



Project aims to acquaint students with the outdoors

By **Connie Mertz**
For The Daily Item

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— The Pennsylvania Game Commission is not only there for the hunting and trapping community, and it's more than biological research on the state's varied species of wildlife. There's another program that has had and is continuing to have far-reaching effects among school-age students. It's a conservation education program called "Project Wild."

"Project Wild is an international conservation education program with hands-on, interdisciplinary activities about wildlife, people and the environment," Theresa Alberici, the Game Commission's Project Wild coordinator explains.

"The main purpose of the program is to help students explore the wildlife and environment, increase their knowledge about wildlife and ecological concepts and foster informed decision, responsible behavior and constructive action."

This sounds like a mouthful, but simply put Project Wild makes learning fun. It's a tool used by educators to introduce difficult wildlife and environmental concepts to students from preschool through adulthood. The hands-on activities are used not only in schools, but in many youth groups, including 4-H and scouts.

"Project Wild isn't about teaching kids what to think about wildlife; it's about teaching kids how to think about wildlife and giving them the skills they need to become responsibly active citizens who recognize the importance of wildlife and the environment," she said.

In all, there are 120 activities listed in the Project Wild Activity Guide.

"The activities have been designed so educators can easily incorporate them into almost any classroom curricula and nearly any subject -- not just science but also reading, English, social studies, math, civics or art," she notes.

Interested teachers and youth leaders need to complete a six-hour Project Wild workshop for certification. According to Alberici, who has been working with the program since its inception in 1983, participants in the workshops leave with a renewed sense of appreciation for wildlife and excited to share the information with students. In 25 years, more than 26,000 individuals have been certified to use Project Wild activities in Pennsylvania. Nationwide, it has grown to one million. Project Wild curriculum has also been recognized nationwide as the most successful wildlife education program and has been the recipient of numerous awards. Why is it so successful? "Activities work," she comments emphatically.

One example is an action-packed activity called "Quick Frozen Critters," said to be one of the all-time favorites among students. The activity is a simulation of the predator/prey relationship. "Prey must run from one side of the field to the other to obtain food tokens. Along the way, they can take shelter in designated areas or freeze. Meanwhile, predators are trying their best to tag their prey," she said summarizing the activity.

"From this activity, students are able to describe the predator-prey relationship, understand food chains and describe physical and behavioral adaptations and strategies used by both predators and prey."

"The Thicket Game" brings home the fact that oftentimes wildlife can see us, but we can't see them. While the predator is blindfolded and counts to 20, the prey runs to hide nearby. The rule is that those hiding must be able to see the predator at all times. It's amazing how close the prey can come toward the predator without

being discovered. The lesson here is adaptation to the surrounding environment.

There are new developments with the Project Wild program. On the national level, there is a new supplementary guide for preschoolers.

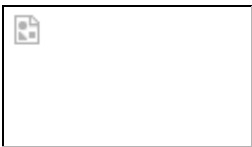
"In Pennsylvania, we are in the final process of a PA supplement," Alberici said. "We also hold advanced workshops that address a particular species, topic and/or issue. Project Wild is more than a guide; it's a conservation education program, and it is relevant right here in Pennsylvania."

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Photos



Theresa Alberici, Pennsylvania Game Commission Project WILD coordinator, works with educators to identify various bird species during a recent Wild on the Susquehanna workshop.



provided Teachers canoe to take a closer look at the endangered American lotus as part of the WILD about Endangered Species workshop



provided Teachers measure elk antlers while participating in the WILD about Elk Workshop