

# **Sessions Woods Wildlife Conservation Education Center**

## **Project Plan**

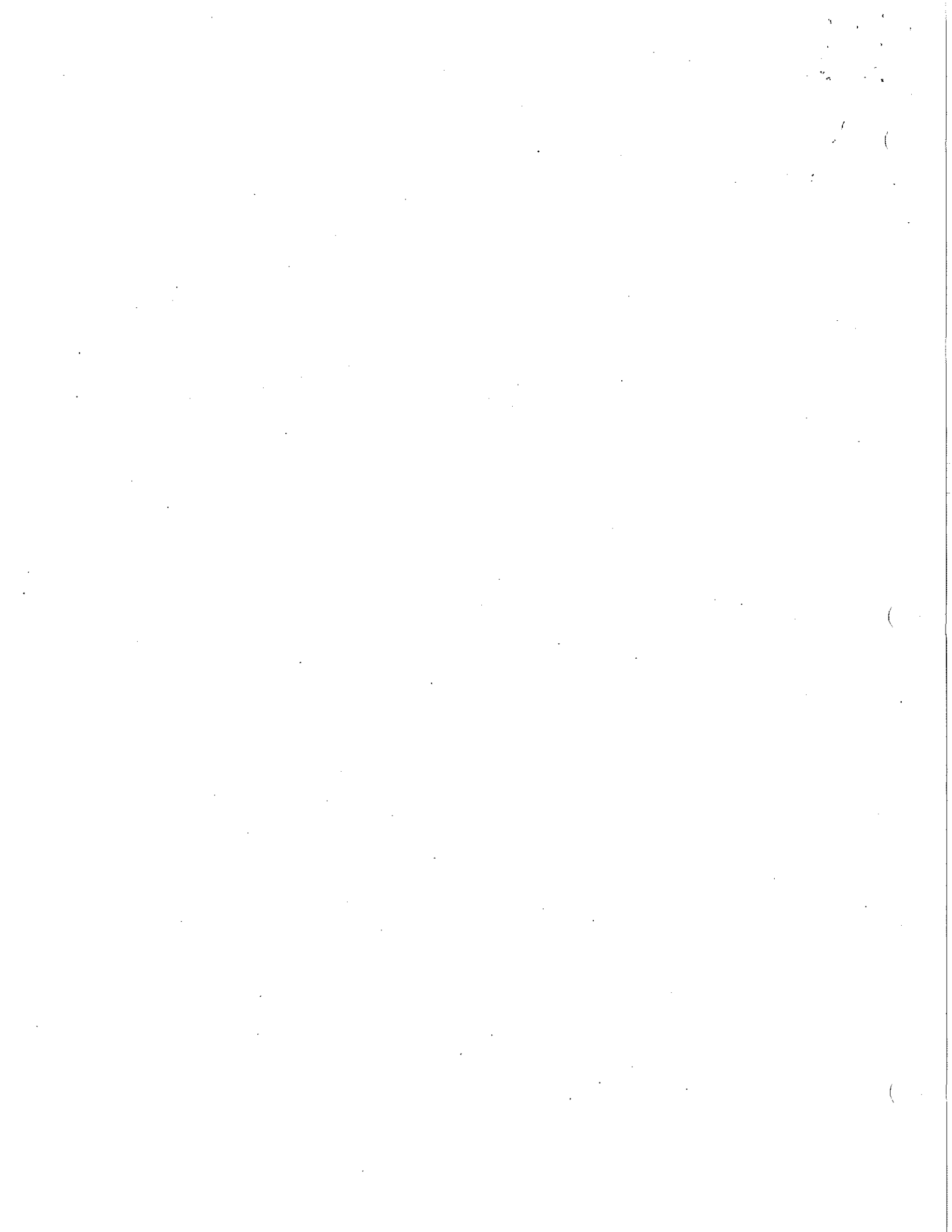
**Sessions Woods Wildlife Management Area  
Burlington, CT**

**July 1995**

**Prepared by the Sessions Woods Management Committee**

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*16 pages*



## SESSIONS WOODS WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA AND CONSERVATION EDUCATION CENTER

### Introduction

The Department of Environmental Protection Wildlife Division has long recognized that public support and understanding of wildlife management is necessary for the Division to accomplish its management goals. However, very few Connecticut citizens understand the principles and practices of wildlife management. In recognition of this problem, the Wildlife Division is making an increased commitment to education and the encouragement of wildlife and habitat management on private land. By developing a conservation education center at the Sessions Woods Wildlife Management Area, in Burlington, the Division aims to provide a place where citizens, educators and youth leaders can learn about wildlife, wildlife management and the role of the Wildlife Division. Visitors will be provided with a quality learning experience through exhibits, demonstration sites, self-guided trails, instructional programs and publications. An enlightened populace will better understand sound wildlife management practices and will be more likely to undertake habitat management projects on their own property. They will also be better able to appreciate how the actions of the Wildlife Division benefit wildlife and the Connecticut residents who enjoy it.

The Wildlife Division's goals for the Conservation Education Center are:

1. To provide visitors with a quality wildlife learning experience through interpretive exhibits, outdoor demonstration sites, technical assistance materials and professional instruction.
2. To familiarize citizens, educators and other conservation-oriented youth leaders with wildlife management and natural resource conservation principles and methods.
3. To demonstrate techniques and benefits of wildlife habitat management, so as to encourage private landowners to manage wildlife habitat on their property.
4. To improve the habitat value of Sessions Woods property for a variety of wildlife species and encourage recreational use of the area.
5. To provide a meeting and training facility for the DEP, various conservation groups and other natural resource agencies.

### History

The 455-acre Sessions Woods Wildlife Management Area was purchased by the State of Connecticut in 1981 using Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act (Pittman-Robertson) funds, derived from excise taxes paid by sportsmen on firearms and ammunition, and matching gift credits. The use of Pittman-Robertson (P-R) money to purchase and develop Sessions Woods does not restrict its use to specific groups. The educational opportunities offered at Sessions Woods will serve a broad cross-section of citizens in our increasingly urbanized state.

## Facilities and Completed Projects

The Conservation Education Center was constructed in 1992(?). It contains a large meeting room that can accommodate up to 250 people, a 3,500-square foot exhibit area, office space for Wildlife Division staff, a small meeting room, a photographic dark room, an archive records and research reference library and kitchen facilities. The building is currently not open for public use until it can be renovated to meet fire safety and ADA codes. Renovation is planned for fall 1995. Presently, the center houses 12 employees of the Wildlife Division, covering such programs as Furbearer, Nonharvested Wildlife, Conservation Education/Firearms Safety, Urban Wildlife and Public Awareness.

Other buildings on the property include a workshop, necropsy room, a pole barn and a former office building that can be renovated into an overnight lodge.

Interpretive demonstration sites were developed on two easily traveled trails. Special drive-in access can be arranged for interested groups, including physically handicapped visitors. Among the demonstrations along the 2.6-mile Beaver Pond Trail are wildlife food and cover plantings, a forest clearcut, water control structures, a solar-electric deer fence and stream improvements. A 25-foot observation tower allows visitors to view distant landscapes. A 0.6-mile inner loop, the Deer Sign Trail, focuses on practices for properties of one to five acres, although techniques demonstrated on both trails can be adapted for both larger or smaller areas. The wildlife management demonstrations include plants, with and without deer-proof fences around them, a bat shelter for as many as 300 bats and artificial tree cavities for cavity-nesting wildlife. Stops along the trail are identified with interpretive signs mounted on wooded posts and protected by plastic covers. A four-color trail map with general information was developed for the two trails.

A Backyard Habitat Demonstration Area was developed to assist homeowners who wish to enhance their property for wildlife. Native trees, shrubs and other plants for landscaping are identified by common and scientific names, and nest boxes, artificial feeders and an artificial wetland provide ideas and techniques.

Along the Beaver Pond Trail, there is an outdoor classroom/amphitheater with seating for 50 people.

[Should we also mention/discuss handicapped outhouse, other outhouses, parking lot, signage, etc??]

## Planning and Development

1983-1994: State wildlife agencies, education centers and museums were surveyed to solicit information which might be useful in the planning and development of a conservation education center. Goals, exhibit and program ideas, and plans for the demonstration trails were compiled. Demonstrations of wildlife management practices were developed along the trails and explained with interpretive signs. A four-color trail guide was developed; copies were placed in the sign-in boxes at each of the two trailheads. Additional meetings were held to deal with such matters as

building code violations, parking lot upgrading, funding and planning.

**1995:** The Sessions Woods Wildlife Management Committee first met in February, 1995. Their first task was to define the messages that the Wildlife Division needs to convey in displays, trail demonstrations, educational programs and printed materials. The committee proposed three main messages: 1) Wildlife population dynamics in Connecticut, 2) Habitat/wildlife relationships, and 3) People and wildlife. These messages are important in helping the public understand wildlife management and the role of the Wildlife Division. They should also help people see how their actions impact wildlife populations. Displays, demonstrations and programs can deliver one or all messages.

### **DO WE WANT TO BRIEFLY EXPLAIN THE MESSAGES OR INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING OUTLINE?**

The following outline lists topics and examples that can be used to convey the three messages:

#### **1) Wildlife population dynamics in Connecticut**

Population growth - Carrying capacity (biological) - Growth Potential

~~K-selection, r-selection~~

Limiting factors (disease, habitat, predators)

Cultural carrying capacity

Examples: Bluff Point deer herd, beaver, coyotes, hawks

Monitoring of populations (how the Division determines status)

Aerial deer surveys

Waterfowl surveys, banding

Threatened and endangered species

Radio telemetry

Collecting data (deer jaws, etc.)

What the Wildlife Division does to manage populations

Hunting

Trapping

Habitat enhancement

Reintroduction (fisher, turkeys)

#### **2) Habitat/Wildlife Relationships**

Wildlife have both general and specific habitat needs; some species have broad needs, other have narrow needs (bog turtle)

Forest interior birds, forest fragmentation

Threatened and endangered species

Wetlands: numbers of species that use them, other benefits, diversity (examples: threatened and endangered species)

Forest succession

## Human effects on habitat, past and present

- Historic changes (bear, deer, turkey, coyote)

- Development/habitat loss

- Current changes (suburbanization) (examples: plover, tern, osprey, grassland birds)

- Species that have flourished in the presence of humans (resident geese, raccoon, starling)

## What the Wildlife Division is doing to manage habitat

- Wood duck and bluebird nest boxes, osprey platforms

- Forestry practices (cutting reviews, creating edge and openings)

- Duck Stamp, wetland projects

- Creating and enhancing wetlands

- Agricultural agreements

## What you can do

- Backyard habitat enhancement

- Encourage native plants

- Outdoor classrooms

- Learn about wetlands, town wetland projects/inland wetland commissions

## 3) People and Wildlife

- Value of wildlife

- Contributes to quality of life, aesthetics

- Ecological relationships, importance (bats:insects, raptors:mice)

- Recreation (hunting, birdwatching, viewing, bird feeding, etc, - economics)

## Nuisance wildlife (economics)

- Beaver, deer, raccoon

## Contributions of sportsmen and other groups to wildlife conservation

- Pittman-Robertson Program

- License sales, duck stamp purchases

## How people's actions affect wildlife

- Pesticides, toxins - DDT, PCBs

- Development, habitat changes

- Exotics (starling, house sparrows, mute swan, Norway rat)

- Feeding wildlife (waterfowl)

- Disturbance (noise, cars) (how disturbance affects nesting activities)

- Pets

- Caring for "abandoned" wildlife

- Perceptions, misconceptions

- Landfills - gulls, increase in raccoons brings more predation on ground-nesting birds

- (actions affect balance in populations)

## What you can do

Encourage bats; build nest boxes; keep cats inside; leash pets at beach; manage yards for wildlife  
Don't feed waterfowl, put chemicals on your lawn, kill snakes, etc.  
Donate to tax check-off, nonharvested program, etc.  
How people's actions affect wildlife

After defining the messages, the committee broke up into five subcommittees (Display, Marketing, Operations, Inventory and Programs) to accomplish the following results:

#### DISPLAY SUBCOMMITTEE

Themes discussed for displays included population dynamics in Connecticut, people and wildlife, and habitat and wildlife. The Peabody Museum (New Haven) and The Maritime Center (Norwalk) were visited to view their displays and talk to the people responsible for them. Subcommittee members were looking for input on display and graphics techniques, use of text as part of the display design, types of materials used for display construction and a display's overall ability to convey the message. Contacts were made at the Peabody and Maritime Center for committee members to get professional advice in planning and fabricating exhibits at Sessions Woods.

It was decided that a beaver marsh diorama should be the primary display, placed against the north wall of the exhibit area. The diorama would relate to some of the demonstrations on the Beaver Pond Trail. It would also convey the following messages: habitat and wildlife, habitat succession, population growth and carrying capacity, trapping to manage populations and people and wildlife (nuisance problems). Experts in the field of constructing dioramas will have to be consulted and hired for this display to be developed. The Wildlife Division would retain creative control.

Not all possible displays have been discussed by the subcommittee at this time. However, plans were discussed for a display explaining deer management in Connecticut, a beach scene showing piping plover/least tern management techniques and an exhibit of historical changes in land use and wildlife populations.

The display subcommittee also suggested that the trail demonstrations should be evaluated for their effectiveness in educating visitors. A trail users survey was developed and mailed to the visitors who had signed in at the trailheads. Surveys will also be placed at the trailheads for visitors to fill out after they walk the trails.

#### MARKETING SUBCOMMITTEE

Marketing ideas included developing promotional and educational videos, a mini-brochure, local publicity, mass mailings to school and environmental groups, advertising in the hunting and trapping guide, putting articles in *Connecticut Wildlife* magazine (several have already appeared), joining the information superhighway (Internet) and developing a kiosk and window display with information about the center's hours, programs, etc.

The subcommittee started compiling a promotional mailing list. Wildlife Division staff were

asked to supply the names of reporters and newspapers that they deal with on a regular basis for interviews, etc. A letter publicizing the availability of the trails and a trail map was sent to Connecticut land trusts and conservation organizations, as well as to all town conservation and inland wetland commissions.

Information about Sessions Woods was sent to the Greater Hartford Tourism District for inclusion in their quarterly guide and to the Connecticut Vacation Guide for inclusion in their annual guide.

#### PROGRAMS SUBCOMMITTEE

A list was compiled of existing slide programs, and the need for an overall slide program on what the Wildlife Division does was identified. Potential field programs and events suggested included slide lectures and workshops on bluebirds and wetlands, programs on hunter safety, field walks, bird feeding and wildlife watching seminars, and outdoor classroom development. A Wildlife Management Day, Migratory Bird Day, National Hunting and Fishing Day, Earth Day, and National Wildlife Week were considerations for annual or biennial events. Outside groups such as UConn (Wildlife Diseases), Fisheries (CARE), Project Wild and CITES could also provide programs and/or workshops.

#### OPERATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE

This subcommittee was responsible for compiling a list of operational needs: additional staff (director, interpreter) maintenance (adjustments to schedules of existing staff), materials and logistics. Materials needed include trash cans, locks for office doors, storage room lock hardware replacement and additional housekeeping supplies. Logistics considerations include providing security for larger events, posting signs informing people about hunting hours and scheduling staff coverage for events by outside groups or after hours. Budget impacts such as additional heating, cooling and electrical expenses, plus additional salaries and materials have to be calculated. Requirements for operating the center at a higher level of use were also discussed. Funding research on possible grants and in-kind donations must also be done. It was suggested that a "Friends of Sessions Woods" group be formed to act as a vehicle for fund-raising.

#### INVENTORY SUBCOMMITTEE

Lists were compiled of existing equipment, supplies, displays, films, videos and other educational materials.

*include our lists in appendix.*



# Sessions Woods Operations Plan

Operations Subcommittee Meetings 2/22/95 & 3/2/95

To go to Level II we will need the following to minimally begin operation of the Education Center:

## Staffing

Director (@\$40,000+) or Reassignment of Current Staff person to director duties.

Interpreter (@\$28,000) or Reassignment of current staff person to cover duties.

Maintenance - with the 2 current maintainers adjustments can be made in priority to cover additional building maintenance.

## Pit Toilets

- On trails (4) materials purchased.
- Near parking area - ADA access - (@\$500) Temporary use in this location until flush outside accessible facilities are available.

## Materials

- Trash cans for foyer area
- Storage room lock hardware needs replaced for security (@\$200).
- Locks for remaining offices. May be covered in hardware changes for door handles by public works (@\$500).
- Depot supplies increase (Toilet paper, towels, cleaners etc.) (@\$500 added to the current costs)

## Logistics

- Aggressive Marketing needed when we have an opening date.
- Charge for particular programs (cost of coffee, speaker etc.)
- Security for larger events.
- Posting accesses about hunting.
- Scheduling of someone to be present when an outside group wants to use the Education Center.

## Budget impacts

- Heating & Cooling increase (@\$ \_\_\_\_\_/yr.).
- Materials (@\$ \_\_\_\_\_/yr.).
- Salaries of staff (@\$ \_\_\_\_\_/yr.).
- Electrical use increase (@\$ \_\_\_\_\_/yr.).

## Programs

- Evening/lecture series.
- Workshops, seminars & training in the Education Center during normal working hours (Mon. thru Fri. 8:30AM - 4:00PM).

- Workshops, seminars & training outside of the Education Center during normal working hours (Mon. thru Fri. 8:30AM - 4:00PM).
- Workshops, seminars & training in the Education Center outside of normal working hours (Mon. thru Fri. 8:30AM - 4:00PM).
- Workshops, seminars & training outside of the Education Center outside of normal working hours (Mon. thru Fri. 8:30AM - 4:00PM).

To operate at a more active level many other items will improve our ability to attract an audience and educate:

Staffing

Director (@\$40,000+).

Interpreter (@\$28,000).

Maintenance - 2 current maintainers plus 2 seasonal maintainers.

Facilities

Bathrooms accessible from the outside Options:

- Storage room conversion to bathroom - provide outside/inside access. Good location for building use, but plumbing would be difficult (@\$\_\_\_\_) ???).
- Outside attached to back of Education Center. (use current field)(@\$50,000).
- Outside independent if Education Center. with separate field (@\$75,000).

Overnight Accommodations - Upgrade existing old office to be used for overnight use. Code changes (building, fire and ADA) structural changes, complete bathrooms (@\$100,000)

Storage - assume loss of use of upstairs storage in Education Center.

Options

- (1) Old office as storage - remove walls etc. Assumes that the facility is not to be converted into an overnight use in the near future (@\$4000).
- (2) Construct a storage building to store wildlife mounts, displays, etc. either as a new building or as new construction as an addition to an existing maintenance building (@\$100,000). For display storage temperature and humidity control is required.
- (3) Upgrade the pole barn - slab floor (@\$3,000), garage doors (@\$8,000) for storage.
- (4) Improve conditions of a portion of the existing maintenance building/office for storage. For display storage temperature and humidity control is required (@\$30,000).

- (5) Darkroom in the Education Center could be used for storage to some additional extent unless plans for its use are a priority (@\$500).

#### Materials

- ?Pay phone in foyer(@\$\_\_\_\_\_)
- ?Emergency phone (911 only)on the outside (@\$\_\_\_\_\_).
- Display area track lighting (@\$20,000)
- Wall picture hanging system (@\$8,000)

#### Logistics

- ?Gift sales counter (perhaps display of items in foyer and sales at office or an additional wall in office to separate & display.
- Display area use (do we need video cameras for protection).
- Fee schedule for outside uses of indoor facilities.
- Develop Friends of Sessions Woods organization. Can we start it ourselves.
- Consider Federal Aid and \$ collections carefully. Concerns over gift account safety. Can we call everything a donation and use the \$ as we need to.
- Doors in the cross hall to cut the noise during use of the Meeting Room.

#### Budget impacts

- Heating & Cooling increase (@\$\_\_\_\_\_/yr.).
- Materials (@\$\_\_\_\_\_/yr.).
- Storage
- Bathrooms
- Salaries of staff(@\$\_\_\_\_\_/yr.).
- Lighting
- Electrical use increase(@\$\_\_\_\_\_/yr.).



# Sessions Woods Management Committee

## Programs Subcommittee report May 19, 1995

Peter Picone, Jenny Dickson, Paul Rego, Paul Fusco

The Programs Subcommittee is charged with discussing and making recommendations to the full committee about potential and existing programs that can be utilized for the wildlife division's Sessions Woods educational effort.

### A- Existing Programs

What is available from existing wildlife programs for public education and awareness?

#### Existing Slide Programs:

Bluebirds in CT - J. Dickson  
Bats in CT - J. Dickson  
CT Endangered Species - J. Victoria, J. Dickson  
Eagles in CT - J. Victoria, J. Dickson  
CT Coyotes - P. Rego  
Furbearers in CT - P. Rego  
Fisher Reintroduction - P. Rego  
Effects of Urbanization on Wildlife - P. Picone  
Landscaping for Wildlife (Using native plants) - P. Picone  
Wildlife Damage Management (backyard, household) - P. Picone  
White-tailed Deer Management in CT - H. Kilpatrick  
Bluff Point Deer Study - H. Kilpatrick  
Wild Turkey in CT - D. May, H. Kilpatrick  
Forest Habitat Management - S. Jackson, P. Rothbart, J. Wilson  
Beaver Management in CT - J. Wilson  
Waterfowl in CT - P. Merola  
Mute Swan Management Issue - G. Chasko, P. Merola  
Rabies Management in CT - M. Clavette, C. Vann  
Hunter Education/ wildlife identification - D. Kubas, B. Kalinowski  
Need an overall slide program that covers- What does the wildlife division do?

#### Potential Field Programs / Events:

Bluebird slide lecture and workshop  
Bat slide lecture and workshop  
Hunter Safety programs  
Snow-tracking Field Walk  
Backyard Habitat Enhancement Lecture and Field Walk  
Outdoor Classroom Development (how to inventory and manage school properties for wildlife.  
Bird / Plant Walks  
Bird Feeding Seminar  
Amateur Nature Photography  
Wetlands / Vernal Pool Workshop  
Wildlife Watching Seminar

Events that could be done on an annual or biennial basis.

**Wildlife Management Day** - this would entail each program leader to have a station with a table with charts, photographs, and publications, and other display materials about their area of expertise for public viewing and discussion. Each division program or project would be stationed at locations along the Deer Sign Trail. Public is invited to view stations and discuss wildlife topics with biologists. There would also be keynote lectures in the main building or under a tent outside behind the main building. A shuttle bus could also be made available for touring Beaver Sign trail. (This type of event is done on a yearly basis at the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station in Hamden; Peter Picone participated in it for five years while working there).

**Migratory Bird Day**

**Earth Day**

**National Wildlife Week**

**Hawk Watch or Hawk Festival**

*CT Environment Completion Day*

Outside Groups- may be utilized for additional programs

Coverts Project

Wild Turkey Hunting Seminar

CARE Program (Fisheries)

Project Wild Workshops

CITES Workshop

Fish and Wildlife Service training sessions

Law Enforcement Updates on Historical Wildlife Enforcement

Forest Stewardship Program

Wildlife Diseases (UConn)

White-tail Classic

Waterfowl Expo

Taxidermy Seminar

Banquets of many traditional wildlife conservation group's annual meetings

TWS Chapter Meetings

Frugal Gourmet (Wildlife Food) Expo

Ted Nugent invitational

Notes taken and typed by Peter Picone

# Display and Exhibit Preparation

## *Important Considerations and Recommendations from the Sessions Woods Display Subcommittee*

Three members (J.B., K.H., P.F.) of the committee went out on a fact finding mission to the Peabody Museum (New Haven) and to the Maritime Center (Norwalk)(Steve Jackson met us in Norwalk). Exhibit designers and planners were spoken to and exhibit tours were taken. The following points should be considered in planning our facility:

1. Small text blocks used at the Peabody seem to be easy to put together, easy to make changes to, have a clean professional look and are relatively inexpensive to produce. They consist of flat, hard plastic backing (similar to the white plastic S.J. has as sample) with laser copy text covered by a flat piece of plexiglass.
2. Larger size text should be handled with vinyl lettering. We will need to have a vinyl cutting machine on site for making large type an integral part of our exhibit designs. Having this piece of equipment at Sessions Woods is a must if we want to be able to set up good designs efficiently.
3. Light box panel text /graphics are used at the Maritime Center and would be good for dark exhibit areas; however, they will require expensive equipment (Maritime Center uses MacIntosh computers, *Illustrator*, *Photoshop*, *Quark Xpress* softwares, slide scanning hardware, and CD rom hardware) capabilities to produce and make periodic changes to light box display film.
4. Questions are used to provoke thought at the Peabody. Instead of stating facts, questions are used to lead the reader to the message. This is done in the 3 sec., 30 sec., 3 min. style.
5. Effective use of track /spot lighting is a must. We will need to invest in quality lighting.
6. Development of a teacher's guide to the exhibits can be an added learning tool.
7. Large is good. Main attractions should be large for better impact.
8. Vertical wall space should be used to maximize our display area. Example: Flock of geese mounted on wall.
9. Sound should be incorporated in some way as a background "mood" sensation.
10. Diorama. Dioramas are gaining status in the exhibit world as an ever increasing way of getting the message across. We have discussed and recommend including one large diorama in the Sessions facility. It would show a complete beaver marsh from lower transitional to upper open water, modeled after the existing beaver marsh on the Sessions property. This would include a painted background, mounted specimens and appropriate plant types. A cut-away beaver lodge would be in the foreground, with one or more beaver inside. Other species could include deer, wood ducks, mallards, otter, osprey, etc.. We believe the prospect of obtaining grant money for this project would make it possible. This proposed diorama would be built along one entire wall (north) in the exhibit room and would serve as the main centerpiece of the facility. It would be directly related to what people see out on our trail. To our knowledge, this would be the only one of its kind (at least in this part of the country).
11. We were advised to become members of N.A.M.E. (National Association of Museum Exhibit builders) to have access to professionals in the exhibit building field and to use their expertise in producing our designs.
12. Many other techniques are used and should be considered on a display by display basis. These would include hands-on, interactive, video monitor and similar exhibit types.
13. We have a standing invitation to visit the Peabody Museum fabrication and graphics lab to see and learn the techniques and materials they use in producing their exhibits.

