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AGFC, Academics Afield brings new audience outdoors

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Jan. 25, 2023

[Jeff Williams \(/en/news/author/jeff-williams/\)](#), Editor, Arkansas Wildlife Magazine

PINE BLUFF — A group of students has begun building a community of hunters on the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff campus.

Hollie Sanders, an assistant chief in the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission's Education Division, offered a glimpse into the Academics Afield program during the Commission's January meeting.

"This program is designed to introduce college students from nontraditional backgrounds to hunting and recreational shooting through community-based mentorship," Sanders said.

The Georgia Wildlife Federation launched Academics Afield in 2019. It's since grown to eight states across the Southeast with money from a multistate grant through the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program. The AGFC, UAPB and the Arkansas Outdoor Society are program partners.

Sanders says Arkansas was invited to join Academics Afield in 2021; events began with the 2022 fall semester. An intern, Cadarius Gilbert, was hired from a pool of UAPB students and was charged with facilitating four hunting events per year.

"A hunting event includes a safety shoot, an educational component where they learn about wildlife management and species identification, they actually hunt and then we will use the processed game to eat it together in a social event," Sanders said.



Events began with a trap shoot (including safety training) for interested students, followed by on-campus recruiting.

"The majority of those students have lasted with us through the whole fall semester and into the spring semester," Sanders said.

The first hunt focused on northern bobwhite, partially because of its social nature.

"This hunt was held at Caviness Cattle and Quail, and allowed beginning student hunters to participate in a group hunt that was easy to learn from," Sanders said. "They also got to experience

hunting with dogs. Our students were highly engaged, they were successful in harvest and they did get to process quail as well."

Next came pursuit of larger game.



"They also managed a deer hunt held at Hilburn Farms, which was also very successful thanks to the Arkansas Outdoor Society and our own Education staff," Sanders said.

Students enjoyed a duck hunt in mid-January. The plan is to end the semester with another trap shoot aimed at recruitment of new students.

"One thing that I like about this program is we really built relationships," Sanders said. "It's not just a one-off mentored hunt and you don't see folks again. We spent many months with these students through hunter education and instructor certification, safety shoots and hunts. And they have built a small hunting community on the UAPB campus that is growing."

Cutlines

Quail Hunt

A quail hunt was held at Caviness Cattle and Quail, thanks to Harlan Cainess and Lea White, Hollie Sanders and Trenton Powell with AGFC.

Trap Shoot

The first outing of the program was to Blue Rock Gun Club to become more familiar with wingshooting.

Deer Hunt

Participants enjoyed a successful deer hunt at Hilburn Farms, thanks to Scott Hilburn and Ben Haynes with the Arkansas Outdoor Society and Joe Huggins and Jake Wilkerson with AGFC.

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