



## Wisconsin Youth Conservation Congress



**Goal:** 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).

**Background:** In 2009, the Natural Resources Board asked, “Would you support the concept of establishing a Youth Conservation Congress?” on the Spring Hearing questionnaire. The question passed overwhelmingly. With favorable input from the citizens, the NRB asked the Wisconsin Conservation Congress (WCC) to proceed with getting a Youth Conservation Congress established that would function under the umbrella of the Wisconsin Conservation Congress. The WCC undertook this charge with support from the DNR. The purpose of this initiative is to create a program that will instill a sense of ownership, civic pride, involvement and advocacy in the future stewards of our state’s natural resources and sporting heritage. The YCC intends to be a hands-on opportunity to involve youth in natural resource management, citizen based science, and provide them an avenue to engage in policy making.

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.

**Objectives:** The YCC will teach youth delegates about (1) natural resource management and careers through a variety of service-learning opportunities throughout the year, (2) the process by which Wisconsin’s natural resource policy is determined, and (3) the role and history of the Wisconsin Conservation Congress (WCC), a statutorily created citizen advisory group<sup>1</sup>. The YCC will (4) 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. 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.

### **Activities to meet objectives:**

1. The DNR will expose YCC delegates to the many facets and factors involved in natural resource management, to various career options in natural resource related fields and afford them the opportunity to interact with professionals in those fields. It will also enable them to participate in typical work done by natural resource professionals. 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. In addition, YCC delegates will receive a complimentary Natural Resources Foundation membership and will have an opportunity to attend Natural Resources Foundation educational field trips at a reduced rate.

- 2-3. 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 natural resource and sporting heritage related issues a voice in the management of those resources and activities. 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.
4. Participants can make an oral and/or poster presentation on their service-learning project at the annual Wisconsin Conservation Congress' convention<sup>2</sup>, 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.

<sup>1</sup>The Wisconsin Conservation Congress is the only statutory body in the state where citizens elect county delegates to represent their interests and advise the Natural Resources Board and the Department of Natural Resources on how to manage Wisconsin's natural resources.

<sup>2</sup>The WCC convention is an annual gathering of the 360 statewide delegates held in May.