

New Mexico State 4-H Conference: Wildlife Habitat Education Program (WHEP) Contest

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INTRODUCTION

The Wildlife Habitat Education Program (WHEP) began in 1978 and grew into a national program with the first National WHEP Invitational in 1989. The program is a hands-on wildlife management education program focusing on species biology and habitat requirements, habitat quality assessment, and wildlife management practices across multiple ecological regions in the United States. Participants

have the opportunity to test their wildlife knowledge in a friendly, competitive environment during local, regional, state, and national competitions. The winning senior (ages 14–19) WHEP team from New Mexico earns the privilege of representing New Mexico the following year at the National WHEP Invitational.

The WHEP manual is a comprehensive introduction to the National WHEP rules, wildlife terms and concepts, species and habitat information, and management practices. You are also encouraged to extend your wildlife knowledge via other reputable sources. New Mexico State University Cooperative Extension Service Guides L-112 (*Guide to Coaching a National 4-H and FFA Wildlife Habitat Education Program Team*; https://aces.nmsu.edu/pubs/_1/L112.pdf) and L-113 (*Guide to Coaching a Wildlife Habitat Education Program in New Mexico*; https://aces.nmsu.edu/pubs/_1/L113.pdf) provide information on preparing for a WHEP contest. The WHEP gives participants an introduction to what is required in managing wildlife successfully. The New Mexico 4-H Conference WHEP contest adapts the national contest rules to meet New Mexico's needs and prepare participants for competition at the national level. Explore and learn the rules for New Mexico's state contest and begin preparing for a rewarding wildlife adventure!



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I. ELIGIBILITY

- A. Read the “General Rules and Guidelines” section (page 8) of *The National 4-H Wildlife Habitat Education Program*, 5th edition manual (WHEP 2020; <https://www.whep.org/national-whep-manual/>).
- B. Members may be enrolled in any New Mexico 4-H project.
- C. Two teams, consisting of three or four members, may be entered from each county.
- D. Individuals may enter, but may only participate in the individual activities. They are not eligible for team awards nor to represent New Mexico in national team competitions.

All participants should familiarize themselves with the WHEP national manual (WHEP 2020). Further, participants should read and know the New Mexico State 4-H WHEP contest rules (hereafter “rules”) contained in this guide. New Mexico State 4-H WHEP contest rules applicable to the New Mexico 4-H WHEP contest differ from, and supersede, those described in WHEP 2020 for the national contest. In addition, the New Mexico State 4-H WHEP contest may differ from the format described in WHEP 2020 to accommodate holding the contest in southern New Mexico. The Superintendent is responsible for and has final authority to make determinations on correct interpretations of answers regarding specific questions and all other decisions falling under their purview. All decisions are final.

NOTE: Contestants are not allowed to have any electronic devices, including cell phones, PalmPilots, tablets, mp3 players, etc. with them during the contest. No clipboards, notebooks, note cards, etc. are allowed during the contest. Bring your own pencil; all other contest materials will be provided.

II. CONTEST

The New Mexico State 4-H WHEP contest consists of four activities.

Activity I: Wildlife Challenge

Individual Activity; 30 seconds/station, ~15 minutes total; 25 stations at 2 points each; 50 points total

Objective: To demonstrate knowledge of wildlife identification, ecoregions, wildlife management concepts, terminology, wildlife management practices, and the biology and ecology of wildlife species.

The Wildlife Challenge combines wildlife identification and general knowledge. Contestants will visit stations where they answer a question or identify an animal by specimen or portion of specimen, photo, animal sign, or sound. Alternatively, stations may be located outdoors and questions may be related to various habitat features.

Any information found in the **Wildlife Management Concepts and Terms, Ecoregions, Wildlife Species, Wildlife Management Practices (WMPs), Appendix A. Definitions of Food Groups, and Appendix B. Glossary** sections of the WHEP manual is eligible to be used for questions in the Wildlife Challenge. Ecoregion-specific questions will be limited to **Hot Desert, Urban, and Wetlands** ecoregions. All wildlife species found in the manual are eligible for identification purposes, while species-specific questions will be limited to those species found in Hot Desert, Urban, and Wetlands ecoregions.

Scoring: When identifying species in the Wildlife Challenge, the full common name, correct spelling, and capitalization must be used in order to receive credit (e.g., ruffed grouse, not grouse; American beaver, not beaver; eastern gray squirrel, not gray squirrel or squirrel). **No partial credit is available. Refer to the Wildlife Species section of the WHEP manual (beginning on page 69) for proper spelling and capitalization.**

Activity II: On-Site Recommendations of Wildlife Management Practices (WMPs)

Individual Activity; up to 30 minutes; 50 points total

Objective: To demonstrate knowledge of recommendation of WMPs to manage wildlife and habitat in the Hot Desert, Urban, and Wetlands regions.

Recommendations of Wildlife Management Practices (WMPs) should consider each species listed **separately**, and WMPs should be recommended as if each species was the only species (focal species) considered on the site. Refer to the WMP chart in Hot Desert, Urban, and Wetlands ecoregions for the New Mexico State 4-H WHEP contest. Before starting WMP recommendations, contestants will be given a written or verbal scenario with information describing the field conditions of the site. Based on this information, an **“X” must be marked in the box** for each WMP recommended. Contestants will have **up to 30 minutes** to complete this activity. Time allowed will correlate generally to the number of correct WMPs. For example, if there are 16 correct WMPs for a contest, contestants may be allotted 15 minutes to complete this activity. Contestants will be notified of the time allotted on site the day of the contest. This is an individual activity; no talking or collaboration is allowed.

Scoring: Total Score = [(number of correct answers marked by the contestant minus number of incorrect answers marked by the contestant) divided by total number of possible correct answers marked by the Superintendent in charge] multiplied by 50 and rounded to the nearest whole number.

For example, a WMP score sheet key includes 25 correct answers. The contestant marks 19 correct answers, but

also marks 7 incorrect answers. The contestant's score is calculated as $[(19 - 7 = 12) / 25] \times 50 = 24$ points.

No negative scores will be assigned. The minimum individual score on Activity II is zero. Blank WMP worksheets for each ecoregion can be found at www.whep.org.

Activity III-A: Written Wildlife Management Plan

Team Activity; 1 hour; 125 points total

Objective: To demonstrate knowledge of the habitat requirements of wildlife species in the Hot Desert, Urban, and Wetlands ecoregions. To state in a well-organized, team-written wildlife management plan the objectives, focal species, recommended WMPs and their impacts, and how the plan's outcomes will be evaluated.

The Written Management Plan is a team event where team members discuss, consider, and provide written recommendations to address current conditions and objectives regarding wildlife populations and habitat on a specified property (site). A written scenario describing the site, current conditions, and landowner objectives is provided to teams before starting the activity. **Each team interprets the objectives, identifies the focal species, recommends WMPs and their intended impacts, and states how their plan's outcomes will be evaluated.**

All plans must be written using paragraph format. Team number, individual team member names, and County name must be written on the back of each sheet. Teams must write their plan on the blank side of the field condition sheet. Participants should draw a sketch on a separate piece of paper, which will be provided, and locate where recommended practices will be implemented, or mark locations on an aerial photo of the site to be managed, if provided. Teams will have **one hour** to complete the written Wildlife Management Plan.

Field Condition Sheet (Written Plan Scenario):

The field condition sheet may include the following information:

1. Landowner's objectives
2. Definition of property boundaries; size of tract
3. Population conditions for the species
4. Special considerations, which can include costs

If any of the above are omitted, they are not considered by event organizers to be important to the development of the wildlife management plan.

Scoring: The "Judges' Scoring Sheet – Activity III-A Written Wildlife Management Plan," shown on page 14 of the WHEP manual, details how plans are judged. Teams should familiarize themselves with the score sheet to aid in focused preparation and understanding to maximize points. **Plans not written in the proper format or not correctly identified will not be judged.**

Activity III-B: Oral Reasons for Written Plan

Individual Activity; 2–5 minutes; 25 points total

Objective: To individually demonstrate comprehensive knowledge of species' habitat and food requirements and recommended Wildlife Management Practices described in the team's well-organized, team-written plan.

After completing the written wildlife management plan, each team member will be expected to demonstrate their understanding of the written plan. Thus, it is important for each team member to actively participate in preparing the team-written plan. **Comprehensive knowledge of the written plan is necessary to successfully respond to judges' questions about the team's plan.** Team members are called individually into a room with one or more judges where they are asked a series of questions to test the individual's knowledge of the team's plan. For example, team members may be asked to explain a certain part of the plan, such as the background or implementation, or they may be asked to further explain certain management practices recommended within the plan, or the habitat needs of the focal species. **Questions can cover anything related to the written plan, the focal species, or recommended management practices.** Each team member's interview will last approximately 2–5 minutes.

Sample questions and requests:

- Explain the WMPs your team implemented for Gambel's quail.
- Two of the four species in your plan had very different habitat requirements. Identify those species and explain the compromises you made to accommodate those species.
- The pronghorn prefers open rangelands with ample grasses, forbs, and shrubs. Explain the practices your team recommended to maintain the habitat.
- In assessing habitat on this site, what do you consider the most limiting factor for Crissal thrasher?
- Explain two methods you would use to determine the effectiveness of your team's plan.

Scoring: The "Judges' Scoring Sheet – Activity III-B Oral Reasons for Wildlife Management Plan," on page 16 of the WHEP manual, will be used to score contestants' answers to the oral reasons questions. Total points possible sum to 100, but are multiplied by 0.25 for a maximum score of 25 per contestant. **Note: Oral reason scores are not included in determining high individual scores.**

III. CONTEST SCORING

Individual Awards

Individual scores for awards will consist of the sum of Activities I and II.

Activity I: Wildlife Challenge (50 points)

Activity II: On-Site Recommendation of Wildlife Management Practices (WMPs) (50 points)

Maximum Individual Total Score: 100 points

Team Awards

The top three individual scores within a team for Activities I, II, and III-B will count toward the total overall team score. The score for the team-written plan will be added to this total. For teams of four members, the lowest score for each activity will be dropped. For teams of three members, all individual scores will count.

Activity I: Wildlife Challenge (50 points \times 3 = 150 total team points)

Activity II: On-Site Recommendation of Wildlife Management Practices (WMPs) (50 points \times 3 = 150 total team points)

Activity III-A: Written Wildlife Management Plan (125 total team points)

Activity III-B: Oral Reasons for Written Plan (25 points \times 3 = 75 total team points)

Maximum Team Total Score: 500 points

Tiebreakers

1. Individual

In case of ties for top individuals (sum of Activities I and II), scores for Activity II (WMPs), then Activity I (when necessary), will be used to break ties.

2. Team

In case of ties for the top teams (sum of Activities I, II, III-A, and III-B), the total team score for Activity II, then the total team score for Activity I (if necessary), will be used to break the tie. If there is still a tie, the total team score for Activity III will be used to break the tie. In rare instances where this approach fails to determine a winner, the Activity III-A score will be used.



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