old, so the agency has partnered with DCNR, Bureau of State Parks and Audubon Pennsylvania to redo the Pennsylvania Songbirds curriculum supplement. During this 2-year project all background information and activities will reviewed, updated and rewritten where needed.

The Game Commission also participated in the Mid-Atlantic Environmental Literacy Summit with education leaders from New York, Virginia, Maryland, West Virginia and Washington DC, and the annual Project WILD Coordinators Meeting and Training with educators from throughout the country, and also helped plan the AFWA Conservation Education Summit in Washington, D.C.

The Commission continues to serve on the Environmental Education Advisory Committee and contributed to the bi-annual report on Environmental Education in Pennsylvania, as well as the development of the Environmental Literacy Plan for Pennsylvania. □