

# Law Enforcement Management of Conservation Outreach Programs in Alabama

**Stephen M. Pepper**, *Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division, Law Enforcement Section, 64 North Union St., Montgomery, AL 36130-1456*

---

*Abstract:* Beginning in 1994 with a mandatory hunter education program, Alabama's Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries has continued to introduce, almost yearly, new outreach programs in both hunter and conservation education. Alabama Conservation Enforcement Officers (CEOs) are often required to participate in these programs. Some law enforcement personnel feel that the outreach programs take up a relatively large percentage of a CEO's time and have a detrimental effect on enforcement efforts. Surprisingly, this study shows that a CEO spends just over 5% of his time with outreach programs and much of this is before the opening of hunting seasons. In addition, enforcement data seems to be correlated with number of law enforcement officers on the job rather than time spent working on outreach programs.

Proc. Annu. Conf. Southeast. Assoc. Fish and Wildl. Agencies 57: 357-363

---

The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources is responsible for protecting the natural resources of the State. Within the Department, the Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries is responsible for protecting and managing the fish and wildlife resources. As with most state fish and wildlife agencies, the Division's Law Enforcement Section is primarily responsible for enforcement of the State's fish and wildlife laws, rules, and regulations. Alabama's Conservation Enforcement Officers (CEOs) face an increasing challenge to their enforcement efforts. Many of these challenges have been brought on by increased emphasis on existing programs or totally new conservation outreach programs. These programs include hunter education programs, conservation education, community and youth fishing events, youth dove hunts, conservation expos, and other various miscellaneous outreach programs. While some of these programs require only a minimum amount of time away from enforcement activities, others require significant amounts of time from the enforcement officer.

At the inception of this study, some enforcement personnel felt that the conservation outreach demands were having a detrimental effect on enforcement efforts. New outreach programs were being brought on board almost every year and increased emphasis on established programs called for more of the enforcement officer's time. Are conservation outreach programs affecting the enforcement effort in Alabama? In this study, the conservation outreach programs in Alabama will be listed and the CEO's role in each will be examined.

**Table 1.** Number of hunter education students trained and certified from 1993–94 to 2001–02. (Statistics provided by Alabama Department of Conservation, Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division.)

|         | <i>N</i> Students trained | <i>N</i> Students certified |
|---------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1993–94 | 11,814                    | 11,151                      |
| 1994–95 | 11,114                    | 10,498                      |
| 1995–96 | 11,810                    | 11,466                      |
| 1996–97 | 12,241                    | 11,450                      |
| 1997–98 | 12,232                    | 11,403                      |
| 1998–99 | 12,452                    | 11,586                      |
| 1999–00 | 13,815                    | 12,872                      |
| 2000–01 | 12,931                    | 12,396                      |
| 2001–02 | 10,752                    | 10,500                      |
| Totals  | 109,161                   | 103,322                     |

## Hunter Education

Although the hunter education program began in Alabama in 1973, the program did not become mandatory until the 1993–94 fiscal year. At this time, anyone born on or after 1 August 1977 was required to complete a mandatory hunter education course before they could purchase a hunting license. With only three full-time hunter education coordinators statewide, the program had to rely on volunteer instructors, wildlife managers, and enforcement officers. Most officers found themselves to be the hunter education coordinator in their assigned area. Since the course was mandatory, the officers had to insure that all applicable age individuals in their assigned area were given an opportunity to take and pass a course. Many officers busily recruited volunteer instructors while others chose to do most of the work involved in preparation and advertising, and then taught the courses themselves. All officers are required to have at least two courses in each county. More than two courses are needed in many counties due to demand. As a result of these efforts, more than 103,000 students were certified from 1993–94 to 2001–02 (Table 1). As scheduling conflicts became a problem throughout the mandatory hunter education program, better delivery mechanisms were being developed. Enforcement officers are assisting with home study options, CD-ROM programs, and Internet courses. Many officers participate in youth shooting sports events in their respective, assigned areas. Thousands of students have participated in these events that are conducted to promote safe, responsible firearms handling, improved marksmanship skills, and above all, recruit new hunters.

## Conservation Education

Conservation education programs are the second group of programs in which enforcement officers participate on a regular basis. Project Wild, Becoming An Out-

doors Woman (BOW), aquatic education, youth dove hunts, conservation expos, state and regional fairs, boat shows, hunting expos and seminars, and archery in schools are some of the programs that demand the enforcement officer's time.

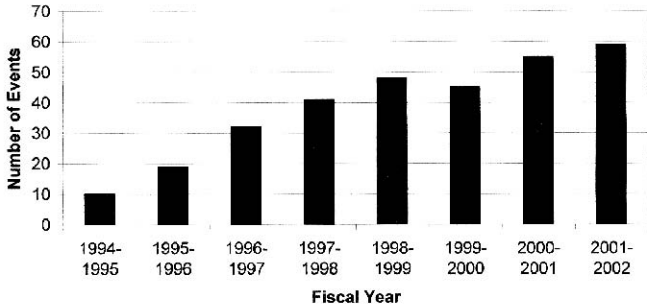
Project Wild is a conservation and environmental education program of instructional workshops and supplementary curriculum materials for teachers. The stated goal of Project Wild is to assist learners of any age in developing awareness, knowledge, skills, and commitment to result in informed decisions, responsible behavior, and constructive actions concerning wildlife and the environment upon which all life depends. The first step is to train teachers, who in turn, pass on their knowledge to the students. Workshops are conducted for schoolteachers and other educators throughout the state. These workshops allow teachers to experience wildlife in the natural state. Enforcement officers provide many of the outdoor experiences for the teachers, including tours of river and lake systems by patrol boat, explaining wildlife and fish habits, patrol experiences, and various job-related problems. The officers conduct and assist in firearm activities involving shotguns, rifles, and pistols. The officers also prepare real-life scenarios to provide the teachers with an insight on daily enforcement activities. Many teachers then establish outdoor classrooms at their respective schools, and enforcement officers are invited to their classes.

BOW is another popular outreach program. Women of all ages participate in seminars in which they are subjected to many outdoor activities. They include fishing, hunting, mountain biking, firearms training, primitive weapon training, preparing wild game, and operating all types of watercraft. This program began in 1994 and as of 2003, 16 seminars have been completed with approximately 1600 women in attendance. BOW continues to be one of the most sought-after outreach programs as the classes are always filled well in advance of the program date. Many enforcement officers participate in the BOW program as instructors. They are also on hand to insure safety in all parts of the program. The reward to the officers is seeing many women develop a whole new perspective relating to hunting, fishing, and the outdoors in general.

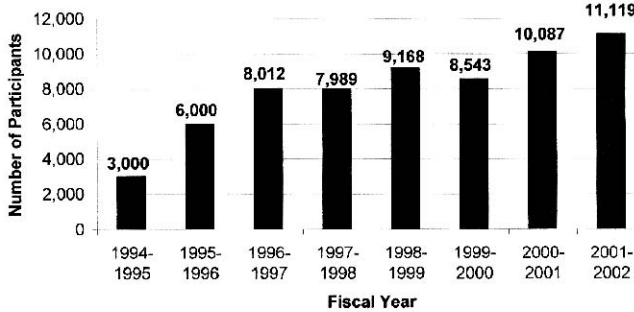
Aquatic education in the form of community fishing events calls for participation from many enforcement officers. The objective of this program is to introduce youth to fishing, provide a quality family experience, and to provide or enhance fishing opportunities for anglers of all ages. As the events provide a wonderful opportunity to bring families together to teach youngsters to fish, they also are provided for physically challenged persons and for senior citizens. From 1994–95 to 2001–02, there were almost 65,000 participants in 361 community fishing events (Fig. 1).

An enforcement officer is usually the point person for these events as the officer is normally the most visible and well-known Division employee in any given area of the state. The officer normally sets up the partnership between the Division and local governments, business, or private citizens. The partnership creates donations for fish, bait, and refreshments. These efforts insure that this program helps participating families have lasting memories of their fishing day.

In September 1999, the Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries initiated a youth dove hunting program. From 1999–00 to 2001–02, 68 youth dove hunts have



Number of Participants in Alabama as of 10/1/02



**Figure 1.** Number of Community Fishing Events and Number of Participants in Alabama from 1994–1995 to 2001–2002. (Statistics provided by Alabama Division of Wildlife and Fisheries.)

been held to date with over 3500 participants. (Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Statistics). This endeavor is a cooperative effort with private landowners and other sponsors, and enforcement officers are involved in organizing these hunts in their assigned areas. After locating a willing landowner to provide the place to hunt, the officer must find other willing sponsors to provide refreshments. The goal is to provide youth the opportunity to experience hunting in a positive atmosphere. The enforcement officers are present at the hunts to insure safety and to help mentor these young hunters.

Recently, the Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries hosted the first Conservation Expo at Oak Mountain State Park near Birmingham. The event displayed to the citizens of Alabama the hunting, fishing, boating, and other outdoor recreational and conservation opportunities throughout the state. Activities included shooting sports, archery, treestand safety, hunting safety, laser shot simulation, falconry, non-game wildlife, conservation organizations, and fishing related activities for all ages.

Eighty enforcement officers helped make this first expo a resounding success.

There were over 2500 visitors at this one-day event and most agreed that this outreach program would grow in the future.

Enforcement officers spend much of their conservation outreach time on a variety of public-initiated events. These include state and regional fairs, boat shows, outdoor shows, hunting expos, and other various seminars and workshops. Enforcement presence is required or requested at these events. The Division's static display booth and/or the computer-generated laser-shooting display, are manned by enforcement officers at most of these events and both have proven to be very popular with the public. Many thousands of people see their first CEO at these events. The professionalism and the courtesy shown to answer every question from the public at these events carries over into the fields, woods, and waters.. The hunting and fishing public remember these encounters with the enforcement officer and tends to respect the officer and for what he/she represents.

In 2003, the Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries began promoting Olympic style archery in selected middle school physical education classes. The State Department of Education and the Division have developed a partnership to conduct a pilot program similar to Kentucky's National Archery in the Schools Program. Alabama's pilot program includes two schools from each of the eight State Department of Education districts. The Division will provide all of the necessary equipment to implement the program in the 16 schools. The National Archery Association has trained division personnel, including several enforcement officers as Level II instructors. These officers will then train physical education teachers at participating schools to be Level I instructors. This program will ultimately influence thousands of young people throughout Alabama.

## **Discussion**

It is no surprise that CEOs in Alabama and enforcement officers in other states have more demands for their work time than ever before due to conservation outreach programs. At the start of research for this paper, 21 Alabama CEOs, selected at random, were asked, "What percentage of your work time do you spend on conservation outreach programs?" The informal estimates ranged from 10% to 40% of their work time. Many officers also felt that the programs did affect their enforcement effort at certain times of the year.

Since most of Alabama's Conservation Outreach programs that require participation of enforcement officers in Alabama began around 1994, a survey of the number of arrests by Alabama officers from 1994-95 until 2001-02 was compiled (Table 2). It is obvious from the information in Table 2 that arrests have declined in Alabama by approximately 25% from the 1994-95 fiscal year to the 2001-02 fiscal year. This happens to be the average percentage in the aforementioned estimated random survey from the 21 enforcement officers. Could there indeed be a direct correlation with the time spent on conservation outreach programs and the decline in arrests? As this answer was too simple, the data contained in Tables 2 and 3 were studied more closely. A drastic decline in arrests in fiscal year 2001 that carried over to fiscal year

**Table 2.** Number of arrests and warnings made by Law Enforcement Section of the Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries from 1994–95 to 2001–02. (Statistics provided by Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries.)

| Year    | Total arrests | Warnings | Combined |
|---------|---------------|----------|----------|
| 1994–95 | 9,099         | 1,639    | 10,738   |
| 1995–96 | 7,901         | 1,553    | 9,454    |
| 1996–97 | 8,428         | 1,898    | 10,326   |
| 1997–98 | 8,914         | 2,059    | 10,973   |
| 1998–99 | 8,802         | 1,832    | 10,634   |
| 1999–00 | 7,954         | 1,415    | 9,369    |
| 2000–01 | 6,846         | 1,050    | 7,539    |
| 2001–02 | 6,597         | 844      | 7,441    |

**Table 3.** Number of vacancies in the Law Enforcement Section of the Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries from 1994–95 to 2001–02. (Statistics provided by the Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries.)

| Year    | <i>N</i> Vacancies |
|---------|--------------------|
| 1994–95 | 10                 |
| 1995–96 | 10                 |
| 1996–97 | 6                  |
| 1997–98 | 14                 |
| 1998–99 | 16                 |
| 1999–00 | 8                  |
| 2000–01 | 7                  |
| 2001–02 | 27                 |

2002 also has a direct correlation with the number of vacancies in the Division's Enforcement Section. Many enforcement officers retired during fiscal years 2000 and 2001. Twenty-seven vacancies were carried into fiscal year 2002, which calculates to 17% of the total authorized enforcement force for the Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries.

To further investigate the enforcement officer's ideas that conservation outreach programs were hampering their enforcement efforts to various degrees, information was gathered from all Alabama Conservation Enforcement Officers for calendar year 2002. They were asked to review their weekly report forms for the whole year, list the number of hours they worked per each three-month period, and then list the number of these work hours that were totally dedicated to conservation outreach programs

**Table 4.** Results of survey of Alabama's Conservation Enforcement Officers' work time for calendar year ending 2002. (Statistics provided by Alabama Division of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries.)

|   | 2002 Year |         |         |         |
|---|-----------|---------|---------|---------|
|   | Jan-Mar   | Apr-Jun | Jul-Sep | Oct-Dec |
| Total hrs. worked by CEOs               | 31,922    | 32,818  | 33,688  | 39,046  |
| Total outreach hrs. worked by CEOs      | 1,159     | 1,588   | 2,568   | 2,151   |
| % of outreach hrs. to total hrs. worked | 3.63%     | 4.84%   | 7.62%   | 5.51%   |

(Table 4). Surprisingly, the enforcement officers do not dedicate as much time on conservation outreach programs as many officers had previously estimated. More work time per officer is dedicated to conservation outreach programs in the late summer, early fall time period (July–September) due to hunter education programs, regional and state fairs, and hunting expos that take place prior to the traditional opening of Alabama's hunting seasons. It should be noted that the entire time dedicated to conservation outreach programs by Alabama's CEOs on the average was only slightly more than 5% of their work time for the entire year. This translates into an average of slightly over two work hours for each 40-hour workweek per officer.

## Summary

Most of Alabama's conservation outreach programs have begun since 1994. Almost yearly since then, a new program has been established, and, most enforcement officers have an initial tendency to feel that their enforcement effort will be hindered. We have to change our work habits for each new program, and have to prioritize our work with each new program.

Conservation outreach programs are here to stay in Alabama. They have proven to be important tools in which to reach the public concerning conservation and natural resource issues. As predicted in previous studies, more outreach programs are working in Alabama due to the popularity and the number of people that have been reached in a short amount of time. Alabama's CEOs are dealing with a more educated and conservation-oriented hunting and fishing public. The officers must be up to the task, as educating and introducing the public to the outdoors will continue to play a prominent role in their job duties. As usual, the dedication and professionalism of these officers will prevail. They will help make conservation outreach programs beneficial to the people of Alabama.