



American Wilderness Leadership School, Making A Unique Impact

Article and Images by Leaha Wirth

Unequivocally, a critical objective for our hunting future and perpetuation of the sport is recruitment and retention. We talk about it every year at the IHEA Convention, and all organizations in the industry energize new theories and practices around getting-keeping people hunting. The American Wilderness Leadership School (AWLS), which I recently had the privilege to attend, has a unique model that works.

Backed by the SCI Foundation, AWLS is packed with unbelievable activities in an even more amazing setting in Wyoming. Offering survival, shooting, and conservation classes amongst a plethora of other outdoor activities, attendees not only learn about

things like game management, firearm safety, marksmanship skills, and stream ecology, but can also walk away with college credits and NASP or NRA First Steps Certifications. Some say it even changed their lives.

AWLS single purpose is to present the science of conservation and the positive role of hunting to people that may not otherwise think of hunting as positive, or happen to be teaching outdoor programs that need some energy injected into them. Their theory is interesting—bring in educators to learn about ecology and hunting. When I say educators, I mean public school science and math teachers, natural resource and health science instructors, even YMCA Program Directors.

Mary Spence (pictured below), former Coast Guard officer and environmental science teacher, had a lot to say about the impact AWLS had on her. “When I returned to Tampa, I was able to put my training to use right away...when we passed our deer pen, I had the opportunity to discuss the role of hunting in wildlife management and explain the term ‘carrying capacity’.” Mary teaches over 1,600 sixth graders every year and volunteers for Boy and Girl Scouts of America. “They will all have a piece of AWLS in their education.”

In addition to taking the notion of positive hunting to teachers, AWLS also has an agreement with the Salvation Army. They bring in their summer camp instructors and pastors presenting them

again, with ways that they can get kids outside and teach them about the benefits of ecology and hunting. The long-term goal of this program is to reach 700,000 students annually, and every single one of these camp leaders took NASP qualification away and further inquired about becoming certified hunter education instructors. Carrie and Michael Dixon run a Salvation Army summer camp in inner city Kansas City, MO. They were so grateful for AWLS and the actual on-the-ground exercises it gave them for the kids that they mentor. “We really struggle with teaching ethics. The hunting and shooting tools that we are taking away from AWLS have given us a clear way to communicate ethics.”

In general, the unequivocal expertise of the instructors that participate all summer in AWLS gives these attendees an experience that arguably no other outdoor

Diane Lueck (right), BOW Instructor and University of Wisconsin professor, gives Florida teacher, Mary Spence shotgun shooting instruction.



conservation/hunting program can match. And it gives them REAL TOOLS to keep students engaged and learning about the outdoors. It offers these teachers and camp leaders ways to talk about conservation and the positive effects of hunting not just once in a quick learning setting, but daily, and even yearly to the same student—changing the way our children think about the outdoors and game management.

I strongly encourage you to consider taking the course or even help them out with Hunter Education sessions if you can break away for the summer. All the students I met were very interested in becoming certified hunter education instructors. Also, adding real-life game management activities to your classroom can further engage and make your Hunter Education class interesting and more memorable for your students and our future wildlife conservation experts and hunters. We can never teach enough about integrity, character, ethics, balance in nature, and the outdoors to our children. Thank you AWLS. Your course is truly amazing. ■



Conservation Education And Shooting Sports Instructors Needed

Each summer the American Wilderness Leadership School (AWLS) in Jackson, Wyoming introduces educators to principles of conservation and the positive role of hunting and to shooting sports.

AWLS instructors are university professors, professionals in the field of conservation, K-12 science teachers, Project Wild trainers, shooting sports instructors and coaches, trainers in National Archery in the Schools and graduates of the AWLS program.

The AWLS core curriculum is the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. Educators experience a variety of learning experiences in

the indoor and outdoor classrooms and through field trips to meet with professionals working in wildlife and land management positions.

Sponsorships to attend AWLS as an educator or as a high school student are available. AWLS has six educator workshop sessions and one high school student session.

If you have an interest in being an instructor at the American Wilderness Leadership School Summer 2012 contact Sue Hankner, SCIF Director of Education to learn more about AWLS programs and its staff. AWLS is searching to fill one available 2012 instructor position. ■