



The Wildlife Society  
Native Peoples Wildlife Management  
Working Group



**Native Student Professional Development Program  
Raleigh, North Carolina  
October 15-19, 2016  
Final Report**

**Summary of Objectives and Accomplishments:**

As a scientific organization for professionals who manage and conserve wildlife and habitats, The Wildlife Society (TWS) is increasingly concerned about the lack of ethnic and cultural diversity within the profession. Diversity is essential if the profession is to grow and meet the nation's conservation challenges. To help address this concern, TWS established a professional-development program for Native students studying various aspects of natural resource management.

The indigenous community has enormous potential to enrich diversity within the wildlife profession. Native lands often consist of important wildlife habitat, and indigenous students are showing a growing interest in pursuing careers in wildlife management and conservation. Furthermore, Native American and other indigenous cultures rely heavily on wildlife resources as a source of income, basis for their culture, and subsistence living. TWS has an active Native Peoples' Wildlife Management Working Group (hereafter, Working Group or NPWMWG) composed of wildlife professionals and students, tribal and non-tribal, who recognize native people's cultural, spiritual, and ecological connections to the land. TWS and the Working Group have been exploring ways to promote the early development of indigenous wildlife professionals. Interest in wildlife careers is growing among indigenous students, and since its inception in 2006, the program has provided 95 students with professional development opportunities.

TWS believes one of the most-effective ways to support indigenous wildlife students is to give them an opportunity to attend and participate in TWS's Annual Conference – the largest gathering of wildlife professionals in North America. In 2008, TWS, with support from multiple federal agencies, implemented a competitive Native Student Professional Development (NSPD) Program. Individuals selected for this program receive grants of \$1,500-\$2,500 each (depending on student location, conference location and total amount of funding available) to help cover

registration fees, lodging, meals and transportation to attend and participate in the annual conference. They also receive a one-year membership in TWS and become members of the Native Peoples' Wildlife Management Working Group. As TWS members they receive all the associated benefits, including *The Wildlife Professional*, the weekly *eWildlifer*, access to the TWS Network Online Directory (launching in December), and free online access to all TWS journals (effective Jan. 1).

The purpose of this APHIS grant was to provide Federal financial assistance to fund a symposium or provide funds for competitive students to participate in The Wildlife Society's 23rd Annual Conference in Raleigh, North Carolina, October 15-19, 2016.

**Eligibility:**

Candidates must be self-identified members of a Native American, Native Hawaiian, First Nations, or indigenous tribe, and currently enrolled in an undergraduate or graduate program in a relevant academic discipline such as wildlife biology or ecology. Applicants must display a record of academic excellence and a strong interest in pursuing a career in wildlife management or conservation.

**Application:**

Flyers for the Professional Development Program (attached PDF) were sent out May 22 with a due date of August 1, 2016.

**Selection:**

Qualified applicants are evaluated by a panel consisting of the Chair of the Native Peoples' Wildlife Management Working Group, two other working-group members, a TWS staff member, the Professional Development Program Coordinator, and at least one representative from other program partners, including the Native American Fish and Wildlife Society.

With an increase in funding from sponsors this year, the Native People's Wildlife Management Working Group had funding for sixteen students to attend this year's conference. The National Wildlife Research Center's grant financially supported two Native American students to attend this year's conference, Grant Real Bird, White Mountain Apache, from Arizona State University and Ty Werdel, Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate, from South Dakota State University.



Front row (left to right): Paige Schmidt (NSPD mentor and NPWMWG Sec/Treas.), Alana Wilcox, Laura Lagunez, Ashley Archer. Middle row (left to right): Xavier Lovato, Daniel Bird, Brett Charles Stevenson, Bryan Begay, Celina Gray, Jacob Riley, Ty Werdel. Back row (left to right): Serra Hoagland (NSPD Program Coordinator, NPWMWG Chair-Elect), Talbrett Caramillo, Chase Voirin, Kyle Bobiwash, Grant Real Bird, Harlan Tso. *Not pictured: Brissa Christophersen*

**2016 Native Student Professional Development Program participants**

**Ashley Archer**

Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians  
Michigan State University  
Undergraduate Fisheries and Wildlife

**Bryan Begay**

Navajo  
Northern Arizona University  
Undergraduate  
Forestry with a certificate in Wildlife Ecology and Management

**Daniel Bird**

Santo Domingo Pueblo  
Purdue University  
Graduate  
Forestry and Natural Resources

**Kyle Bobiwash**

Mississauga First Nation (Ojibway)  
Simon Fraser University  
Graduate  
Pollinator Agroecology

**Celina Gray**

Blackfeet and Little Shell Chippewa  
Salish Kootenai College  
Undergraduate  
Wildlife and Fisheries Biology

**Laura Lagunez**

Navajo Nation and Nahua Indian  
Cornell University  
Undergraduate  
Animal Science

**Grant Real Bird**

White Mountain Apache  
Arizona State University  
Undergraduate  
Environmental and Resource Management

**Brett Charles Stevenson**

Ninilchick Village Tribe  
Salish Kootenai College  
Undergraduate  
Wildlife and Fisheries

**Chase Voirin**

Navajo  
University of Arizona  
Graduate Wildlife Management and Conservation

**Ty Werdel**

Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate (South Dakota)  
South Dakota State University  
Graduate  
Wildlife Sciences

**Alana Wilcox**

Manitoba Métis Federation, Prairie Buffalo Local  
University of Manitoba  
Graduate  
Biological Sciences/Zoology

**Brissa Christophersen**

Native Hawaiian  
Humboldt State University  
Undergraduate  
Wildlife Conservation & Management

**Harlan Tso**

Navajo  
Northern Arizona University  
Undergraduate Wildlife Management

**Xavier Lovato**

Cochiti/Santo Domingo Pueblo  
New Mexico State University  
Undergraduate  
Wildlife Science

**Talbrett Caramillo**

Jicarilla Apache Nation  
San Juan College  
Undergraduate  
Biology

**Jacob Riley**

Laguna Pueblo  
New Mexico State University  
Undergraduate  
Wildlife Science

Professional Development students had a number of requirements to fulfill as part of their attendance at the meeting. Some of the highlights are expressed here.

With sixteen students, this year's group was larger than usual, but very tight-knit, according to Serra Hoagland, program manager. They sat together at the plenary or keynote sessions each morning, attended the NPWMWG meeting where they provided input for the 2017 Annual Conference in Albuquerque, and hosted a dinner during which each student gave a 3-5 minute presentation on their culture, recent field work or jobs, and proposed research.

Alana Wilcox, a member of the Métis Nation and Ph.D. student at the University of Manitoba, had the opportunity to volunteer at the conference last year in Winnipeg, but says attending the conference as part of the NSPD program was quite different. "In this case, having the chance to interact with other students from a diversity of backgrounds allowed us to learn from each other, not only with regard to what we're studying, but also our personal experiences in the wildlife profession," she said.

Northern Arizona University undergraduate student Bryan Begay is a member of the Navajo Nation who participated in the program and spoke highly of his conference experience.

“I can’t stress enough on how rejuvenating it was to be surrounded by wildlifers who had the same passions, sentiments and ideas,” Begay said. “My advice to other native students is to apply for the program. Put yourself out there and get to experience the wonderful things that the wildlife professional can offer.”

For others, like Talbrett Caramillo, the NSPD program provides inspiration for students who aren’t sure of the direction of their future. Camarillo is a member of the Jicarilla Apache Nation attending San Juan College in Farmington, New Mexico. Prior to being accepted in the program, he had been considering taking a few semesters off from school and then deciding whether he should continue. “I just felt isolated,” Caramillo said. “I haven’t met students here on campus that are really pursuing anything in wildlife. [The NSPD program] gave me a chance to step back and really kind of ask myself whether or not this is what I want to do, but being accepted is a big sign telling me to keep pursuing wildlife and stay in school.”

Laura Lagunez, a Navajo Nation and Nahua Indian student at Cornell University, is one of two second-year participants in the program. Lagunez took much initiative this year, putting together a webpage for the program and even participating in the panel discussion Handling Microaggressions in the Workplace. Both Lagunez and Chase Voirin—the other second-year participant—served as peer-to-peer mentors to the other students, Hoagland says.

Each student had his or her own unique experiences, but all shared the one similar sentiment: fellowship. Rooming together, sharing meals and even attending talks together facilitated comradery, as Wilcox pointed out. Friendships were made and many of the students continue to keep in touch via email or other online mediums. Among the students there is an overarching tone of fulfillment in the wake of the conference, both professionally and personally.

“Our NSPD students feel welcomed here,” said Hoagland, who joined TWS after participating in the NSPD program in 2010. “TWS is moving in the right direction and we look forward to continued efforts on increasing diversity within our profession at the 2017 TWS meeting.”

**List of partners:**

This year, the program was funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, USDA-APHIS National Wildlife Research Center, and the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community.

**Acknowledgements:**

The NPWMWG previously expressed to The Wildlife Society Council in a letter that while this is a great program, it is difficult to fund without assistance. Serra Hoagland says they've had much more success the past few years with TWS Business Solutions and Development Manager Chuck Shively helping to fundraise. Next year, they plan to look for funding from corporations in addition to tribes and government agencies. Thanks to Chuck for this much needed assistance.

We would like to thank Dr. Larry Clark, Director of the National Wildlife Research Center, for his continued support for grant funding, his interest in this student program, and for attending the Working Group meeting this year.

We would like to extend a special thank you to The Wildlife Society, Ken Williams, and Jane Jorgensen.

**Final Report Prepared by:**

Serra Hoagland – Native Peoples Wildlife Management Working Group, Professional Development Program Coordinator

Daniel N. Gossett – USDA/APHIS/WS/NWRC, NPWMWG member.

Contributions to this report included excerpts from writings from Nick Wesdock, TWS Operations Assistant, and Andrew Hubble, NWRC APHIS Native American Working Group Representative.

**For more information:**

**Name:** Serra Hoagland

**Affiliation:** Program Coordinator, Native Student Professional Development Program

**Phone:** 928-556-2190

**Email:** [serrahoagland@gmail.com](mailto:serrahoagland@gmail.com)

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