

Wildlife Education and Sustainability Program

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INTRODUCTION

Previous research has shown the importance of wildlife and environmental education and training for educators. There has also been a lack of appropriate training for wildlife educators, especially at the K-12 level. A review of agriculture teaching certification degree programs reveals that very few include wildlife ecology or habitat management courses, yet high school agriculture educators are increasingly expected to cover these topics and train wildlife teams for FFA and 4-H competitions. The National Center for Education and Economy, National Academy of Science and National Research Council are among many who have acknowledged the need for new and innovative approaches to education, specifically in science education.



How It Works

The goal of the multi-disciplinary Wildlife Education and Sustainability Training (WEST) Program is to: 1) develop a state and national standards aligned curriculum of experiential lessons focused on wildlife ecology and management for post-secondary agriculture teacher preparation, 2) conduct free, annual 4-day professional development workshops to provide an experiential learning experience for pre-service teachers while training them in use of the curriculum, and 3) conduct research on the program's effectiveness.

Participants participated in a 4-day, 3-night teacher training workshop at a partnering wildlife refuge. The training consisted of immersive, experiential activities where post-secondary students will receive instruction and an opportunity to practice wildlife ecology and management lessons in. The lessons were aligned with Texas standards.

Example of Program Agenda

2:20-3:30 pm	Soils
3:30-4:30 pm	Range/Land Treatment
4:30-5:30 pm	Plant Collecting
5:30-6:45 pm	Plant Keying/ID/Pressing
6:45-7:30 pm	Break-Shower, Change, Unpack
7:30-8:15 pm	Dinner
8:15-9:15 pm	Plant Keying/ID/Pressing
9:15-9:30 pm	Day One Wrap Up
Day Two	
7:00 AM	Rise and Shine
8:00-8:30 am	Breakfast
8:30-10:30 am	Techniques (Telemetry, Trapping)
10:30-12:00 pm	Techniques (mammals, skins, skulls)
12:00-12:45 pm	Lunch
1:00-2:30 pm	Ethics, Laws, Conflicts
2:30-4:30 pm	Techniques (water fowl)
4:30-6:00 pm	Techniques (upland game birds)
6:00-7:00 pm	Break-Shower, Change
7:00-7:45	Dinner
8:00-8:45	Surveying Techniques
8:45-10:00 pm	Night Survey
Day Three	
7:30am-Rotunda	Breakfast
8am	Check small mammal traps
9:30	Lecture – Habitat Management
11:00am	Driving Tour Refuge – Habitat Management
12:30pm-Rotunda	Lunch
1:30pm-Classroom	Biological Basis for Hunting/Hunting Funding, Ethics, Laws & Conflicts, Project WILD Resources
5pm.	Course design considerations (Integrating Everything into the Secondary Classroom)
6:30pm	Break & Meet Rotunda for last night dinner @ 7pm
8pm	Post-Evaluation, Q&A session

Results to Date & Future Plans

The program has been a success with participation from teachers all across the state and from varying types of programs. We have also had participation from pre-service teachers from four different state institutions. A total of 75 teachers have participated in the three WEST program so far. We have two scheduled for Summer 2020 and an additional two the 2020-2021 school year. Starting with the second workshop, the Project WILD wildlife education program certification was added for all participants to add to their educational materials. Follow up with participants to measure impact in the classroom is being conducted during the Spring 2020 and Fall 2021 semesters with past participants.

Costs/Resources Needed

This program is funded by a USDA-Higher Education Challenge Grant. The funds cover the expense for participant housing, food, educational materials and project director support. The total program funding is for \$299,567 over three years. The goal is to continue the program with external funds or to develop the program as a continuing professional development requiring a small registration fee.

