

For Immediate Release

Photos available upon request

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Academy seeks youth leaders energized about wildlife conservation

The Wildlife Leadership Academy is seeking youth from across the state interested in wildlife and conservation to participate in weeklong field school programs this summer.

Participants study with top wildlife biologists and managers in the state and through the program are empowered to become ambassadors for conservation, completing service and leadership projects in their home communities throughout the year.

John Felix, a principal at Donegal High School, called the program "all encompassing."

"It involves the study of biology, botany and plant science, conservation, game management...It also provides the opportunity for students to learn from authorities in these fields," he said.

Instructor and professional ecologist Lisa Smith also commended the program.

"The high caliber and sheer number of conservation professionals who are involved as instructors in this camp is beyond impressive, but more than that is the commitment of time, energy and passion that each of these instructors give to the students," Smith said.

The Academy offers two field schools, each focusing on a single wildlife species.

The *Pennsylvania Bucktails* field school focuses on white-tailed deer, a species of regard in the state for wildlife watchers and hunters alike.

The second offering, *Pennsylvania Drummers* focuses on the state bird, the Ruffed Grouse.

"The Ruffed Grouse is one the most popular upland game birds and also the state bird," noted Mark Banker, regional biologist for The Ruffed Grouse Society. "The Ruffed Grouse represents a large group of wildlife that uses the most imperiled forest habitat in Pennsylvania – young forests."

The field school differs from other weeklong programs in part because students commit to participating in at least three outreach activities in their home communities after the field school experience, said Michele Kittell, the Academy's Director.

"We facilitate these outreach activities, encouraging students to participate in projects beyond their required activities," Kittell said. "The conservation outreach focuses on environmental education, community service, media engagement, and/or participation in the arts. The goal of the Wildlife Leadership Academy field schools is to provide the students with the tools and knowledge to become informed leaders for wildlife conservation now and in the future."

Graduates of the program have taken the Academy's challenge to heart, having conducted more than 210 conservation education, communication, and service projects; engaged in 846 contact hours with the public; and reached an audience of more than 6,000 people across 40 counties in the state.

Wildlife Leadership Academy is a cooperative initiative involving several state agencies and conservation organizations and is administered by the Pennsylvania Institute for Conservation Education. The program brings the knowledge and expertise of many prominent biologists, including representatives of Audubon PA,

Kutztown University, Pennsylvania Game Commission, Pennsylvania State University, Quality Deer Management Association, Ruffed Grouse Society, and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers directly to high school students.

Applications are now available for the 2011 field schools. Interested students can download an application by going to www.PICEweb.org and clicking on the youth programs link. This year's application deadline is April 1, 2011. PA Drummers will be held at the Powdermill Nature Reserve in Westmoreland County June 21-25. PA Bucktails will be held at Stone Valley Recreation Area in Huntingdon County July 5-9.

For more information, contact Wildlife Leadership Academy Director, Michele Kittell, at mkittell@piceweb.org or (570)245-8518.