

YOUTH CONSERVATION CONGRESS MENTOR HANDBOOK



What does it mean to be a mentor for the YCC

All youth involved with the Youth Conservation Congress (YCC) will be matched with a current Wisconsin Conservation Congress (WCC) delegate from their county or a nearby county. For the purpose of our program we will call this matched relationship a “mentor”.

Since this program is a youth extension of the WCC, it is a natural fit that the mentor will be a WCC delegate.

The purpose of the mentor relationship is 3 fold:

1. To help youth learn more about the role and history of the WCC, the importance of citizen advocacy for conservation in Wisconsin, to engage in policy making, and to help grow the next generation of conservation leaders in Wisconsin through participation in the WCC.
2. To continue to build sporting heritage in Wisconsin through hands on educational opportunities (hunting, fishing, trapping, silent sports, etc.). Mentors will help train youth to be safe, ethical and responsible.
3. To facilitate opportunities for youth to gain field experience. Mentors will help youth learn more about wildlife, fisheries, forestry, air, water, and recreation resources in the state. This is accomplished by youth volunteering with the DNR, exploring career opportunities, job shadowing, connecting with local conservation groups, and learning from local leaders.

Why be a mentor?

As the YCC grows, we need more WCC delegates to serve as mentors. All individual delegates within the WCC bring a unique set of skills, knowledge and a personal conviction of why they serve on the WCC. You don't have to be a teacher, a youth development professional or have any formal training to be a mentor.

Who will I be a mentor to?

Your mentee most likely will be a youth from within your county. Sometimes mentors are asked to support a youth in a nearby county if other WCC delegates aren't available. If you have a relative or family friend in a different part of the state, you can mentor that youth.

YCC delegates are typically of high school age, but there are no minimum age requirements. Youth can participate in the YCC through the end of the summer following their senior year of high school.

Mentors can be assigned more than one youth. Some mentors have reported that it works well to have two delegates at once.

How are mentors supported

Mentors are supported by the Youth Conservation Congress Oversight Committee. This Committee works in cooperation with the YCC Coordinator to plan activities, events, and support the YCC delegates.

Monthly newsletters are sent out to mentors and YCC delegates. The intention of these newsletters is to provide details regarding WCC meetings and events, YCC opportunities, general natural resource information, and ideas for YCC delegates and mentors to get together.

What is the process for becoming a mentor?

1. Find a youth who is interested in joining OR you may be contacted to see if you are willing to serve as a mentor.
2. An application form* will need to be filled out and submitted by the youth.
3. A mentor and activity form* will need to be filled out and submitted – signed by youth, youth parent/guardian and mentor.
4. Application forms and mentor forms will be reviewed by the YCC Coordinator.
5. A background check will be performed on the mentor.
6. The YCC Coordinator will conduct a short interview with the perspective YCC delegate to learn more about their interests, experiences, and goals for joining the YCC program.
7. Mentors will receive contact information and details regarding their mentee.
8. Both mentor and YCC delegate will begin receiving communications from the YCC Coordinator regarding YCC opportunities and upcoming activities.

*An informational packet with application forms can be found at:

https://dnr.wi.gov/about/WCC/Documents/YCC/2020_YCC_Info_Packet.pdf

What is my role as a mentor?

Connect youth to the Wisconsin Conservation Congress and discuss the role of citizen input.

Invite youth to attend meetings with you. Talk to them about your involvement and why you became part of the WCC. Encourage them to be informed on natural resource issues across the state.

Connect youth with opportunities.

As a mentor, you don't have to be an expert. You can help seek out and facilitate unique experiences with outdoor professionals. Many mentors will invite youth to hunt, fish or trap, but you can also consider a multitude of other ways to engage youth in outdoor and conservation activities. Consider:

- Taking a class together about outdoors skills such as fly tying, archery, edible wild plant ID, etc.
- Touring a fish hatchery.
- Visiting a taxidermy shop and setting up a behind the scene tour.
- Participating or being a spectator in a fishing tournament.
- Learning about wildlife photography or setting up and monitoring remote cameras.
- Working to remove invasive species on public or private land.
- Sharing hunting, fishing, trapping, and outdoor magazines after you have read them.

Show up and show interest.

You don't have to have extensive experience working with youth. You also don't have to spend all of your precious free time as a mentor. We know you are undoubtedly already busy. Every mentor/mentee situation will be unique. Over the course of a year you could consider:

- Bringing youth to at least one WCC meeting.
- Sharing information about local events and sporting tournaments in your county.
- Participating in hunting/fishing/trapping or other outdoor activities 2-4 times a year.
- Checking in with youth by phone, text or email once a month or every other month.
- Talking to youth about their future plans and show interest in their passions.

The biggest role for the mentor is to connect the YCC delegate to the WCC and show interest in helping them achieve their goals as a YCC delegate.

Check in with your delegate on a monthly basis. Ask if they read their newsletter, see if there are any activities you can participate in together or any upcoming meetings you can encourage them to attend.

What activities could I initiate as a mentor?

Meetings

- Invite your mentee to attend a WCC meeting with you (District meetings, CDAC, committee).
- Encourage your mentee to attend the WCC yearly convention. Details related to youth activities and a schedule for the youth will be provided by the YCC Coordinator.
- Invite your mentee to attend other local conservation related meetings with you (Trout Unlimited, County wildlife organizations, Sporting clubs, etc.)

DNR volunteer opportunities

- Volunteer with local DNR staff to learn more about wildlife, fisheries, forestry, lands, etc.
- Throughout the year, there are many activities or surveys for youth to volunteer. A list of volunteer opportunities will be made available to mentors.
- Youth 16 and over can volunteer without an adult chaperone. A Volunteer Agreement form* must be completed, including a parent's signature, along with written permission from their school if they are missing class time.
- Youth under 16 must be accompanied by a parent/legal guardian and fill out a Volunteer Agreement form*.

Local activities

- Connect with local conservation groups to find out what meetings, field days, or events are taking place.
- Do sporting clubs exist in your county? Check to see if they offer youth hunts or events.

Statewide activities

- Midwest Outdoor Heritage Expo at DNR MacKenzie Center – May.
- OutWiGo, DNR activity days across the state.

Visiting State properties

- Search all available activities on state properties:
<https://dnr.wi.gov/topic/outdoorrecreation/>

Encourage education classes

- Traditional hunting, archery, trapping, duck hunting
- ATV
- Boating
- Snowmobile

Hunting

- Invite your mentee to hunt with you.
- Provide information about hunter safety classes.
 - Youth can also serve as Junior Volunteer Instructors.
- Opportunities to participate in youth hunts: <https://dnr.wi.gov/topic/hunt/youth.html>
- Visit shooting ranges in Wisconsin:
<https://dnr.wi.gov/education/outdoorskills/shootingranges/RangeLocations.html#>
- Attend field days through: Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited, Turkey Federation.

Fishing

- Invite your mentee to fish with you and share information and stories about your fishing experiences.
- Talk about ethics of fishing and review Wisconsin fishing regulations.
- Introduce opportunities to fish for new species of fish.
- Explore opportunities for YCC to learn more about fish biology, watershed health, and fisheries management.
- Encourage youth to join a school fishing club.
- Is there a Trout Unlimited chapter in your area? They often welcome volunteer help for group work days.

Trapping

- Wisconsin Trappers Education Courses
 - Online options or in person learning
- Connect with the Wisconsin Future Trappers
 - Summer Trapping Camp

Hiking

Wisconsin has two National Scenic Trails

- Ice Age Trail <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/parks/iceagetrail>
- North Country Trail <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/parks/northcountrytrail>

Hiking is a great seasonal activity.

- Early spring: search for deer sheds, look for turkey activity, and take notice of changing vegetation as the snow melts.
- Spring: observe new flowers, forage for morel mushrooms or spring wild edible plants.
- Summer: forage for berries, observe wildlife activity, and go birding.
- Fall: observe nut trees – has it been a good mast (nut) year? Nuts are an important food

source for wildlife. Search for buck rubs.

- Winter: fresh snow provides great tracking conditions.
 - Consider snowshoeing or cross country skiing.

Citizen Science

- Visit: https://researchguides.library.wisc.edu/citizen_science/opportunities to connect to a comprehensive list of citizen monitoring activities.

How do we contact DNR staff and find partners?

- The YCC Coordinator, Kyle Zenz can help facilitate connections with DNR staff and partners. Kyle will also provide assistance and support with the mentoring relationship. Contact: 715-299-0925, kyle.zenz@wisconsin.gov
- Contact sheets will be created with information for county-specific DNR staff, County resource managers, local conservation and sporting clubs and more. This project will be on-going and we could use your help adding to these lists.

YOUTH CONSERVATION CONGRESS

MENTOR CODE OF CONDUCT



Mentors will:

- Work with youth delegate to put them in touch with people in the youth delegate's area of interest in their local area.
- Train and advise to the youth delegate needs and wants
- Seek out opportunities in the community for youth delegate to participate in
- Conduct themselves in a professional manner and act responsibly at all times
- Display strong emotional intelligence
- Be patient, flexible, relatable, safe, knowledgeable, encouraging, and positive
- Accept constructive input from youth delegate
- Provide constructive input to the youth delegate
- Follow all program policies, procedures, guidelines
- Instruct and represent with integrity, passion, and dedication
- Guarantee a safe and comfortable learning environment
- Lead by example
- Present factual and objective information allowing students to form their own opinions and conclusions
- Maintain a professional and respectful attitude at all times
- Train youth delegate to be safe, ethical and responsible
- Be aware of personal space and what could be perceived as improper touching
- Take responsibility to notify Kyle or Kari of changes to the youth delegates status and/or involvement with the YCC.

Mentors will not:

- Impose personal preferences on youth delegate or act in a confrontational manner
- Use offensive language
- Allow arguments or rude behavior to take place among mentors and youth delegates
- Use their mentor position as a means to promote their personal opinion

Code of conduct effective 4/1/18
Revision: 1