

2019 WCTWS Student-Professional Workshop Necedah NWR, October 5, 2019
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Student Chapter Members

Weather for Saturday, October 5 showed rain, wind, and cold temperatures. However, that did not stop Northland College and UW - Stevens Point students from attending a Student Professional Workshop at the Necedah National Wildlife Refuge. The Wisconsin Chapter of The Wildlife Society sponsored the workshop with the objective of offering hands-on experiences for students. The day-long workshop focused on areas of work such as distance sampling, habitat monitoring, surveying, and wetland classification. Brad Strobel, Wildlife Biologist and Mark Pfof, Private Lands Biologist with the US Fish and Wildlife Service led the group of students in exploring the field techniques.

When we arrived at Necedah, we explored the beautiful, informative Visitor Center before settling in for the long day ahead of us. Once everyone was settled, Brad and Mark introduced themselves and gave an overview of their jobs and the refuge in general. Not long after, we were split into two groups. One would stay in the warm building for an hour or so and work with Brad while the other group ventured to the cold, wet swamp with Mark.

Students who decided to brave the rain were introduced to a laser level. Mark explained how to use the device and we practiced before receiving a wetland restoration scenario. Some of us were asked to create a wetland scrape for a client and some were to build a ditch plug. Armed with waders, a laser level, and a job book, we took to the wetland to complete our tasks. To build the wetland scrape, we needed to map out an area that was favorable to wetland species, fit the wants of our client, and stay within our budget. Once we determined the area and shape of the scrape, we were tasked with calculating the volume of our wetland and prices. Another component to this situation was creating habitat for all wildlife, and not just the ducks for the client. From our budget, \$1000 was set aside to use at our discretion to provide habitat for other wetland dependent species. While this was going on, the other group of students was building a ditch plug, which is a slightly different way of creating the same wildlife habitat. For this exercise, we were responsible for plugging up an offshoot of a river to create a larger more static system. With our laser level we were responsible for mapping the changes in elevation and depth of the ditch. The next part required a little more math. We then had to figure out how much fill we would need to fill the ditch. Once we had this information, we began determining the expected flooding and calculating the size of the wetland the plug would create. After each of these exercises, we hung up our dripping clothes in the Visitor Center and discussed if the price of each management action would be worth the effort and how wildlife would use each.

Students working with Brad were shown a survey technique used frequently at the refuge for a variety of species. Distance sampling involves walking transects to determine the density of a certain species of interest in an area. At Necedah, one species of concern is the Karner blue butterfly. We tried this technique of sampling by walking transects in the prairie and looking for little colored plastic frogs while collecting data using ArcCollector. This allowed us to practice

measuring distances of the animals from the transect and determine our detection rates. After we trudged back to the building, we were able to analyze our results using R Studio.

Overall this workshop was a great event for networking with professionals in the field and also up-and-coming peers from across the state. In the forming stages of this workshop, Dr. Scott Hygnstrom would like to make this an annual event to provide a setting for students to network and learn valuable hands on skills. We hope to recreate this event next year and begin a tradition of having a Student-Professional Workshop every fall, so that new and old students from all three TWS student chapters in the state have the opportunity to meet each other. Each year to make logistics easier for all chapters, we will try to and rotate the workshop location so that each year it is more centrally located to a different student chapter. Next year, we hope to move the workshop up to the northwoods so that the Northland students do not have to drive so far! By creating this annual event, we hope to promote unity among our student chapters and get the students among each of the chapters to interact more.

This event provided a great opportunity for the presidents of the student chapters to meet and talk about opportunities to get the chapters more engaged and work together on projects or events. At each chapter, we have unique projects and specialties. Northland's student chapter has the opportunity to work more with wolves and other woodland obligate species, while, Madison's chapter has the ability to work with animals that come from a more urban or suburban setting. Stevens Point's chapter is unique in that they have a wide range of independent research projects that span throughout central Wisconsin. All of these projects offer unique opportunities to any student no matter the chapter and we think that all students throughout the state should be able to collaborate on these opportunities to gain valuable experience. Another step in the path of collaboration is to host joint workshops. These events would be entirely student organized and managed. They would be just another way for students to learn valuable hard and soft skills within the profession. By creating and organizing these types of events, we hope to achieve the goal of having a more unified student body within the Wisconsin Chapter of The Wildlife Society.

As students who attended the workshop, we thought it was a great experience for all who attended, even with the weather being less than stellar. Students had a great time learning how to assess wildlife populations and how to manage wetlands on private lands. In addition to these experiences, the relationships and contacts made at the Student Professional Workshop likely will lead to more collaboration among all three of the student chapters. All aimed at providing more opportunities and learning experiences for students across the state of Wisconsin. Lastly, from all students and WCTWS board members, we would like to thank the Necedah National Wildlife Refuge staff and anyone else who helped organize this event!