

Nova Scotia Natural Resources Habitat Conservation Fund-

Hope for Wildlife Youth Environmental Day Camp Pilot Project- Final Report

1) Project Goal and Objectives:

a) Goal: The goal of the project is change the everyday habits of children and youth and to help them create and participate in projects that help wildlife and habitats in Nova Scotia. Participants will learn how animals are connected to their environments, and how humans can have a positive effect on wildlife and their habitats by changing their habits to reduce their impact on the environment. They will also learn ways to help protect, conserve, and restore habitats in Nova Scotia

b) Objectives: The project coordinator, with the help of Hope for Wildlife Society volunteers will create a 5-day program to be delivered to children and youth at a summer day-camp based out of the Hope for Wildlife Learning Centre. For the pilot project, 3 camps will be developed, each catering to a different age group: 4-7 years, 8-11 years, and 12-15 years. The camp will be delivered by camp leaders during July and August 2010. During Camp, participants will learn how by changing everyday habits, they can help reduce their impact on the environment and they will learn how this relates to wildlife and their habitats. During camp, participants will participate in activities which help the environment and will also be encouraged to make a change at home that helps the environment. At the end of the week-long camp, participants will carry out a project to help conserve and/or restore habitat that will be highlighted in the community. Community members may also be invited to participate in the effort or the project will seek to educate the community. At the end of camp, each participant will create their own 'pledge to the environment' which will detail actions that they will take or habits they will change in a personal effort to help wildlife and habitats in Nova Scotia. Camp Participants will be invited create a display for our Open House. Their display will detail what they learned at camp, their community projects, and their pledges to the environment. A review of the entire project will evaluate the feasibility and success of the pilot project and determine if it will be implemented as a regular program in 2011.

2) Outline:

Two 5-day programs were created for two different age groups; ages 7-9 from July 19-23 and ages 10-13 from August 16-20. Each camp day ran from 10am to 3pm. The program was developed and directed by two camp leaders. During both weeks, campers participated in activities which focussed on developing awareness of the surrounding environments. Each day of camp had a different habitat theme, with one day being devoted to oceans and rivers, another for forests and jungles, etc. Each activity centered on that day's theme.

At the beginning of camp, participants were asked to choose a "nature name". This name would represent who they were at camp; a person more in touch with the

natural environment, leaving their “old selves” behind. The first day was an introduction to Hope for Wildlife. The children were given an in-depth tour of the facilities and introduced to the work of wildlife rehabilitators. They were encouraged to ask questions, and were shown everything from how to feed babies and how the hospital functions to the rooftop garden where vegetables are grown for feeding animals. They planted vegetable and flower seeds that they were responsible for caring for during camp. Some of the seeds were replanted in the garden at the end of the week; the campers took others home to have their own window gardens.

During the week, the children participated in activities that included: cleaning oil off of bird feathers, creating a habitat collage of collected materials, creating crafts out of recycled materials and building a scarecrow for the vegetable garden. They were also made responsible for the care of the education animals, feeding and cleaning their cages daily. At the end of the first camp, the children participated in a litter clean-up along a walking trail near the facility. At the end of the second week, campers participated in an environmental mock-courtroom presentation in which they played roles of humans versus nature in order to demonstrate what they had learned. During the final day of both camps, the founder of Hope for Wildlife, Hope Swinimer, participated in a circle discussion in which each camper described what they had learned from the week and what lessons they would be taking home with them. The final day of camp ended with surveys for both the parents and children to fill out about the camp experience.

At the Open House, photo slideshows from each camp were on display along with crafts and projects completed by the camp participants. Disks of photos from each week were provided for all camp participants.

3) Results:

Both camps were limited to 8 children and both were filled for a total of 16 children attending.

By giving the children the responsibility of caring for the education animals daily, they learned about the various needs of animals from food and water to space, warmth and shelter. Each child had the opportunity to feed and clean the cage of one or two different animals everyday; they weren't just given instructions, but challenged to think about what each animal required to survive and thrive in its captive environment or “mini-habitat”. This way of seeing the whole picture of a habitat on a small scale was broadened during walking trips along a hiking trail and to the beach where the kids were asked to look for signs of animals such as footprints. They also collected pieces of “habitat” to bring back with them and turn into a project. The younger group made one large collage describing the habitats and environments they saw around the Hope for Wildlife facility; the older group made individual posters in which they described the habitat and requirements of one species. When the projects were completed, both groups were asked to describe their work. The young kids were able to point out different materials they had found and the animals they felt used those items; for example, they used twigs to represent bird's nests and berries as food items. The older

group described their individual posters in terms of food webs and chains; for example, a raccoon lived in a tree which gets its energy from the sun and they eat fish which eat bugs etc. From these activities, both groups demonstrated an understanding of the interconnected local environments and habitats and that all living things have some purpose in the environment.

On the final day of the first camp, the collage the younger group had made was again brought out, but the leaders had altered it by adding bits of garbage and pictures of pollution. After a discussion about pollution, the children were led on a litter walk to clean up a local walking trail. They quickly made the connection between the beautiful habitat collage they had created and the harm that people had caused by littering. Some even confessed to having littered themselves out of laziness or because it was “easier” but after this activity, all the children made a pledge to never litter again and to spread the word about keeping habitats clean.

A game entitled “How Can I Help?” was created for the younger group to determine what they had learned about Hope for Wildlife’s mission of rescue and rehabilitation of wildlife animals. The group was presented with different scenarios in which animals were or appeared to be injured and asked what they would do to help in that situation. The answers given were remarkably close to the actual protocols used by Hope for Wildlife staff in similar situations, which showed that the children really understood that there are some cases in which people should step in to help, and others in which humans should not interfere.

The biggest test of what the older children had learned was the “Nature Courtroom” exercise completed on the final day. They were asked to represent nature versus humans before a jury of their peers and present cases. They were given few guidelines to direct their arguments other than they were representing all of their chosen group; for example, the team representing the ocean had to speak for the water, the beaches and all the animals that relied on the oceans for survival and the team representing humans had to speak for humanity as a whole. The exercise was completed twice with the roles being switched around each time. The thoughtful and mature arguments posed by the children for both sides were compelling evidence that they truly understood the battle between what humans use and what nature can provide. The jury members were successful in developing compromises that both parties had to agree to in order to meet the needs of both equally. The children really rose to the challenge and got into their roles so much that they didn’t want to stop even when their parents started to arrive.

4) Assessment of Achievements and Lessons Learned

The camps were successful in changing how all the children viewed their environments and the ways in which they interact with it. Without seeing them at home, it’s hard to tell if their daily habits were altered. We received positive comments from the children’s parents about how their child was coming home excited about recycling and backyard gardening so we can be sure they were taking some of the lessons home with them.

The original goal was to provide 3 week-long camps, however some of our other funding requests for this project were denied, cutting the available funds for the camps significantly. Despite this setback, the Society was still able to hold 2 of the camps. The target ages for the camps were also adjusted to accommodate the reduced number of camps because a smaller range of ages in each group allowed the leaders to create activities more suited to the general knowledge of the group. A larger age range means the older children will be bored and the youngest children would have a hard time understanding.

It was difficult for the camp leaders to know what to expect going in since neither had directed a children's camp before. Because of this, both had to learn and adjust activities on an ongoing basis. If it was clear that the children were not interested or did not understand, a new twist or way to look at the activity had to be developed. For this reason, each day plan included many extra or alternate activities that could be substituted if needed. During the first camp, this was rarely necessary as many of the activities ran over the planned time because the children were enjoying them so much. In planning the second camp for the older group, many of the same activities were going to be used with minor adjustments to make them more challenging. However, it became clear after the first day that the older group was more difficult to keep interested. After the first day of the second camp, the leaders completely changed the planned activities, making them more interactive and physically challenging to keep their interest. It was difficult to switch plans so completely, but it definitely worked because after the first day there were no more complaints or talk of being uninterested. The planned "pledges to the environment" became more about discussions within the groups about changes they could make rather than official statements. This was because the children tended to be more creative if involved in group talks than if they were asked to come up with something on their own. At the conclusion of the first camp, the children were asked to go around the circle saying what they had learned and what they would take away from camp. After the first child said her piece, each successive child gave a variation of the same answer. However, once the group started to discuss ideas of what they could change personally at home, they became more open and creative.

5) Follow-up steps

The parent and participant surveys were collected after camp was completed and the results were examined with the intention of learning what could be improved. Out of 16 children who attended, only two returned their surveys; both said they would definitely return to camp next year and only one wanted to change camp so his least favourite game wasn't included.

Nine out of 16 parents returned surveys and all scored the camp very high for the activities offered, the staff and the overall experience with most giving ten out of ten. All parents indicated that they would still enrol their child/ children if a registration fee was instituted.

A report consisting of descriptions of all the activities included in camp, supplies used, approximate times for each activity and copies of all forms will be compiled in order to provide a starting point for future camps.

Since this pilot project was such a success in so many ways, we will continue to provide summer camps and make them a permanent part of our education program. This project has also encouraged us to explore other educational opportunities such as single-day camps, workshops and the possibility of starting a nature-action youth group.

Project Budget: