

USFWS Southeast Region's Youth Ambassador Program: our next generation of conservation leaders using new media to connect with their peers and promote the work of the Service

The Youth Ambassador Program Bulletin



Both photos by Garrett Wilkerson.



A dragonfly at Alligator River.
Photo by Grey Clawson.

One of Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar's key priorities for the Department is a focus on today's youth, educating them on possible careers in nature, and developing the next generation of conservation leaders. Using funding provided for this initiative, the Southeast Region of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has developed a pilot program to create opportunities for youth around the region to connect with nature, the work of the Service, and each other.

In the spring of 2010, ten USFWS offices around the Southeast Region were selected to participate in the program: three wildlife refuges, three fish hatcheries, three ecological services offices, and one law enforcement office. Each office was then asked to recruit a junior or senior aged high school student (or a freshman in college for the ecological services offices) to be their Youth Ambassador for one year. Youth Ambassadors were required to meet the following standards:

1. No less than a B average in school
2. Proficient with social media tools including Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, and blogs
3. Excellent writing skills, as demonstrated by a two-page essay
4. A personal interest in wildlife conservation or biology

5. Leadership skills demonstrated among peers

As a Youth Ambassador, each participant becomes heavily involved in the daily operations of their station, including taking photos and video of events at their station, participating on the Friends Group board (Refuges and Hatcheries), and working with public affairs officials to broaden their office's communication capacity. Ultimately, this boils down to four goals:

1. To promote conservation awareness among their peers
2. To learn about the operation of the field station, the Service and career opportunities
3. To provide a "youth" perspective to Service staff on how that station could reach out to and be more relevant to today's youth
4. To connect with fellow ambassadors around the region and share their experience.

So far, eight ambassadors have been selected. You can read more about our youth ambassadors who have begun their on the ground adventures in this installment of the Youth Ambassador Bulletin and look forward to hearing from others in our upcoming editions. View our website at <http://www.fws.gov/southeast/youthambassadors/>

Garrett Wilkerson

Black Bayou Lake National Wildlife Refuge

Although I am only a month and a half into my volunteer time at Black Bayou Lake National Wildlife Refuge, I have already had many awesome experiences! First, I went to Upper Ouachita National Wildlife Refuge and learned about the Mollicy Restoration Project that they have going on. Summed up, this project is allowing the Ouachita River to flow through the land as it did before human intervention.

The pictures I took of this project were amazing. Another thing I did was bird banding with two of the biologists out at Black Bayou Lake. This was definitely an experience because it allowed to me see how birds are tracked, and I was able to see some birds up close. Since I had never seen some of these birds, such as the hooded warbler, I was excited to see them up close. I never realized all the colors these birds had in them! Watching the biologists do all their measurements and actually banding the birds makes one appreciate what all the employees of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service do.

I will be volunteering at the Fall Celebration Saturday, October 9th, and this is something

I have been looking forward to for quite a while.



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

The Fall Celebration is an event at Black Bayou Lake that gives everyone in the community an opportunity to come out and see what the Refuge is all about. We will be having live exhibits, bird box building, an alligator snapping turtle release, and free food at the Celebration. I am so excited about this event because I love seeing people getting involved in nature and being in the great outdoors. I am looking forward to many more months of volunteering, and I hope to one day be a biologist for the USFWS myself.



Turtles at Pocosin Lakes. Photo by Grey Clawson.

Grey Clawson

Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge

So far, I have enjoyed this program overall. My experience over the summer was loads of fun and I did things that I think some people would never even think of. Personally, I have had so much fun because of the people that work on the refuges and just being out in nature



Cody holding a turtle. Photo by Nicole Rankin/USFWS.



Cody assisting Jaci Zelko. Photo by Nicole Rankin/USFWS.

in general. The program has kept me occupied with doing the things I love most, taking pictures and filming things.

So far, this has been a great jump start towards whatever career path I choose simply because there are so many aspects to this program that can be applied to any job. I look forward to the future experiences in the months to come.

Cody Meshes

Warm Springs National Fish Hatchery

Since I started the program I have gained a vast amount of knowledge about what goes on at the fish technology center, and in nature. My experience has been nothing but good, the employees at Warm Springs could not be more gracious and helping towards me. If I ever need help or have any type of question they will try their best to find the solution. I have assisted in a number of projects done by the hatchery already, each of which is a learning experience in itself, the different species I have worked with all are fascinating whether they are the Axolotl Salamander or the Striped Bass even the American Alligator.

I have written many blogs and have taken a large quantity of photos, ranging from everyday chores to large events like the Open House. I must also say there

have been a lot of moments that are just outright hilarious, I thoroughly enjoy this program and believe I will keep enjoying it. I would like to thank the people who recommended me for this and the people who created this program.



Daniel measuring one angry turtle! Photo by USFWS.

Daniel Mayer

Natchitoches National Fish Hatchery

The external force that initiated my interest in this program was my ecology instructor, Dr. Margaret Hodge. When Dr. Hodge told our ecology class about the program I immediately became interested and jumped on the opportunity. I have always wanted to do biological research and to gain some experience in the field, but I have been unable to do so thus far. When Dr. Hodge explained the program to the class, I right away thought that this was my chance to gain some real field biological experience.



Unhappy snapping turtles awaiting measurement. Photo by USFWS.

I also really liked the idea of helping my generation to become aware of conservation issues and to become conservation minded.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

After all, it is my generation that will one day run this planet, and I feel an obligation to wildlife and to God to do as much as I can to preserve our natural resources. Anything biology related sounds interesting to me, and after reading into the goals of the project I knew I would really like being a part of it.

After I complete my education I will be a wildlife biologist, specializing in large carnivores of North America, such as American black bears, cougars, and Canadian lynx. This program will expose me to the different careers offered by the Department of the Interior, and it will also allow me to experience some hands on research, while also providing a way in which I can assist in helping my generation to become more mindful of their impact on this planet.



At the 24th Annual Catch a Rainbow Fishing Derby. Photo by Alex Hoover.

Alex Hoover

Wolf Creek National Fish Hatchery

Alex been an integral part of Wolf Creek's summer events. She traveled with USFWS personnel to a statewide tourism meeting encompassing those federal agencies in Kentucky with an outdoor mission (e.g. NPS, FWS, USFS) and finished up signs for the small aquariums and terrariums. She ensured setup and post event cleanup, along with taking photos, during the Longest Day of Play event.



At the 24th Annual Catch a Rainbow Fishing Derby. Photo by Alex Hoover.



At 2010's Longest Day of Play. Photo by Alex Hoover.

Alex also photographed the 24th Annual Catch a Rainbow Event, as well as attended the Active Strategies for EE workshop as well. Alex has helped to edit and post documents as well as take photos and post them to the regional

Flickr account. She has assisted Wolf Creek in keeping their Facebook and Twitter accounts updated, and has made an excellent contribution to the communication capacity at Wolf Creek.