

WILDLIFE VIEWING AND NATURE TOURISM WORKING GROUP

Chair: Shelly Plante

Wednesday, September 24, 2025

8:00am – 10:00am

Attendees = 27

Agenda

Call to Order/Review Agenda

- Round robin with name/agency/ title

Work Plan Review

- No edits

6th Wildlife Viewing and Nature Tourism Academy- February 16-20, 2026, in Seattle, Washington - www.wvntacademy.com

- Registration is open- early bird deadline Nov 30, 2025
- Full week of training, learning, networking and information sharing
- Only allow up to 150 registrants to keep meeting small and allow valuable networking and information sharing opportunities.
- The full detailed agenda for the Academy is on [the website](#).
- Enriching field experiences included with registration

Webinar Series

- Created based on surveys of what people want to see turned into webinars from the Academy.
- Finished Spring webinar series
- Upcoming Fall Series include 3 series
 - Expanding the Roost: exploration in community-based engagement through the lens of bat conservation
 - Handing over the controls: New applications of wildlife viewing cams can more actively engage your audience
 - Living with black bears: A collaborative Outreach Project
- All webinars posted to the AFWA YouTube channel under the [WVNT Playlist](#)

Relevancy for Wildlife & Tourism [[Relevancy Campaign Results](#)] – Matt Harlow, DJ Case & Associates

- This is more like a formula instead of a campaign (how it differs from the Making it Last campaign)
- Target Audience (for this project)
 - Traditions
 - Already have a relationship with agency
 - Relevancy Audience
 - Everyone else
- AVOID controversial topics (state specific)
- BROADEN the message!
 - Tweak your traditional messaging to reach a larger audience
 - When you do this → found NO NEGATIVE impact on traditional audience
 - EX: [narrow message] Big brown bats → bats eat lots of insects → [broad message] View the bats at ABC Cave

- EX: St. Stephen Fish Lift [narrow message] → Crucial breeding waters for striped bass → view the fish using the lift to reach breeding waters [broad message].
- Make a BUTTON for people to click on to get people to more information on the broader message (ie. Click here to view the wildlife camera; ie. Explore your next trail; ie. Get Involved etc)
- Make your agency name BIG so people can link the broader name to your agency.
 - NAME in WORDS need to be big; logo does not need to be big → make big enough so people recognize the shape of the logo to make the connection
- IMAGES very important
 - High quality
 - Smiling people
 - Room for other elements (to put text, logo, button...)
- Make COPY simple
 - Make the agency OBVIOUS
 - Short, bulleted points
 - Tell a 'complete' story
 - SIMPLE word choice
- AVOID:
 - Acronyms
 - Management (of species....)
 - Birding – use bird watching
- BUTTON- have a button
 - Make it look like a button
 - Text on button with a hand pointing to click on button
 - Link should continue & expand the experience

Multi-State Conservation Grant Update – Increasing access for wildlife-related recreationists with disabilities: Case studies from state wildlife agencies– Ashley Dayer, PhD, and Freya McGregor, The Dayer Lab, Virginia Tech

- Why does supporting wildlife viewers matter? Wildlife -related recreationists:
 - Wildlife viewers make up 97% of all wildlife-related recreationists (71% ONLY view wildlife)
 - 29% hunters and anglers (3% ONLY hunt of fish; 26% also view wildlife)
 - It's the LAW to support people who are disabled to have equal opportunity
- Of wildlife viewers- 39% have 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 so:
 - 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 Wildlife Viewing and Nature Tourism Academy, February 2026, and possibly at the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference, March 2026.
- Webinars 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](#)

Ongoing communication tools

- Monthly working group calls- email shelly.plante@tpwd.texas.gov to be added to this list
 - Virtual meetings the 3rd Wednesday of every month
- Join FB group → contact Shelly Plante at shelly.plante@tpwd.texas.gov or look up “[Wildlife Viewing and Nature Tourism Working Group](#)” and answer questions to join)
- Check out the WVNT Working Group page on the AFWA Website [\[click here to visit website\]](#).

WVNT Updates from States/Organizations – Roundtable Discussion

- Idaho- trying to engage the public about SWAP; using a small wildlife viewing guide on various topics (bats, owls, ungulates, etc.) that gets handed out to everyone, including hunter education participants (Ungulate Guide); stickers inside each of the guides that are a big hit & also produce sticker sheets for kids (so they don’t take (and not use) the full guides).
- STICKERS are a huge selling point and success in multiple states
- Florida: Updating birding trails and categorizing them to meet the needs of the public
- NC: updated the agency website to have detailed information/interactive website for bird watching trails.
- TX: working with story tellers to celebrate the 30th anniversary of birding programs (and other anniversary programs) all happening in 2026.
- FL: bringing the Florida Wild Quest back in 2026
- NE: increasing awareness for funding for upkeep a biking trail; including information about the trail, biodiversity of animals, connecting to communities the wildlife and recreational opportunities.