

Introduction

The National and Arkansas 4-H Wildlife Habitat Education Program is designed to teach youth about the fundamentals of wildlife management. Although these are competitive events, their primary function is education. Natural resource management is learned through participation in the contest and the associated field trips, practice sessions and demonstrations. Additional benefits come from the development of leadership capabilities and meeting youth and wildlife professionals from across the state and nation.

The Arkansas 4-H Wildlife Habitat Education Program conducts a contest and practice session each year. Contests are held at various locations throughout the state. Awards are given to Junior and Senior competitors in individual and team events. All contestants who compete, regardless of whether they are on a team, are eligible to receive awards and recognition in the competition for individuals. Contestants compete in four wildlife activities:

WHEP Activity	Work on the Activity...
I. Wildlife Identification	Independently
II. Wildlife Foods and Concepts	Independently
III. Interpreting Wildlife Habitat from Aerial Photos	Independently
IV. On Site Recommendation of Wildlife Management Practices	As a team

Junior contestants work independently on Activities I, II, and III. Juniors work as a team for Activity IV. Teams are comprised of three or four members from one county. If there are not enough members from their county to compete as a team, Junior contestants will compete as individuals only.

The goal of the Arkansas 4-H Wildlife Habitat Education Program is to provide the opportunity for 4-H'ers from all counties to develop an appreciation for the need and importance of conserving natural resources for quality living and to acquire information and understanding of practical wildlife management skills.

The Arkansas 4-H Wildlife Habitat Education Program is designed to teach youth about the fundamentals of wildlife science and management. Upon completing the program, 4-H youth will be able to:

- Identify common wildlife by picture, track, skull, fur, behavior, habitat or other unique characteristic.
- Identify common wildlife foods of wildlife species.
- Understand and apply wildlife concepts when discussing wildlife management.
- Interpret aerial photographs and judge its quality as wildlife habitat.
- Prescribe wildlife management practices.
- Develop a wildlife management plan.

In addition, the contest encourages and promotes a better understanding of wildlife for 4-H members, volunteer leaders, extension agents and cooperating natural resource professionals. Preparation for the contest (1) acquaints 4-H members with multiple benefits provided by wildlife habitat management, such as forest products, water quality, forage and outdoor recreation; (2) helps 4-H members understand the techniques of enhancing wildlife habitat; (3) develops the ability of 4-H members to work together toward a common goal; (4) provides wildlife habitat

training for future landowners, administrators, and planners who are not professional land managers; and (5) provides career education for future wildlife biologists and managers.

About The Handbook

A number of assumptions and simplifications have been made to make the handbook more understandable for purposes of the Arkansas 4-H Wildlife Habitat Education Program. In actual management cases, trained and experienced professionals can assist landowners in making proper decisions to meet their goals and objectives, which may differ from what is found in this handbook. If a wildlife professional helps train an Arkansas wildlife team, be aware that they may say something that differs from this handbook, especially if they are not familiar with the contest or its content. Regardless, the handbook will be the text from which the contestants are evaluated. **The Arkansas Contest Handbook is the “final word” for scoring decisions.**

Nationally, the 4-H Wildlife Habitat Education Program was developed so 4-H'ers throughout the country would use the same study materials. We have attempted to keep this handbook as close to the national manual as possible, while tailoring its content towards issues and circumstances germane to the state of Arkansas. We deleted content from the national manual that was not relevant to Arkansas, and added information that will improve understanding of Arkansas wildlife as well as help the winning state Arkansas team compete more effectively in the national contest. For purposes of the Arkansas contest, this handbook is the guide that judges will follow for grading and scoring the contest. Studying its contents is the first step toward developing a winning individual or team! Beyond the contest, it is our hope that this handbook will enable coaches and contestants to learn about and apply beneficial land management practices for Arkansas wildlife.

For convenience, the handbook is divided into sections, each containing resource materials used to prepare for the competitive activity. Each activity reflects a set of skills that are like building blocks in helping participants prepare for the capstone activity – writing a wildlife management plan.

Before making recommendations on habitat management, one must know all possible information about the life requirements of the specific animal(s) for which the area is being managed. Wildlife Identification and General Species Knowledge sections help participants learn the life requirements of the wildlife species in the contest.

The manager must be able to inventory and evaluate the present condition of the habitat and explain the condition to landowners. The aerial photography information is designed to develop an understanding of this inventory and evaluation process.

Once the inventory is complete, the manager decides which management practices can be applied to improve the habitat for specific wildlife species. The on-site management recommendation activity gives the participant some experience with this decision-making process.

Finally, so that others can clearly understand the proposed management decisions, the wildlife manager must explain the decisions on paper and locate them on aerial photos or some other type of map. The written management plan activities encourage participants to explain and illustrate their decisions so that others can understand and carry out the recommendations.

How to Use the Handbook

Leaders and participants should first learn the wildlife habitat concepts and terms then locate and mark the materials that are pertinent to the region(s) they are studying. The basic steps are:

1. Determine which region(s) to use. This may be where participants live or other areas where county or state contests are going to be held. Region descriptions, found in the Regions section, can be used when making this decision.
2. Determine which wildlife species will be used. A list of recommended species accompanies the description of each region. There are many field guides and Web sites that provide photos of the applicable wildlife species. Students should learn to identify species from many different sources. They should be prepared to identify the male, female, juvenile and adult of a species.
3. Locate and mark the selected species in the Wildlife Species section of the handbook. Read the species information and identify the recommended habitat management practices.
4. Locate and mark the appropriate management practices in the Wildlife Management Practices section. Please note that all wildlife management practices listed in the manual are not necessarily used for all regions.
5. Information from the Species section will be used on the General Knowledge section of the National Contest. Because wildlife foods are so important to the success of a management program we have included basic definitions of food groups used in WHEP. These definitions can be part of the General Knowledge Test. Species to be studied for the state contest are those listed for the region designated for each year's contest.

Preparing for Contests

This handbook is a tool for learning about wildlife habitat management. It also provides information about the contest and study materials. The handbook is the resource from which the contest is developed. First-time participants are oftentimes overwhelmed by the volume of study material provided in this handbook. However, only a portion of the study guide is used each year. One region is selected and announced before the contest annually. The contest moves to different locations throughout the state to broaden contestants' understanding and view different habitats. Every year, the Wildlife ID activity uses species from the urban region and one other. Participants focus their study on a maximum of 37 species for Wildlife ID. The remainder of the contest focuses on species within the announced region which is no more than 20 species.

Each year, a contest site will be selected in one of the five regions represented in Arkansas. This region will be announced before the contest occurs. Study the characteristics of the selected region for clues about the types of wildlife management practices which may be appropriate at the contest site. If possible, find a site that contains these characteristics to practice for the contest.

Each of the contest activities builds upon the next. The culminating activity is the written wildlife management plan and oral defense. Recognizing habitat needs of wildlife species is the

building block for writing a good plan. Once habitat deficiencies are identified, understanding various wildlife management practices and their application is important. The mark of a winning team is being able to write and speak fluently using wildlife concepts and terminology in a meaningful way.

Participants should be able to understand the concepts and terms in the handbook, which are located in Activity II: General Wildlife Knowledge. Leaders should explain the concepts when needed and provide local examples to clarify any misunderstandings. This section is important because the activities require understanding these concepts and terms. Participants should use these terms and concepts in their written and oral presentations at the contest.

Once the concepts are understood, the leader should review the appropriate regional information with the participants. Leaders have the flexibility to use any of the information about regions that they feel are appropriate. Participants and leaders should review plant succession processes, special habitats such as riparian, common plants, wildlife species and management practices. Specific information about habitat requirements and recommended management practices are found in the Wildlife Identification section where wildlife species are listed in alphabetical order by the accepted common name. Whenever possible participants should go to the field and find examples of the principles and practices found in these sections. Leaders can use “quiz bowls” and question/answer sessions to measure learning.

Following the above exercises, leaders can introduce participants to the various activities found in the handbook. Conducting practice sessions using aerial photographs and outdoor sites will be helpful. Start with only two or three wildlife species, adding more as participants become more knowledgeable. Obtain several aerial photographs, preferably with a scale of 8 inches equal to 1 mile, and discuss their features. Explain to participants how these features are important to wildlife. Identify the habitat requirements that are available for the animals selected. Then ask participants to identify what needs are missing.

One of the best approaches when starting a team is to attend the annual practice session. Training is provided to help 4-H'ers and their coaches learn wildlife information and basic skills needed to successfully compete in the contest. If you have not participated in WHEP before, attending the introductory sessions is a good start.

Following is a list of web sites having e-mail, snail mail, and telephone information on agency personnel who work with wildlife on private lands and education programs. Some have field offices in your area. Contact them for assistance when practicing and preparing for this contest. However, be aware that these wildlife professionals may say something that differs from this handbook, especially if they are not familiar with the contest or its content. Regardless, the handbook will be the text (i.e., the final word) from which the contestants are evaluated.

- Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, www.agfc.com
- Arkansas Forestry Commission, www.forestry.state.ar.us
- Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission, www.naturalheritage.com
- Audubon Arkansas, www.ar.audubon.org
- Natural Resource Conservation Service, www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov
- The Nature Conservancy – Arkansas Chapter, www.nature.org/
- United States Fish and Wildlife Service, www.fws.gov
- University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service, www.uaex.edu