Youth at Work

Helping disabled hunters, helping waterfowl—the future of help is on the way.

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Young people can make a difference on the land through volunteering—and are welcome additions to Department of Natural Resources programs.

The DNR Volunteer Network offers youth dedicated to the environment and our public resources opportunities to volunteer at parks planting gardens or trees, building bird houses, organizing clean-up days or improving trails or playgrounds. Or, they can provide valuable assistance during special events such as fishing clinics and programs providing disabled youth opportunities to hunt. In many instances, youth identify a problem or opportunity and approach DNR with a proposal that maximizes their talents and resources.

The only requirements are that, if they are under 16, they must be a part of an organized group or working side-by-side with a family member who provides adult supervision, and that all under the age of 18 have a parent sign the volunteer forms.

> "May you remember that though the roads we take can sometimes be difficult, those are the ones that lead to the most beautiful views."
>
> ***—Douglas Pagels***

Here are a few examples of how young resource stewards have made a difference.

Boy Scout Troop 92

The 2006 work day for members and leaders of Antioch-based Boy Scout Troop 92 represented a commitment that had stood the test of time—their 25th year of a wood duck nesting box project at Chain O'Lakes State Park. In 1980, the troop set a goal of increasing the wood duck population by constructing, installing, monitoring and maintaining boxes in the state park, and to create a continuing project that promoted environmental awareness, team work and outdoor fun.

Fifty houses were constructed in 1980 and subsequent troop members (nearly 100 scouts and 30 leaders, with one of the original scouts now a leader) have cleaned boxes annually and repaired and replaced boxes as needed.

When a volunteer group starts a project, there is no way of knowing how

Teen members of the Sesser-Valier Outdoorsmen Club assist with the annual Rend Lake Shooting Event for People with Disabilities.

(Photo by Dianne Blasa.)

(Photo by Robin Reif.)

Scout groups provide volunteer services at many Illinois state parks, including Lake Le-Aqua Na.

long they will be committed to their task. DNR and local bird watchers and waterfowl hunters are extremely thankful to Troop 92 for continuing their volunteer work and for helping increase the wood ducks population at Chain O'Lakes.

Sesser-Valier Outdoorsmen Club

An active group of nearly 60 teen volunteers with the Outdoorsmen Club at Sesser-Valier High School has earned national recognition for their volunteerism. With a mission to "save and faithfully defend from waste, the natural resources of my country, its air, soil and minerals, its forests, waters and wildlife," competition to join the club is high, and members have to stick to the environmental code of conduct at all times or will be asked to leave. A lot of work and studying is required before members can participate in fun things, such as mountain climbing, whitewater rafting, working the DNR annual Rend Lake Shooting Event for People with Disabilities or helping DNR conduct urban fishing clinics at Southern Illinois Hunting and Fishing Days.

Often, members awake before dawn during deer season to help disabled hunters to blinds the club had previously constructed. And there they remain, ready to track and process deer, and to help hunters out of the field.

Mike Sample, sponsor of the club, said: "I believe the members give their time because they thoroughly enjoy seeing the excitement felt by those they are assisting."

"Watching hunters ride into the woods on the strong, young shoulders of a teenager is worth it all," said Jay Williams, DNR disabled opportunities program coordinator. "As the event day starts you wonder how you will be able to get everything accomplished for the event. Then a busload of 60 awesome teen volunteers pulls up, the day goes as planned and everyone has a great time."

(Photo by Kathy Andrews.)

Conducting special events at state parks, such as the maple syrup event at Argyle Lake State Park, requires many hands.

To volunteer, contact your local DNR park or district office, or visit www.dnr.state.il.us/volunteer/index.htm.