



Youth Awards

President's Environmental Youth Awards

Introduction

Since 1971, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has sponsored the President's Environmental Youth Awards (PEYA) program which recognizes young people across America for projects which demonstrate their commitment to the environment. Young people in all fifty states and U.S. territories are invited to participate annually in the PEYA program, which offers youth, individually and collectively, an opportunity to become an environmental force within their communities. The program encourages individuals, school classes, schools, summer camps, public interest groups, and youth organizations to promote local environmental awareness and to channel this awareness into positive community involvement. The PEYA program has two components: the regional certificate program and the national awards competition.



Regional Certificate Program

Regional certificates are awarded by EPA's ten regional offices year round. Therefore, applications may be submitted to the regional offices at any time throughout the year. All participants in the regional certification program receive certificates signed by the President of the United States honoring them for their efforts in environmental protection.

National Awards Competition

One outstanding project from each of the ten EPA regional offices is selected for national recognition. National individual project winners, or one representative from a national award-winning group project, along with one project sponsor, are honored by EPA Headquarters in Washington, D.C.

Judging Criteria

Regional award panels judge environmental projects based on several factors. These factors include the environmental need for the project, the project's ability to reach its goals, the long-term environmental benefits of the project, the positive environmental impact on the local community, and the extent to which the project was designed, coordinated, and implemented due to youth initiative in the project.

Role of the Sponsor

Each project must have an adult sponsor who plays an important role in helping a young person or groups of young people carry out their projects and apply for the awards. The sponsor can be a teacher, youth group advisor, summer camp counselor, or community leader. Young people must work closely with the sponsor throughout the project and application process.

Application Deadline

Applications for the regional certificate program may be sent to the EPA regional office where the project is located at any time throughout the year. To participate in the annual national awards competition, projects must be completed and applications must be postmarked by July 31st of the award year. All applications must be mailed to the appropriate EPA regional office. Contact the regional office that represents your community for an application or more information about the program.

Examples of Past Winners

1999 Winner

Morgan Danielle Dusch
Paoli, Indiana

“Seasonal Deviations of Lake Patoka Water Quality”

In her junior year, Morgan Danielle Dusch researched Patoka Lake, a man-made lake in southern Indiana, by conducting in-depth chemical, bacterial, and physical tests. The primary purpose of the research project was to determine whether the water quality and chemical purity of the lake’s perennial entry streams are deteriorating and to determine the sustainability of the lake.

Patoka Lake’s recreational facilities have become very popular, and the beauty and convenience of the lake draw campers, boaters, swimmers, hunters, and fishermen from neighboring states. Visitation and use of the site, however, come with a price — contamination. People affected by the decreasing water quality of the lake include 50,000 individuals who rely on Patoka for their drinking water.

Studying stressors, Dusch found through her research that a variety of activities have altered the water quality of the lake. She compared historical data with seasonal data she collected and made a series of projections about the lake’s health 25 years in the future. In fact, comparative data from Dusch’s evaluation of relative risk showed that, according to chemical and bacterial data, Patoka Lake no longer would be able to sustain life after 2015. According to Dusch’s geological and physical data, Lake Patoka has a sustainability projection of 25 years — 55 years less than the original projection. At the request of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, with which Dusch had been invited to test the water, administration monies have since been allocated for the temporary repair of a grout curtain below Patoka Dam to keep users of the lake’s water safe and provide water for future years.



2000 Winner

Michael Penland, Eric Soderquist, and Paul Kim
Soldotna, Alaska

“Soldotna Creek Park Project”

As a community project for their government class and for the annual Caring for the Kenai contest, Michael Penland, Eric Soderquist, and Paul Kim of Soldotna, Alaska designed and installed a fish habitat restoration and protection project at Soldotna Creek Park. The purpose of the students’ project was to decrease the adverse effects of public use on the habitat in the park, while improving the accessibility and functionality of the facility. The students’ work assisted in reducing trampling damage at the site caused by anglers, resolved design problems related to work previously performed at the site, and restored healthy vegetation to previously damaged riparian areas of the mouth of Soldotna Creek and the banks of the Kenai River. The project improved accessibility by adding pullout areas along the existing elevated walkway with benches and areas for wheelchairs where people can sit and observe activity on the river.

The students coordinated their project with staff of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, the Alaska Division of Parks, local businesses, and the Kenai River Sportfishing Association. The students conducted all necessary planning and fund raising, completed permit applications, and performed the manual labor for the project. They learned about the time-consuming complexities of codes and permitting and planning requirements. In the fall, they prepared the site by clearing debris. The three students filmed their progress and used the video to make presentations to agencies and potential donors. During the winter, they raised funds in the community and collected building materials donated or discounted by companies in the area. They also cut out and assembled parts in the Soldotna city shop while the waterfront was iced up. In the summer, the three students installed a stairway to help prevent destruction of the bank by foot traffic and a cantilevered fishing platform that would allow anglers and sightseers to approach the waterway without harming its fragile habitat. They also built four alcoves and benches along the river, planted a living fence consisting of alder and willow along the top portion of the Soldotna access point to discourage trespassing onto private property, and used earthwork willows and coconut mats to promote revegetation by the creek.



The students collected more than \$15,000 for the project. The initial time estimate for the project was two weeks; the actual time spent was more than a thousand hours to build the walkways and fishing platforms and restore the bank habitat. Michel Penland said the project taught the students valuable lessons about how things happen in the real world, but added that the effort was worthwhile because it allowed them to return something to the community.

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*For additional information, visit the World Wide Web at
<http://www.epa.gov/enviroed>*