



*Izaak Walton League of America  
American Wetlands Month Case Studies:*

**5K Run for Wetlands**

For the past ten years, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Arlington County Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Resources have hosted a *Run for Wetlands* 5K Run/ 2K Walk in Arlington, Virginia.

**Project Description**

The purpose of the *Run for Wetlands* is to help raise awareness of the importance of wetlands. Each year, volunteers have brought together a diverse group of sponsors that include Arlington County, Ballston area businesses, and several nonprofit conservation organizations. Funds raised from the event are used for wildlife habitat improvements and environmental education in Arlington County.

Proceeds from previous events have been used to hold school group cleanup events, build a wildlife viewing platform, install water control structures, provide interpretive signs, and erect wood duck boxes at the Ballston Beaver Pond – a three-acre wetland near the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Arlington Square office. The agency adopted this small wetland several years ago as a way to stay involved with hands-on wildlife habitat management and as a community service activity.

Registration for the 5K event is \$18 if paid in advance and \$20 on race day. The 2K walk is \$15 for adults and free for children under eight who are accompanied by a registered adult. Awards are given to the top male and female finishers and the top three male and female finishers in each age group. In addition, there is a team event for teams of five runners, including at least two women. All registered entrants receive a t-shirt with a specially designed logo for that year's event.

In addition, government agencies and nonprofit organizations have booths at the event highlighting wetland ecology and conservation. In addition to benefiting local wildlife habitat projects and educating communities about the importance of wetlands, the *Run for Wetlands* is a community event for people to get some exercise and to have fun. About 250 people participate in the *Run for Wetlands* each year.

## **Steps and Timeline to Organize a *Run for Wetlands***

The timeline used in this step-by-step guide to organizing a *Run for Wetlands* is intended to demonstrate the minimum amount of time needed to plan an event for May. Please note that steps can be taken earlier to begin planning.

### **January**

#### **1. Select volunteers for the following roles:**

- Race Director – responsible for delegating tasks and recruiting volunteers.
- Treasurer – responsible for opening an account and keeping records of the registrations and sponsor donations.
- Administrative Assistant – responsible for database management and processing registration forms.

#### **2. Choose a date.**

Choose a date in May to celebrate American Wetlands Month. Check local running event calendars on the web to avoid conflicts with other big races. Choose a date early and notify running web sites to prevent other big races from choosing the same date.

#### **3. Choose a location.**

A location for the run must be chosen. It would be ideal to locate the run on a bike path or other trail that is removed from traffic. Work with local government agencies to determine the best location for a run. Permits from government agencies may be necessary, as well. Also, choose a start location for the race that includes an indoor area such as an Izaak Walton League chapter or school. Registration, refreshments, and educational booths and displays can take place in the building.

#### **4. Start soliciting businesses, government agencies, and organizations for sponsorship.**

Getting sponsors is very important - much of the money that is raised will come from local sponsors. The more volunteers there are to solicit donations, the fewer sponsors each person will have to identify. Draft a memo for volunteers to give to potential sponsors, explaining the project, the importance of wetland conservation, and what the organization hopes to receive from sponsors. Volunteers should be given deadlines to report on their progress in finding sponsors.

One good place to look for potential sponsors is to find out who donated to other local races. Sponsors include those who donate cash and businesses that donate in-kind items such as fruit, water, bagels, etc. for runners on race day. Other businesses will want to give products. Gift certificates to restaurants, health clubs, sports stores and donations of books, artwork, and similar items make excellent door prizes and auction items. Be sure to contact grocery stores, restaurants, caterers, sports supply stores, health clubs, and other local businesses for sponsorship. Local government agencies, civic associations, conservation organizations and other groups may also be willing to sponsor or volunteer. Be sure to ask for donations to meet all needs, including printing (office supply stores, print shops), a

rented mailbox for registration checks and other mail (mail service stores), and other needs. Ask sponsors for their logo to print on the t-shirt. Logos can be sent by mail as camera-ready artwork or over email as a graphics file.

### **5. Contact a local running club.**

Identify a local running club, join the club, attend meetings, and discuss the importance of holding a *Run for Wetlands*. A running club will have the knowledge and equipment to set up the course (instruments to measure the course that are calibrated correctly, timing devices to ensure accurate times, computer programs to determine winners in categories and teams, and other race course equipment). The club should be able to set up the course with markers, provide volunteers as course marshals, timers, etc., and assist with the race on the day of the event. They may even be able to make map of the course for posting on the web or in flyers. The running club may require payment for these services (\$250 - \$500 is reasonable). The running club that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service works with adopted the *Run for Wetlands* as an annual community event. The club designates a race director to organize the actual race, while the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service race director organizes volunteers, sponsors, advertising, and logistics.

### **6. Design and t-shirts.**

Find a volunteer artist with a unique style to distinguish *Run for Wetlands* designs from those found in other races. Artists may be located by holding a contest for the general public, holding a contest for students, or working with local art galleries and societies to find potential artists. Find a t-shirt printing company. If unable to find a company willing to donate printing services, compare set up charges, shipping, printing and other costs from several companies to get the best deal.

## **February**

### **7. Submit any necessary permit applications.**

Permits from local parks departments for use of bike paths and from the police to close parts of roads to traffic may be needed. The local running club may know which permits are needed. In addition, local government agencies should be able to answer questions about permits needed. Liability insurance may be required to obtain permits or for the use of buildings such as schools. The running club should also have liability insurance which the club can provide to the race organizer. If using a school building, there may be a need to get a permit to use the school. Some permits have fees associated with them. Work with county government agencies to request that fees be waived.

### **8. Meet with the running club and other volunteers to coordinate race organization.**

Determine the registration protocol, which includes fees, team requirements, and other details that the running club will be able to assist with. Usually teams must pre-register so the running club can enter the names in the computer before the race. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's *Run for Wetlands* requires teams of up to five people with at least two women. The winning team is decided by the three fastest runners, one of whom must be a woman.

### **9. Develop and distribute a registration form.**

The registration form serves several purposes. In addition to advertising the race, the form is a means to collect contact information for the runners that can be used both during the race to post results and after the race to send additional wetland educational material and information about the next race.

Distribution of the registration form can take place through running club mailing lists, local environmental organizations, email list serves, and the race web site. Be sure to include the costs of printing and mailing copies of the registration form when determining a fundraising budget for the race. The form should include the following:

- General information about the race.
- When and where the race will take place.
- Race rules.
- Cost of registration.
- What the proceed will go toward (local wetland conservation and education projects).
- Contact information for the race organizers and sponsoring organization.
- Space for runners to put their address, phone, email and other contact information.
- A liability waiver
- A signature line (indicate that an adult must sign for minors).
- Information about the wetland ecology and conservation booths that will be available, prizes that will be given to winners, door prizes, and t-shirts. T-shirt design for the year could be shown on the registration form.

Be sure to identify a person or several people to be in charge of collecting registration forms and returning phone calls. A mailbox is needed for registrants to send in fees and for other correspondence. A volunteer or sponsoring organization can use their address, or the organization may want to rent a mailbox. Mail service stores may be willing to donate a box.

## **March**

### **10. Begin advertising the race.**

Post information about the race through the community new sections of local newspapers, organization newsletters, email list serves, flyers at health clubs, flyers at nature centers, and through general press releases to all media outlets. Radio stations also are required to use a certain amount of airtime for free public service announcements. Running clubs also advertise races through web sites and newsletters. Some of these publications may charge fees for advertising, but it may be worth even a \$200 fee to reach a large number of runners.

Find a volunteer webmaster to design a web site for the race. Post a downloadable registration form that can be mailed in with a check. Post anything else of interest, like a map of the race course, directions to the starting point, and information about parking.

### **11. Order race numbers.**

Runners will need to wear numbers for judges to determine each runner's race time. Runnersworld sends free race bibs when race organizers agree to send the registrant list after the race. Call (800) 638-0482 or visit [www.runnersworld.com](http://www.runnersworld.com) and click on "Race Sponsorship."

## **12. Determine awards and other prizes.**

Awards are what the fastest runners win. It is useful to have winners for certain age category, including young kids, and for male and female winners. If walkers are given a separate start time for the race, only runners can win awards. The awards can include certificates and small gifts. These gifts can include framed prints of the race logo printed or mugs with the race logo. Door prizes can be available to anyone who registered and is present, whether or not they are runners. By giving good door prizes, the race becomes more fun for non-serious runners who do not have to win the race to win a nice prize. One way to organize this is to have registrants put the corner tab from their race bib into a box before the race. After the race, while the slower runners are still coming in, have a child or prominent community person pick numbers out of the box.

## **13. Establish environmental education and outreach for the event.**

Provide a display area on the importance of wetland conservation before the race for runners and those who have come to watch the race. Contact federal, state and local government agencies, non-profit groups, watershed organizations, Izaak Walton League chapters and other groups to bring displays, handouts and activities on the day of the race. If possible, provide tables for these organizations for free or for rent. Encourage the groups to provide hands-on activities whenever possible.

## **April**

## **14. Order t-shirts.**

In order to list sponsors on the t-shirts, all sponsors must be secured with money received or assured, and sponsor logos received. One idea is to order enough shirts to give one to each volunteer who signs up ahead of time, sponsors, running club volunteers, and others that are important to thank. It is not always possible to know exactly how many and what size to order ahead of time. It is best to get a suggestion from the local running club on the percentage of different sizes to order. Extra shirts can be sold later or at the following year's race. Be sure to order in plenty of time before the race!

## **15. Follow up and logistics.**

Keep in close contact with local government permitting agencies, the owners of the building used for the race location, and the running club to make sure everything is set for the day of the race. Ask the county government to supply traffic cones for the course setup. Arrange to get a bullhorn for the race day.

## **16. Enter pre-registered participants into a database.**

The Administrative Assistant and other volunteers should enter the name, age, gender, address, and email for each registrant as the registration forms arrive in the mail. This information will be used to print labels for race bibs, keep race statistics, and to contact registrants to participate in future years.

## **17. Assign tasks to volunteers for race day.**

The local running club may be able to provide finish line officials, course marshals, and mid-race water table volunteers, but some of these tasks may require additional volunteers. Other tasks to assign may include:

- Picking up donated food and water from sponsors .
- Working the registration table.
- Buying (or picking up donated) ice and buckets to cool bottles.
- Distributing water to race participants (provide at least two bottles per racer).
- Preparing food and working the food table.
- Setting up the awards table.
- Taking pictures of the event.
- Distributing t-shirts to runners. One way to ensure that each runner receives one t-shirt is to take the corner tab from the runner's race bib in exchange for the shirt.
- Cleaning up after the event.

## **May**

### **18. Obtain trail/event signs.**

The county may have signs, or these may need to be designed and printed by volunteers. Post the signs on the running trail a week before the race to let other users of the path know there is an event taking place. These signs also provide advertising for the event.

### **19. Make signs to use on race day, including:**

- Registration (arrow), A-L, M-Z, Pre-registered, On-site Registration, etc....
- Please recycle here (no tops)
- Water fountain (arrow), water
- Donators of food (names)
- Donator of water (name)
- Other sponsor names

### **20. Finish entering pre-registrants in database and generate bib labels.**

Mark the labels with color codes that will be used to tally finishers (in system developed jointly with running club) and paste on corresponding bibs. This is usually done the day before the event to make sure the late pre-registrants are included.

### **21. Buy supplies.**

The following items will be needed:

- 4 safety pins per runner to attach their bib numbers to their shirts
- Colored markers for the people manning the race day registration table to code the bib numbers according to age and gender
- Cups for water at mid-race water stop, and at end, unless individual bottles are given out
- Napkins
- Tape (for signs), and extra paper for making last minute signs
- Pens
- Cash for change, for those runners that pay on race day with cash
- Blank registration forms for race day sign-up

## **The Big Day!!!**

### **22. Set up for the race.**

Arrive several hours before the race to set up tables for registration, food, water, awards and prizes, and educational booths. Place signs where appropriate. Place recycle bins for water bottles and trash bins for general trash. The local running club will handle the on-site logistics for the actual race components.

### **23. After the race.**

Ask the race director to say a few words of thanks and ask someone to talk about the importance of wetland conservation. Afterwards, announce the winners and distribute the awards to the winners. Also at this time, have a local celebrity, elected official, or child draw for the door prizes.

Clean up after the event may include packing up left over food and water, collecting loose trash, cleaning tables, and returning borrowed items

## **After the Event**

### **24. Post final race results on the web site and race photos.**

Coordinate with running club to get results finalized and post the results on the website as soon as possible. Also include photos of the race and educational exhibits and thank your sponsors. Contact running club web sites to ask them to provide a link on their web sites to the race results. Also place photos into a album for display at the next race.

### **25. Follow-up with sponsors.**

Send thank you notes and t-shirts (usually one or two per sponsor organization, depending on size of donation) to sponsors.

## **General note:**

The *Run for Wetlands* race has become a local favorite with families in the community because it's fun. In addition to careful organization, the race organizers work with runners to satisfy their needs, including late registrations, people who want their t-shirts mailed, and more. These accommodations helps make the run a fun experience for all involved.

For more information about this race, see the web site at [www.winsupport.com/wetlands](http://www.winsupport.com/wetlands).