



LEAD YOUR OWN ADVENTURE



# NATURAL LEADERS

## Network

PILOT VERSION

Tool Kit

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# ARE YOU A NATURAL LEADER?



## Do you know that young people have been at the core of some of the biggest social movements in history?

From supporting Civil Rights to working for a greener world, young people have been powerful agents of change, with the energy and determination to fight for what is right.

In that same spirit, the Natural Leaders Network is a group of young people working for positive change. We want to help kids get unplugged, on their feet, and outdoors. We want them to find nature and connect to it, even if they live on city streets that seem anything but green. When they do, they'll feel better physically and emotionally.

I know. I grew up in South Central Los Angeles, a place that a lot of people associate with violence and urban decay. But as a teenager, I had a chance to visit Grand Teton National Park in Wyoming. There I began to realize what nature can do to people. Nature made me feel better inside, and I saw that it could make other people feel good, too. I had a sort of epiphany out there: that I love nature because I love people.

Now I'm leading the Natural Leaders Network, hoping to empower leaders of today to make a difference in kids' lives. My story is one of many that are yet to be told. Already we're helping kids plant urban gardens, fish in local streams, hike wild trails, clean up polluted rivers, camp under the stars, and discover the plants and animals in their region. For the past two years, we've sponsored a national Get Outside Day! and seen thousands of kids step out into nature with our encouragement.

To take this work to a new level, we need more Natural Leaders. And that's where you come in. Whether you're a professional educator or organizer, or a high school kid with a lot of determination, you can help us. Maybe you want to start by taking a couple of family members to a local park. Maybe you want to organize a Natural Leaders Network for your whole region. Whatever your ambitions, this tool kit is designed to help.

So read on for some inspiration and ideas, then head outdoors. And remember: a lot of people are saying we're losing contact with nature, and that young people don't even care. I want you to have the tenacity to hope for something better...and act today to make it happen.

**Juan D. Martinez, National Coordinator**  
*Natural Leaders Network*





## WHAT IS THE NATURAL LEADERS NETWORK (NLN)?

The Natural Leaders Network empowers a worldwide youth movement to strengthen the bond between children and nature.

## WHAT IS THE TOOL KIT?

This tool kit is a guide for all youth around the world who want to start Natural Leaders action groups or networks. It's like a road map to figure out how to get started and where to go with your work. It offers some cool ideas and gives examples of how you might build your own Network. You will find stories of current Natural Leaders and the work they are doing, as well as the history of the Natural Leaders Network and how Natural Leaders fit into the greater movement to reconnect kids to nature. Go ahead, start reading.

## WHO SHOULD READ IT?

It's for you, because you enjoy getting outdoors and want to make sure others have the same chances to explore the planet. If you are 15 – 29 years old and passionate about the outdoors, you are in the right place! The tool kit is a way to help you get kids outside in your area by developing a Natural Leaders Network (NLN) specific to your community and the people in it. It will also guide you through steps to becoming an effective leader in your community, no matter what size or shape your community may be. The Natural Leaders have had great success in developing regional groups and taking action to get kids outdoors in nature. Now we want to see you do the same!

## HOW SHOULD I USE IT?

Read it. Learn it. Do it. Figure out which parts are most useful and relevant to you and then focus on those. The tool kit has a “choose your own adventure” feel so that you can find something that makes sense for you and your community. Visit the Natural Leaders Network website, [www.naturalleaders.org](http://www.naturalleaders.org), for more detailed information about any of the topics you see included here. You will also find contact information for other Natural Leaders so you can ask questions and get involved. Ready? Let's go.

## WHAT WILL I FIND IN THE TOOL KIT?

Check out the Table of Contents and choose your adventure from there!





CHECK OUT THE TABLE OF CONTENTS AND CHOOSE YOUR ADVENTURE FROM THERE!

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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### HOW TO START A REGIONAL NATURAL LEADERS NETWORK

Check out this section for tips and steps on how to organize a group of Natural Leaders in your area. Remember that there is no “right” way to build a regional Natural Leaders Network. Take a look at the stories in this section for inspiration, or do something completely new!

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### RESOURCE CENTER

The tools that make up the tool kit live here. Copy them, link to them, use them as a guide. This section has everything you will need to start a regional Natural Leaders Network in your community.

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### CLOSING

Here are a few parting thoughts!



"Today, I'm thinking about how lucky I am to have a backyard. No, not the lawn behind my house. I mean Wyoming. In my backyard, I have Yellowstone Park, Pahaska, the Tetons. I have all of these places available to me. They are all beautiful." ~ Delegate from the Wyoming Youth Congress

"When I worked with three amazing students from New York City exploring all of nature's diversity, I was watching social change unfold before my eyes. Not only were they exploring and working in the depths of some of nature's most beautiful preserves, or hiking to new heights and even swimming in the ocean, but they were also getting a truly holistic experience. Life lessons, a first job, the outdoors, and planning for one's future do not sound like they necessarily belong together in the same sentence. For these three young women, all of these experiences work together to contribute to a strong foundation for the future. They are already trail blazing the way for future generations by demonstrating that nature is for everyone. They even changed me, their mentor, by helping me see nature in ways I would never have imagined!" ~ Tara Arthur, Natural Leader

## THE MOVEMENT

We love getting outside. But why is it so meaningful? Well, you tell us! For some people, nature is a national park or a preserved forest—a place that feels pristine and ancient. For others, it is a community garden where they can get dirt under their fingernails and be surrounded by growing things that they have planted. And for some others, nature is the tree surrounded by concrete growing outside their front door that adds a little beauty to their daily lives. If you ask us, getting outdoors is the easiest, cheapest, and best way to repower our internal batteries.

The power of the outdoors and nature is exhibited through the diverse experience of Natural Leaders everywhere!



The 2005 best-selling book *Last Child in the Woods*, by author and futurist Richard Louv, brought a new term into being and into the hearts and minds of people around the world: Nature-deficit disorder. Nature-deficit disorder is a decreased health and happiness epidemic in America's children associated with a lack of interaction with nature. "Rich," as his friends and the NLN members call him, knew something needed to be done, so he and like-minded folks came together to create the Children & Nature Network (C&NN), a non-profit organization focused on building the world-wide movement to reconnect children with nature in their everyday lives. They each brought a substantial set of accomplishments and a shared vision for an international children and nature movement focused on education, urban design, architecture, conservation, public health, and much more. The co-founders are the recipients of numerous awards and recognition for their research, leadership, journalism, educational program development, and entrepreneurship. They include Richard Louv, Dr. Cheryl Charles, Martin LeBlanc, Dr. Martha Farrell Erickson, Amy Pertschuk, and Mike Pertschuk. The vision and mission of the Children & Nature Network is to give every child in every community a wide range of opportunities to experience nature directly, reconnecting our children with nature's joys and lessons, and its profound physical and mental bounty.





Now for the facts: Nature-deficit disorder is associated with many contributing factors. First, children spend dramatically less time outside today than they did thirty years ago. Today, about one-third of children in the United States are reported to play outdoors on a daily basis, while seventy percent of their mothers report having played outside daily as children, and half regularly spent three hours or more outside at a time<sup>i</sup>. Meanwhile, electronic media, including video games, television, computers, and recorded music, occupies about 25% of today's kids' time<sup>ii</sup>.

Second, there are strong indicators that the state of our children's health and well-being is presently quite poor. One in three kids and teens is overweight or obese, and very few parents are aware of their own children's unhealthy weight<sup>iii</sup>. Vitamin D deficiency is also extremely high in children; 9 % of children in the United States under the age of 22 are reported to be deficient in Vitamin D and 61% of the same children are insufficient. This vitamin is produced primarily from sunlight exposure, and deficiency is associated with

higher systolic blood pressure, higher lipoprotein cholesterol, and other cardiovascular risk factors<sup>iv</sup>. Not only are physical ailments high in children, but also one in five children and adolescents are reported to have a diagnosable mental health disorder<sup>v</sup>. Ten to fifteen percent of children and adolescents have some symptoms of depression at any given time, and five percent of all children aged nine to seventeen have or have had diagnosable major depression<sup>vi</sup>. Correspondingly, teen suicide is shockingly high. On average, seventeen percent of students in grades nine through twelve have considered suicide, three percent have devised a plan to commit suicide, and eight percent have attempted suicide<sup>vii</sup>.

Third, the evidence suggests that regular time outdoors is essential to children's health and happiness. Playing in nature tends to improve school performance, foster problem-solving and cooperation skills, enhance creativity, and help develop other cognitive abilities<sup>viii</sup>. Strong correlations with children's health have also been found, including decreasing predisposition to childhood obesity, managing symptoms of Attention Deficit Disorder, and improving resistance to common colds and other illnesses<sup>ix</sup>. Outdoor experiences are associated with an increase in the likelihood of environmental awareness and action as adults, and therefore tend to foster community-level environmental decision-making concerned with the future of human and environmental health<sup>x</sup>.

The facts about kids' current time in nature, and the state of their physical and mental health, can sound a little scary. But getting children outside is an effective first step to combating these numbers! The bottom line: getting outdoors in nature makes us happier, healthier, and greener. A win-win-win.



# THE NATURAL LEADERS NETWORK



## OUR MISSION:

The Natural Leaders Network (NLN) empowers a worldwide youth movement to strengthen the bond between children and nature. This movement involves youth in all environments, from rural to urban, and all economic and ethnic groups. Our vision is to build and cultivate a network among Natural Leaders around the world that mobilizes young people to get outdoors and makes sure our nation's leaders know how much we value those experiences. The worldwide NLN will further develop and contribute to the mission by resolving barriers to getting youth outdoors and providing opportunities to connect to each other and nature. The NLN brings together individuals, organizations, communities, and sectors in a non-partisan, inclusive, peer-to-peer network. The Natural Leaders Network is an initiative of the Children & Nature Network (C&NN), with the founding support of The Sierra Club and corporate support of The North Face.

The pillars of the Natural Leaders Network (NLN) serve as a guide for the national agenda of the Network within the United States. These pillars were developed by youth, for youth, at the Natural Leaders Summit held at Headlands Institute in June, 2009. The summit convened 50 diverse young people from all over the United States, who shaped the foundation of the Network.

## COMMUNICATION:

We believe today's youth have much to share with each other, and so the NLN is committed to the development of a peer-to-peer network to facilitate that conversation. We know that there is much to learn from and share with the generations who came before and will follow us, as well. We approach this by focusing on two goals: (1) creating an even flow of intergenerational communication and mentorship; and (2) supporting communication among members of the Natural Leaders Network.

## DIVERSITY IN NATURE:

We believe there are many valid definitions of nature. We want to see diverse people enjoying the outdoors all the time, and we also want to see them experiencing nature in diverse ways. For some people, nature means wild or remote places that may require time and money to access. For others, nature means urban gardens or even a single street tree. We emphasize that natural places and nature play are best defined by those experiencing them.

## GREEN JOBS:

We believe in green jobs, which we define as employment opportunities that connect people with nature and pay a livable wage. Our goal is to ensure and shape the development of pathways to employment, and to disseminate information about these pathways to young people. By building diverse, nontraditional partnerships, the Natural Leaders Network will ensure that these green jobs are filled with passionate individuals. Examples of green jobs are park rangers, outdoor educators, windmill technicians, and conservation corps members.



# NATURAL LEADERS IN ACTION



## RETREAT IN NEW MEXICO

The Natural Leaders Network and Rocky Mountain Youth Corps inaugurated their first-ever Southwest Natural Leaders Network Retreat, combining environmental leadership and civic engagement for schoolchildren in Taos, New Mexico. Organized by regional Natural Leader Rosie Williams, the retreat delivered a full day of quality environmental education programming, followed by an overnight camp-out. The event was co-hosted by Sierra Club's Building Bridges to the Outdoors project. The afternoon featured outstanding educators from the Taos community, such as Eric Patterson, a volunteer with the Sierra Club's Water Sentinels program, who provided a compelling hands-on workshop examining water quality in local streams. Also, a watershed ecology lesson was delivered by the Field Institute of Taos, a nonprofit providing outdoor education camps focused on active, hands-on learning experiences since 1996. Rosie got kids outdoors, taught them some great stuff, and got them talking about the importance of the outdoors in their community. She hopes to continue the Camp-Out tradition this fall with even more Taos students and an expanded program.



## HEALING GARDEN IN TEXAS

In the summer of 2009, Natural Leader and therapist at Austin Child Guidance Center, Sarah Jones, partnered with Keep Austin Beautiful to create the Children's Healing Garden at the Center. Austin Child Guidance Center has a 58-year tradition serving as a community-based nonprofit dedicated solely to helping children and families create emotionally healthy lives through affordable mental health services. The Children's Healing Garden is a therapeutic outdoor space for the clients and families receiving services at the Center to relax and find peace in nature. The Garden was inspired by the understanding that nature alone can be healing and that pairing nature with therapy will promote positive associations with nature while healing children's internal struggles. One therapist described the following experience she had with a 10-year-old, male client:

We jump from one rock to the other and each time we jump to a different rock, he and I tell each other one positive quality that we have expressed/experienced during the week. If we don't make the jump, then we tell one negative quality/experience and when we make the next jump, we turn the negative into its opposite positive. Last week... he said 'The rocks are like magic rocks that help me remember everything that is good in my week. And if I feel bad, then I jump on the next rock and it helps me change the bad feeling into a good feeling.'

The Children's Healing Garden allows children who face various challenges in their daily lives to find peace and solitude in nature. They love it; as time passes, more therapists and children utilize the garden. Children enjoy the space and get positive benefits from being outdoors. Sarah hopes to see the combination of nature and therapy grow among therapists everywhere. Healthier, happier, and greener!







## NATURAL LEADERS NETWORK COLLABORATION WITH U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

In December 2009, Natural Leaders Tara Arthur and Matt Browning were invited by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service to speak at a national meeting on youth and natural resources. The meeting was held at the agency's beautiful National Conservation Training Center campus in Shepherdstown, WV. Along with four other young professionals, Tara and Matt sat on stage, talk-show style, for one hour and were asked a series of questions by more than one hundred government employees. Questions covered such topics as the careers they considered pursuing when they were young, the reasons youth aren't getting outside as much as they used to, and the ways this and other Department of Interior agencies can get youth motivated for careers in natural resources. After the live session, the six youth were recorded answering the same questions in the agency's high-end video recording studio. These recordings will be used in agency advertisements and social networking media. The agency also hired a professional photographer to shoot portraits of the six youth in a variety of outdoor activities. These pictures will be used for interpretive panels and published pamphlets on careers in natural resources.



## CONGRESS IN WYOMING

Teton Science Schools, in partnership with state, federal and private agencies and organizations from across Wyoming and the United States, collaboratively held the first-ever Wyoming Youth Congress on Children and Nature. Natural Leader Leslie Cook works at Teton Science Schools and organized the event. The Wyoming Youth Congress sought to engage the youth of Wyoming in the discourse about the growing disconnect between children and the outdoors, as well as to harness youth energy, creativity, and enthusiasm to inspire other kids, adults, parents, teachers, and decision-makers to take action to strengthen the connections between children and nature. The 78 student delegates at the Congress were 8th graders nominated by their school district superintendents to participate. At the Congress, one delegate said, "I have learned that students are more relaxed when they are outside. We hope that school can connect more with nature. The more kids connect with nature, the more they will appreciate it and take better care of it." Teton Science Schools will host another Wyoming Youth Congress and looks forward to having an even stronger presence by the Natural Leaders Network at the event.



# HOW TO START A REGIONAL NETWORK

Now that you've heard why the Natural Leaders Network (NLN) is awesome and vital to fighting the battle against nature-deficit disorder, it's your turn! You're ready to think about starting your own regional network! This section provides the meat and potatoes for coordinating a grassroots, local movement. Some ideas will be more relevant to your location than others, so be aware that you will have to adapt the guidelines to your own needs. As with any good adventure, you are encouraged to seize opportunities as they arise and follow your own path. And what if you want to take a group of kids outside but don't feel ready to start an entire network? You're still a Natural Leader in our book. Do what feels right for you now and consider building a network in the future. We are here to answer questions and brainstorm with you at any time. Good luck and have fun!

## GETTING OUTSIDE!

The easiest thing to start (or continue) doing is to get outside and bring your friends or some children with you. Opportunities are endless and always enjoyable. Only your imagination, and the imagination of children, can limit you. Some activities we've done are: Sports (walking, night hiking, creek stumping, road biking, hunting, fishing, orienteering, mountain biking, rollerblading, skiing, snowshoeing, swimming, BMX biking, ultimate frisbee, soccer, football, kayaking, frisbee golf, rafting, rock climbing, bouldering, all-terrain vehicle riding, dirt bike riding, sailing, snowmobile riding, horseback riding, backpacking, camping); Games (unorganized free play, capture the flag, water-balloon fights, kite flying, scavenger hunts, rubber duck racing, canoe racing); Exploration (tree climbing, geo-caching, canyoneering); Construction Projects (sand castles, birch canoes, snowmen, tree houses, snow caves); Art Projects (leaf rubbings; creating miniature worlds from acorns, sticks, and moss; nature poetry writing; face painting); Science Projects (bug safaris, intertidal investigations, star gazing, native plant identification, wildflower photography, wildlife sketching, landscape painting, dam building); Outdoor Cooking (gardening, mushroom collecting, solar oven baking, wild-crafting); Seasonal Activities (leaf raking and leaf-pile jumping, pumpkin collecting and carving, spring wildflower identification, apple gathering and cider making, maple tree tapping and maple syrup brewing); and Service Projects (stream clean-ups, trash clean-ups, tree-plantings, storm drain stenciling, local green space mapping). You don't need much time, money, or organization to plan, or spontaneously engage in, most of these activities. Be safe, be respectful, and have fun. Not to harp on this or anything, but it's up to YOU! Get out there!

Getting outside is a great way to build relationships between potential network members. Besides these great in-the-field activities, new leaders looking to take further steps toward creating a regional network should consider developing their leadership organizational skills by working with other Natural Leaders and mentors. Before proceeding, take a minute to review the NLN mission and vision statements. The NLN's mission is to empower a worldwide youth movement to strengthen the bond between children and nature. Our vision is to build and cultivate a network among Natural Leaders around the world. As this Network grows, it will further contribute to the mission by breaking down barriers to getting youth outdoors and by providing opportunities for youth to learn and connect with each other and the natural world. These statements define who we are as Natural Leaders, and you should be proud to carry them with you in your work as well! You're now ready to learn how to develop your own regional network. Review and act on the steps below, picking out those that are most interesting and relevant to you.



## STEP ONE: RECRUITMENT

Recruit a few other youth who are passionate about connecting people with the outdoors. First, decide how large an area you want to impact, and then find three to five young people in this region who are involved with and/or interested in getting kids outside. Sometimes a city-wide or even state-wide network will be possible, but other times a community-scale or neighborhood network may be more realistic. These recruits will become the core members of your Natural Leaders Network. Make sure they are familiar with and committed to the NLN's mission and vision statement, that they fit within the 15 – 29-year-old age range, and that they have some time to aid in your efforts. You may also want to create a list of attributes you are looking for in potential members. For example, should they have previous experience with getting children and youth outside? Perhaps you feel they only need to have previous experience working with young people and a commitment to the outdoors and nature. Another good question to ask yourself is: Are you willing to take anyone who is interested in joining and, if so, how will you handle members who are less committed and may want to revoke their membership later?

**After you have a good idea of who you want in your core leadership group, follow these suggestions for discovering additional great Natural Leaders in your region:**

- Hold a general interest meeting about the NLN at a perceived neutral/safe meeting space, such as a public library (rather than a home) or have it outside;
- Send email invitations to listserves such as your state's science teachers organizations and environmental education associations to seek nominations of youth participants; and
- Post general information fliers on the NLN in public places and on community calendars.

Once you have established your core group, think about hosting a weekend retreat or a dinner picnic to bring everyone together and solidify the goals and objectives of your network. Using the NLN mission and vision statement, identify the work you hope to accomplish. Think about both short- and long-term goals, and strive to write down a list of these goals by the end of your gathering. Consensus among all members is especially vital during this stage, so make sure everyone's ideas and concerns are heard!

## STEP TWO: PARTNERSHIPS

Recruit mentors to help build and steer your new regional network. Thinking about the same region you identified earlier, find two or three adult members who have career or volunteer experience with children, youth, or nature and ask them if they would sponsor or mentor your new regional Natural Leaders Network. Once they are recruited, you can ask them for guidance and for suggestions of new community connections. Start your search by introducing yourself to local environmental educators, outing club trip leaders, summer camp counselors, experiential or outdoor educators such as those in Montessori and other private schools, science education curricula specialists, science laboratory technicians, landscape architects, garden club members, recreation program directors, after-school program coordinators, pediatricians, city planners, grandparents, developers, boys and girls clubs, community foundation members, and any other leaders you think may be interested. Try not to get discouraged if people say they are interested in your work but simply don't have time to join you; perhaps they know someone who does have the time!

**A few more suggestions for finding mentors are:**

- Send email invitations to listserves such as your state's science teachers organizations and environmental education associations;
- Invite potential mentors to a general interest meeting or a core group gathering;
- Ask your core group if they know any potential mentors and encourage members with these personal connections to contact potential mentors directly;
- Ask recruited mentors to consider asking their friends and colleagues to join; and
- Request potential mentor contacts from the national NLN or Children & Nature Network.

Be clear about your expectations with potential mentors. Make sure they know what their role in your regional network would be from the beginning of their involvement. Your core group can work to develop a great mentor description that includes guidelines and suggestions or mentors.



## STEP THREE: LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Foster leadership development within your core group. Although it may initially seem simpler to dive into programming, you can create a more sustainable and effective regional network by nurturing members at all levels of leadership skills and experience. The more your members grow in terms of their leadership capacities, the more your network expands and develops—and as that happens you drive the mission of the NLN forward!

Here are some suggestions for facilitating leadership development in your members . . .

### **Rotate who facilitates core group meetings:**

- Develop a long-term rotation schedule to allow for scheduling difficulties;
- Consider pairing up a mentor with core members who request extra help;
- Request facilitators to organize the time, date, agenda, and location of the meeting or conference call;
- Recommend that facilitators invite guest speakers or mentors to speak on specific leadership topics; and
- Require facilitators to check with the next scheduled facilitator for future planning and feedback.

### **Host leadership development workshops:**

- Pick either an outdoor or indoor location such as a park or a school;
- Select the site based on the expected group size;
- Make sure to include an outdoor component; and
- Invite mentors and core members to help plan and facilitate the workshop.

### **Host public events with presentations and speakers relevant to leadership skills:**

- Schedule planning meetings;
- Consider expanding your audience beyond the core group by inviting middle and high school students and core members' friends and family to meetings;
- Be aware of any expenses such as location rental fees and refreshments;
- Consider recruiting partners and funders;
- Ask members with experiential education backgrounds to lead interactive leadership or communication development activities;

- Ask mentors with leadership experience to give an inspirational talk;
- Host the event! Remember to solicit feedback from core members and attendees;
- Facilitate a group brainstorm during the meeting about the importance of good leadership and what makes a strong leader;
- Plug the NLN and the importance of getting outside in nature;
- Follow up the meeting by thanking attendees and special guests;
- Offer information to attendees on future events in your community; and
- Sign up core members for leadership webinars and/or seminars.

## STEP FOUR: FOSTERING COMMITMENT

Remember that even if your members are committed to the NLN mission and vision, they most likely have many other demands on their time, including multiple jobs, volunteering activities, and family commitments. You will feel out your core group's needs and desires and develop a balance between leadership development activities and outdoor programming with your community's children and youth. However, any events you schedule to build up your core group will only help in future programming and recruitment efforts!

A regional calendar is a wonderful tool for keeping the members of your network informed and engaged. Scheduling programs and events far in advance allows busy members and mentors to hold the dates in their calendar. Some of the events that you might consider including are important dates for the NLN or other special events of national environmental, educational, and service groups. Similarly, pre-established events in your community are just as important.

Listed below are some dates you should consider.

### **Special days for the NLN:**

- Natural Leaders Get Outside Day! This annual event is the first Saturday in April, extending into the week afterward. It is held in conjunction with April's designation by the Children & Nature Network as Children & Nature Awareness Month.

- 9/11 Day of Service This annual day of service is held in memory of the 9/11/2001 attacks and in conjunction with the National Day of Service.

**Important days for national environmental, educational, and service groups:**

- Earth Day - April 22
- World Environment Day - June 5
- National Public Lands Day - usually in late September. Check [www.publiclandsday.org](http://www.publiclandsday.org) for date
- World Health Day - April 7
- National Wildlife Week - March 15-21
- 350 Day - Check [350.org](http://350.org) for date
- World Water Monitoring Day - September 18
- Make a Difference Day - October 24
- AmeriCorps Week - May 8-15
- There are many, many more! Keep your eyes and ears alert!

**Celebrations and events in your local community may include:**

- Parades
- Holiday festivals and fairs
- Library open houses
- Nature Club trips
- Natural Families outings
- Natural Teachers trainings
- Hiking club meetings and hikes
- Land trust open houses and hikes
- Public school activities
- Regional AmeriCorps workshops

You might try a web-based calendar application that core members can change and the greater NLN can view. One way to accomplish this would be by creating a Google email account for your natural leaders network such as "MyRegionalNLN@gmail.com" and then utilize the Google Calendar web application. You will need to share the log-in information with your core group, and you may also need to train members who are unfamiliar with these websites. Remember to use your core members' talents! Find out what they are good at and what they like to do. Maybe you already have a core member that is into organizing calendars or has super coding skills.



**STEP FIVE: GET ACTIVE**

The last suggestion is to Get Active! Coordinate with your core members and mentors to add your network's activities to the calendar. Actions speak much louder than words; no one can know what you stand for until you stand up. Get out there and make your presence known in your community!

**You might also consider these suggestions to increase the presence of your local or regional Natural Leaders Network:**

- Talk with community leaders, businesses, and government representatives for possible funding opportunities, special events, and functions in which you can participate;
- Speak with health professionals about the positive effects of getting outside;
- Recruit great partners in your community by volunteering at their events;
- Perform visible community service projects;
- Host a booth at community fairs; and
- Invite the greater community to an "Open House" event.

As mentioned before, these are only recommendations. You can use these recommendations and your own ideas however it makes the most sense in your community. You are the expert on what will work best in your community since you live there! As you build your local or regional Natural Leaders Network, you will probably discover some great ideas of your own about what works well and what doesn't. Please share these with the NLN so that we might all benefit from your experiences. Thanks and good luck establishing your regional Natural Leaders Network!



# RESOURCE CENTER



All of the following resources and more are available on the website [www.naturalleaders.org](http://www.naturalleaders.org), and there are additional resources on the Children & Nature Network website at [www.childrenandnature.org](http://www.childrenandnature.org).

**Here are descriptions of some of the resources available especially for Natural Leaders:**

- Registration for your Natural Leaders Network (NLN) regional group—We want to know who is involved in the NLN and what kind of great work you are doing. Please keep the information about you and your group up to date!
- Use of logo and name—Once you are registered, we hope that you will use the Natural Leaders Network logo and name as described online to advertise and support your work;
- Invitation and application for recruiting natural leaders into leadership positions: These tools will help you build your leadership base with samples of how to invite more leaders to apply for leadership roles in your regional network;
- Press release template—Keep your local media informed of what events your regional NLN group is doing! The press release template includes all the pieces you need to contact your local newspaper, radio, or television station; you just need to fill in the blanks and send it along; and
- Liability & photo/video release

## CLOSING

Whew, there's a lot in here. Hopefully you had some questions answered, found some new ones, and got all fired up—not just to be outdoors, but to motivate others to be out there, too! Joining the Natural Leaders Network—and starting your own local or regional network—will enhance the work you are already doing, foster new ideas, and support you every step of the way. Plus, you will be part of an effort to ensure that your voice, and your friends' voices, and your schoolmates' voices, and the voices of everyone else who will be inheriting this planet one day are heard by the members of Congress, legislators, CEOs, and Executive Directors who are making these decisions right now. We've said it before, but it's up to you. It really is.

And here's the thing, the best part, the fact that makes all of this so great: you are already a Natural Leader. Believe it! You already carry this mission and vision in your heart—we just wrote it down for you. Welcome to the Natural Leaders Network!



# Final Thoughts from Each Tool Kit Creator

- Tara Arthur has experienced the many joys and diversity nature has to offer since she was a child. She hopes that this tool kit can contribute to expanding these kinds of experiences to all kids of all backgrounds and inspire Natural Leaders everywhere!
- Matt Browning was raised as an Iowan corn-fed boy, where he spent much of the harsh summers and harsher winters playing outside. He hopes that this tool kit provides the resources for Natural Leaders across the country to get local Networks started across the world so that kids have as much fun (and health) as he did.
- Leslie Cook loves being on the water and helping other people to experience nature in new and unusual ways (fresh mud facials are a favorite). In her mind this tool kit will help get more kids outside and help them grow into adults who care about the outdoors.
- Rebecca Martin is an AmeriCorps volunteer serving her second term with the Maine Conservation Corps. She enjoys investigating the natural world with learners of all ages and levels. Rebecca believes it is vital for all people to spend time in nature and she is hopeful that this resource will provide guidance for like-minded natural leaders and open new doors to get folks outside.
- Rosie Williams is happiest when out-of-doors and getting her hands dirty. She looks forward to hearing all about Natural Leaders across the country who are doing amazing things in their communities to get kids outside!

**NOTE:** The role of the Children & Nature Network (C&NN) and its Natural Leaders Network is to help build the children and nature movement, and to help youth and others learn about ways to get outside and connect to nature. Natural Leaders Day and other activities of the Natural Leaders Network are approaches we wish to encourage. However, such events are organized independently and C&NN is not responsible for the actions of specific Natural Leaders or local Natural Leaders Networks. At any time, when youth are outside on their own, or with families and friends, everyone should take safety precautions and be mindful of risks.

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The mission of the Natural Leaders Network is to empower a worldwide youth movement to strengthen the bond between children and nature. Our vision is to build and cultivate a network among Natural Leaders around the world.

## **NATURAL LEADERS NETWORK NATIONAL TEAM OF CORE LEADERS**

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The Natural Leaders Network is an initiative of the Children & Nature Network (C&NN), with the founding support of the Sierra Club and corporate support of The North Face.



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The Children & Nature Network is a non-profit organization dedicated to building a worldwide movement to reconnect children and nature. C&NN builds awareness, provides access to state-of-the-art resources, supports the grassroots with tools and strategies, develops publications and educational materials, synthesizes the best available research, and encourages collaboration.



[www.naturalleaders.org](http://www.naturalleaders.org) | [www.childrenandnature.org](http://www.childrenandnature.org)