



Message from the director . . .

The Youth Environmental Program thrives on face-to-face interaction with young West Virginians. Whether it's at Youth Environmental Day, Junior Conservation Camp, the Youth Environmental Conference, a



Annette Hoskins
YEP Director

local 4-H or scout meeting, or a visit to a grade school classroom, the YEP works best when in-person education is achieved.

Of course, as we all know, 2020 has not been the best year for close-contact learning. And, just as the rest of the world has been forced to adjust to the ongoing pandemic, the YEP too has tried its best to carry on its mission in different and innovative ways.

In June, we launched our virtual State Junior Conservation Camp with more than 20 videos, as well as live webinars, available on the Department of Environmental Protection's YouTube Channel, "Environment Matters" and its Facebook page. The entire camp is still watchable on both YouTube and the YEP website in case you missed it.

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Learning rebooted

Pandemic forces educators to take new approach to teaching

By Beth Henry-Vance

Several organizations in West Virginia have released exciting new online content this year.

From fun educational videos that highlight everything from native amphibians to kayaking, to in-depth lesson plans for teachers and parents, these sites share a wide range of activities that feature learning opportunities tied to the great outdoors.



In fact, there are so many exciting online opportunities nowadays, it can be overwhelming.

Mary Sue Burns, a STEM coach with Pocahontas County Schools and a retired science teacher, said the dramatically increased opportunities for online learning are both wonderful and almost too much to handle.

Burns and other environmental educators recently hosted a webinar called "Into the Wild," which encouraged teachers to take students outside as much as



possible.

"You can get all these great ideas online," she said. "We want to encourage teachers, students and parents to go beyond some of these websites and take some of these ideas outside, into nature, in their own backyards."

With that in mind, here is a list of some sites to check out – specifically, websites that feature a variety of environmental topics that can be explored

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"Massive innovation has ensued, from creating virtual water festivals, to designing lesson plans, to covering a wider array of water topics."

— Klancey Burford
WVDEP



News from the YEP districts

District 1

Shanti Amos
District Coordinator



CLARKSBURG is fortunate to have residents like Wayne Worth. He noticed his city had a problem with litter and took action.

In 2018, he formed Clarksburg Community Action, a non-profit organization that works to create a safer, healthier and cleaner community.

All ages pitch in to help clean up their city. Clarksburg Community Action is also a member of the Adopt-A-Highway and Youth Environmental Program.

Every Wednesday, and some Saturdays, you will find Clarksburg Community Action volunteers cleaning up neighborhoods and helping with special projects. Safety is always a concern when working on public streets, so they provide volunteers a safety vest, gloves and pickers.

They not only pick up litter, tires and other items, they also knock on doors to let neighbors



know how to report a crime or drug activity. "We're cleaning up our streets and taking back our streets," Worth said.

West Virginia is fortunate to have citizens who volunteer their time on a regular basis to help keep the state litter free. The Adopt-A-Highway Program has 40,000 volunteers who collectively removed four million pounds of trash from state highways last year. If you are not already, I encourage you to get involved with a cleanup in your area.

District 3

Beth Henry-Vance
District Coordinator



BIRCH River is a little cleaner, thanks to the efforts of Girl Scouts in Braxton County.

Some members of Frametown Girl Scout Troop 38217 took it upon themselves to pick up tires and trash from the river this summer, said leader Jennifer Butcher.

The group, which has been a member of the Youth Environmental Program since 2015, participates in Adopt-A-Spot and Make It Shine cleanups each year. Still, Butcher said she was proud that several youngsters started picking up litter out of Birch River on their own.

"The kids, they got really into it," she said, explaining the group reached out to the Department of Environmental Protection's Rehabilitation Environmental Action Plan and organized a volunteer stream cleanup in late July.

Over four days, the group of



12 kids joined parents, neighbors and members of the Birch River Watershed Association to remove trash. Five of the children were Girl Scouts, and the other seven were friends who joined in.

"It was a big community effort," she said, noting they kept social distancing in mind. "I am so proud of these people. Plus, it gave the kids something to do, and it meant something, because this is where they swim."

District 2

Susan Parker
District Coordinator



WELL, here we are in mid-September and I feel we are all finding our new normalcy.

I want to thank everyone who made our virtual State Junior Conservation Camp a huge success. If you haven't checked it out, please be sure to visit our webpage or DEP YouTube channel. We are also working to bring you a virtual Youth Environmental Conference next month! Our theme is "careers in conservation" and we will have some exciting interviews to share. I want to compliment some of the YEP groups that went the extra mile and still worked to do some litter clean-ups.

The Adopt-A-Highway and Adopt-A-Spot clean-ups will resume this fall. The cleanup date is Sept. 26, but we will accept dates throughout October. Please notify the WVDEP by calling 1-800-322-5530.

I also want to highlight some exciting projects I have been a part



of these past few months. A rain barrel workshop was held online, and 50 participants took home rain barrels and install kits in our area (see photo above).

I have also had the privilege of helping with the Slanesville Garden.

The dedication of many volunteers has allowed us to make it possible to provide free produce and education to the public.

I am available for in person presentations, webinars, packets and upcycle craft bags.

District 4

Sara Prior
District Coordinator



WEST Virginians, young and old, might find themselves on electronic devices more than usual these days.

With this change, it is very important to remember to get outside. Maybe the 1,000 Hours Outside challenge is just the motivation you need to accomplish this?

The challenge is simple. Make it a priority to go outside every day. If you go to 1000hoursoutside.com, you will learn more about the project and find a free tracker sheet to tally your time. If 1,000 hours seems daunting, make a goal of 100 hours to start. Even though the purpose of this challenge is to match screen time with time in nature, the main idea is simply to make going outside a priority.

Studies show that time spent outdoors is important to your health and well-being.

I feel that my time in nature alleviates stress and improves my



mood.

I can see these benefits in my children as well.

I encourage you to make outside time a priority this fall. Going for a hike, riding your bike, conducting a litter cleanup, or just reading a book outdoors can be counted toward your personal goal.

I promise you will be happy that you accepted the challenge.

Spotlight On.



Winfield Scotts 4-H Club

Location: Putnam County

Number of members: 30

The Scotts are involved with conservation activities throughout the year, including the “Keep Winfield Elementary School Green” office paper recycling program and the Winfield Scotts Cloverbuds’ household recycling collections. They also participate in poster contests; celebrate National 4-H Week; attend Putnam County 4-H Camp; and exhibit 4-H projects and livestock at the Putnam County Fair.

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And while we’ve had to cancel this year’s Youth Environmental Conference, plans are already underway to bring that to you virtually as well on October 6-7. We’ll look at careers in conservation and also visit some of our favorite spots around West Virginia. Look for more information on the YEC soon.

In addition to these major projects, the YEP also has tried to keep you engaged and thinking about the environment through Facebook.

In April, we launched an Earth Day Challenge on Facebook. In May, we cancelled Youth Environmental Day but still conducted a virtual recycled hat contest, a staple at Youth Day. Also this summer, we unveiled an Earth Bingo game on Facebook. We’re also using the social media platform to do book readings.

It’s not perfect. We miss seeing your smiles in person and hearing your stories. But we’re all in this together and we’ll get through it. Until then, the YEP will continue to look for ways to connect with its membership during these unprecedented times.

As always, don’t hesitate to reach out if you have questions or comments. Email me at Annette.L.Hoskins@wv.gov or call at 304-926-0499, ext. 49759.

LEARNING

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online through videos, games and other content for anyone interested in nature. But don’t stop there! We hope you’re inspired to get outside as much as possible.

Project WET

One organization that has worked to increase its online resources is Project WET (Water Education Today). Usually, the international program focuses on in-person, hands-on training for teachers, as well as in-person water festivals and events for school-age children. Since this spring, the program has worked quickly to expand its virtual options, said Tomi Bergstrom, the Project WET coordinator for the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection.



Bergstrom

Bergstrom said some of these expansions include online trainings for educators, new videos, additional home school resources, water lessons, student booklets and more.

“I am excited that the Project WET Foundation has created so many resources to share to the public free of cost. I think this really shows how much we value and want to support our educators,” Bergstrom said recently.

“As far as students, I have had a few virtual presentations with them and absolutely love their questions and comments. I always get excited for students to understand the importance of water and how it is necessary for our natural systems to exist.”

Project WET and the WVDEP Watershed Improvement Branch launched rain barrel workshops for a select number of schools earlier this year and that program also had to adapt because of social-distancing guidelines, said DEP employee Klancey Burford, who coordinates the project.

The Rain Barrels for Schools program’s rain barrel installations and one-hour water education sessions for the chosen schools were sidelined with the pandemic.

“We were able to complete installations following social distancing protocols with only the teacher present, but were unable to meet with the students,” Burford said. “Therefore, we have taken the opportunity to create recorded lessons that can be shared with even more classrooms than just those chosen to receive rain barrels.”

Regarding the changes this year, Burford added, “The current (unprecedented!) state of the world has ensured that Project WET has had to think outside of the box to get water education into the minds and hearts of students across the country. Massive innovation has ensued, from creating virtual water festivals, to designing lesson plans, to covering a wider array of water topics. This creative energy will hopefully translate to even more accessible education for our students going forward.”

More information about Project WET can be found online at <https://dep.wv.gov/www/getinvolved/wet/Pages/default.aspx>

PBS

For another set of fun videos on everything from taking a recycling plant tour to learning about salamanders, take a look at <https://www.pbslearningmedia.org/>

This site, from West Virginia Public Broadcasting and Public LearningMedia, features educational videos, games and lessons about science, geography, math, the arts and almost any school subject. News quizzes, interactive lessons, TV shows, interviews and more can be searched by grade level and topic.

On the Road in West Virginia

A series of scenic tours and mini history lessons on all of West Virginia’s counties and state parks can be viewed at www.ontheroadinwv.com and on Facebook. The creator, Wayne Worth, has traveled to every county in the state several times, and these short documentaries highlight county seats and many of the unique, beautiful places throughout the state.

Worth said the project is a hobby that he is sharing with the public for free, as a way to give back to the state he loves,

For more information on virtual learning sites go to: <https://dep.wv.gov/environmental-advocate/YEP/Pages/Environmental-education-links-.aspx>.