

Expanding Wildlife Education for Future Generations



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Needs Identification

Youth today suffer from “nature-deficit disorder”, which is a term coined by Richard Louv (2006) to describe the growing divide between children and nature. When youth are exposed to hands-on learning experiences with nature, they are more likely to perform better in school and be good stewards of the environment. The Wildlife Habitat Education Program (WHEP) is a national program that exposes youth to potential careers and education in the wildlife and fisheries industries and engages them through friendly, wildlife competition. In an effort to increase nature-based experiences and recruit more youth to natural resources opportunities in South Carolina, intentional programming was developed to recruit adult mentors and expand WHEP opportunities across the state.

Program Objectives:

- Recruit and train 4-H Volunteers, 4-H Agents, and other educators
- Provide tools and resources for educators to teach youth about wildlife and fisheries management and conservation
- Provide educators with hands-on field experience to better equip them to teach youth about wildlife
- Increase the overall interest of WHEP in South Carolina



Figure 1: Educators learn about wildlife management plans and participate in a mock wildlife challenge test

Program Delivery

- A six hour, hands-on workshop was held at John de la Howe - School for Agriculture in McCormick, South Carolina
- Conducted by the SC WHEP Committee, which consisted of 4-H & Natural Resources agents, 4-H specialists, wildlife specialists & industry experts
- Morning portion featured presentations on an overview of WHEP and an in-depth look at the individual activities within WHEP
- In the afternoon, participants were exposed to mock contests, modeled after state & national contests, and a guided walk through of a written wildlife management plan

Results

• All participants (n = 21) agreed or strongly agreed that the training increased their skills in wildlife areas of interest to them, provided them information/resources to successfully lead a WHEP team, and gave them hands-on experience that will help them with future WHEP activities

• The WHEP Training made 90% of participants more passionate about youth wildlife programs

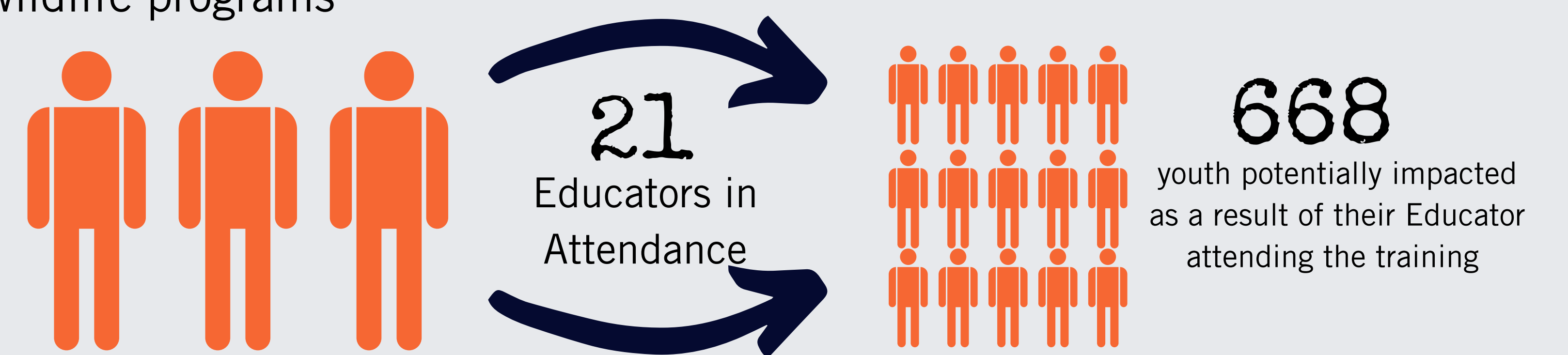


Table 1: Survey responses by participants using a 5-point Likert scale

Declarative Statement Used: <i>The WHEP Adult Educators Training...</i>	Percent Sum Agree/Strongly Agree	Mean
Gave me hands-on experience that will help me with future WHEP activities	100%	4.82
Provided me with information/resources to successfully lead a WHEP team	100%	4.62
Increase my skills in wildlife areas of interest to me	100%	4.24
Made me more passionate about youth wildlife programs	90%	4.38
Allowed me to network with other educators from across the state	81%	4.19



Future Steps & Impact:

The recent successes of WHEP in South Carolina include hosting the first State WHEP Contest in over a decade, and 4-H and FFA teams placing third and first overall at the National WHEP Contest, respectively, which has led to new support and collaboration from across the state.

Nemours Wildlife Foundation has agreed to become a sponsor of the program and has provided funding for future state WHEP contests, along with support for youth to attend the national contest. The South Carolina WHEP will continue to expand by having additional adult workshops, along with youth WHEP workshops.

