

100

(POPULAR, EXCITING, EDUCATIONAL)

**OUTDOOR RECREATION
AND ACTIVITY**

IDEAS

FOR YOUR CHAPTER

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This article is the sixth in a series on helping chapters grow their membership, simply and affordably. In this article, we highlight outdoor recreation and related activities chapters can host in their communities. The first five articles – which focused on conservation projects, marketing ideas, fundraising, membership, and attracting youth to chapters – are available on the League's Web site at www.iwla.org/chapters.

1. ANGLING

Fishing is a great place to start engaging your community because you can fish anywhere – the city, suburbs, country, or wilderness. Chapter-owned ponds and large managed lakes are big draws for League members, guests, and potential members. The Lincoln Chapter in Nebraska gives kids top priority at the chapter's catch-and-release lake. Members of the Orange (California) Chapter teach fishing seminars for youth at a public lake in a highly developed suburb of Los Angeles, where hundreds of youth from southern California have learned to fish with help from the Izaak Walton League. The experience is about more than just fishing etiquette and casting techniques – they also learn about the biological environment of the lake and what the fish need to thrive.

Fishing events, like the winter ice fishing derby hosted by Wisconsin's Bill Cook Chapter (weather permitting!) or the spring bass fishing tournament held by the Berks County Chapter in southeastern Pennsylvania, also reel in new members.

Countless chapters use a simple rod and reel, hook, and a worm to introduce people to the great outdoors.



2. AQUATIC ACTIVITIES

Many chapters also use their fishing spots – man-made ponds and lakes, streams, lakeside frontage, and river access – for swimming, nature observation, and ever-popular boating.

If your chapter has easy access to water, organize and host classes on canoe and kayak safety, paddling techniques, and the simple fun of water recreation. Take a tip from the Rockville (Maryland) Chapter's "Paddle Sports Day," which offers training classes right on the chapter's ponds. Or organize a day trip on a nearby river, as the Cincinnati (Ohio) Chapter does. Some chapters even offer boat docks for their members, like the marina at the Miller Chapter in Portage, Indiana, with waterway access to Lake Michigan.

With open bodies of water come special safety and environmental considerations. Chapters should place lifesaving equipment in convenient areas and require use of personal flotation devices in boats of all types. Chapters with water on their properties also need to comply with local, state, and federal regulations governing use of inland water bodies.



3. VIEWS OF NATURE

Wildlife watching has far more participants nationwide than hunting and fishing combined. It gives people a chance to “get back to nature” and study wildlife in its own habitat. Bird watching also often involves studying bird songs and calls, since many species are more readily detected and identified by ear than by eye.

Chapter nature trails with interpretive signs are popular wildlife viewing stations, particularly in mixed habitats with forests, open fields, streams, wetlands, and open water. Some chapters offer marked trails for hiking, biking, and horseback riding. Forest arboretums with tree identification signs and native grassland preserves are found at other League chapters. Many of these facilities can be used year-round for nature tours, bird watching, school field trips, field course work, orienteering, and other outdoor activities.



League chapter examples are endless. For example, the Southern Maryland Chapter, not far from the Chesapeake Bay, is proud of its unique elevated observation boardwalk through the local Zekiah and Jordan Swamps. The Kameska (South Dakota) Chapter’s latest project was developing a nature trail and butterfly garden at the local county park, which includes viewing platforms to photograph or simply observe wetland wildlife without interfering with their activities.

Introducing people young and old to the joy of observing nature cultivates new advocates for sound conservation policy.

4. CAMPING

Camping on chapter grounds may involve a tent, a cabin, an open-faced hut – or no shelter at all. Simple day camp sites may include a parking pad, picnic table, fire ring or elevated grill, or a pavilion for group outings. Overnight camp sites range from the bare essentials to ones that provide electrical, septic, and water accommodations for recreational vehicles or camper trailers. The Lynchburg (Virginia) Chapter is one that has mastered top-shelf accommodations for its members’ RVs, including winterized camping sites.

A chapter’s camping facilities may be used for members’ family outings, organized trips for Boy and Girl Scout troops, or as part of an introduction to the outdoors for youth, adults, and persons with special needs. The Bethesda-Chevy Chase (Maryland) Chapter hosted their first Family Campout last year on the chapter grounds, open to members and guests, to introduce families to the joys of outdoor camping.

The event included a nature walk, stories around the campfire, and camping demonstrations. Camp sites also are an inexpensive accommodation for chapter events such as a sporting meeting, open house, festival, or state division meeting.

Safety and health considerations for chapters center primarily around fire control, litter collection, and restroom facilities.



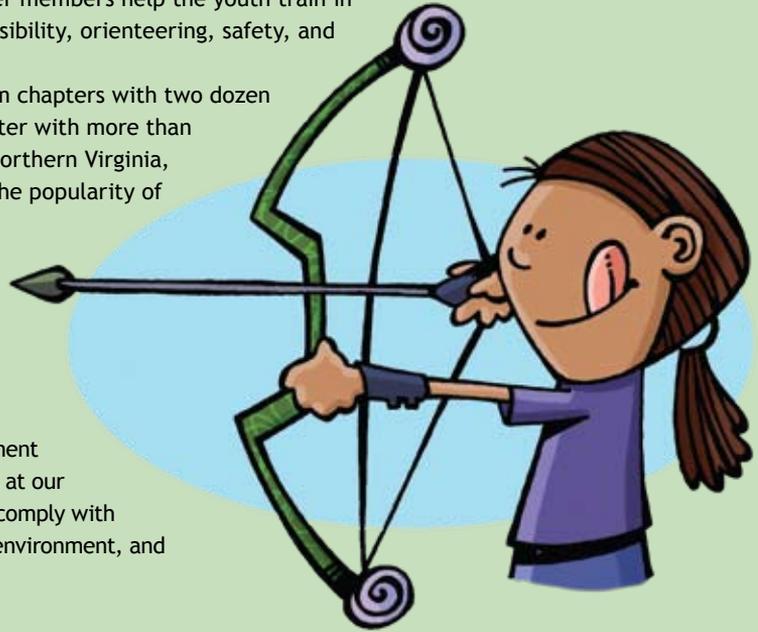
5. SHOOTING SPORTS

Almost half of League chapters own and operate shooting ranges, including archery, rifle and pistol, skeet, sporting clays, and trap ranges. These facilities are also used for firearms safety training, hunter education courses, pre-season hunter sight-day, and youth shooting activities.

Like many chapters, the Frederick (Maryland) Chapter's Youth Program participates annually in the state's Youth Hunter Education Challenge. To prepare for the event, chapter members help the youth train in rifle, archery, shotgun, muzzle loading, hunter responsibility, orienteering, safety, and wildlife identification.

Chapters of any size can host a shooting range, from chapters with two dozen members like the Caldwell Chapter in Idaho to a chapter with more than 2,000 members like the Arlington-Fairfax Chapter in northern Virginia, which even has a waiting list for membership due to the popularity of its shooting facilities.

Range ownership, however, also conveys heightened responsibility for safety concerns and environmental stewardship. The League has a set of recommended guidelines and minimum safety standards for chapter shooting ranges. We also have an agreement with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the National Association of Shooting Ranges to promote the development and implementation of environmental stewardship plans at our chapter shooting ranges. But it is up to each chapter to comply with all applicable laws and regulations, protect the natural environment, and ensure the safety of its members and guests.



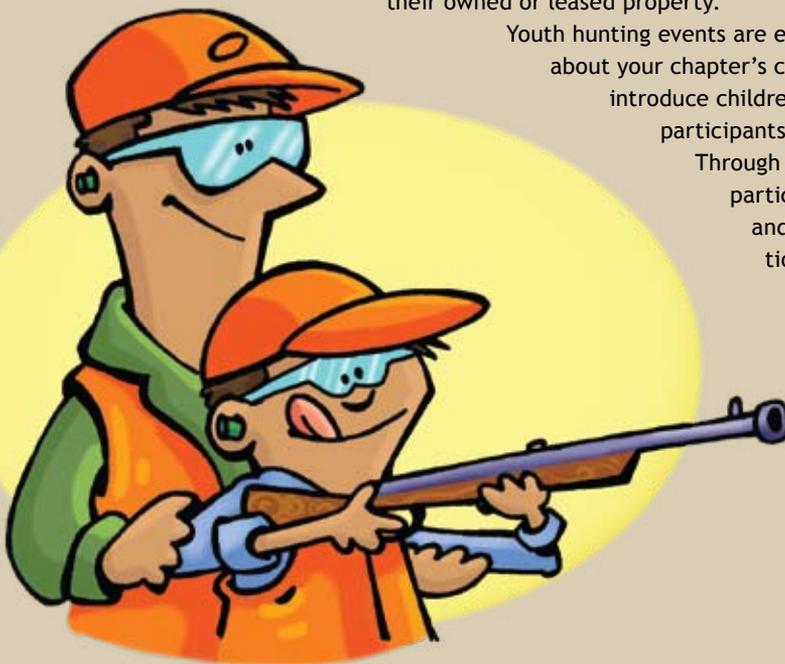
6. HUNTING

In a highly controlled environment, some chapters host hands-on events to introduce novices or youth to the sport of hunting – the practice of pursuing wild animals with modern firearms. Some chapter members volunteer to mentor new hunters in the field. Other chapters simply allow its members to hunt wild game on their owned or leased property.

Youth hunting events are excellent opportunities for the public to learn about your chapter's conservation work, attract potential members, introduce children to the joy of outdoor recreation, and teach participants safe and responsible hunting techniques.

Through such an activity, a chapter will also educate participants about managing wildlife populations and the role hunters play in promoting conservation practices.

The Bethesda-Chevy Chase Chapter's annual Maryland dove season opener draws dozens of members and invited guests. To the north in Pennsylvania, the Lancaster Red Rose Chapter's annual youth pheasant hunt is used to reward hunter education course graduates.



7. ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Practical learning goals can and should be worked into chapter outdoor activities – but they should also be fun! For example, a youth fishing day can be turned into an educational opportunity to discuss fish habitat needs and threats posed by dams, land management practices, invasive species, and overfishing.

The Bush Lake Chapter in Minnesota teaches home-based conservation in monthly Water-Smart Landscaping Classes. Chapter members and the community at-large get hands-on training in composting, building rain gardens, and using rain barrels to create healthier landscapes that are self-sustaining.



Building bat boxes helps the Mahaska County (Iowa) Chapter educate their community about the benefits of these bug eaters. You'll often find youth gathered around the bat houses at dusk, counting the bats as they fly out. Chapter members take the bat boxes to community events to teach people how to build the boxes - and why they should.

Whether a chapter has its own grounds or not, every chapter can offer activities that not only introduce the public to the outdoors but also educate them about conservation and promote responsible use of natural resources.

8. YOUTH ACTIVITIES

Any activity involving youth, whether teaching them about nature or outdoor skills, is likely to generate member enthusiasm and participation. For example, you can sponsor a Scout troop on your chapter grounds or provide an archery day for local school children. Organize youth activities that include parents and other family members so the whole family can learn together.

The Des Moines (Iowa) Chapter sponsors a Boy Scout "Venture Crew," open to young men and women ages 14 to 20, which holds events centered on camping, outdoor learning, and service projects.

The Oil City Chapter has hosted the annual Venango County (Pennsylvania) Youth Field Days since 2001. Each year, up to 200 youth, ages 8 to 18, and their parents visit the chapter grounds for an entire day of outdoor activities, including wildlife management and identification, ecology, and conservation, with fishing, shooting sports, and archery added into the mix.



Safety First! To help ensure the safety of all outdoor activity participants and protect the chapter from liability, provide appropriate equipment and training, monitor the work closely, follow all safety precautions, carry adequate liability insurance, and secure liability release forms from participants, regardless of their age.

9. COMMUNITY OUTREACH

IWLA chapters provide opportunities for friends, families, and neighbors to participate in a wide range of outdoor recreational activities. So use the chapter's property to expose not only the card-carrying members but the public to the great outdoors. Teach them outdoor recreational skills, and you'll instill a conservation ethic and recruit new members and supporters at the same time.

Virginia's Loudoun County Chapter is one of many that host women-only outdoor events, providing organized training sessions to teach the basic principles of outdoor recreational sports and skills such as shooting, archery, camping, fishing, orienteering, hunting, wildlife viewing, outdoor photography, and survival skills.

The Brown County (Wisconsin) Chapter sponsors an annual fishing day for students at the Syble Hopp School – an educational center for children with developmental disabilities – and local high school students. The chapter also hosts fishing events for residents of assisted-living centers and nursing homes.



10. CONSERVATION

Tackling a natural resource problem in your community can be hard work, but promoting it is easier when it is combined with a fun outdoor activity. A canoe trip along a local river threatened by non-point source pollution presents an opportunity to educate the public and enlist their support in cleanup efforts. A pond management workshop in a classroom setting could end up being a bust unless you include actual problem solving outside or add a field demonstration of fish counting. The Central New York Chapter uses streams as living classrooms to engage middle school, high school, and college students and adult volunteers and educate them about water quality, watershed ecology, pollution, and stream monitoring.

Take advantage of designated national days, such as Earth Day, Arbor Day, and National Hunting and Fishing Day, to enlist the public's support on specific measures and projects. The Brown County (Wisconsin) Chapter's largest community event is its annual Teddy Bear Hunt, which is part of its Earth Day celebration. Chapter members hide teddy bears throughout the trails at Osprey Point so children can "hunt" for a special teddy bear while acquainting themselves with the trails and natural resources. Children and their families also enjoy fishing, bird watching, and nature crafts.

Don't let your chapter fall into the trap of becoming an exclusive hook 'n bullet country club. By advancing our dual mission of conservation and outdoor recreation, you will benefit the local community and help build awareness of the League's conservation mission.



Need more ideas? Many League chapters have years of experience planning and developing outdoor recreation activities. Check your *IWLA Chapter Manual* (Unit V and Appendix K) for detailed descriptions of outdoor recreation successes and lessons learned by League chapters nationwide.