

American Wilderness Leadership School (AWLS)

2018 Session #4

Mary Havlik

I would like to thank the Education Sables Committee of the Adirondack-Catskill Chapter of the Safari Club for sponsoring my trip to the American Wilderness Leadership School (AWLS) in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. The week long program, which is designed specifically for educators, focused on incorporating the outdoors into the classroom.

I had a mix of emotions as I headed off to Wyoming for the week. I was excited as I love being outdoors and knew we would be learning how to shoot archery and I would be expanding my knowledge about land and animal conservation. However, I was also nervous as I would be spending a week away, without cell service, with an unknown group of strangers.



As I was greeted by the AWLS instructor at the airport, I immediately calmed and was overwhelmed by the friendliness and excitement he presented awhile welcoming me. In the van, I met six other educators and learned about the vast level of experiences, where they were from, and how they hoped to use the information. Everyone, all thirty of us, were eager to learn about



incorporating conservation and ecology lessons with our students.

We began instruction on the evening of our arrival, discussing the basic laws of ecology. Our ecology course was broken into several classes, including wildlife ecology, animal migration patterns, stream ecology, the Yellowstone ecosystem, and field trips to the Wyoming Game & Fish and the Elk Refuge.



After the seated instruction, we were able to apply all of this information by getting into the stream to calculate flow and examine the aquatic wildlife, and we designed games to demonstrate the impact of hunting, predators, and environmental changes on animal populations.



Other hands-on experiences included survival training, building a shelter, obtaining water, and starting a fire; we also learned how to shoot archery and are certified with the National Archery in Schools Program. We also learned firearms safety, safe shooting practices, and firearms cleaning and we finalized our bonding experience with a whitewater rafting trip down the Snake River.



All of these experiences are things that can be transferred on to our students. I run counseling groups with students who have a high level of interest in the outdoors-camping, fishing, and hunting. I plan to share the information I learned with them, to help them further their appreciation for nature and understand the value in conservation. I also want to expand their understanding of the ecosystems. The nature trail at our school should be the perfect place to incorporate these lessons.



At Cooperstown Central School, one of our physical education teachers is already teaching archery. I am excited to say that I have reached out to him and arranged some co-teaching opportunities so I can take advantage of my NASP certification and connect with students in another way. This was my first experience with archery since I was in high school and I am happy to say that I developed a personal appreciation for target shooting. Since returning home, I purchased my own compound bow to continue to advance my skills and I have enrolled in the bow hunting safety course.



I am very grateful to have been offered this opportunity to attend the AWLS educators program. I am excited to share my experience with my fellow coworkers and other educators to encourage them to attend. This was an amazing experience that I not only enjoyed, but one that my students will also gain from.