

Young Naturalists Club

2007/2008 Final Report for Nova Scotia Habitat Conservation Fund

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(1) Project goal and objectives

The goal of the Young Naturalists Club is to provide positive experiences and learning opportunities related to natural history, primarily of Nova Scotia. Positive experiences in nature, and excitement regarding natural history knowledge, lead to the development of an environmental and conservation ethic in children. It is thought that these early experiences in nature are key to producing citizens that value and protect the natural world.

The objectives of the program are:

- **Host monthly YNC meetings** (3rd Saturday morning of each month from September to June), at which time members can share their natural history observations, hear from guest speakers, and participate in hands-on activities..
- **Lead guided monthly field trips** (4th Sunday afternoon of each month from September to June), at which time members will spend up to 4 hours in nature.
- **Provide opportunities** for local naturalists to share their knowledge and enthusiasm with the next generation of naturalists.
- **Make the connection** between wildlife preservation and conservation.
- **Showcase** local outdoor opportunities to YNC families.
- **Continue to offer** educational programming regarding the natural history of Nova Scotia.
- **Increase the number of chapters** of Young Naturalists Clubs in Nova Scotia by two additional regional chapters.
- **Enhance leadership** and interpretation abilities of YNC leaders by providing opportunities for skills development, including leading nature-oriented activities, and assisting in managing the Club.

(2) Outline of the work completed

Eight meetings and eight field trips were held in the 2007/2008 school year. Each meeting and field trip had at least one guest speaker or field trip leader from the natural history community. The YNC operated successful for a second year, and planning for its third year is underway.

(3) Results

Most meetings and field trips were well attended. The highest turn-out of the year was for the trip to McNabs Island (60 people). The average number of people per meeting/fieldtrip was 17. The themes for the meetings and field trips are available on the Club website: <http://www.chebucto.ns.ca/environment/FNSN/YNC/index.html>.

The YNC also received funding from the following sources

- Sage Environmental
- Nature Canada
- Department of Natural Resources
- School of Resource and Environmental Studies (Dalhousie)

YNC Board members and YNC Leaders increased their skill in these areas. Board members helped plan the themes for each month, and found guest speakers and field trip leaders. YNC Leaders lead activities, and helped supervise meetings and field trips. In addition, the YNC Coordinator (Karen McKendry) was honored for her leadership abilities through the receipt of two community awards (NSEN Eco-Hero Award for Young Environmentalists of the Year, and an award from the School for Resource and Environmental Studies at Dalhousie University).

No new Nova Scotian chapters of the YNC were not created in 2007/2008.

(4) Assessment of achievements and lessons learned, measured against the project goals and objectives

The current YNC model is working well. The frequency of meeting and field trips suits most families. Families are too often away to justify summer meetings and field trips. The good attendance at most meetings is a sign of success. YNC members have expressed their concerns, and actions taken, which regard to nature conservation. Several members created art (and photos, and poems) based on their experiences in the Club. One member cited the shoreline cleanup field trip as her favourite, since she got to “help nature.” These signs indicate that members are developing an environmental ethic due to their experiences in the Club.

Guests speakers and field trip leaders from the natural history community have expressed pleasure at having the opportunity to share their knowledge with the next generation. Parents and YNC members have repeatedly expressed how much they enjoy the Club, and how much they have learned. There is definitely community support for continuing the YNC.

Despite the desire within other Nova Scotian communities to start chapters of the YNC, the YNC Coordinator did not have time to do this task this year. A paid, full-time Coordinator for the YNC would have time to devote to this.

(5) Recommendations for follow-up steps to the project.

Continue to run the Club as it is, with new topics and field trips every month. If funding can be found for a full-time Coordinator, it would be possible to grow the Halifax chapter, and start chapters in other Nova Scotian communities.