



Robert Bohmann, Chair
1105 Melvin Ave.
Racine, WI 53402
608-235-5825

Larry Bonde, Vice-Chair
22514 Rockville Road
Kiel, WI 53042
920-286-3327

Joe Weiss, Secretary
Jayne Meyer, Public Relations
Alan Suchla, Historian

CORRESPONDENCE/MEMORANDUM

DATE: January 28, 2015

TO: Chair Cole, Secretary Stepp, and members of the Board

FROM: Larry Bonde, WCC Vice-Chair

SUBJECT: January NRB, Item 5.B.2, Youth Conservation Congress Initiative Update

It is with much enthusiasm that I come before you today to update you on the Wisconsin Conservation Congress' Youth Conservation Congress initiative. As you know, the Youth Conservation Congress is the conception of this Board, specifically, Chair Cole. The WCC has worked to establish a YCC that would function under the umbrella of the Wisconsin Conservation Congress, and under the current program there are 20 youth from around the state that are participating. The program as presently organized has youth attending WCC meetings with their WCC delegate mentor. While meetings discussing wildlife management plans, harvest methods and population trends are an excellent avenue into civic engagement, I think we can all agree they may not be viewed as the most exciting item on a teenager's calendar. The Congress has struggled to identify a more tangible and appealing incentive for the participants that would really draw and keep their interest, while continuing to engage them in this unique civic process.

NRB Chair Preston Cole asked Deputy Secretary Moroney to assign a group of DNR staff that could assist the WCC in developing the YCC and create a more robust program. Land Division Administrator, Kurt Thiede and WCC Liaison Kari Lee-Zimmermann were assigned to lead the effort. Trish Nitschke (Office of Communications), Cindy Koepke (Green and Healthy Schools), Keith Warnke and John Motoviloff (Recruitment and Retention), Justine Hasz (Fisheries Section Chief), Jeff Pritzl (Northeast Regional Wildlife Supervisor), Jeff King (Training Warden), and I worked together to more clearly define how we might "...effectively engage, educate, and involve youth in the management and protection of our natural resources and foster a conservation ethic through participation on the Wisconsin Youth Conservation Congress (YCC)." After much insightful discussion, we determined the following objectives for the program and activities would greatly help meet the true vision of the program.

The YCC will help youth delegates learn about natural resource management and careers through a variety of service-learning opportunities throughout the year including an all-day "field day" held in each DNR region. The DNR, recently committed to support the YCC by partnering with the WCC on this effort. These field days will expose YCC delegates to the many facets and factors involved in natural resource management and the various career options in natural resource related fields. It will also afford them the opportunity to interact with professionals in those fields, and enable them the opportunity to participate in typical work done by natural resource professionals. In addition, YCC delegates will have the opportunity to work with DNR staff on a wide variety of volunteer opportunities (depending on youth interests, season and opportunities available) such as fish netting or wildlife surveys, tagging or marking fish at a hatchery facility, assisting with habitat assessments, air monitoring, ride-alongs, or water quality sampling. YCC delegates will also be given a complimentary Natural Resources Foundation membership and have an opportunity to attend Natural Resources Foundation educational field trips at a reduced rate.

The YCC will teach youth delegates the process by which Wisconsin's natural resource policy is determined and the role and history of the Wisconsin Conservation Congress (WCC), a statutorily created citizen advisory group. Youth delegates will have access to DNR policy makers and will participate in WCC meetings such as the district meeting, advisory committee meetings, the DNR and WCC Spring Hearings, and the WCC annual convention in

May. The Youth Congress will afford young adults with an interest in environmental issues a voice in the management of those resources. YCC delegates may work with the Conservation Congress county delegation and district councilors to introduce a resolution to effect change at the annual Spring Hearings, which they can follow through the WCC process.

The YCC will provide youth delegates with the opportunity to strengthen valuable transferable skills such as problem-solving, communication, teamwork, and leadership skills through working with other Youth Conservation Congress delegates, WCC delegates, and DNR staff. Participants can make an oral and/or poster presentation on their service-learning project at the annual Wisconsin Conservation Congress' convention, thereby strengthening communication and presentation skills. YCC delegates will also participate in break-out sessions at the annual convention that will require the delegates to work in groups to discuss current natural resource issues facing the state and determine potential problem-solving options. Youth will also work together to mold and shape the YCC program moving forward.

The YCC will afford participants the opportunity to network with youth from around the state that are interested in natural resources as well as DNR professionals and policy makers. The Youth Conservation Congress may fulfill independent study requirements or service-learning hours/credits for some schools. Educators may also use this program to complement their course curriculum for interested students.

The above proposed initiative to enhance and bolster the Youth Conservation Congress was presented to the Executive Council at their January meeting and is now presented to you today for your information and we'd welcome any comments or input you may have. We are planning to roll out the program to schools, teachers and guidance counselors, established groups such as Project Wet/Wild, Green and Healthy Schools, National Archery in the Schools Program, Future Farmers of America, 4-H, Boy/Girl Scouts, Big Brothers/Sisters, Kids and Mentors Outdoors (KAMO), and similar organizations in March.