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Mr. David Buggs, david.buggs@tpwd.texas.gov, 512-389-8595

Alabama Conservation Agency Honored for Workforce Diversity and Inclusion Efforts

SEAFWA Award Recognizes Outstanding Work for Career Recruitment, Outdoor Awareness

The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ALDCNR) has received the 2019 Workforce Diversity and Inclusion Award from the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (SEAFWA). The Alabama agency was recognized for multiple efforts to engage racial minorities, women, and people with disabilities.

The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources has shown exceptional leadership in working to diversify its workforce, an important challenge that must be faced to better serve people of all backgrounds into the future. Their work provides a valuable model for many other fish and game agencies facing the same challenges across our nation. "When you work with people that are doing great things in the community and making progress in an area which we all need to focus, the best thing I can do is get out of their way," said ALDCNR executive director Chuck Sykes.

For five years, the Department has led the Alabama Collegiate Mentoring Program. This gives minority students at Tuskegee, Troy, Alabama, A&M and Auburn Universities hands-on experience in the field through internships and ride-along programs. The goal is to expose students to conservation science career opportunities.

The agency also expanded public outreach to a wider array of demographic audiences. It started a series of urban workshops to provide information and answer questions about wildlife concerns in urban areas, with locations chosen to engage minorities and diverse audiences. The Department also produced Facebook Live events hosted by agency staff, on topics ranging from hunting and hunter education, fisheries and wildlife and employment opportunities.

The 2018-2019 hunting season marked the second year of Alabama's Adult Mentored Hunting Program, with a 200 percent increase in applicants, providing hands-on education and opportunity for 137 people, up from 66 in the first year. One quarter of all applicants were female and a fifth were minorities. Participants learned wildlife biology and ecology, hunting safety and skills, equipment, wild game cleaning and cooking, game laws and more. Various partners made this possible. The program also provides opportunities for people with disabilities, maintaining 20 sites with accessibility, and 233 permits issued last season.

Attracting and retaining a diverse workforce is a challenge for many organizations today, and the Department has created two positions to address the issue. Alongside this, agency conservation enforcement officers took part in 192 outreach and education events reaching 22,961 people in early 2019. The goal is to enhance state outreach, education and recruiting activities, and strengthen partnerships with non-governmental organizations and communities.

The SEAFWA annual Diversity and Inclusion Award allows member agencies to learn from best practices implemented by other agencies, creating benchmarks of progress toward developing more inclusion among wildlife agencies across America. More information is on the [SEAFWA website](#).