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(EASY, FUN, EFFECTIVE)

CONSERVATION
PROJECT

IDEAS

FOR YOUR CHAPTER

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1. LITTER CLEAN-UP

All over the country, there are programs chapters can work with to fight litter. The Adopt-a-Highway program is available in many states, and requires partners to select a stretch of highway (usually at least two miles) to maintain by picking up trash at least twice a year. Some partners go on to beautify the area by planting native wildflowers. The program provides orange vests, gloves, bags, and other equipment, and erects a sign recognizing the partner's name—good publicity for the League. For chapters with limited manpower, it is possible to pay a maintenance company to do the actual cleanups but still get credit as the sponsor. Many variations of Adopt-a-Highway are offered through county and city programs.



The League's Radford Chapter in Virginia has adopted a three-mile stretch of road that about a dozen members turn out to clean four times a year. They pick up enough trash to fill up two pickup trucks, and then set it out for the state to collect. "The state saves millions by having people do this," says chapter president Luke Powell. "We've had great success with it."

Roads aren't the only place to find litter. Similar cleanup efforts can target local rivers, streams, and lakes. Some chapters have purchased boats just for litter cleanups, while others rely on members' boats. Scheduling regular work days on the water is one approach. Another is to join in on larger community efforts. Many areas organize annual river cleanup days where Ikes are regular participants.

2. RECYCLING PROGRAM

Recycling programs run by local governments are lacking in many communities, leaving a void for the Ikes to fill. Why not reduce the sheer quantity going into landfills and promote reuse of materials by getting members involved with recycling? If your chapter decides to start a recycling program, make sure it involves the public in order for it to count as a true community conservation effort.

Some chapters help by simply adding collection sites to what's already available to local residents. These sites can range from barrels set up around town for bottles and cans to a fixed drop-off site for newspapers. Chapter members can pitch in with jobs like rinsing out bottles, removing labels or caps, and separating out non-recyclable trash. They can also help transport the recyclables to an established collection site.

Even without a chapter-run recycling program, consider sending volunteers to existing programs. Kids from the Northwest Ohio Yikes, a youth chapter, help with their town's recycling. Twice a year they unload cans, bottles, cardboard, magazines, and glass that people bring to the town drop-off site, separating the items into dumpsters. It's a sticky job, but the kids get paid for helping, and the funds support their chapter.

Communities that have recycling programs for specific items—paint, cell phones, computers, and so on—can always use volunteers, too. Ikes of all ages can participate, since most of the work requires minimal physical labor or training.



3. STUDENT SCHOLARSHIPS

If your chapter wants to make an investment in the conservation leaders of tomorrow, consider offering a chapter scholarship. Many League chapters have set up scholarship funds to provide one or more scholarships to high school or college students pursuing a natural resource-related field.

The basic approach is to build a scholarship fund from any available source, such as fundraising profits, member donations, or community donors. An amount as little as \$100 a year is enough to provide one student a scholarship. Some chapters award more than \$10,000 annually.

If your chapter doesn't have the resources to start a scholarship, perhaps it can join with other chapters or your state division to offer a joint scholarship. Some chapters use the interest generated from longtime savings funds to provide scholarships. Others affiliate themselves with a local university and target students who will enter that school's natural resource program. For example, the Caldwell Chapter in Idaho donated \$10,000 in 1967 to a University of Idaho endowment fund. They reinvested some of that money, generating a substantial funding source that provides an annual scholarship to one worthy applicant to the university's college of natural resources.

Be sure to establish set guidelines for the application and selection process. Determine whether applicants should be local residents or League members. Publicize the scholarship through local media, high schools, colleges, and online. And don't forget to notify the media when you've selected a scholarship recipient so that the student and the League get recognition for it. Finally, cap the award off with free chapter memberships for the scholarship winners—it's a smart investment in the League's future.



4. INVASIVE SPECIES REMOVAL

Whether it's purple loosestrife or multiflora rose, invasive species can be daunting to battle once they've taken over an area. But many Ikes have found power in numbers, taking on removal of non-native plants as their chapter conservation project. Some remove invasives on chapter property, while others branch out to a local park or public area—broadening the project into a community conservation effort.

Before starting, contact experts with a local natural resource agency who can help identify invasive plants and instruct members on proper removal techniques. Some plants can be pulled out or cut down; others require targeted chemical treatment. The Kampeska Chapter in South Dakota, for instance, was working on upgrading a trail in a county park when members discovered an invasion of buckthorn. They had a local professor educate them in how to eradicate the plant. Since then, members have been cutting down the trees and painting the top of the stumps with chemicals to kill the plant. "It's labor intensive, and it's quite a project," says chapter president Jim Madsen. "But we need to do something about invasives—they're all over, and people don't even realize it."

Some chapters have found success using a plant's natural enemy as a biological control. The *galerucella* beetle is a finicky species that only eats purple loosestrife, so members of the Bill Cook Chapter in Wisconsin have obtained kits for raising these beetles in order to release them in areas where purple loosestrife is a problem. They have even involved local students in the project.



5. STREAM MONITORING

The League is best known for its Save Our Streams program, and it's a natural fit for chapters looking to participate in a much-needed community conservation service.

Our SOS program offers training and workshops for members interested in learning how to monitor water quality and restore streams. Checking out the health of your local stream can be a good project for kids, since the SOS method involves catching and identifying aquatic insects and other critters that serve as indicators of water quality. Or, if the problem is eroded stream banks, gather members together to stabilize the banks by planting native vegetation.

Several chapters have tailored stream projects to their local needs. One example is the stream monitoring underway at the Diana Chapter in Indiana. The Kankakee River, which runs behind the chapter's land, is a popular place to fish, boat, and water ski. But with recreation comes pollution, so chapter member and microbiologist Steve Dolniak decided to apply for state funding to study the river's water quality. The grant covered training, test kits, and equipment, and for the past couple years the Diana Ikes have helped gather water data by heading out on boats and collecting samples and observations. They then report the data to a state database.

"For a little bit of investment, you get a whole lot of info," says Dolniak. "Before there was a concern about the quality of the water that people fish and swim in. Now we've learned the river is in good shape."



6. WILDLIFE HABITAT

Wildlife is constantly being displaced by development and habitat destruction. Help the critters out by providing more places for them to nest and graze. One way to do this is by building homes for them, including bluebird houses, wood duck nest boxes, bat boxes, and other easy-to-construct items. This can be the focus of a youth event or public workshop, or it can be an ongoing chapter project.

Bill Binns, president of the Mahaska Chapter in Iowa, has made hundreds of bird and bat boxes over the years. He purchases rough cedar to construct the homes in his spare time, then sells them or gives them to the chapter to sell as a fundraiser. He also donates them to other groups such as Pheasants Forever to raffle off. And he keeps some for his own enjoyment.

His chapter also approaches wildlife habitat restoration on a larger scale. The chapter's property includes acreage that the Ikes are preserving as natural habitat. They enrolled some in the federal Conservation Reserve Program, and on other sections they have worked with the government to reclaim old coal mines. They reworked and cleaned up some of the property's ponds, and they've done a prairie burn to restore native prairie grasses.

Research what state or federal programs might apply to your chapter property. A number of chapters have found wetlands or other valuable ecosystems that have qualified for government funds and assistance to restore.



7. TREE PLANTING

Trees help clean the air, anchor river banks, provide homes and food for wildlife, and beautify our surroundings. There are numerous ways for chapters to center conservation projects around trees.

One is to get the community involved with collecting nuts from native trees. The nuts can be donated to a state nursery or organization such as the Boy Scouts, or they can be raised as seedlings to be planted by chapter members for streambank stabilization or reforestation.

Even if you don't raise seedlings yourselves, you can purchase them from agencies like a state department of natural resources. Look into other organizations such as Trees Forever to team up on projects. Sometimes they just need the extra hands that Ikes can offer to hold tree planting events.

Certain native trees need the most help, such as the American chestnut tree. Members of the Rockville Chapter in Maryland worked with the American Chestnut Foundation to establish an orchard where they are trying to bring back a viable strain of the once abundant American chestnut. Other chapters plant varieties of pine and spruce to reforest the land, and also to raise as Christmas trees, which can double as a fundraiser. Planting memorial trees can also augment forested areas and generate funds.



8. YOUTH EDUCATION

Youth conservation programs are a must for chapters that want to attract younger members and families. There are many ways to start one.

Scouts have a natural link to the League, with their similar interest in the outdoors. Scouts all need a place to carry out their activities and pursue their badges or projects—particularly Eagle Scouts. Many League chapters offer their grounds to Scouts looking for campsites, nature trails, or fishing spots. In return, many chapters benefit from Scouts looking to help out and complete requirements, from planting trees to building bridges. Another simple way to help Scouts is by sponsoring them through financial support and mentorship.

Schools are another good way to get involved with kids, from preschool on up. Science and biology teachers are always looking for a place to hold field trips, and their curriculum often requires a natural or environmental element. Often, a chapter only needs to offer up its property as a site where kids can learn about trees, bugs, or water quality. Some chapters pay for the school bus, making the field trip even more feasible for the school. Taking it to the next level, chapter members can also serve as instructors, serve meals, or follow up with further conservation events for youth. Keep in mind that youth programs should have an educational focus related to conservation. Events such as fishing derbies, while effective at promoting outdoor recreation among youth, aren't really considered conservation education projects.

Several chapters have very successful youth programs. At the Mountaineer Chapter in West Virginia, Ikes host 175 fifth graders for Youth Conservation Day each year. The students stay at a nearby 4-H camp overnight, and then come to the chapter grounds for a day of catching insects, learning about forestry, and more. Members help manage the group and prepare lunch. The chapter also brings seventh graders in each year for a member-led Save Our Streams workshop.

"We've made a concentrated effort to get youth involved and it has paid off," says chapter president Don Phares. "People in the community know us as a good group that works with kids."



9. CONSERVATION WORKSHOPS

A good way to engage the public in conservation is to offer workshops at your chapter. The folks at the Wildlife Achievement Chapter in Maryland have found this to be a successful technique for drawing people in from the community, and for galvanizing members to participate. They started with a rain barrel workshop a few years ago when the county was looking for a group that could collaborate on such an event. Members help pick up the barrels and prep them for the workshop. They now run the event themselves, teaching more than 50 people each year how to assemble a rain barrel. Participants get to take home a free barrel, although other chapters considering similar projects could also charge a fee to cover costs or raise funds.

Wildlife Achievement member Jeff Deschamps says his chapter now runs regular workshops on nest boxes, invasive plants, energy conservation, and well and septic issues. They advertise the workshops in the local newspaper, and about half of the participants are non-members. They also try to get press coverage of the event itself to increase the League's exposure.

When considering possible workshops, remember to investigate what resources you have within your own chapter. For example, a member might have a wood shop or a background in biology. Also, take advantage of any connections you have to other agencies or organizations that might want to offer equipment or expertise. Look for donations of wood or other scrap materials. Utilize the Internet for useful information, such as nest box building plans. And start small: If you are successful at helping people tackle a simple project—particularly if children and families can join in—you are more likely to generate interest in future workshops.



10. GUEST SPEAKERS

If your chapter already holds monthly member meetings, you can easily expand those to become community events by hosting speakers on various conservation topics.

Every month, the Austin Chapter in Minnesota features a presentation in conjunction with their chapter meeting. Topics have ranged from wild turkey trapping to feedlot issues to water management. The process is easy: The chapter's program committee thinks of relevant topics or taps into member suggestions or contacts, and then invites the speakers.

Many government agencies are happy to send speakers out to reach interested League members and others who attend these events. Another good resource is any local college or university. Also consider any retired professors or other experts among your membership.

As with workshops, publicizing the presentations before and after the event not only generates more participation, it sends the message that the League plays an important educational role in the community.



DEFENDERS CHAPTER ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Carrying out good conservation work not only promotes the League's mission and helps your chapter qualify for 501(c)(3) status, it helps you become eligible for a Defenders Chapter Achievement Award. This award annually recognizes a chapter's overall efforts to become a model of the League's priorities.

To qualify, a chapter must have fulfilled five of the following six criteria during the year of application:

1. Offered all available membership categories at the chapter level (individual, family, student, and youth).
2. Made a minimum \$100 donation to either the Izaak Walton League Trust, an Izaak Walton League division, an annual appeal from the IWLA national office, some other national IWLA conservation program, or made a contribution to the IWLA Endowment.
3. Provided a scholarship to a local, college-bound student who intends to study environmental or conservation-related major, or provided a contribution to a joint chapter or division-sponsored scholarship fund, or made a contribution to IWLA National Conservation Scholarship (minimum \$100).
4. Completed an on-the-ground conservation project in keeping with the goals of a national IWLA program such as, but not limited to, Save Our Streams, Protect Our Wetlands, Outdoor Ethics, Clean Air, Clean Energy, or Sustainability Education.
5. Established and maintained a chartered youth chapter of the IWLA within the existing chapter structure, or provided financial or volunteer support for a conservation education event for either a chapter's youth group, a community-based youth organization, or another conservation group's youth program, or provided a contribution to IWLA National Youth Convention (minimum \$100).
6. Printed and distributed a chapter newsletter (with copies regularly sent to National Office); or maintained a chapter Web site (linked with National's Web site); or sponsored at least six *Outdoor America* magazine subscriptions to local school, university, or public libraries.

Defenders Award applications are due no later than March 15 for the preceding year's efforts. For more information, contact IWLA's director of chapter relations, Earl Hower, (301) 548-0150 ext. 216; earlh@iwla.org.



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together creating memories, and encouraging a love of wildlife and the outdoors that will last a lifetime. In addition, they'll come to understand that hunters are true conservationists. STEP OUTSIDE with friends or family and blaze a trail for life. Find out more at www.stepoutside.org