



ASSOCIATION *of*
FISH & WILDLIFE
AGENCIES

Conservation Education Success Stories from State Fish and Wildlife Agencies

CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION, WILDLIFE DIVISION

www.ct.gov/dep/site/default.asp

Master Wildlife Conservationist (MWC) Program

An adult volunteer, 40-hour, training program, the goal of the MWC program is to train volunteers to provide wildlife information to school and scout groups and the general public. The volunteers also assist with the Wildlife Division's research projects. Currently, the Division has 75 active MWCs who provided 3,700 volunteer hours in 2008. Fifty-five of the active MWCs provided about 1,400 volunteer hours teaching children and adults about the state's wildlife and wildlife management activities at schools, nature centers, libraries, nursing homes, festivals and fairs. The training is held once a year and the demand for attendance is great.

THE COLORADO DIVISION OF WILDLIFE

<http://wildlife.state.co.us>

Environmental Learning for Kids

For the past 13 years, the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) has partnered with Environmental Learning for Kids (ELK), a Denver-based, 501(c)3 organization established in 1996 by a Latina female wildlife biologist, Stacie Gilmore, who worked for the Colorado Department of Natural Resources and an African-American wildlife biologist, Scott Gilmore, who currently works for CDOW.

Stacie and Scott saw firsthand the lack of diversity within the natural resource field. They created ELK to fill the growing need of introducing and educating Colorado's urban youth about science, math, leadership and natural resource careers. Both Stacie and Scott are alumni of a minority summer employment program, that Secretary of the Interior, and former U.S. Senator, Ken Salazar created during his tenure as Executive Director at the CO Department of Natural Resources.

Since its inception, ELK has played a major role in the outreach efforts of the CDOW Angler Education Program assisting in educating more than 100,000 youth and their families about the joys of fishing. Over a 100 ELK youth and staff have worked with the CDOW fishing program teaching the skills necessary to become a successful angler and steward. This a very unique program where the youth that live in the inner city actually provide other youth from their own communities the opportunity to participate in a high quality outdoor experience.

In its own right, ELK has served more than 70,000 youth and families of color and a majority of youth who participate in ELK, through one to one mentoring by ELK staff, have gone on to become first-

generation college students and graduates. In ELK's year-round program, 98% of the students graduate from high school. The retention rate for the same program is 95% – once students get involved, they come back year after year. Visit www.elkkids.com for more information.

FLORIDA FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION COMMISSION
www.myfwc.com

Chinsegut Nature Center

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission's (FWC) Chinsegut Wildlife and Environmental Area hosted 72 programs specifically for youth and families in 2008 using 56 Regular Service Volunteers and 123 additional Occasional Service Volunteers. A total of 4,486 people participated in a program on site. Adults and youth alike assisted with creating a butterfly/bird garden, trail maintenance and nonnative plant removal. In addition, participants gained skills in archery, insect and bird identification, orienteering, spiders, pioneer history, botany, reptiles and amphibians, threatened and endangered species, prescribed fire, astronomy and conservation. Visit, http://myfwc.com/RECREATION/Chinsegut_Nature_Center_index.htm for details.

E-Field Trips

Electronic education field trips coordinated by Distance Learning, Inc. has allowed FWC to provide information about manatees and North Atlantic right whales to a national audience. Once the program is created and available on the site, students and teachers are able to download education materials that they use on the field trip. On average each year, more than 500 teachers use the field trips and register more than 10,000 students who would otherwise not be able to visit Florida or take a field trip. Visit, www.efieldtrips.org for more information.

Saltwater Fishing Clinics

Kids' Fishing Clinics, conducted by FWC's Division of Marine Fisheries Management, are one-day educational events spread regionally throughout Florida. The *Kids' Fishing Clinics* strive to create responsible marine resource stewards by teaching children the vulnerability of Florida's marine ecosystems as well as teach fundamental saltwater fishing skills and provide participants with a positive fishing experience. An estimated 4,000 children attend the clinics each year accompanied by 2,000 parents or guardians and assisted by 1,000 volunteers.

Since 1996, more than 46,000 children have participated in *Kids' Fishing Clinics* accompanied by an estimated 31,000 parents or guardians. The clinics wouldn't be possible without the 8,000 volunteers who have assisted in educating young anglers about fishing techniques, marine habitats, ethical angling and conservation.

MAINE DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE
www.state.me.us/ifw

Youth Conservation Camp

Via an auction of originally five, and now 10, moose hunting permits, the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife raised funds to provide scholarships for Maine boys and girls, ages 10-14, to attend conservation camps in Bryant Pond and Princeton, Maine. During their week of residential camp, thousands of kids have enjoyed the opportunity to learn about Maine's wildlife, woods and waters;

participate in Hunter Safety, Bow Safety and Boater Safety programming; and experience fishing, camping and hiking adventures. For more information, visit www.extension.umaine.edu/bryantpond/conservation_camp.asp or www.greenlandpoint.com/

Maine Wildlife Park

This unique wildlife park owned and operated by the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife and located in Gray, is home to more than 30 species of native Maine wildlife that cannot be released back into the wild due to injuries or human dependence. The park houses moose, bear, deer, lynx, hawks, owls, eagles, turtles and other critters in spacious exhibits interspersed with nature trails, interpretive exhibits, a picnic area and more. More than 3,000 children participate in wildlife and conservation education programs here annually, and more than 95,000 people visit the park during its six-month open season. The park exists to demonstrate the programs and projects of the Department in its efforts to protect and preserve Maine's valuable wildlife and habitats. Go to www.mainewildlifepark.com for more information.

MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION **www.mdc.mo.gov**

Discover Nature Schools

Missourians have long supported a tax to help conserve our natural heritage in a sustainable way. However, the key to successful conservation is the stewardship ethic of individuals. For the future health of our children and our natural world, the Missouri Department of Conservation offers "Discover Nature Schools." The program is designed to help children experience nature outside the classroom close to home, while helping administrators and teachers deliver hands-on, place-based learning and overcome the challenges of funding and testing. Key components of the program include: instructional materials (teacher and student guides) that focus on conservation and nature study aligned with Grade Level Expectation testing standards; grants for related teaching resources and equipment; grants for field trips; and teacher training. A middle school unit is now available, a 4th/5th grade unit is being piloted this year and a high school ecology unit will be piloted in 2010.

The Department provides approximately \$1,000 in grants per Missouri middle school for initial instruction resources; \$7 per student up to 500 students per school for field experiences/travel; and student guide (color) and teacher guide (b&w). The Department has budgeted approximately \$250,000 for the initial program, but that will grow as more schools participate.

NEW HAMPSHIRE FISH AND GAME DEPARTMENT **www.wildlife.state.nh.us/**

Amoskeag Fishways Partnership

The Amoskeag Fishways Learning and Visitors Center, an environmental education center located in Manchester, is a partnership between the NH Fish and Game Department, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Public Service of NH (statewide electric utility) and NH Audubon. This unique partnership was formed in 1995 to foster cultural and ecological stewardship of the Merrimack River watershed and riparian systems, particularly among urban dwellers. The Fishways serves more than 22,000 visitors every year through an interactive exhibit hall and a wide variety of programs offered to school children, families

and adults that focus on the urban wildlife, history and ecology of the local area. Visit www.amoskeagfishways.org for more information.

Project HOME - A Schoolyard Habitat Model

The “Project HOME: Homes for Wildlife in the Schoolyard” program of the NH Fish and Game Department makes a difference for wildlife and provides learning experiences in schoolyard landscapes, cultivating stewardship and connection to place. More than 20% of the schools in New Hampshire have been involved with creating a schoolyard habitat, and more than 60 schools have received Homes for Wildlife Action Grants to assist in the development of their sites.

The Project HOME program provides school communities the tools for developing projects and creating outdoor classrooms using an interdisciplinary approach that engages all learners and meets the state Framework for Science Literacy. The program involves teacher professional development and community training focused on building field investigation skills, developing an enhancement plan, installing a project and garnering ongoing support for the project.

Great Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve

The Great Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, a state and federal partnership between NOAA and the NH Fish and Game Department, has conducted environmental education programs for K-12 student audiences and the general public since 1996. Great Bay Discovery Center in Greenland serves as the conservation-education headquarters for the Reserve; it has served more than 40,000 school children in programs focused on estuarine education.

Blending the mission of fish and wildlife conservation with coastal and estuarine issues has allowed the Center to cover topics ranging from global climate change, fisheries management, recreation and natural and cultural history. The Center has incorporated several green design features into its buildings and grounds and includes a New England-style barn featuring geothermal heating and cooling, composting toilets, a porous asphalt driveway and porous concrete walkways, as well as interpretive exhibits about these features. Go to www.greatbay.org for details.

New Hampshire Watershed Education Program

NH Fish and Game’s Watershed Education Program is a statewide program for secondary schools. It provides teacher training, curriculum development and direct support, putting students where the action is: in their own watershed. Using hands-on investigative approaches to aquatic habitats, students study water quality and macroinvertebrates. They learn elements of aquatic resource management through habitat assessment, population studies, salmonid eggs and river tanks in the classroom. Students also have a chance to use the latest technology in the form of GIS maps and water quality testing equipment while getting outdoors to directly assess natural aquatic resources in their community. The program partners with more than 130 teachers in 50 schools, reaching upward of 2,200 students each year.

NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION (NYSDEC)

www.dec.ny.gov

After School Conservation Club

The After-School Conservation Club brings environmental education to and fosters a sense of stewardship in inner-city elementary-aged children involved in after-school programs. Environmental

educators from NYSDEC provide training and support for the site coordinators and youth counselors. AmeriCorps members of the Student Conservation Association from New York City to Albany conduct lessons at the sites. Every site conducts three to four hours of environmental education activities and stewardship projects each week. During the fall, students learn basic environmental concepts, such as predator/prey relationships and adaptations, and their stewardship project involves developing recycling programs at their host site (community centers and schools). In the spring, students learn about water resources, including fish, wetlands and water quality. Their spring stewardship project is creating butterfly gardens and other wildlife habitat.

Currently, 17 high-need sites throughout New York City participate in the program and close to 1,500 students have participated since its inception in 2006.

Environmental Education Summer Camps & the Camp Diversity Program

NYSDEC operates four residential summer camps across the state. The camps serve youth ages 12 to 17 years old, who take part in week-long environmental education programs. In 2008, the camps celebrated 61 years of operation, with more than 1,500 youth attending camp. More than 75% of the children come to camp through sponsoring organizations such as local sportsmen, garden and service clubs. DEC's Camp Diversity Program funds nearly 20% of the campers through "camperships," made available to underserved youth in need who wish to attend camp.

The Camp Diversity Program was established in 2004 to encourage under-served youth to attend the camps. It provides outdoor and natural resource experiences to youth, especially from urban areas, who would otherwise not have such opportunities. Inner-city youth take part in outdoor and environmental activities, both pre- and post-camp, to prepare them for the camp experience. Pre-camp activities include fishing, hiking, overnight camping and nature exploration. Post-camp activities also include career exploration and visiting colleges with natural resource and environmental quality majors. Together, these experiences connect inner-city youth to nature, preparing them for a lifetime of enjoyment of the outdoors.

TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT

www.tpwd.state.tx.us/

Community Outdoor Outreach Program (CO-OP)

CO-OP provides grants to tax-exempt organizations ranging from \$5,000 to \$30,000 to eligible groups including city and county governments, schools, churches, State Park Friends' groups and non-profit organizations to implement programs and activities including camping, fishing, environmental education, Buffalo Soldiers, hunting, hiking, canoeing, kayaking and more. Since 1999, more than 525 grants have been awarded.

Texas Master Naturalists

The Texas Master Naturalist (TMN) program trains and manages chapters of certified volunteers who become stewards and advocates for natural habitats and resources in their communities. Volunteers also function as outreach specialists to build awareness about native species and natural systems. Texas Nature Trackers is a citizen-scientist monitoring program under the TMN umbrella.

TMN is a partnership between TPWD and Texas AgriLife (formerly Texas Cooperative Extension) and modeled after Master Gardeners. The program currently supports 2,750 TMN volunteers in 39 local

chapters across the state. Each chapter trains one or two classes of volunteers each year with a minimum of 40 hours of classroom work and field trips designed to cover a broad array of natural resource topics focused on regional examples. Each volunteer must log at least 40 hours of volunteer service to become a certified TMN and to maintain certification, 40 hours of pre-approved annual service with eight hours of advanced training.

Since its establishment in 1998, TMN volunteer efforts have provided more than 450,000 hours of service valued at more than \$8 million. This service has resulted in enhancing 75,000 acres of wildlife and native plant habitats; reaching more than 1.2 million youth, adults and private landowners. The program has gained international state and local recognition with the Wildlife Management Institute's Presidents' 2000 Award, the National Audubon Society's 2001 Habitat Hero's Award, the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission's 2001 Environmental Excellence Award and Texas A&M University's 2001 Vice Chancellor's Award of Excellence in Partnership and in 2005 the U. S. Department of Interior's "Take Pride in America" award.

Coastal Expo

Coastal Expo is a fun, family-oriented event with activities to learn about coastal ecosystems, why they are important and how to protect them. Visitors see and touch crabs, sea stars and other coastal animals; view a glass-bottom stream; solve a mysterious fish kill; learn what washes up on the Texas coast; fish for live catfish; skill building with angler education stations; and participate in other great activities.

Coastal Expos create awareness and understanding of the functions and values of coastal ecosystems through communication about topics like water conservation, recycling and use of native plants. Coastal Expos uniquely focus this message towards minority populations of Texans and particularly those who may never otherwise see firsthand the Texas coast. The Coastal Expo concept recognizes that most of Texas forms the watershed for the Texas coast and that Texans all over the state, not just living along the coast, have a critical role in protecting coastal ecosystems.

Now in its eighth year, Coastal Expos have been held at malls and community events. For example, the Coastal Expo at South Park Mall in south San Antonio averages participation of more than 5,000 Texans of all ages each year. Coastal Expos at Sea Rim State Park touched more than 700 elementary students each year, with over 75% African-American or Hispanic participants. Other Coastal Expos have been held at Beaumont's Neches River Festival, McAllen's Tropic Nature Festival, Bentsen/Rio Grande State Park and Edinburg in the lower Rio Grande Valley.

Urban Outdoor Program, Major Metro

The Urban Outdoor Program, Major Metro, brings outreach programs to the Austin, Houston and Dallas/Fort Worth areas. Specialists network with and develop community partners who use TPWD sites, programs and activities in *their own* programs; arrange *Outdoor Kids Adventure Days* and other events; and conduct team meetings with local TPWD program staff who assist in these efforts. These can include Becoming an Outdoors-Woman, state park interpretation, angler, boater and hunter education, Texas Youth Hunter Program, the CO-OP grant program and other TPWD education, interpretation and outreach programs.

Created in 1998 as TPWD's initial outreach effort, the education branch placed regional outreach specialists in Houston, Dallas, San Antonio and finally Austin to specifically break down urban populations' barriers to participation in outdoor recreation. Today, specialists are located in Houston,

Dallas/Fort Worth and Austin targeting underserved urban populations in an effort to engage them in the outdoors and TPWD's mission. Heavy reliance is placed on volunteers provided by other TPWD programs such as Aquatic Education and Hunter Education as well as other constituent partners like the Master Naturalists.

"Texas Buffalo Soldier" Outdoor Educational Programs

"Texas Buffalo Soldier" Outdoor Educational Programs emphasize Texans' multi-shared western heritage about the 9th Cavalry Buffalo Soldiers, Vaqueros, Negro Cowboys, Frontier Women, Native Americans and other cultural groups in Texas during the 1800s. Buffalo Soldiers set up encampments at schools and special events, accompany trail rides and carry the colors at official ceremonies.

Operated as a volunteer regiment, the program follows military procedures and volunteers are held to a strict code of conduct — "above the age of 18, effective, able-bodied, sober, of good character and habits may be enlisted." The Community Services effort is led by the Texas Buffalo Soldiers (Educational Programs), Exploring Texas Roots (Cultural Research Programs), Blazing New Trails (Outdoor Educational Programs) and Texas Buffalo Soldiers Heritage Trail Program (Heritage Education/Heritage Tourism Programs). The core functions of the Community Services Programs are education and outreach programming, with specific program management and coordination with the Texas Historical Commission through the Texas Buffalo Soldiers Memorandum of Understanding.

WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

<http://wdfw.wa.gov/>

Citizen Science Program

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) has successfully created a citizen science program for schools and adult volunteers to monitor biodiversity and to undertake stewardship both through policy changes and physical eco-management projects, using The NatureMapping Program, the "Facebook" approach to nature, jointly run by WDFW Education and the University of Washington.

Adult volunteer groups engage in NatureMapping for the near shore, monitoring the progress for restoring the Puget Sound and assist WDFW biologists in collecting data for common bird and mammal species to help meet the agency mission to conserve fish and wildlife. Schools use citizen science to develop K-12 students' science inquiry skills in field investigation, and contribute the results of their studies to biologists' questions. High school students are motivated to stay in school as they undertake culminating projects that investigate their natural environment that sustains their community and related green careers. These citizen science projects involving field studies and stewardship are published through a high school journal published by the Pacific Education Institute, a consortium of state natural resource agencies (including WDFW) and education organizations, providing leadership in rigorous and relevant applied math and science education in the environment for schools.

To add your state's Conservation Education Success Story, email:

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