



By Dan Schmidt
Forest County WCO

Making a Difference



THE 30th Class of wildlife conservation officer cadets will begin its training in March at the Ross Leffler School of Conservation at the Game Commission's Headquarters in Harrisburg.

I hope this article serves as motivation to the new cadets as they prepare for 50 weeks of intense training; that it helps readers understand the role the cadets will fill as WCOs in making Pennsylvania a better and safer place, not only for its wildlife, but its people. I also hope it inspires young readers to explore a career as a WCO and that it reminds veteran and retired WCOs and District Game Protectors of the important role they've played throughout their careers.

WCOs are jacks-of-all-trades in wildlife conservation. We trap bears, turkeys and other animals to help biologists estimate populations and track movement. We stock pheasants and give hunters advice. We also supervise the agency's HTE programs, as well as teach various wildlife programs at schools, civic organizations, county fairs and sportsmen's clubs.

But the effort doesn't stop there. We enforce laws that protect wildlife, people and property. We help find

lost persons in mountainous areas. We work with local and state police, as well as Fish and Boat Commission and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service officers. We help farmers and residents deal with crop and property damage caused by wildlife. We work with local envirothons, Scouts and conservation organizations.

Some of us become land management officers who supervise the agency's Food and Cover Corps crews that take care of our more than 1.4 million acres of state game lands. We also become supervisors who manage field officers.

Cadets also know, or quickly learn, this—sometime in your career you may, like officers before you, have to save somebody's life, pursue/arrest felons, raid marijuana fields, solve hunting-related shooting incidents, prosecute large-scale wildlife poaching or black market operations, or even become involved in a fight for your life.

Cadets make sacrifices, but they're worth it, because they help mold us into field officers who make a difference. It's a career that for more than a century has helped to conserve our natural resources for wildlife, Pennsylvanians and future generations of Pennsylvanians. We serve proudly. 