



# 4-H Wildlife Management Education Highlights State's Abundant Resources

## Impact Statement

### The Problem/Issue:

In a comparison of state natural resources, Alabama is first for most navigable streams; first for most species of saltwater and freshwater fish; fourth in overall biodiversity; and fifth in species diversity. This abundance of natural resources has a direct impact on Alabama's economy. For example, 1.4 million of the nation's 18 million white-tailed deer and 350,000 of its 4million wild turkeys are located in Alabama. Hunting and fishing by 360,000 in-state and 30,000 out-of-state hunters generate over \$600,000 annually in taxes, license fees, hunting rights and sales of equipment and supplies.

### What's Been Done:

4-H wildlife and fisheries programs have attracted approximately 8,000 youth to learn the skills necessary to manage and conserve habitats necessary to support those resources. Those who participate on county teams at the State Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Contest demonstrate their ability to identify wildlife foods and habitats, make management recommendations and write urban management plans. During the contest, training is conducted for Extension agents and volunteer leaders interested in coaching teams. Since 1987, Alabama's teams have won the national invitational six times and consistently placed in the top five.

This year, a district natural resources camp met its goal of integrating traditional and non-traditional youth audiences when it attracted more urban youth (52) than rural youth (34). These campers learned about native Alabama wildlife, went fishing and boating, practiced calling turkeys and feasted on new foods at a wild game dinner.

In preparation for a new state-level emphasis on sportfishing, Extension created a new steering committee and had eight people trained by the National 4-H Sportfishing Committee to be state instructor-trainers. However, there are already many local fishing events that emphasize water safety, fish identification, selection and use of lures, casting and fish cleaning. In addition, high school-level aquaculture programs have begun in Baldwin and Mobile counties. Ninety students participated in field experiences dealing with water quality and fish health.

### Why We Care:

The state-level 4-H wildlife program provides opportunities for youth to:

- Develop an appreciation of the need and importance of conserving and properly managing natural resources
- Demonstrate knowledge and skills related to the management of the various wildlife resources.
- Develop critical-thinking, decision-making and team-building skills

- Develop and demonstrate citizenship and leadership knowledge and skills
- Write essays (to receive scholarships) explaining the importance of natural resources in their lives

Screams of glee, smiles on faces and several quotes reflect experiences of youth in their first "natural environment" adventure at a district-level camp:

"I didn't know that venison was deer, and that it tasted so good."

"I actually built my own birdfeeder. It was truly amazing because I thought I couldn't do it, but I proved myself wrong.

"I learned that flying squirrels really don't have wings."

"Do not kill a female turkey!"

"More fatalities happen from tree stand accidents during hunting season than gun accidents."

Local-level experiences provide younger youth enjoyable ways to learn basic biology and aquatic ecology, while older youth have experienced the practical application of biology, chemistry and mathematics in a "hands on" environment.