



Faces of Conservation Legacy



LESLIE WITTENBURG, *Director of Education – L.A.N.D.S. Intensive*

Enjoying the outdoors through fishing, hunting, camping, sailing and scuba diving has been a passion of mine ever since I can remember. Graduating with a bachelor's degree in interdisciplinary studies with a minor in biology from Texas Woman's University led me straight into a 20-year career as a science and aquatic science teacher in public schools. During that time, I also earned a master's degree in education from Texas Tech University and became a certified administrator.

I was introduced to the Texas Wildlife Association and the L.A.N.D.S. Intensive program during the last five years of my teaching career. I became a L.A.N.D.S. certified teacher and began using the materials and resources available to me. I witnessed first-hand the positive impact this program had on my students, fellow teachers and community members.

This meaningful hands-on learning experience was indeed connecting my students to the land and promoting a sound land stewardship ethic. For me this was an "ah ha" teaching moment. There is no better way for students to learn science and connect them to the land than to get them outdoors.

I immersed my students with the L.A.N.D.S. hands-on activities, quail necropsy and field study. I also helped present activities and teaching methods as well as differentiation strategies each summer at L.A.N.D.S. Intensive teacher trainings.

In July 2011, I pursued my newly found passion for outdoor education of students, teachers and volunteers and went to work for TWA as a Regional Education Coordinator and Education Program Specialist in the Dallas/Fort Worth area.

I was tasked with implementation and expansion of the L.A.N.D.S. Intensive program in that area, as well as developing a Trinity River watershed study program. By partnering with Hamline University's Center for Global Environmental Education's Waters to the Sea program and Imagination Fort Worth, the Trinity River program continues to grow each year and reached more than 1,200 students in 2016.

I developed, wrote and implemented a "Necropsy in a Box" program for Texas teachers to assist them in conducting quail necropsies in their classrooms. I piloted this program four years ago with three schools and 56 students. For the 2016-2017 school year, the Necropsy in a Box program will serve 122 Texas schools and 11,717 students.

Since November of 2015, I have served as the Director of Education for the L.A.N.D.S. Intensive program working for its continued growth across the state, enriching and expanding the TEKS aligned curriculum, training and mentoring teachers, recruiting and training new volunteers and developing new partnerships.

I firmly believe that every student in Texas should have the opportunity to participate in the L.A.N.D.S. Intensive program. Having been involved with the L.A.N.D.S. Intensive program almost from its inception and seeing the positive results including former program students who have entered the wildlife industry or who are pursuing wildlife degrees proves that we, the Texas Wildlife Association and L.A.N.D.S. Intensive, are making a difference.



Leslie Wittenburg guiding a macroinvertebrate study with a student.





CLINT FAAS, *Director of Conservation Programs*

Hunting, fishing and the outdoors have always been passions of mine. Ever since I can remember, I wanted to be outside as much as possible and choosing a career in wildlife was only fitting.

I earned a bachelor’s in wildlife ecology from Texas A&M University and a master’s in wildlife ecology from Texas State University. In 2013, after several years of working as a wildlife manager on private property where I gained valuable first-hand experience, I was hired by the Texas Wildlife Association as the Conservation Program Coordinator. I currently serve as TWA’s Director of Conservation Programs.

This role is twofold. First, I coordinate adult education programs. These may be in the form of classroom-style symposia or conferences, hands-on field days or online webinars and webisodes. Each year, we host or take part in eight to 12 events across the state and 12 monthly webinars. Although TWA plays a major role in these programs, none of them would be possible without the help of partner organizations and agencies.

Second, I focus on important conservation initiatives within the state. These are current or emerging issues that face private property owners. My involvement includes disseminating information to TWA leadership and representing TWA and private landowners at various stakeholder meetings or on advisory committees.

Ultimately, the goal is helping landowners and land managers become better land stewards. By offering educational events with instructors who represent the top of their field, we hope to provide stewards with sound, science-based information that they can then apply to the land. In doing this, I know that I am doing my small part to create healthier, well-managed, private lands in Texas.



KASSI SCHEFFER, *Director of Education – Outreach Programs*

Growing up, I always had a fondness for kids and animals but I never had a “this is what I want to be when I grow up” profession in mind. I grew up in Houston and Austin but was fortunate to have family in small towns. They had farms and ranches to explore and ponds to fish, so I have always had an intrinsic love of open space, wildlife and harvest fields.

All of this led me to Texas A&M University. Upon graduating with my animal science degree, I still had no idea what I wanted to do professionally. I was pretty sure that working with livestock was not the direction I was headed.

Then (luckily), a call came from a friend about a position with the Texas Wildlife Association and Texas Brigades—educating youths about wildlife—that was the “light bulb” moment!

I began as the Program Assistant in January 2008, was promoted to Education Program Specialist a few years later and have served as the Director of Education for the Outreach Programs since November 2015. The thing I love most about the Outreach Programs—and what I personally strive for—is creating programs that spark a child’s interest and teaches them something, even if it’s just one fun animal fact that increases their curiosity and encourages learning.

So, while the Outreach Programs are not field based, they offer a lineup of programs that overcome any obstacle of learning and bring the wildlife, land and water to student and teacher. Annually, we send trunks to more than 1,000 classrooms statewide and “beam” skunks into schools during live videoconferences. And, our natural resource educators are interacting with eager students multiple times each week.

I have been asked and have asked myself this question over the years, “How do we know if we’re making a difference?” If anyone has THE answer, please let me know. While our programs may not be halting land fragmentation, conserving water or growing crops directly, they are educating an ever-growing population of young people on how they are connected to the land and why they too should steward our/their resources.

So, my response to THE question is, “We may never know the extensive results of our work with the youth of Texas, but isn’t attempting to make a difference better than not trying at all?”



Students dig into the contents of a Discovery Trunk upon its arrival to their classroom.

