



WILDLIFE VIEWING AND NATURE TOURISM WORKING GROUP

Chair: Shelly Plante (TX)

Vice Chair: Deniz Aygen (ID)

Wednesday, September 16, 2026

10:15am – 12:15pm

Agenda

- 10:15am Call to Order/Review Agenda/Work Plan Review
- Round table introductions
 - Review of Working Group charge; opened for discussion for any suggested edits; no changes to the plan as presented
- 10:20am Multi-State Conservation Grant Update – [Increasing access for wildlife-related recreationists with disabilities: Case studies from state wildlife agencies](#) – Shelly Plante, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (on behalf of Ashley Dayer, PhD, and Freya McGregor, The Dayer Lab, Virginia Tech)
- Collaborating with Virginia Tech since 2019. Highlights from Phase 1, Phase 2, and phase 3.
 - Current work 2025-26 case study project
 - Included site visits, photos, and in-depth interview with staff and disabled participants, found supporting resources.
 - How many wildlife viewers have disabilities? 39%
 - Access and inclusion is federal law
 - **Case study:** effective and ongoing engagement with the disability community
 - **Case study:** Accessible wildlife viewing location
 - **Case study:** Adaptive loaner equipment program
 - **Case study:** Inclusive wildlife viewing program
 - Recordings, transcripts, reports and handouts are now available. Check them out at <https://viewing.fishwildlife.vt.edu/disabled-wildlife-viewers>
- 10:25am WVNT Working Group-North American Waterfowl Management Plan Human Dimensions and Public Engagement Team: Engaging Birdwatchers, Wildlife Viewers, and Others in Conservation Action for Waterfowl and Wetlands through Wetland Recreation – Deniz Aygen, Idaho Fish and Game
- Four states (VA, MI, CA, and AZ) will complete a six-part wetland and conservation program.
 - They will have six experiences delivered monthly or bimonthly that will focus on new wetland/waterfowl experiences, skill and knowledge building, emotional connection, and conservation behavior change.

- Will be assessed prior (baseline) and then assessed after 6 months to see evaluate the impact of the program.
- Will build a program model that other states can follow in the future.

10:30am Key Wildlife Watching Findings from the 2025 National Participation Tracker – Kristy Griffith, NORC at the University of Chicago

- Goals: 1- provide more frequent estimates; 2- New and more detailed data; 3- Valuable takeaways for practitioners.
- Help with identifying where priority areas may be and where efforts need to focus on in the future.
- 32K interview with adults 18 and older
- Tracker measures:
 - Participations
 - First-time participation
 - Days participating
 - Trips taken
- Among Americans age 16 and older, 59.2% watch wildlife in 2025 compared to 57.2%
- Most started wildlife-watching before turning 18 and were introduced by a parent or started on their own.
- Common motivators were the ability to spend time outdoors and having fun. Lack of time and distance were the barriers most commonly cited
- Among those who watched wildlife on trips in 2025 most observed on state lands, private property or by the water.
- Birds were the most common wildlife observed. Songbirds and birds of prey were the most commonly observed at home and on trips
- Roughly half of those who watched wildlife or birds in 2025 identified themselves as wildlife-watchers or birders some or a lot.
- Most wildlife watchers did not participate in any kind of formal wildlife-watching clubs or organized activities.
- A quarter of people who have not previously volunteered to teach people about wildlife watching are interested in doing so
- Between 5-10% who did not watch wildlife or birdwatch last year, but have before, are interested in resuming
- The value of this data will grow as additional years of data becomes available
 - Consistent measurement will strengthen our understanding of trends
- Learn more at <https://go.norc.org/outdoor-tracker>

11:00am Strategies for Connecting with Broader Audiences – Jordan Sanford, Pennsylvania Game and Fish Department

- Diversifying partnerships
- Improving educational resources
- Digital campaigns
- Non-traditional events

Partnership highlights: PA on Display

- 67 locations across PA (rest areas, turnpike plazas, PA Welcome Centers)
- 3 agency brochures

Partnership Highlights: Free library of Philadelphia

- Provide backpacks, binoculars, etc→ free checkout from library
- Working on putting together an accessible birding backpack (ADA)

Improving Educational Resources

- Hiring more education staff
- Indoor and outdoor classroom experiences
- Professional development opportunities for educators
- Educational kits – available for loan

Pennsylvania Wildlife Kits

- Loanable wildlife kit with PA mammal pelts, skulls, tracks and scat
- Lessons and activity guide included
- Since 2022, have reached approx. 36,489 students and 9,334 adults

Digital campaign: 6 things

- Let wildlife be wild
- Plant native plants
- Install a nestbox
- Create leaf and brush piles for habitat
- Secure food, garbage, and recycle
- Slow the mow

Event Highlights: Philadelphia Flower Show

- 11,800 people visited the PGC booth at event

11:25am

Using Signature Events to Grow Nature Tourism: Lessons from 30 Years of the Great Texas Birding Classic – *Shelly Plante, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department*

- Lesson 1: Determine Funding Structure and Goals
- Lesson 2: Establish How People Participate
 - Adult tournaments
 - Youth Tournaments
 - All Ages Tournaments
- Lesson 3: Identify and coordinate tie-ins to other programs/opportunities
 - Great Texas wildlife trails

Project funding available!

- Conservation grants

Citizen Science Opportunities: eBird Online Checklist submissions

- Lesson 4: Provide Support to Participants
- Lesson 5: Engagement is Key

- le. Try new things, learn from others, and offer opportunities to give feedback
- Lesson 6: Make promotion and prizes personal

Visit Great Texas Birding Classic FB page and website for details

- www.birdingclassic.org
- www.facebook.com/birdingclassic

11:50am 7th Wildlife Viewing and Nature Tourism Academy
February 27-March 3, 2028, in Shepherdstown, WV (National Conservation Training Center)
www.wvntacademy.com

- Request for proposals: out by March 2027
- Registration Opens: August 2027
- Full week of training, learning, networking, and information sharing

11:55am Fall Webinar Series

- Fall/winter webinar schedule

Designing and Leading Inclusive Birding Programs
Date: Thursday, Oct. 8, 12:30-2pm Eastern
Presented by: Freya McGregor, Research Associate, Virginia Tech

Strategies for Connecting with Broader Audiences
Date: Wednesday, Oct. 14, 1-2pm Eastern
Presented by: Jordan Sanford, Wildlife Outreach Coordinator, Pennsylvania Game Commission

Trailblazing with Data (Beginner Wildlife Viewers)
Date: Tuesday, Nov. 10, 1-2pm Eastern
Presented by: Samantha Adams, Wildlife Exploration Subsection Leader, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

Swifties: Awe, Storytelling & Wildlife Viewing
Date: Wednesday, Dec. 9, 1-2pm Eastern
Presented by: Heather Feeler, Communications Branch Chief, Missouri Department of Conservation

A New Window into Wildlife Viewing
Date: Wednesday, Jan. 13, 1-2pm Eastern
Presented by: Deniz Aygen, Wildlife Viewing Biologist, Idaho Department of Fish and Game

Becoming Bear Aware
Date: Wednesday, Feb. 10, 1-2pm Eastern
Presented by: Nicole Jordan, Communication Specialist, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Kara Raftery, Communications and HR Specialist, City of Leavenworth

Everglades Wildlife Watch – Connecting Communities and Conservation Online and in the Field

Date: Wednesday, March 10, 1-2pm Eastern
Presented by: Graysen Boehning, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation
Commission

The Empathy Movement: Applying Lessons Learned

Date: Wednesday, April 14, 1-2pm Eastern
Presented by: Emily Bernhardt, Empathy Network Strategist, Woodland Park
Zoo

12:00:pm WVNT Updates from States/Organizations – Roundtable Discussion
Come prepared to share any milestones, successes, innovative projects, or
questions your organization wants to share or discuss with colleagues

Ongoing communication tools

Webinars, Facebook Group, Monthly Calls

- Email shelly.plante@tpwd.texas.gov and ask to be added to meeting
invites and/or webinar/academy email list
- Virtual meetings meet the 3rd Wednesday of every month, 2-3:30pm
Eastern
- Academy- every other year; next on in 2028

12:15pm Adjourn