



ASSOCIATION of
FISH & WILDLIFE
AGENCIES

Leadership & Professional Development Committee

Chair: David Golden (NJ) Vice Chair: Mark Tisa (MA)

September 23, 2025 10:15am-12:15pm

Regional Leadership Efforts

Elena Takaki (AFWA-MAT Director of Professional Development & Conservation Education)

Western Conservation Leadership Development Program (WCLDP): Ali Duvall, Program Manager

- Created 2020: Has engaged more than 200 western conservationists
- Immersive course ***Fundamentals of Western Conservation Leadership: Through the Looking Glass*** now launching Cohort 5. Focus: Adaptive leadership, systems thinking, cross-sector collaboration; Foster resilience skills & practices to address workplace stress, overwhelm, conflict. Unlike NCLI, utilizes team challenges instead of individual challenges. Course delivers AL competencies to support NCLI grads working together on conservation challenges across regions & states. Also offer a curriculum for peer coaches.
- In 2025, WCLDP also launched two short courses, a ***Resilient Leadership: A Training in Emotional Intelligence and Resiliency Skills for Western Conservation Professionals*** (April) and ***Expand Your Leadership Potential in a Changing Environment*** (Sept)
- WCLDP alumni & coaches meet quarterly to build relationships, practice skills & collaborate
- Executive Board engagement: Oversees & supports WCLDP with financial & technical support & other critical guidance. Advisory Council provides broad western perspectives, serves as champions, and helps Board & Staff stay connected to priority issues, needs & key partners.
- WCLDP seeks to complement & work together with NCLI and other leadership development programs supported by AFWA. Contact Ali Duvall, Program Manager: aliduvall@ecoalliancesforchange.com or 406-370-5047; www.westernconservationldp.com

Southeast Conservation Leadership Program (SECLP): (Lead: Angela Larsen-Gray)

- Engaged AFWA MAT Team for guidance in developing a program structure and proposal. Submitting for grant for SECLP for Fall 2026, but will proceed regardless due to self-sustaining funding structure.
- 3-day intensive structure
- Contact Angela Larsen-Gray for more info: alarsen-gray@ncasi.org

Northeast Conservation Leadership Program (NECLP): (Leads: Elena Takaki & Julie Dieguez)

- Pilot regional program sponsored by NEAFWA, managed by AFWA-MAT. Goal of continuing annually and replication in other regions

- Based on NCLI format but shorter duration; Utilizing individual challenges but peer groups will work through challenges together as well with peer coach guidance
- Will feature two residencies @ \$6K/Fellow tuition
 - Fall Residency: October 5-10 NCTC, WV
 - Spring Residency: March 10-13 Hudson Farms, NJ
- 25 Fellows from 10 states & DC (4 USFWS)
- Contact: Elena Takaki etakaki@fishwildlife.org ; Julie Dieguez jdieguez@fishwildlife.org

Midwest: (Interested in a regional program; staying informed of how NECLP pilot performs)

Comments:

- (Ann F) Need consistency in funding and who should attend (Elena T): Want consistency in how these programs run. Will finesse structure based on feedback as these programs emerge. Funding: NCLI no longer federally funded: Gives NCLI autonomy financially & with curriculum development, but challenging to get sponsors to keep costs low.

National Conservation Leadership Institute (NCLI) Update (Elena Takaki, AFWA MAT)

- Cohort 19: 37 Fellows. Residencies:
 - 6 day Fall Residency Oct 19-26, 2025 at NCTC in Shepherdstown, WV
 - 3 day virtual Residency January 2026
 - 6 day Spring Residency June 7-13, 2026 at NCTC in Shepherdstown, WV
- Cohort 18 completed the program with a 5-day Spring Residency in-person at NCTC, WV

American Fisheries Society (Jeff Kopaska)

- Aiming to compile an online list of available Professional Development opportunities available across nation to provide training opportunities (beyond just leadership training)
- Plan to contact state chapters of AWS, TWS, and beyond to develop an online list of courses instructors could provide widely. Put in nationwide grant to work with biologists from various states to provide foundational training to help them deal with public outreach/relations, science communication, dealing with media, etc.

Developing Leaders in Wildlife Management: Leon Corbett (FL FWCC) & Ann Forstchen (WMI)

- (Leon C., Division of Habitat & Species Conservation within FWCC) Reviewed supervisor status within Division: 30 are in first year as brand new supervisors; 46% in yrs 1-5. This equates to ¾ of supervisors are new. Less mentors available. Collaborating with Ann F., Wildlife Management Institute to focus on: Better employee engagement, more guidance for less experienced supervisors. Conducted meeting with regional supervisors about what soft skills needed, especially communication skills for mid-level managers. “Thinking Like a Manager” (THAM) model – situational analysis tool to work through complex challenges. *Build relationships before you build partnerships.*
- (Ann C., WMI) Initial approach was to involve and incorporate social science; now more of a focus on how to work through the thinking process to approach a particular issue. Providing foundational elements (have done so with 12 agencies so far). Developed 2006, now using in very different applications Refreshers on foundational elements for commissioners and senior leadership team members. Cohort 8, over 100 people but have lost at least half (no longer employed).

- Both Leon & Ann open to discuss with anyone interested. Willing to share tools and info on situational analysis model.

Comments: (Elena T.) Goal of AFWA-MAT to work with HR & Training Coordinators to provide opportunity for networking & sharing (method TBD) – many providing excellent foundational, “soft skills” trainings and supervisory development pathways, but no current opportunity to network or share. (Dave G.) Also, internal agency trainings may not be sufficient and more opportunities would be valuable.

Center for Wildlife Studies: Jack Hopkins President & CEO

- Target variety of people who need real skills, specialized training (beyond leadership skills) to acquire and advance in jobs.
- 60 different courses in Applied Quantitative Ecology, GIS, Conservation Planning, Research & Mgt Methods. Grad level classes: Some undergrads take to gain credit; Some people taking for credit, but many take for skills.
- Trained 2200 learners globally 2020-2024. Provided training in every state & Canada. Typical participants: 1) Those in jobs; 2) Those in schools & academia; 3) Learners looking for job in this field (wildlife, fisheries, etc.)- new employment or those in transition (“tweeners” – people between jobs, careers). 63% female 35% male. 195 students from 60 colleges & universities for academic credit. 220 agencies/organizations.
- Work with Ecological Society of America and TWS*
- Course format: Basic, Standard, Premium models:
 - Certificate of Course Completion
 - Microcredentials: Digital Badges, show you have this skill
 - Professional Certificate Programs: Min. 12 graduate level credits; May include an optional applied project (1-3 credits per term); Self-paced or meet in person; Consistent participation & guidance from an instructor; Each course concludes w/final exam or project (8 to pass); Courses can be used for academic credit at your institution; Use courses to certify as an ecologist at any level with ESA and TWS*
- New Addition: Project Mgt for the Biological Sciences Course
- By end of 2025 100 full scholarships have been provided valued at \$50K

Conservation Leaders for Tomorrow Program: Dave Windsor, Director

- October 20th anniversary
- 2025-26 workshop season: 8 in-person workshops & 2 online cohorts scheduled starting in November 2025 with online cohorts and ending in March 2026 with our last workshop. To date 24 State and 2 Federal agencies have confirmed their participation.
- Workshop registrations begin 9/4/25, filed on a first-come-first-serve basis. Online cohort registrations start 9/10. Agencies that may have missed the initial participation sign-up are always welcome to participate. Workshop availability options may be limited but late sign-ups can usually be accommodated with the flexibility we have at most of our venues.
- For more info: Contact Dave Windsor at dave@clft.org

Comments: (Dave G.) NJ offers CLFT course to familiarize employees with culture & management value of hunting community. Very valuable. \$3300/wk - everything covered incl travel (excellent instructors, food, etc.)

International Hunter Ed Association: Megan Fedrick, Director of Operations

- IHEA Leadership Academy: Developing the Next Generation of Leaders in Hunter Education: Provide Hunter Education Professionals with skills to lead effective hunter ed programs. Program will be cohort based and will include both webinars and in-person training (3-day in person).
- Program Structure: Training starts with a session at the 2026 conference ---> 2 webinars following the initial session ---> 3-day in person academy (may move west to east each year) ---> IHEA Sourcing locations & inviting speakers --> Academy certificates presented to Cohort 1 at 2027 conference
- Leadership Academy Serves: Hunter Education Admins, Hunter Education Staff, Shooting Sports Coordinators, Range Coordinator, NASP Coordinators, R3 Practitioners
- Current Topics: IHEA National Services, Leadership Development, Available Resources (AFWA, NGOs, Industry Partners), Federal Grant Systems, Instructor Recruitment & Development Strategies, Edutech (Educational Technology Applications)
- In-Person Training Component: Classroom Presentations; Guest Speakers-Industry, Education & Leadership; Half-day team building excursion; Final day panel discussion, feedback & certificates
- Next Steps: Development of Certified Hunter Ed Professional Program w/ credits accrued by attending: Webinars, Conference Workshops/Assigned Sessions, Completing IHEA Online Courses, Attending the ILA

AFWA-Management Assistance Team (MAT) Updates: Elena Takaki (AFWA, MAT)

- Courses Open for Registration Now: www.matlearning.org
 - Rooted to Rise: Leading in Wild Times (10/1/25)
 - Generations at Work: Growing Stronger Together in Conservation (10/21/25)
 - AI for Conservation Leaders (10/30/25)
 - Transforming Archery, Transforming Systems: Adaptive Leadership in Action (11/5/25)
 - Chaordic Leadership: Leading in the Space Between Chaos & Order on (11/12/25)
 - Beyond Resolution: Conflict Transformation for Collaborative Teams (11/18/25)
 - Your Leadership Story: Discover It, Shape It, Share It (12/2/25)
 - Leadership Launchpad (10/27-10/31/25)

End of Meeting Comments: (Scott Anderson) Individual vs Group Challenge Approach in Leadership Development programs – worth debate? (Gina Krusinski): NCLI Model: Individual challenges for first 12 yrs of program; Moved to group “global” project approach but received some agency pushback due to need for clarified communication so moved back to individual approach. (Dave G) Should be more focused on process than individual challenge itself. Concern about group challenge approach - individual challenge allows them to work to solve problems in a safe space without pressure of others trying to do same things in group setting – advise first do individual challenge THEN move on to group challenge working together (Hybrid model). (Lynn Quattro) Group may be a disadvantage to individuals who fade into background in group setting.