

American Wilderness Leadership School

Summer 2019

By Margaret Sharkey

An interest in hunting and conservation, plus a love of the outdoors, motivated me to apply to the American Wilderness Leadership School (AWLS). As a teacher in the Hoosick Falls Central School District, I have been promoting opportunities for students with similar interests. Thanks to a grant from the Adirondack-Catskill Chapter of Safari Club International (SCI), I was able to attend AWLS with 35 educators from across North America and now have more skills to share with my students. Among these skills is a budding interest in archery, so I have chosen the last three steps from the National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP) guidelines to help me share my experience at AWLS. These steps are Shot Set Up, Release, and Follow Through/Reflect.



Shot Set Up

Participants from California to New York, a group that included a large representation from the Midwest, and even educators from Alaska and Canada, gathered in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, for the one-week AWLS program. Some of us had experience hunting; some of us didn't. What we all shared was a love of learning and an appreciation of the outdoors. The first element that impressed us was the natural grandeur of the setting, a campus located in the Bridger-Teton National Forest south of Yellowstone Park. Soon after arrival, we were greeted by the exceptionally friendly staff and enjoyed getting to know each other as we prepared for an intensive course which would keep us busy 15 hours a day. ***The shot was set with intention as the AWLS staff targeted the SCI Foundation goals!***

Release

Our intensive schedule began almost immediately. It was perfectly planned and executed to take advantage of the short time that we would all be together. Most of our training was hands-on. We learned such skills as the following: outdoor survival, NASP archery, firearm safety, shooting sports, fly fishing, and Project Wild leadership. We also took a college-level introductory course in Wildlife Ecology and Conservation. Field trips rounded out the hand- on and classroom learning. One day, our college lecture was presented on a mesa overlooking the Pinedale gas fields, where a warden from the Wyoming Game and Fish department discussed the interplay of hydraulic fracturing and wildlife conservation. We also visited Trapper's Point to learn about the area's natural history. Another day, we visited an Elk Refuge and the Grand Teton's visitor center. ***The shot was released with the confidence generated by the staff's knowledge and experience!***

Follow Through /Reflect

Since returning from AWLS, I have had time to reflect on this valuable experience and, now that the school year is beginning, I am planning my follow through. Reflecting on the experience, I am happy to have shared this opportunity to expand my horizons with a group of educators that has become a support network connected via a Facebook group. In terms of follow through, I plan to continue supporting the Outdoor Education opportunities that we offer at Hoosick Falls Central School District; these opportunities include hunter education, shooting sports, archery competition, tight lines fly fishing, and the Earth Club. Thanks to the Adirondack-Catskill Chapter of Safari Club International, ***I will be able to follow through, incorporating the lessons I learned at the American Wilderness Leadership School!***



Photos:

- 1) Educators from across North America gather upon arriving at AWLS.
- 2) Margaret (on the left), happy that she hit the 3-D target, enjoys competition with colleagues.