

ENGAGEMENT and EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Chair: Amanda Wuestefeld (IN)

Vice Chair: Judy Camuso (ME)

Wednesday, September 24, 2025

Attendees = 23

Agenda

- Call to Order/Review Agenda
- Introductions & Welcome: Amanda Wuestefeld (IN)
 - Round robin intros- names/title/location and favorite part of the meeting
- Working Group/Subcommittee Reports
 - Education Working Group
 - Have an upcoming webinar on Oct 16. [\[click here for information\]](#)
 - Working on building program goals that line up education and agency goals/mission.
 - Partnering with MAT with coursework development.
 - Started talking about success planning and the need to explore how to do this in state agencies; will create a webinar around this topic in 2026
 - Engagement & Connections Working Group
 - Updated the WG charge; looking to have our WG and other groups (AFWA committees/WG) connect with the broader public.
 - Coffee Talks- no longer have funding; looking to refocus this energy to learning opportunities to connect with the public; partnering with MAT
 - Looking for a new Vice-Chair; soliciting nominations.
 - WORKSHOP: Are we asking the right questions?
 - Are our agencies ready to follow where the public is leading us as to what their needs/wants are?
 - The importance of leveraging partnerships; communication and boots on the ground efforts to make the work an easier lift.
 - Outreach & Marketing Working Group
 - Report on out the [Relevancy Communication Toolkit](#) (2025)
 - Lesson learned include that broadening the messaging has only a positive impact (no negative impact on the traditional audiences).
 - Wildlife Viewing and Nature Tourism Working Group
 - 6th Wildlife Viewing & Nature Tourism Academy WNVTAcademy.com; registration is open; February 2026
 - Spring/Fall webinar series; 3 more left for this year
 - Report on the research on Wildlife Viewing with Disabilities; what are the needs and how can we meet them.
 - We have monthly phone calls; reach out to Chair [Shelly Plante](#) to participate.
 - WORKSHOP: Increasing Access for Wildlife-Related Recreationists with Disabilities: Case Studies From State Wildlife Agencies
 - Joint Working Group: Engagement & Education and Wildlife Diversity and Conservation Funding Committees
 - Refocusing our work from RAWA to State Wildlife Action Plans (SWAPs), species of greatest conservation needs.

- Sharing findings about supporting disabled wildlife viewers - Ashley Dayer, PhD, and Freya McGregor
 - Why does supporting wildlife viewers matter? Wildlife -related recreationists:
 - Wildlife viewers make up 97% (71% ONLY view wildlife)
 - 29% hunters and anglers (3% ONLY hunt of fish; 26% also view wildlife)
 - It's the LAW to support those people who are disabled to have equal opportunity
 - Of wildlife viewers- 39% has a disability that affects accessibility to wildlife viewing
 - Wildlife Viewing research – has been done in 3 phases [\[link to research\]](#)
 - Recommendations from the focus groups
 - Provide **detailed accessibility information** for all programs and trails
 - **Go above the guidelines** to improve accessibility at wildlife viewing locations
 - Actively **improve inclusion** in wildlife viewing programs
 - Provide **ongoing training** to all staff and volunteers
 - Secure **funding** to support these actions
 - **Collaborate** widely when implementing
 - Phase 4 Case Studies Research [research currently underway]
 - **Backgrounds:** state agencies are already doing great work to increase accessibility and inclusion for disabled wildlife viewers
 - **Problem:** other states don't know what these projects look like, or how to implement similar projects in their state
 - **Idea:** develop detailed case study reports and share them with states do:
 - We can understand why they were successful, and
 - States don't have to reinvent the wheel
 - Full case study review will be available early next year; plan to present during the 2026 North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference, March 2026.
 - Webinars around these case studies on these case studies will be happening in 2026. You can sign up to learn when the webinars will be taking place; sign up for email updates → [\[click here to sign up to learn more\]](#).

■ [Wildlife Viewing Toolkit Website: Report and Checklists](#)

- Association for Conservation Information (ACI): Where Outdoor Communicators Connect – Micah Holmes (OK)
 - We have a new website www.aci-net.org
 - Next ACI conference in Oklahoma, July 2026; scholarships available for first-timers
 - There is a yearly prestigious awards contest as well.
 - We are looking for speakers for the 2026 conference; please feel free to recommend or volunteer
- Discussion: Review Annual Work Plan and Future Work of the Committee
 - Results of a survey that went out the our email list to see what our group is hoping to get out of our committee:
 - One of the top items was practical application of AI.
 - Offering a 3-part series of how to use AI tools for Conservation Outreach.
 - [\[Download flyer\]](#).
 - Discussion for future webinar possibilities:
 - Succession planning
 - Onboarding

- Hiring process (to address the fear of meeting the people where they are at--- people aren't doing this out of fear → hire someone who can fill that role)
- Training employees on all levels in developing partnerships
- Communication around SWAPs as they are being revised and should be published in 2026
- Communication around the National Survey (report coming out in 2028) → have time to strategize how to best relay that information.

■ “Lightning” rounds (5 minutes each)

- Project WILD is offering some new online courses: 1) ticks, 2) mosquitos
- Project WILD launched 3 courses 1) one health 2), wildlife crossings, and 3) human dimensions.
- AZ: OHV and trauma centers have partnered to do train the trainer on OHV safety training
- Louisiana: expanding on our shooting sports and hunter education; creating outreach on non-consumptive recreation (building from the ground up)
- AZ: streaming service for wildlife camera is coming back online→ very popular
- ID: pocket viewing guides a huge success → stickers in there are very popular; working to develop products that all people want
- AR: connecting programs with schools → will present in an upcoming webinar as well as at the NA Conference 2026
- Project WILD: Annual Project WILD Conference in Spring 2026 in Arizona
- Project WILD: schoolyard habitat sites guide is now available on the Project WILD website: www.fishwildlife.org/projectwild
- FL: new program being launched → [Everglades Wildlife Watch](#)
- FL: launching a new Wildlife Viewer Survey
- Maine: amplifying state parks as an education opportunity to the public → connecting to the departments larger mission; Outdoor Skills Days → mix of traditional and non-traditional activities; launched Maine Outdoors App to streamline licensing and connect non-traditional users to agency offerings; developing wildlife viewing landing page on the department website; launched Nature Quest program; doing more collaborative social media posts with other agencies within and outside of Maine; working to be more transparent about funding.
- TX: working with story tellers with a number of anniversary events/programs happening in 2026
- OK: have just started charging for our public education events; in second year of employee R3 program;
- TX: going through a strategic planning process for our TX Master Naturalist Program

■ Other Business

■ Adjourn