



# Youth Engagement in Climate Change: Empowering a Generation of Leaders



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## SUMMARY

Launched in 2009, The Wild Center's Youth Climate Initiative, works to convene, engage, connect and empower young people around the world for action on climate change through Youth Climate Summits and leadership opportunities.

The Initiative's primary objective is to create a climate literate and empowered generation who:

- Understands the essential principles of Earth's climate system
- Knows how to assess scientifically credible information about climate science
- Communicates about climate and climate change in a meaningful way
- Makes informed and responsible decisions with regard to actions that may affect climate
- Takes action on climate change in their schools, communities and lives



## THE PROGRAM

The Wild Center's Youth Climate Initiative increases participant climate literacy through workshops, presentations, and experiences with leaders in climate science, resiliency, and solutions, and moves participants to stewardship through creating and implementing a Climate Action Plan (CAP), a framework for reducing emissions and climate impacts in one's community. In order to create a CAP, students must think critically about which impacts they want to address, reason with each other about their focus, then find feasible solutions that fit their situation. Since its pilot year in 2009, over 60 Schools and 1,500 students have directly participated in The Wild Center's Youth Climate Summits with over 25,000 students being indirectly impacted through the actions of their peers and teachers.

### GOALS:

- Increase climate change awareness, literacy, and decision-making skills in students through annual place-based *Adirondack Youth Climate Summits*
- Enhance young people's capacity to lead climate projects and initiatives in their schools and communities
- Increase teacher comprehension of climate science and cultivate stewardship through *Teacher Climate Institutes* and other learning opportunities
- Foster community-based climate action projects through sub-grants to schools to implement CAPs
- Support commitment and youth voice through student-created media about projects
- Enhance dissemination by building on The Wild Center's AYCP website
- Create and share globally a working model of engaging and empowering youth in climate

## OUTCOMES

A central component of the program are student-generated *Climate Action Plans (CAPs)*, a solutions oriented plan to reduce the carbon footprint of their communities and create climate change awareness through planning and implementation of *Climate Outreach Events/Activities* for their schools and communities.

School and community projects take place throughout the year and include:

- Farm2School Initiatives to connect schools with locally sourced food
- School gardens, including greenhouses and integrated curriculums
- Recycling programs to reduce waste and save schools money
- Composting programs at the school and community level
- Carbon and energy audits
- Campaigns like "Ban the Bag" and "I AM PRO SNOW"
- Carbon neutral dances
- Community climate outreach events
- Meeting with decision makers and community leaders



## WHY CONVENE A YOUTH CLIMATE SUMMIT?

### A Summit:

- Connects communities
- Involves, inspires and engages youth
- Creates partnerships with scientists, businesses, and community groups
- Showcases pathways to green jobs
- Empowers youth to solve climate change impacts using their own ideas and solution
- Connect to the Global Sustainability Goals

Youth Climate Summits are flexible and scalable for each intended audience. They are meant to be place-based as well as meet organizations and community needs.

## NATIONAL & GLOBAL SCALE UP INITIATIVE

In 2015, the Adirondack Youth Climate Program partnered with The White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, US Department of Energy, and the Association of Science Technology Centers to collaborate with organizations across the country and world to replicate the Adirondack Youth Climate Summit.

To help organizations plan and launch youth climate summits, The Wild Center created the *Youth Climate Program Toolkit* to help other informal science institutions and NGOs from around the world plan youth climate summits.

In 2015 - 2017, Wild Center staff and Adirondack Youth Climate Leaders worked to establish the following summits in the United States:

- Seattle Youth Climate Action Network – Woodland Park Zoo, Washington
- Detroit Youth Climate Summit, Michigan
- Vermont Youth Climate Summit, Vermont
- Houston Youth Climate Summit, Texas
- Catskill Youth Climate Summit, New York
- Teen Eco-Summit – Columbus Zoo & Aquarium, Ohio
- More summits are being planned across the United States

Globally, the summit has been replicated in **Finland, Sri Lanka, Liberia & Germany** – further building a global network of engaged and empowered youth. A student stated, "We were lucky enough to have a Finnish delegation come to our Youth Climate Summit. It really made me realize that it wasn't a local issue we were talking about, it was a global issue."

The Wild Center serves in a leadership capacity on the Climate Literacy & Energy Awareness Network Leadership Board; the National Climate Compact; and ECOS – Education, Communication and Outreach for Climate Empowerment with the United Nations.



"My generation is stepping up to the challenge. We are the first generation to feel the effects of climate change and the last ones who can do anything about it, and do something we will...All of the (Youth Climate) students bring their own perspectives to the challenges we face. Students all over the world are educated, motivated, and as we bring our ideas back to our families and communities, we are helping to spark a chain reaction of awareness. These climate summits empower youth to make a difference, and are the perfect model of a grassroots movement having an impact on a global scale. Climate change is here, that's for sure, but I can also assure you, that the youth of this world will change the fight against it. That I am confident of."

~Witter Swanson (AYCP student)



"The Beekmantown Central School District has taken steps to raise the bar on energy efficiencies across the district. A pilot for LED lighting was put in place in Spring of 2015 to investigate the cost benefits of such changes. This, along with steps to automate lighting in the school district, have moved the school district in the direction of cost savings while moving toward a greener school and ultimately to a lower carbon footprint. Students from Beekmantown High School's AP Environmental science group that attended last year's Adirondack Climate Summit attended Board meetings as well as meeting with contracting bidders to investigate and evaluate proposals. These students played a pivotal role in the decision-making process."

~ Youth Climate Program Teacher



Engaging and Supporting YOUTH CLIMATE ACTION and Leadership  
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Visit [wildcenter.org/youthclimate](http://wildcenter.org/youthclimate) for more information and to download a free toolkit