

INTRODUCTION

The Wildlife Habitat Education Program (WHEP) is a 4-H and Future Farmers of America (FFA) natural resource youth program designed to teach wildlife and fisheries habitat management to youth in the United States (Figure 1).

Using a science-based manual, participants will

1. Learn wildlife terms and concepts.
2. Learn about wildlife habitat.
3. Learn how to evaluate wildlife habitat.
4. Learn about wildlife habitat management practices.
5. Learn about wildlife damage management.

This guide is designed to help New Mexico coaches understand the different parts of the program and provide some direction for coaching a team. The format in New Mexico is slightly different compared to the national contest. However, New Mexico uses the same fundamental principles and curriculum from the national WHEP manual for the New Mexico contest. This allows dedicated New Mexico teams that win the state contest to be competitive at the National WHEP Invitational. The New Mexico contest consists of the following four activities: Wildlife Identification, General Wildlife Knowledge, Written Management Plan, and Oral Defense. Please see the state contest synopsis for rules specific to New Mexico (<http://aces.nmsu.edu/4h/documents/wildlife-habitat-evaluation-new-mexico-state-contest-revised-2011.pdf>).

In New Mexico, only the following regions are used at the state contest: **Hot Desert**, **Urban**, and **Wetlands** regions. These are the only regions that will be used for the state event.



Figure 1. New Mexico WHEP contest participants receiving instructions regarding development of team wildlife 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 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

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

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 NM 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

Wildlife Identification

Individual activity (20 points)

Objectives

Demonstrate 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. 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.

General Wildlife Knowledge

Individual activity (30 points)

Objective

Demonstrate knowledge of wildlife species and their habitat needs in the Hot Desert, Urban, and Wetlands regions. Demonstrate an understanding of the biology and behaviors of wildlife species found within the regions. 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 (Hot Desert, Urban, and Wetlands)
- Wildlife management concepts and terms
- Wildlife management practices (WMPs)
- Terms in the glossary

In the "Wildlife Species" section of the manual, habitat requirements are listed for each species as well as management practices, habitat preferences, and trivia.

The general knowledge portion tests participants' knowledge in the categories listed previously. The format will be set up as a practicum, with 30 stations worth 1 point each. Wildlife foods definitions are provided in Appendix A of the WHEP manual. For the contest, foods are placed in 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 the available cover and water. Photos can also 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.

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.
- Read and comprehend **each** species in the Hot Desert, Urban, and Wetlands regions.
- Know food groups and WMPs for each species.
- Flash cards are especially useful for this portion of the contest.

Written Management Plan

Team activity (140 points)

Objectives

Demonstrate knowledge of habitat requirements for selected wildlife species in the Hot Desert, Urban, and Wetlands regions to be judged. 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 wildlife management practices 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 only use **one side** of each sheet of paper that is provided. On a separate piece of paper that is provided, participants may draw a sketch of the area and locate where recommended management practices will be put in place. An aerial photo of the area to be managed may be provided. Participants will have **one hour** to write their management plan.

Field Condition Sheet

This is the scenario each team is given and upon which they will base their written 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 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 wildlife management practices for each species. Explain when and where each practice should be implemented. What are the appropriate practices, and how will they influence habitat for 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 Hot Desert, Urban, and Wetlands regions.
- 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.

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.
- Do 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.

Total Possible Points and Activity Scoring

Individual Scoring	
Activity	Points
Wildlife Identification	20
General Wildlife Knowledge	30
Individual point total	50

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	200
Management Plan	140
Oral Defense (TOP 3 SCORES)	60
Team point total	400

Oral defense is an individual activity worth 20 points. The top three individual scores will be taken for the team score.



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