



THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

Leaders in Wildlife Science, Management and Conservation

Final Position Statement

Conservation Education

Aldo Leopold's goal during his academic career was to teach his students "to see the land, to understand what he sees, and enjoy what he understands." Likewise, conservation education should emphasize the experiential learning that will foster admiration and respect for nature and the understanding of the interconnectedness of all living things. For the next generation to become dedicated stewards of our natural resources, children - and adults - must first forge a relationship with nature through experience.

The conservation education process must contain six key elements if it is to be effective in connecting people with nature and preparing them to deal with natural resource problems. First, it must provide an appreciation for and understanding of the basic ecology of the systems in which we live and the natural history of the organisms that inhabit them. Second, it must provide a basic understanding of the properties, distribution, and ecological function of natural resources, as well as the interconnection between social, economic, and environmental systems. Third, it must provide experiential learning that encourages people to discover and reconnect to the natural world. Fourth, it must provide and promote alternatives to current degrading resource uses and promote lifestyle changes that can be accommodated by the existing resource base. Fifth, it must help people understand the political, economic, and social processes by which changes in resource use can be effected. And last, it must lead to positive action on behalf of resource conservation. Positive action in this context is defined as becoming more engaged in outdoor activities, developing a stewardship culture towards natural resources, and developing positive, informed decision-making processes that are based on knowledge rather than emotion.

The policy of The Wildlife Society in regard to conservation education is to:

1. Assist in the development and promotion of educational programs that will disseminate ecologically sound knowledge to advance sustainable management of wildlife and other natural resources.
2. Encourage access to conservation education for all age and social groups. Support efforts to increase conservation education in urban populations that may be most disconnected from natural areas, and provide outreach to both youth and adults. Ensure conservation education is available to diverse population segments.
3. Promote efforts to reconnect youth with the outdoors with a focus on conservation of natural resources through appreciation and understanding of natural resources and ecological function.
4. Promote increased cooperation and communication among all agencies and groups concerned with outdoor recreation, conservation education, and resource management.
5. Encourage members of the wildlife profession to (a) interpret and make readily available results of wildlife research that citizens require for decision-making, (b) actively participate in the implementation of sound, publicly-oriented programs in conservation education, and (c)

encourage agencies and organizations to use the most effective technologies and techniques to disseminate conservation education.