

2021 PAEP WALTER LYON AWARD RECIPIENT



Wildlife Leadership Academy / Michele Kittell Connolly, Executive Director

The Wildlife Leadership Academy was established in 2007. The mission of the Wildlife Leadership Academy is to engage and empower high school age youth to become Conservation Ambassadors to ensure a sustained wildlife, fisheries, and natural resources legacy for future generations. The Academy has graduated 824 high achieving youth from 62 counties across the state as well as students from Ohio, West Virginia, Maryland, Texas, North Carolina, New York, New Jersey, Indiana, and Vermont. To date, the students in the program have reached over 130,000 people across the

Commonwealth with their outreach accomplishments.

Students apply to the Wildlife Leadership Academy and make a year-long commitment to the program. They start with field school where the program teaches them leadership and life skills and continues with educational materials for their program of choice. The Academy has six distinct curriculums: PA Bucktails (deer), PA Bass (Bass and warm-water conservation), PA Brookies (Brook Trout and cold-water conservation), PA Drummers (ruffed grouse and early successional habitat), PA Gobblers (wild turkey), and PA Ursids (black bears). Once the students complete summer school, they return to their communities where they conduct a minimum of four field school related outreach projects, in each of the four categories of Education, Service, Media Engagement, Creative Arts, and Outdoor Mentorship. This extension of the students' field school experience allows them to apply what they have learned serving as Conservation Ambassadors to the benefit of the greater community across Pennsylvania and surrounding states, empowering citizens to support a sustainable natural resource legacy.

Ms. Michele Kittell Connolly has been the Executive Director for the Wildlife Leadership Academy since 2012. Prior to being the director, she was the Program and Outreach Coordinator, hired in 2009. Michele received her M.S. in Zoology from Clemson University and her B.S. in Biology from Pennsylvania State University. She has a diverse research background ranging from studying the ecological effects of an invasive plant species to fish behavior and genetics. She has participated in coral reef surveying in the Bahamas, fish health and husbandry research, and dolphin cognition projects. Michele has published several scientific manuscripts and has presented her work nationally and internationally. She currently serves on the Governor's Advisory Council for Hunting, Fishing and Conservation. Michele is an avid conservationist and enjoys traveling, birding, painting, nature journaling, and nature photography.

The Wildlife Leadership Academy is now taking nominations for the 2022 field school season. Please see their nomination process and additional information on their website at [Wildlife Leadership Academy – The Next Generation of Conservation Leaders](#)