



ASSOCIATION *of*
FISH & WILDLIFE
AGENCIES

EDUCATION WORKING GROUP

Chair: Kellie Tharp (AZ)

Vice Chair: Heather Hubbard (CO)

Tuesday, September 15, 2026

2:30pm- 4:30pm

116th Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Annual Meeting
Lancaster, PA

Education Working Group Notes 9.15.2026

Summary--Discussion included . . .

- Potential topics to explore for future webinars from the Conservation Education Network to help agency staff with basics for conservation education and staff onboarding.
- Project WILD gave an update on online courses and new content in publications.
- A discussion on Educating About Bears highlighted best practices, resources, and strategies from BearWise, Pennsylvania Game Commission, Project WILD and others.
- Staff from Arkansas Game & Fish Commission gave overview of project for educator professional development and school engagement, "School of Conservation Leadership & Outdoor Education."
- Program updates on One Health focused efforts described, including Project WILD online courses and Wildlife Leadership Academy in Pennsylvania

Conservation Education Network

A community of practice that uses webinars for sharing and learning from one another.

New ideas for upcoming webinars that could be provided through the network:

- Information about and applying tools from the AFWA Conservation Education Tool Kit.
- Developing education planning and education strategy at the state level: examples, comparisons, how education planning fits with larger agency planning. One example is from Nebraska, on Nebraska.gov website. Colorado has also worked on alignment between education and large agency planning.
- Digital accessibility, in social media, websites, and other digital platforms. Current guidance, best practices

- Educating about State Wildlife Action Plans (SWAPs). Getting more perspectives from educators, as well as biologists. Distinguishing between communicating *about* the plan vs. the *contents* of the plan.
- Intro to Conservation Education. Basic Conservation Education background and history.
- MAT (matlearning.org) conservation leader online course is currently being outlined.
- On-boarding pieces for entry level employees. Example—training for new supervisors. Analysis of needs may help in identifying new content to develop. Intro to AFWA toolkit is an example of a webinar that also has an onboarding piece.
- A spotlight on AGFC’s Education Division’s School of Conservation Leadership.

Project WILD Updates

12 Online professional development courses now available—new WILD About Bears to launch in Fall 2026.

Update on WILD publications: New high school math activity “Counting on Fish” in the Aquatic WILD curriculum. New Spanish translations student pages are soon to be published.

Webinars: Recently worked with Bat Conservation International and California Dept of Fish & Wildlife to host “Teach About Bats” webinar

ee360+ funding—Project WILD completing year 5 (of five total) from this EPA funding program.

Next Project WILD annual meeting in Oklahoma City in May 2027

Educating About Bears

Project WILD efforts have been around updating bear-focused activities and new “WILD About Bears” online professional development course. Project WILD’s lessons learned in this effort:

Not using “territorial”

Consider trauma informed instruction

Considerable variation in size, coloration of black bears—importance of regional local info on average bear size

Educators love to see what conservation professionals do in the field.

BearWise: Janelle Musser presented.

More visible to more people than individual agency bear pages

Reviewed and consistent information

Ready-to-use materials

Website, bearwise.org, is constantly updated and frequently accessed, highly visible

BearWise communications have more national reach

Helping public distinguish between emergency and nonemergency sightings of bears

Signage options for businesses and organizations to use

Fact sheets and door hangers that responders (police, etc..) can use to distribute when involved.

BearWise Communication Guide—to help prep interviewers

Outdoor safety sheets/ door hangers. Can be used as warnings by law enforcement.

Use of QR codes: Example: how to be a BearWise guest (for hotels)

Membership by agencies to BearWise helps communicate taking responsibility.

Pennsylvania Game Commission: History of doing in-person WILD About Bear workshops throughout the state, typically in June, corresponding with agency staff doing bear conservation fieldwork. Has a “Nose Knows” bear workshop using essential oils to simulate bears identifying one another through scent. AFWA/Project WILD showcasing PGC’s work in WILD Work (career type interviews) for online course.

Florida also has an online [bear curriculum](#) correlated to state education standards. This was developed in partnership with Naples Zoo.

School of Conservation Leadership & Outdoor Ed. Initiative from Arkansas GFC

Derek Ratchford, Arkansas Game & Fish Commission and the Arkansas Outdoor Education Initiative.

Derek.ratchford@agfc.ar.gov for more information.

Outdoor curriculum designed for Arkansas standards. Over three years, many schools have started implementing, and several have been designated.

Phase one: assessment of needs

Phase two: implementation

Phase three: reporting on work

Agency also has the following outdoor education initiatives:

- Leadership Councils
- Generation Conservation Summit
- Curriculum Resources
- Post Secondary Programming/ Collegiate School of Conservation Leadership

Agency has focused on streamlining programs to reach more people and collecting data on education efforts (where, what, who).

A main focus is getting kids outside.

75,000 + students have been reached through programming.

Program aligned to, and used by, all grade levels.

Teacher hub uses 17 interactive tools (online lessons).

2 lessons, 2 experiences and 2 projects per grade level required as part of recognition standards.

Use of career pathways: hospitality and tourism and Natural resources and environmental management.

15 self-paced, self-guided lessons. Example: building your own GIS is one lesson for educators.

Assessment of program efforts are underway. Results indicate success.

Student participation is recorded and linked to Customer Relation database.

One Health in Education

Examples of OneHealth efforts: Project WILD launched two online courses aligned with OneHealth messaging: “Healthy Connections,” and “Tick Treck adventure”

Wildlife Leadership Academy in Pennsylvania outreach project’s with students, including One Health focused activities. “Sciencet Takeout” resources include tick safety activities.

Lighting Round

Pennsylvania: Films on Threatened and Endangered species and accompanying curriculum

Nebraska: public radio station inspired by agency website n conservation efforts--content-such as grassland conservation and big horned sheep conservation.

Train-the-trainer instruction on bow hunting