

EARTH CONNECTIONS

Planning Youth-Directed Natural Resources and Environmental Action Programs



Photo courtesy of USDA/NRCS

Caring for the environment is one of the most critical challenges facing each of us living on this planet – especially youth. Today’s young people, as the future leaders and inhabitants of our earth, must take action to address these issues and create needed changes.

The Power of Youth

Youth have a natural curiosity about science and the environment. In most cases, young people are not only interested and willing to address environmental concerns and issues, but they are very eager to help protect our natural resources and make our Earth a better place to live. It is important to provide educational opportunities for youth to:

- X **learn about environmental conservation, waste management, natural resources and stewardship.**
- X **develop leadership and decision making skills.**
- X **identify environmental concerns and take action within their communities.**

Every young person has individual talents, knowledge and skills to contribute to the good of the community and environment. Youth can help their communities address environmental concerns; their voices and actions can be powerful. However, they often need the encouragement of adults to take on the roles of environmental stewards.

Youth can be valuable partners and resources in helping to protect our environment.



Photo courtesy of USDA/NRCS

Planning Environmental Programs

There are many things to consider when planning natural resources and environmental education programs or activities for youth. Regardless of the program topic, it is important to make sure it promotes environmental awareness and encourages youth to pursue natural resources and environmental stewardship activities.

Consider some of the following possibilities:

- X **Use a hands-on approach to learning**
- X **Make activities fun**
- X **Encourage exploration, discovery, and inquiry**
- X **Link to state core curricula standards for environmental education**
- X **Relate learning experiences to real life**
- X **Actively engage youth in the activities**
- X **Provide opportunities for youth to learn and practice life skills**
- X **Create youth and adult partnerships**
- X **Develop collaborations**
- X **Promote environmental stewardship**
- X **Encourage youth to be environmental ambassadors and share what they have learned**
- X **Empower youth to take action in their communities**

Steps for Planning Environmental Action Programs for Youth

When planning environmental stewardship programs for youth, there are a few basic steps to follow:

1 Identify topics of interest to youth

The environment and its natural resources are key components of what we see, hear and do everyday. When trying to engage youth in natural resource activities, it is recommended that you ask them what topics they find interesting. It may be a topic in the news or a topic discussed at school or home. Experts in the field of youth development recommend that when working with youth, it is important for them to be involved in the planning of what they will be learning as well as how they want to learn about the topic.

2 Access materials and program resources

There is a vast amount of environmental education materials, resources and programs available from the 4-H Youth Development Program and Cooperative Extension; National 4-H Council; federal and state agencies; non-government organizations; and non-profit groups. The CES YES web site provides information and links to various agencies and organizations that promote and support environmental stewardship.

3 Establish partnerships

Developing partnerships with organizations can provide materials, resources and programs; service-learning opportunities; training; and can help foster the leadership skills needed by young people as they prepare to deal with environmental issues and concerns. It is important to work with other agencies and organizations in order to bring varying levels of knowledge,

understanding, and skills, different perspectives, and unique resources to your stewardship programs.

Programs such as *The Nature of Learning*, *Give Forests A Hand*, *Earth Force*, and *Learn and Serve America* provide educational materials and service-learning opportunities for youth. Visit the CES YES web site for links to these other environmental stewardship programs.

4 Provide opportunities for youth to learn and develop life skills

It is vital to provide environmental education opportunities and experiences that utilize experiential (hands-on) and inquiry-based learning techniques as well as encourage the development of life skills such as critical thinking, decision-making and problem-solving skills. Hands-on activities

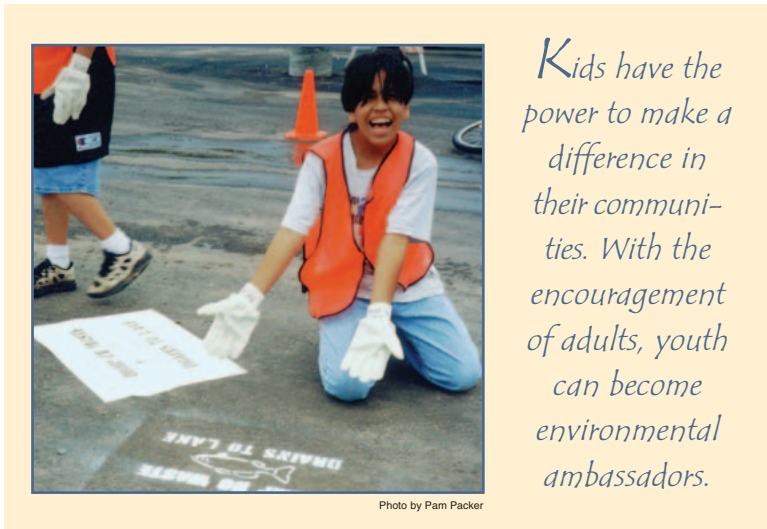
provide a fun and relaxed atmosphere for youth to learn the content of a lesson through personal experience.

When planning programs be sure to consider the Experiential Learning Model. The Experiential Learning Model is divided into three main parts – **DO, REFLECT & APPLY**. The first part focuses on engaging youth in hands-on learning activities. Second, encourage youth to reflect on the information they discovered and to share their

observations and what they learned with others. Finally, it is important to relate the activities to real life and to have youth apply what they learned to their lives.

Leaders can create opportunities for youth to:

- X explore habitats.
- X study eco-systems and the interrelationships between plants and animals.
- X learn about biodiversity.
- X investigate waste management alternatives.
- X study water and air quality.
- X recognize the impact of humans on the environment.
- X identify environmental concerns and propose solutions.



Kids have the power to make a difference in their communities. With the encouragement of adults, youth can become environmental ambassadors.

5 Identify issues and build consensus

Identifying and understanding the issues and concerns of young people and the community are key steps in planning environmental stewardship activities. Youth can participate in educational activities, field trips and tours to learn about community natural resources, pollution prevention, and environmental issues.

Allow youth to discuss their concerns about the environment and why they feel it is important to address these issues in their communities. Which concern is the most important to the majority of group members?



Photo courtesy of USDA/NRCS

6 Research solutions and community actions

Thoroughly research the environmental concern or issue identified by the group. Gather information about the topic and find out how the issue has been addressed in the community. Investigate what actions have been taken to address the issue. Identify actions that have been successful and those that have not worked and why.

7 Work with an expert

There are many steps throughout your project that would benefit from the participation of a local expert. Experts can share their experiences working on local problems and possibly link you to on-going projects, funding, resources and materials. They can help your group review what they've learned, analyze their findings and identify solutions to environmental concerns. Check with partners to learn their goals for involvement. Experts may wish to be involved with your group from the beginning.

8 Share findings and knowledge gained

When conducting natural resource and environmental programming, it is important to apply the Experiential

Learning Model. Encourage youth to reflect on the information they discovered, share their observations and tell others about what they learned or did.

9 Develop collaborations

"United we stand, divided we fall" is a good philosophy to follow when trying to connect kids to the earth and address environmental concerns and issues in your community. It is important to bring together students from other classes in your school, youth from other organizations, family members, friends, business people, and community leaders when trying to address natural resource or environmental issues in a community.

10 Actively engage youth as partners

There have been increased efforts across the nation to involve youth in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of projects and programs that are relevant to their needs and interest. The capacity of youth to be involved in the program development process has proven to be very successful. Despite this fact, engaging youth in program design and action often places adults in unfamiliar and even uncomfortable positions. When planning natural resources and environmental activities, actively engage youth as partners, make their voices heard and their actions seen. Remember, youth can make a difference. Foster opportunities for youth and adults to work together as they learn about natural resources and address environmental concerns.

11 Prepare a plan of action

When preparing the plan of action to address the issues identified be sure to consider the following:

- X **What will be done?**
- X **Who is responsible?**
- X **How will the project be carried out?**
- X **What supplies or resources are needed?**
- X **What collaborations need to be established?**
- X **When will the project be complete?**

Summary

Caring for the environment is one of the most critical challenges facing each one of us. It is vital to protect our environment and seek solutions to address environmental and natural resource issues.

As our future leaders, young people must take action to address these issues. It is important to provide opportunities for youth to learn about environmental conservation, pollution prevention, natural resources and stewardship; to develop leadership and decision-making skill, to identify environmental concerns;

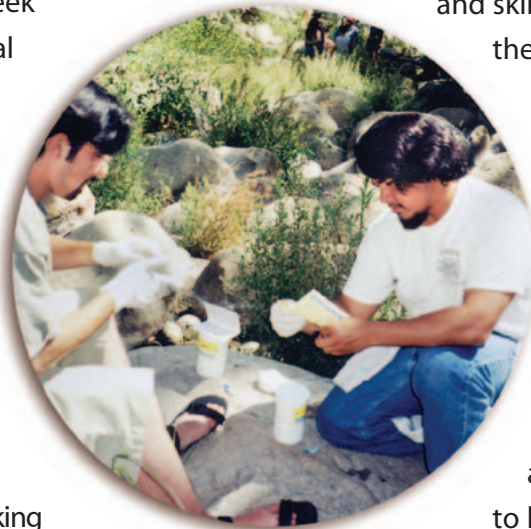


Photo courtesy of The Agua Pura Program

and to take action within their communities. Every young person has individual talents, knowledge and skills to contribute to the good of their community and environment.

Education creates awareness, provides knowledge and develops an understanding that can change attitudes and behaviors. Youth are interested in addressing environmental concerns and they are eager to help protect our natural resources and make our Earth a better place to live.

For more information about promoting youth environmental stewardship in your community visit the CES YES web site at

<http://www.cesyes.net>

Explore the following youth environmental stewardship resources for additional planning ideas:

Environmental Management Power

<http://www.agls.uidaho.edu/iwri/empower>

Give Forests a Hand

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/FR118>

Give Water a Hand

<http://www.uwex.edu/erc/gwah>

See the companion brochure, *Earth Connections: Engaging Youth in Community Environmental Activities*, on the CES YES Web site.



Cooperative Extension Supports Youth Environmental Stewardship

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