



UNIVERSITY OF
FLORIDA

WEC 175

EXTENSION

Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences

4-H Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Program (WHEP): Learn about wildlife ecology and management¹

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The Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Program (WHEP) is a 4-H youth natural resource program dedicated to teaching wildlife and fisheries habitat management to junior and senior level youth (ages 8-19). WHEP fosters relationships between youth, professional wildlife and fisheries biologists, parents, teachers, volunteers, farmers, and ranchers. WHEP is a nationally recognized program and won the 1996 Wildlife Society Conservation Education Award.

As with all 4-H programs, WHEP teaches essential life skills such as oral and written communication, critical thinking, teamwork, and decision-making.

Participating in 4-H WHEP

As a participant in WHEP, you'll have a greater understanding of the value of land and how it can be managed to benefit many wildlife and fish species. You can apply your WHEP skills and knowledge to create better habitat for wildlife and fish now *and* in the future when you join the work force -- no matter what professional field you have chosen.

You will learn about wildlife and what each species needs for food and habitat. You'll also learn about how to enhance and manage land for different wildlife species.



Figure 1. During the State WHEP Contest, participants identify wildlife foods on the table and check off the animals on their list that eat those foods. Photo by Meryl Klein.

In the **Florida WHEP Contest**, you will compete in these three activities:

- Identify common wildlife foods and animals that eat them

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- Judge quality of wildlife habitat from aerial photographs, and give oral reasons for decision
- Recommend wildlife management practices

If you advance to the **National WHEP Contest**, you will compete in the activities above, *PLUS* these additional activities:

- Develop a rural wildlife management plan
- Develop an urban wildlife management plan

The Activities

You can compete as an individual and on teams in either the Junior or Senior age group. Both age groups study the same WHEP Manual and do the same contest activities.

Wildlife Foods Identification

Participants are shown actual wildlife foods which represent categories of foods (such as fruits, insects, flower nectar, seeds, eggs, mammals, reptiles, birds, etc.). Participants must decide which species on their list eat those particular food categories.

Aerial Photograph Evaluation

Participants judge the suitability, or quality, of habitat for specific wildlife species by examining aerial photos of habitat. They rank each habitat from "most suitable" to "least suitable." Then, participants explain their reasoning orally before a judge.



Figure 2. State WHEP Contest: Participants study the aerial photos of habitats, then rank the habitat's suitability for certain wildlife species. Photo by Meryl Klein.

Wildlife Management Practices

Participants must decide which management practices are appropriate to enhance a plot of land for specific wildlife species. They are given a written description of the land in its current state and told the specific animals for which the landowner wants to enhance the land. Participants then recommend actions that benefit the wildlife species the landowner wants to attract to his or her land. (At national contest, participants also write a one-page management plan for the landowner.)

Urban Management Plan (only in the National Contest)

In teams, WHEP participants write a wildlife management plan for an urban area, such as a neighborhood park or schoolyard. They also draw maps to illustrate the implementation of the management practices they recommend. This activity encourages leadership skills, team cooperation, writing skills and creativity.

The Florida WHEP Contest

The Florida WHEP Contest in Florida is held in the spring at the Austin Cary Memorial Forest, near Gainesville. The 4-H Forestry Contest is also held that day at the same location, so participants can compete in both contests if interested.

At the Florida WHEP Contest, participants will do all the activities described above, *except for* writing the one-page management plan for a landowner and the urban management plan. However, participants will have to develop rural and urban wildlife management plans at the National WHEP Contest.

The winners at the Florida WHEP Contest (Junior level individual and a team, Senior level individual and team) will go on to compete in the national contest in the summer.

The National WHEP Contest

The annual WHEP Invitational (national contest) is held in a different state each year, exposing participants to wildlife habitats and practices unique to those regions of the country. National contest sites

have included the North Carolina Atlantic coast, the Prairie Pothole regions in North Dakota, the Texas Hill Country, and the Idaho Rocky Mountains.

The Invitational runs about three days each summer and includes contest activities, fun activities, and educational field trips.



Figure 3. The Florida WHEP team (from Volusia County) at the 2001 national WHEP contest held in Wyoming. Photo courtesy of Linda Evans.

Interested?

If you are interested in getting more information about 4-H WHEP, you can visit the national WHEP web site at <http://www.whep.org> and contact your local county Cooperative Extension Service 4-H agent.

Extension Agents: contact Dr. Mark Hostetler, Wildlife Extension Specialist, hostetlerm@wec.ufl.edu, 352-846-0568.

Helpful Resources

- National 4-H WHEP web site:
<http://www.whep.org>
- WHEP Manual -- see your county 4-H agent to get a copy
- Field guides about mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish, etc.
- Local professionals in wildlife management and wildlife biology