

INTRODUCTION

The Wildlife Habitat Education Program (WHEP) is a 4-H and Future Farmers of America (FFA) natural resource youth program designed to teach youth about wildlife and fisheries management.

Using a science-based manual, participants will

1. Learn wildlife terms and concepts.
2. Learn about wildlife habitat.
3. Learn how to judge the quality of wildlife habitat.
4. Learn about wildlife habitat management practices.
5. Learn about wildlife damage management.

This guide is designed to help coaches understand the different parts of the program and provide some direction for coaching a team. The national contest consists of the following activities.

Activity I: On-Site Recommendation of Wildlife Management Practices (WMPs)

Activity II-A: Written Wildlife Management Plan

Activity II-B: Oral Defense

Activity III: General Wildlife Knowledge

Activity IV: Wildlife Identification

There are a total of 16 eco-regions included in the WHEP manual. The national invitational is hosted by a different state each year, and the region for the contest varies with each location (Figure 1). The WHEP national committee announces the site and region in the spring prior to each national contest.



Figure 1. National WHEP Invitational participants head to the contest site to evaluate habitat for development of their team management plan.

STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL COACHING

Coaching should be fun and educational for you and the participants.

First, read and comprehend the concepts and terms presented in the manual. Also, read and understand the terms in the glossary. Flash cards are useful for studying each species' diet and which management practice is appropriate for each species. Two sets of flash cards are recommended for studying species' food and wildlife management practices. Flash cards may be organized as follows:

- Species on one side, diet on the other
- Species on one side, wildlife management practices on the other

The following are useful coaching materials and where to find them.

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1. **National WHEP Manual:** The manual can be found at www.whep.org/National_WHEP_Manual.html.
2. **Digital slideshow presentations for wildlife identification:** Select photos online (e.g., www.birds.cornell.edu, bugwood.org, google.com).
3. **Wildlife specimens:** Seek out your local Extension agent or State Game and Fish officer.
4. **Flashcards:** Created by participants as a study guide.
5. **Aerial photographs:** Google Earth.
6. **Field guides:** Library or bookstore.

CONTEST ACTIVITIES

Activity I: On-Site Recommendation of Wildlife Management Practices (WMPs)

Individual activity (30 points)

Objectives

Determine and select recommended Wildlife Management Practices (WMPs) for the species listed in the region being studied. Note: When preparing for a competitive event, it is only necessary to learn and understand WMPs appropriate for species listed in the selected region.

Make sure your team is aware that WMPs should be considered **separately** for each species listed. That is, provide management recommendations as if each species was the only species considered on the site. Make sure your team members understand how to mark the score sheet. Remember, participants are given credit for putting an “X” in the appropriate WMP score sheet boxes and for leaving blank those boxes that should not be marked.

Tips:

- Use flash cards to prepare participants for the WMP event. After participants have mastered the information on the cards, mix them up and practice more.
- This activity is subjective and might vary based on the judges’ interpretations.

Activity II-A: Written Wildlife Management Plan

Team activity (140 points)

Objectives

Demonstrate knowledge of habitat requirements for selected wildlife species in the region. Be able to write

recommendations based on the objectives of the landowner as stated on the field condition sheet.

As a team, participants will interpret the management objectives and state which WMPs are best suited to meet these objectives based on positive and negative impacts. See the judges’ scoring sheet in the WHEP manual for details on how plans will be judged. All plans must be written using paragraph format closely following the example in the manual. Teams may use **one side** of each of three pieces of paper provided. Two of these sheets are for writing the plan and the third sheet is for making a sketch map showing where WMPs are implemented. Participants will have **two hours** to write their management plan. Plans written in the incorrect format or incorrectly identified will not be judged.

Field Condition Sheet

This is the scenario each team is given and upon which they will base their management plan. The field condition sheet will contain the following information.

1. Management objectives
2. Description of property boundaries (e.g., size of management tract)
3. Species population conditions
4. Special considerations (e.g., conflicts of interests, budgets)

If any of these are omitted, they are not considered important for the development of the written management plan. If population size is not indicated it means a survey is needed.

Wildlife management plans must provide the following details.

Plan Background

What species will be managed? These will be given in the scenario participants receive at the contest. Accurately identify and state the management objectives. These will also be provided in the scenario.

Plan Development

Provide the habitat requirements for each species in the plan. For the habitat assessment, describe what the site has and what it lacks. Provide as many details as possible. Describe the existing habitat at the site, including specific plant names, as well as habitat requirements for the species in question.

Plan Implementation

This is where the team describes the appropriate WMPs for each species. Explain when and where each practice

should be implemented. What are the appropriate practices, and how will they influence habitat for the indicated species? Be descriptive!

Plan Evaluation

Describe how you will determine if your plan worked and give specific examples. Write how you plan to monitor the success of your plan.

Tips:

- Develop practice scenarios for the region in which the event will be held.
- Save contest scenarios from previous years for future practice.
- Use the score sheet as a guide and practice writing management plans for each region.
- Remember, the management plan is worth the most points so it is important to spend the most time preparing for this activity.
- Take advantage of “easy” points when writing the management plan. For example, maximum points for the plan background can be achieved by simply writing verbatim the species to be managed and the objectives as indicated on the field condition sheet.

Activity II-B: Oral Defense

Team activity (60 points; top 3 individual scores)

Objectives

Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the written plan, and be able to respond to judges’ questions about the team’s plan.

After completing the written wildlife management plan, each team member will be expected to demonstrate his or her understanding of the team’s plan. Team members will be called individually into a room with two to three judges where they will be asked to explain a certain part of the plan, such as the background or the implementation, or they may be asked to further explain certain management practices that were described in the plan. Each team member will be scored independently. The top three scores will be taken for the team’s score.

Tips:

- This is more of a question and answer session. Have your team members practice giving an oral defense of their plan in front of their teammates.
- There are four important and basic criteria in every good oral defense: knowledge of subject, use of appropriate terminology, good presentation, and good organization.

When giving an oral defense, participants should remember to

- Stand up straight in front of the judges.
- Establish eye contact with the judges.
- Not chew gum or wear a cap or hat.
- Speak loud enough to be understood without shouting or talking too rapidly.
- Vary your voice tone so important points are emphasized.
- Use correct enunciation, pronunciation, and grammar.
- Use comparative terms when justifying the plan.

Activity III: General Wildlife Knowledge

Individual activity (30 points)

Objectives

Demonstrate knowledge of wildlife species and their habitat needs. Demonstrate an understanding of the biology and behaviors of wildlife species found within the region considered. Demonstrate an understanding of aerial photos and their use in wildlife management.

Contest questions can be selected from any of the following categories in the WHEP manual.

- Wildlife species identification
- Wildlife foods
- Aerial photos interpretation
- Wildlife habitat requirements for a species
- Region-specific questions
- Wildlife management concepts and terms
- Wildlife management practices (WMPs)
- Terms included in the glossary

Wildlife foods definitions are provided in Appendix A of the WHEP manual. For the contest, foods are placed in food groups. Participants should be prepared to indicate which foods are eaten by specific wildlife species and be familiar with the food group definitions.

Learning to interpret aerial photos allows participants to view areas of the country where they may not have a chance to visit. From photos, they can see the topography and get an idea of available cover and water. Photos can show barriers to migration, agricultural fields, grasslands, and forest cover. Online programs such as Google Earth, TerraServer, and Google Maps are useful tools for evaluating aerial photos. In the “Wildlife Species” section of the manual, habitat requirements are listed for each species as well as management practices, habitat preferences, and trivia.

Tips:

- Foods charts are contained in the “Regions” section of the WHEP manual.
- Further information on foods can be found in the “Wildlife Species” section under the individual wildlife species.
- Know the food group definitions.
- Be familiar with the biology and habitat requirements for each species in the region considered.
- Know food groups and WMPs for each species.
- Flash cards are especially useful for this portion of the contest.

Activity IV: Wildlife Identification

Individual activity (20 points)

Objectives

Demonstrate an ability to identify wildlife species and correctly spell species common names. Wildlife managers must be able to identify the species for which they are managing.

Create digital slideshow presentations to help youth identify each species. Photos of the species used in WHEP are readily available from a number of sources, including many field guides and websites. In this portion of the judging, participants will be asked to identify wildlife species that are listed in the WHEP manual. For the contest, there will be twenty species represented by a clear photograph of either the male or female in either the juvenile or adult stage. Also, wildlife specimens may be used. This portion of the contest is fill-in-the-blank. Each wildlife species will be assigned a number, and participants will write the name of the species as given in the manual in the space provided on the answer sheet. Writing must be legible, and the full common name of the species must be spelled correctly (e.g., house sparrow, not sparrow; ruffed grouse, not grouse; Eastern gray squirrel, not gray squirrel or squirrel). If judges cannot read the answer, the answer will be considered incorrect.

Tips:

- Use digital photos, videos, and specimens to help improve participants’ identification skills.
- Know how to identify adult and juvenile males and females. Create slideshows to practice the more difficult species.

Total Possible Points and Activity Scoring

Individual Scoring	
Activity	Points
Activity I	30
Activity III	30
Activity IV	20
Individual point total	80

Individual scores are used to determine the top individual in each activity. Totals of the top three individual scores are added in the team total as shown under “Team Scoring.”

Team Scoring	
Activity	Points
Total of individual scores	240
Activity II-A	140
Activity II-B (TOP 3 SCORES)	60
Team point total	440

Oral defense (Activity II-B) is an individual activity worth 20 points. The top three individual scores will be taken for the team score for Activity II-B.



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