



West Virginia YOUTH Environmental Program



Spring 2021

WV Department of Environmental Protection

Message from the director ...

When we canceled our 2020 events – Youth Environmental Day and state Junior Conservation Camp – because of COVID-19, we were fairly certain 2021 would provide a green light to bring them back.



Annette Hoskins
YEP Director

Of course, now we know that isn't the case at all. In February, the Youth Environmental Program announced the cancellation of this year's Youth Day in May and Junior Conservation Camp in June.

It was a very difficult decision and one made with careful consideration of all factors involved, the most important being the guaranteed safety of our participants and staff. At the end of the day, we simply did not feel the time was right to move forward with these events.

There are still concerning uncertainties surrounding COVID-19 – too many for us to feel completely confident that we could stage a large gathering, as well as an overnight camp, and protect everyone's health.

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Clubs feeling pain of isolation

*Pandemic difficult
to navigate for
WV youth groups*

By YEP Staff

Among the many benefits of belonging to a youth group is the camaraderie shared during meetings or working together at community events.

Because of COVID-19, organizations such as 4-H clubs and scout troops have been trying to find ways to stay connected without gathering in person. It hasn't been easy.

Many groups haven't met once – virtually or together – nor taken part in an outreach activity since the pandemic began. Leaders said the prolonged isolation is not only adversely affecting the morale of their clubs, it's also cutting into numbers.

Lorrie Wright, a West Virginia University extension agent in Mason County and the director of 4-H Youth Development, said there are about 100 fewer kids in 4-H clubs in her county now, compared to this time last year.

"I have 15 clubs that have



gone the entire year without a single meeting," Wright said. "It's disheartening. It has really been a difficult year. I didn't go into 2021 thinking we'd be doing the same thing over again."

Lisa Arbogast, who leads the Haer Bears 4-H Club in Mason County, has been trying to continue meetings virtually but understands why numbers are falling.

"How can you be a part of a program when you're not allowed to do anything?" Arbogast said. "It's been difficult. WVU has been offering a lot of webinars and some of the camps we normally have, they are trying to do virtually. But the kids are so burned out on virtual. They are desperate to see each other. They miss each other and I miss them."

Candace Nelson, the marketing director for the Girl Scouts of Black Diamond, said her organization is experiencing the same issues, including a drop in membership.

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Pendleton 4-Hers keep on battling

By Susan Parker

Brooke Alt has used the COVID-19 Pandemic to "Zoom" across West Virginia to places she normally doesn't visit.

The WVU Extension agent for Pendleton County is a shining star in what has been a dismal year for many.

"During this time, we were able to connect via Zoom to kids all across the state," said Alt, who works with Pendleton 4-H clubs. "Not only was I teaching kids in my county, but I was able to teach kids on the other side of

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YEP News

WV Youth Environmental Program
601 57th St. S.E., Charleston WV 25304

News from the YEP districts

District 1

Shanti Amos



AS most of you know by now, I have made the difficult decision to leave the West Virginia DEP to accept a position in the private sector.

For the last several years, I have had the privilege of working with amazing volunteers, youth, teachers and youth and municipal leaders as the District 1 coordinator for the Youth Environmental Program.

It has been amazing to see how many West Virginians volunteer countless hours to improve our state.

Before I started working for the DEP, I did not realize how many of you came together on a regular basis to give back to your community by adopting a highway or local park to keep it litter free.

Our YEP groups work diligently throughout the year recycling, cleaning streams, upcycling, teaching groups about

conservation and much more to benefit our state. It has been humbling to watch.

As the District 1 coordinator, I had the opportunity to visit my 10 counties on a regular basis. I have lived in West Virginia my entire life and I never realized how much of it I had never seen. This job helped me to realize how truly blessed I am to live in this beautiful state.

I will also miss working with my talented co-workers. The scope of expertise at the DEP is truly unique.

Employees are available for presentations on a variety of conservation topics and I highly encourage you to take advantage of this valuable resource.

Please feel free to stay in touch. I can be contacted at shantiamos@aol.com or 304-415-8133. I look forward to hearing from you!

District 3

Beth Henry-Vance
District Coordinator



SECOND-graders at North Elementary School in Elkins are gearing up for some fun Earth Day activities.

The students will be able to visit different outdoor stations at their school and take part in lessons featuring wildlife; trees and bees; water conservation; and more during the week of Earth Day, which is celebrated April 22.

Teacher Laurinda Cross, who has been teaching more than 10 years and enrolled the school's second grade in the Youth Environmental Program in 2016, said she incorporates environmental education as much as possible.

"I try to pinpoint things like recycling and use it to teach kids about natural resources, and how we can take care of them on Earth Day and even throughout the year," Cross said.

She added that other nature themes incorporated into the second-grade lessons include

gardening, agriculture, forestry and environmental science.

She and fellow second-grade teacher Dee Dee Sanson try to utilize the school's outdoor classroom as much as possible, and students have enjoyed nature walks, scavenger hunts with magnifying glasses, visits from Smokey Bear, planting fruit trees and tasting edible plants. They also collaborate with local farmers, WVU Extension, the West Virginia DEP and others to offer presentations.

Cross hopes to find funding to expand upon the school's fruit trees, with detailed plans for a school garden and educational signs.

"I think gardening and using plants need to be part of their daily life," Cross said, explaining she tries to spark a love of nature within her students.

District 2

Susan Parker
District Coordinator



BACK to school! I know a lot of parents, teachers and yes, even the students, are jumping for joy to be back in school. Did you know the REAP program, under the WVDEP, offers an amazing recycling bin borrow program for local schools?

Schools sign into a bin-borrow contract that will supply classroom-size and large collection bins for the school. A school is required to fill out a form that names a committed volunteer who will take the lead to make sure materials are collected and transported to a local recycling facility. So far in District 2, three schools are utilizing the program: Springfield-Greenspring Elementary in Hampshire County, New Creek Primary in Mineral County and North Fork Elementary in Pendleton County.

If you or your school is interested in the program, please contact me to obtain the form.

Along with the bin borrow pro-



gram, I can also offer a creative bulletin board about the three R's to really engage the students.

I know this past year has been a challenge for us all and many of the events and activities we looked forward to were canceled. Please don't let this discourage you from filling out and submitting your annual summary report! This is your chance to let your groups shine with the effort they put forward to still make things happen. No matter how small the activity, it mattered!

District 4

Sara Prior
District Coordinator



THE Together Tee Project is a creation of Wyoming East High's Friends of the Earth Club and teacher Brittany Bauer's A.P. environmental science class. Through brainstorming sessions, Zoom calls with stakeholders, creating a Shopify account, delving into technology and the textile industry, and simply caring for others, they found a way to bring a sense of "togetherness" to their peers during a time of social distancing.

They applied for the Samsung Solve for Tomorrow Challenge and did not know exactly what to focus on. They did know that student depression during COVID was a concern they wanted to address. The Friends of the Earth club is known for recycling plastic bottles and wanted to incorporate them into its idea.

Next step, what can be put into these bottles that is environmentally friendly? Research

found that nearly 80 million tons of textiles are sent to landfills every year. This discovery allowed the students to identify the problem and come up with a solution! How do they upcycle unwanted T-shirts? The group learned how to remove silk screening from T-shirts, created a branding stamp, and made a 3-D rendering of the stamp to be placed on the upcycled tees.

The idea was not a finalist for the Samsung Solve for Tomorrow Contest. However, they are continuing with the project. So far, the group has surprised eight students with an upcycled T-shirt and a personalized letter in a bottle. There is no doubt this group created a successful project by how the recipients' responded. Ms. Bauer is very proud of her students and said, "these students' reactions substantiated the Together Tee Project."

District 5

Tom Aluise
District Coordinator



FROM raising trout in the classroom and studying water quality issues with a local watershed group, to writing letters to West Virginia lawmakers and U.S. senators to advocate for a cleaner environment, Tonya Harper's students run the gamut of environmental education and activism.



Harper

Harper teaches science and social studies to fourth- and fifth-graders at Malden Elementary in Kanawha County and was recognized as the 2020 Make It Shine Environmental Teacher of the Year on the grade school level.

Harper, who is active in the Youth Environmental Program, received a \$500 personal award from the state DEP, as well as a \$1,000 award to promote STEM education at her school.

There is no doubt Harper will use her winnings for the better-

ment of her students and the state. She is passionate about equipping her class with the knowledge needed to make the right decisions down the road for West Virginia's environment.

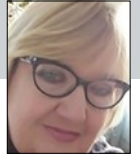
Included in Harper's educational arsenal is a partnership with the Morris Creek Watershed Association in Montgomery. Her students are frequent visitors to Morris Creek, where they remove trash, plant trees, test and document water chemistry, learn about acid mine drainage and much more.

Also, Harper's class raises trout in the classroom and releases the fish into Morris Creek through the Trout Unlimited Program.

Last year, Harper's students entered the county's Wild & Wonderful Water Science Fair and were recognized among the winners for their entry, which detailed work on Morris Creek.

District 6

Debbie Florence
District Coordinator



GREENMONT Elementary School (K-5th grade) in Wood County has found a way to put the three R's into action by starting a school-wide composting program to reduce food waste.

The program was started by Kevin Mace, MEd, NBCT, who has his own three-bin composting system at home.

Mr. Mace explained that he was always bothered by all the food scraps that get thrown away each day in the school's cafeteria.

But the composting program is really another layer of a project that started about four years ago as an after-school garden club.

The garden club was well received and by the second year nearly half the student body was participating.

The momentum continued the next year with a successful fundraising effort to build a greenhouse.

Now the greenhouse hosts a

year-round garden class as part of the school's curriculum.

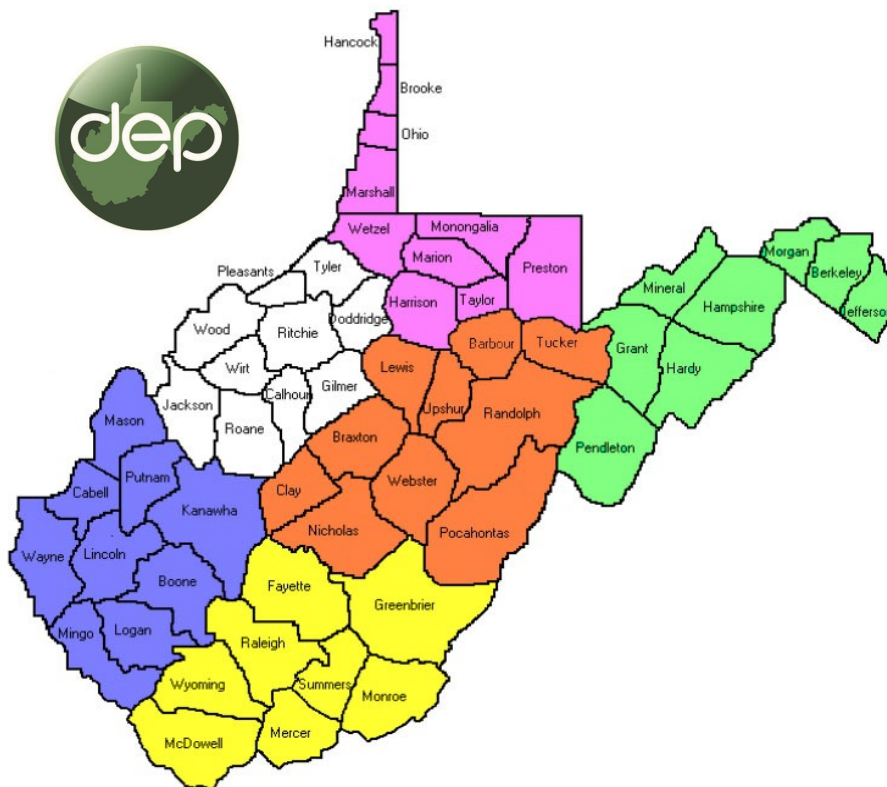
Mr. Mace said, "the goal is to make the garden self-sustaining and creating our own compost is an important part of that."

Composting is underway, with students using five-gallon buckets to collect solid food scraps from lunch. Expanded collection will occur once COVID-19 restrictions are relaxed.

Currently, scraps go to (cold) compost bins made of pallets. Soon the school will add five large Jora compost tumblers, which it plans to purchase next week.

We look forward to following up with Mr. Mace and Greenmont Elementary in our next issue to get an update on their progress and the new Jora composting bins. In the meantime, you can follow their activities on Facebook. Just search for "Greenmont School Garden."

Youth Program Coordinators



- District 1** **Vacant**
2301 Pleasant Valley Road, Fairmont, WV 26554
Phone: 304-368-3950 / Fax: 304-368-3953
shanti.m.amos@wv.gov
- District 2** **Susan Parker**
22288 Northwestern Pike, Romney, WV 26757
Phone: 304-822-7266 / Fax: 304-822-3687
susan.j.parker@wv.gov
- District 3** **Beth Henry-Vance**
47 School Street, Suite 301, Philippi, WV 26416
Phone: 304-457-3219 / Fax: 304-457-5613
beth.a.henryvance@wv.gov
- District 4** **Sara Prior**
1159 Nick Rahall Greenway, Fayetteville, WV 25840
Phone: 304-574-4465 / Fax: 304-574-4480
sara.a.prior@wv.gov
- District 5** **Tom Aluise**
601 57th Street, SE, Charleston, WV 25304
Phone: 304-926-0441 / Fax: 304-926-0458
thomas.j.aluise@wv.gov
- District 6** **Debbie Florence**
2311E Ohio Avenue, Parkersburg, WV 26101
Phone: 304-420-4635 / Fax: 304-420-4554
deborah.n.florence@wv.gov

Spotlight on.



Cub Scout Pack 32

Location: Hampshire County

Number of members: 20

This group has worked diligently to make its community a better place. Members re-stained and re-installed numerous blue bird houses on the West Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind campus. At their Adopt-A-Spot location in Romney this fall, they cleaned and planted 450 flower bulbs and installed a decorative border and stepping stones. The group also created and installed Christmas decorations at the Adopt-A-Spot location, bringing a lot of cheer to the area.

MESSAGE

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We are heartbroken that, again, we will lose time spent in person with all of you. But we hope to still have virtual events associated with both Youth Day and Junior Conservation Camp. We will be working on what those will look like in the coming weeks.

Also, just because we're not meeting in person at North Bend State Park for Youth Day, doesn't mean you can't still send us your summary reports, posters, art contest entries, essays and everything else the YEP judges for its annual awards. We've even made it easier this year by giving you the option to electronically submit your summary report. To learn how, visit www.dep.wv.gov, click on "Citizens" at the top of the homepage, then "Education and Outreach." Once you're on the YEP homepage, look under "Awards." **Remember, the deadline for all submissions is March 15.** If you have any questions or concerns, don't hesitate to reach out to me or to your district coordinator. You can email me at: Annette.L.Hoskins@wv.gov or call 304-926-0499, ext. 49759.

The YEP, like you, is hoping for a return to normalcy in 2022, when we can all be together again.

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"We are echoing that trend," Nelson said. "The numbers are definitely down from past years. We definitely are seeing the effects of COVID in many, many ways."

The Charleston-based Black Diamond Council includes 8,500 girls in 61 counties in West Virginia, Ohio, Maryland and Virginia.

While some troops haven't met since the pandemic began, Nelson said others are finding creative ways to stay in touch, including virtual meetings.

"We provide a lot of different resources trying to keep the girls engaged," Nelson said. "I really think those connections and keeping the girls learning and having some source of normalcy is so important. Whatever we can do to facilitate them being together, we're trying to do."

In Randolph County, members of Elkins Cub Scout Pack 88 were not able to have in-person meetings after the pandemic began. They were able, though, to get together for a hike in the summer of 2020. The activity was socially distanced with masks and it gave families the opportunity to hike and take part in a leaf hunt.

Shannon Straley-Smith, the membership and activities coordinator for Pack 88, said she hopes to regain members this year and host a few more events, including virtual activities such as a rain gutter regatta with boats made from recycled materials.

Arbogast said her 4-H club met in person once in October and once in November when WVU Extension temporarily eased restrictions. WVU announced last month that clubs could begin meeting in person again starting March 1 with a limit on group size – no more than 25 people.

That's good news for clubs who don't have the resources to conduct meetings virtually.

"I'm not 100 percent tech-savvy, but I'm putting forth an effort because I feel it's important to keep the kids involved," said Arbogast, who has facilitated Zoom meetings for the Haer Bears throughout the pandemic and has staged a few socially distanced outreach events.

"It's important to reach out and say, 'Hey, how are you? I miss you and I'm checking in on you,'" Arbogast said.

Susan Carothers, leader of the Meadow Bridge Clovers 4-H club, reaches out to her members through email and Facebook, along with an occasional Zoom meeting. With unreliable Internet for some, making a connection can be frustrating for everyone involved.

Carothers said club members are doing individual projects in anticipation for the state fair in August. "Everyone seems anxious for spring and summer, so hopefully we can get a few outdoor activities going again,"

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the state about plants and animals, which I found very cool.

"I was also able to work with other extension agents from across the state that I normally would never be able to partner with because of our location."

In bucking a trend during the pandemic, Alt said Pendleton County's 4-H numbers actually have improved over the past year, despite WVU Extension shutting down all in-person meetings for much of 2020.

"This was a daunting task that turned out to be a great way to recruit new members," Alt said of her move toward virtual communication and events. "We were able

to reach our already enrolled 4-H members and also provide opportunities to youth who were not already in 4-H."

In addition to changing how she communicated with her 4-Hers, Alt said she also had to think outside the box on how to connect with the community.

"One of the most unique activities that we were able to continue was the annual pet show at our local nursing home," Alt said. "In 2020, we hosted a pet parade where members brought their animals to the nursing home and walked them around the outside of the building in parade style.

"Residents of the nursing home were watching from their windows and waved at the members as they walked by."