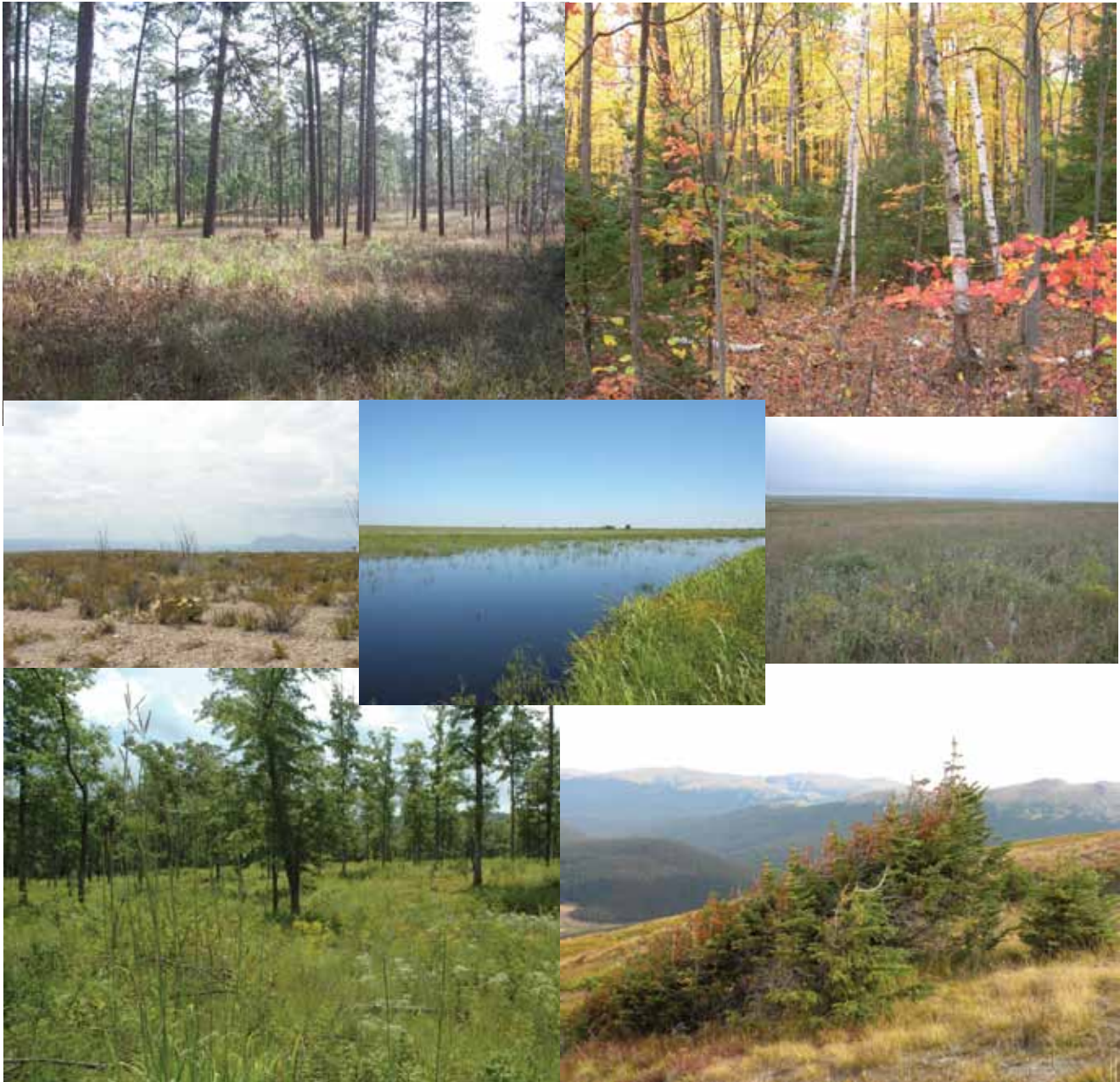


# Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Program



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# History of the National Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Program

The Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Program began in 1978 under the direction of Drs. James L. Byford and Thomas K. Hill, Extension Wildlife and Fisheries Specialists, respectively, at the University of Tennessee. They realized the passion many youth have for wildlife and modeled the Tennessee 4-H Wildlife Judging Contest after the popular livestock judging contests. The program was immediately accepted throughout Tennessee. With support from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, a conference was held in 1985 to explore the possibility of a Southern Region Program. The first Southern Region Invitational was held in 1987. In 1988, the second Southern Region Invitational was supported by the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, and a conference was held concurrently to discuss the possibility of a national event. In 1989, the first national event was held with the support of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

In 1990-91, the program was expanded nationally, and this manual was produced with sponsorship by Champion International Corporation and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The manual was revised in 1998-99 to reflect 4-H Leaders' suggestions over the years and to incorporate new information in wildlife science and management. The Ruffed Grouse Society,

Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, and the USDA Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service were added as sponsors of the manual revision. The manual incorporates the basic concepts originated by Byford and Hill with the addition of landscape regions across the U.S., urban activities, and a wider array of habitat wildlife management practices and wildlife species. Since 1991, the manual has undergone three major revisions (the latest in 2009), each incorporating new information as knowledge is added through wildlife research. This process is very important and highlights the need to always keep an open mind and strive to continue learning. Starting in 2010, FFA teams were invited to compete in WHEP. FFA teams and 4-H teams do not compete against each other, but rather against teams within each organization.

This manual is intended for use in local programs and to prepare for the annual National Invitational Contest. It is the intent of the organizers to move the national contest to different locations each year. States without a wildlife habitat judging program are encouraged to prepare through local contests and to send a delegation to the national contest. This manual is designed to provide uniformity for the program and provide wildlife management information using representative species occupying major regions of the U.S.

**For information contact your State 4-H Office, County Extension Agent, or Wildlife Specialist.**

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# Introduction

The National 4-H Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Program (WHEP) is designed to teach youth about the fundamentals of wildlife and fisheries science and management. The National Invitational Judging event is open only to senior division 4-H members. Junior-high and junior division 4-H members are eligible to compete at county, regional and state events. Natural resources management is learned through participation in the event and the associated educational programs. Additional benefits are the development of life skills and meeting other young people and professionals from around the country who have interests in natural resources.

In this program, youth learn how management for wildlife includes management of habitat and populations. The information in this manual is provided to teach wildlife habitat management concepts and to prepare participants for 4-H natural resources competitive events. The manual and activities are focused not only on increasing knowledge in the wildlife management field, but also in developing skills to apply that knowledge. The invitational addresses these concepts with the following three activities:

1. on-site recommendation of wildlife management practices (individual activity);
2. written wildlife management plan (team activity) and an oral defense of the written plan (individual activity); and
3. general wildlife knowledge and wildlife identification test (individual activity).

Before making wildlife management recommendations, it is important to know all possible information about the life requirements of the species for which the area is being managed. The Concepts and Terms; Regions; Wildlife Species; Wildlife Management Practices; and Wildlife Management sections of this manual provide basic information related to wildlife ecology as well as the life requirements of various wildlife species.

Wildlife managers must be able to inventory and evaluate the present condition of habitat, and explain the condition to landowners and other interested individuals. Once the inventory is complete, a decision must be made as to which wildlife management practices should be applied to improve habitat for certain wildlife species. The on-site management recommendation activity provides experience with this decision-making process. Finally, the written management plan activities enable an explanation to illustrate decisions so others can understand and carry out recommendations.

# About the Manual

The manual is divided into the following major sections.

**Wildlife Management Concepts and Terms** introduces basic wildlife management principles. These concepts and terms are the basis for the remainder of the manual. Participants should be prepared to use the wildlife management concepts and terms in their written plan or oral presentation as appropriate.

**Regions** identifies areas of the U.S. with distinctly different vegetation communities and wildlife species. This section gives a brief description of the vegetation and land use found in the regions, explains typical stage of plant succession, lists wildlife species that will be considered in the national contest and summarizes habitat wildlife management practices that can be used in each region. A chart identifying the major food items for each species in the region is also included.

**Wildlife Species** provides information about habitat requirements and wildlife management practices used for the various species.

**Wildlife Management Practices** explains each of the wildlife management practices discussed in the Wildlife Species section.

Interpreting wildlife habitat from **Aerial Photography** explains how to evaluate wildlife habitat using aerial photographs. Examples on how to rank photographs and identify features are included.

The **Activities** section refers to the competitive component of WHEP and provides resources to help contestants and coaches prepare for a WHEP contest. This section also contains information on how the national contest will be scored. All of the activities and scorecards that will be used for each region(s) are provided. A number of practice/study tools are also provided, such as blank score sheets for the WMP's portion of the contest and a written management plan worksheet.

**Scoring the Contest** explains the scoring procedure for the national contest.

**Glossary and Appendix** defines some of the technical words used in the manual and explains the various food categories included on the foods charts for each region.

# How to Use the Manual

Leaders and participants should first learn the concepts and terms. Then, locate and mark materials pertinent for a particular region. The basic steps are as follows:

**Determine which region to use.** This may be where a local, state or national contest is going to be held. Maps and region descriptions found in the Regions section should be used when making this decision. The wetlands and urban descriptions are applicable to all regions.

**Determine which wildlife species will be used.** A list of recommended species accompanies each region. There are many field guides and Web sites that provide photos of the applicable wildlife species.

**Locate and mark the selected species in the Wildlife Species section.** It is important to learn to identify species from different sources and be able to identify the male, female, adult and juvenile of a species. Learning life history information about a species is critical to make appropriate management decisions.

**Locate and mark the appropriate Wildlife Management Practices in the wildlife management practices section.** Learning how various wildlife management practices affect wildlife species is critical. Not all wildlife management practices listed in the manual are used in every region.

Information from various portions of the manual may be incorporated in the general wildlife knowledge and wildlife identification test. The general wildlife knowledge portion of the test may ask questions related to concepts and terms, wildlife management practices, wildlife food groups, aerial photos and the species descriptions for species included in the region of the contest and the urban and wetlands regions. The wildlife identification component may include species included in the region of the contest, as well as urban and wetlands regions.

# Preparing for Contests

Participants should first read and understand the concepts and terms section of the manual. Leaders should explain the concepts and provide local examples to clarify any misunderstanding. This section is important because the activities require understanding of these concepts and terms. Students should use these terms and concepts in their presentations at the contest.

Once the concepts are understood, leaders should review the appropriate regional information with participants. Leaders have the flexibility to use any of the information about regions they feel is appropriate. Leaders and participants should review plant succession processes, common plants, wildlife species and wildlife management practices. Specific information about habitat requirements and recommended wildlife management practices are found in the wildlife species section. Many teams/participants find it helpful to mark those species included in the region they are judging so the information is more easily found when studying. Some find making note/flash cards helpful. Whenever possible, participants should go to the field and find examples of the principles and practices found in these sections. Leaders should use “quiz bowls” and question/answer sessions to measure learning.

By following the above exercises, leaders can introduce participants to various activities. Conducting practice sessions using outdoor sites and aerial photographs are helpful. It is helpful to start with only one or two wildlife species and add more as participants become more knowledgeable. Aerial photographs (available online) should be evaluated and their features discussed and considered as to how they are important to wildlife. Habitat requirements available for the species selected should be identified, as well as what features are missing.

Videos, field guides and other teaching materials may be used to further learning. State wildlife agencies, state Extension wildlife specialists, and county Extension offices have information regarding the availability of learning materials. Local and state events may use different wildlife species and activities from those recommended in the manual. However, in the national event, all activities and only the wildlife species

and wildlife management practices listed in this manual will be used.

Collecting pictures of the species from several different sources will help with the identification portion of the test.

Beginning and young 4-H'ers should not be expected to perform all the activities. Organizers of local and state events may limit activities for junior division participants. Written management plans and oral reasons may not be appropriate for this age group. Participants in the national event (ages 14 years to 19 years as of January 1 of the contest year) will be asked to perform all of the activities in this manual.

## General Rules and Guidelines

The national event will comply with all policies and guidelines for national 4-H competitive events.

### ***I. Contestants and Eligibility:***

- A. Each state is allowed to enter only one 4-H team and/or one FFA team or up to two 4-H individual contestants and/or two FFA individual contestants. A team will consist of no less than three and no more than four official entrants who are 4-H or FFA members in their state during the current year. If a state is unable to assemble a team, it may send up to two contestants to the individual events only.
- B. All contestants must be at least 14 years old as of January 1 of the year of the contest and cannot be older than 19 years as of December 31 of the contest year.
- C. An individual or team may enter the National 4-H Wildlife Invitational event only once during his/her 4-H and FFA career. For example, a team (or individual) may not compete as a 4-H team one year, then come back another year as an FFA team or individual.
- D. The team of contestants must be certified as the official state entry by the state Extension or FFA director, or by a person designated by the director. The individuals or team may be selected by any procedures a state considers appropriate. It is required that each state obtain medical authorizations for participants and accompanying adults.

- E. If a participant has an Individual Education Plan, a copy of the IEP and any special accommodations must accompany the official entry for the team. Once the IEP and accommodations are received, they will be reviewed. The WHEP National Committee will make all reasonable efforts to accommodate participants with IEPs.

Contestants in the National 4-H Wildlife Invitational must **not** have participated in official post-secondary (university, college, junior college or technical school) competitive events of a similar nature in the same subject matter area. Neither can participants be a member of a post-secondary team undergoing training in preparation for an event. For example, a contestant who has competed in an official collegiate wildlife contest, on or off campus, is ineligible to compete in the national contest. The state 4-H program leaders are responsible for determining the eligibility for participants in national 4-H competitive events from their respective states.

## ***II. General Contest Rules and Information:***

The date, location and region for the National 4-H Wildlife Invitational will be announced no later than May 1 after the 4-H WHEP National Committee's spring meeting. When wetlands or urban areas are used, species from the region where the contest is held may also be used in the contest.

- A. State team entries must be submitted through the official entry process.
- B. Each team shall have no more than two adults at least 21 years of age accompanying the team to the invitational.
- C. Although there will be educational opportunities before the contest begins, all contestants should study this manual and be prepared before coming to the national event. Questions will not be allowed during the contest except for those related to contest procedure.
- D. A materials packet to supplement this manual may be available for leaders and participants in advance of the national event. The packet may contain information on region and wildlife species used in the upcoming event. The materials packet will be supplied by the Extension wildlife specialist, 4-H office or other qualified personnel from the state hosting the national event.

- E. Contestants will be required to adhere to the host state's Code of Conduct. No alcohol, tobacco or drug use will be allowed during the event.
- F. Contestants and coaches/chaperones are required to take part in all phases of the National 4-H Wildlife Invitational, including the opening ceremony, educational program, contest, fun activities, coaches tour, and awards banquet.

### ***On Contest Day:***

- A. All contestants must provide their own pen or pencil and clipboard.
- B. No electronic devices of any kind are allowed at the contest site. This includes, but is not limited to, cell phones and ipods/mp3 players.
- C. Absolutely no talking by contestants will be allowed during the contest, except when working on the designated team activity.
- D. Anyone caught cheating may be disqualified at the discretion of the National WHEP Committee.
- E. All adults, except contest officials, will be separated from contestants at all times while the contest is in progress. All adults must participate in the designated coaches' activity during contest day.
- F. Contestants will work independently on Activity I, II-B and III. Activity II is a team event. Preparation for Activity II-B may also be completed as a team. Scorecards will be submitted to an official committee member immediately after each event.
- G. An official committee will score the contest and analyze results. Their decision is final.
- H. The team score will be the sum of the three highest scores in each of Activities I and III, plus the team score for Activities II, which will include the top three scores for activity II-B.
- I. After the event, individual and team scores and justifications will be made available to the teams. Contest score sheets will not be distributed.
- J. Distribution of awards is determined by the state host. However, every National 4-H Wildlife Invitational will recognize for both FFA and 4-H:
  - First Place Team
  - Second Place Team
  - Third Place Team
  - First Place High Individual
  - Second Place High Individual
  - Third Place High Individual