

YOUTH AND THE OUTDOORS UNITED



fostering memories and stewardship in the outdoors for generations

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Youth and the Outdoors United (YOU) is a non-profit organization committed to empowering young people by fostering a deep, lasting connection with the outdoors. Through immersive, hands-on experiences in outdoor recreation, we engage youth of all backgrounds and skill levels in activities promoting appreciation for outdoor recreation and stewardship of our natural resources.

We achieve this by partnering with local outdoor organizations, subject matter experts, and businesses to offer a variety of programs and experiences, including monthly outdoor activities, expert-led lessons, and community events. These initiatives inspire and equip youth to explore the natural world, build outdoor skills, and develop a lifelong love for outdoor recreation.

In addition to regular outdoor activities, we involve youth in service projects throughout the year, such as park clean-ups, tree planting, and wildlife habitat restoration. These projects not only help to preserve and protect the environment but also teach the importance of environmental stewardship and giving back to the community.

A cornerstone of our organization is the annual Kids Fishing Derby, a family-friendly event and fundraiser that brings together local families and businesses. This event provides youth with the opportunity to develop fishing skills, engage in friendly competition, and connect with others passionate about the outdoors. The funds raised through the derby support our programs, ensuring we can continue offering these valuable experiences to young people, regardless of their background or financial situation.

Through these diverse programs, Youth and the Outdoors United aims to build a sustainable, community-focused culture of outdoor appreciation, environmental stewardship, and youth empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

YOU (Youth and the Outdoors United) was an idea for a Whitepaper project in 2016. The goal was to think back to your childhood days and the outdoor experiences that we loved growing up. YOU's goal, in 2016, was to connect youth and families to the outdoors and give everyone an affordable way to do so. The objective was to have a one-stop shop for people in our community to embrace the outdoors. Our team saw this program as a fun and adventurous project that we all could agree needs to happen in our world today. As of the fall of 2024, the goal for the project has been to assist in making this dream a reality! With a lot of time and effort, our first of many events is set to kick off in mid-June 2025 with a Kids Fishing Derby!

We have begun the heavy lifting for the project with structuring YOU into an entity and developing a board, which is now established. We have worked with attorneys to complete and verify the bylaws, applied for 501(c)3 non-profit status, and will begin fundraising soon. We are excited for everyone to learn about YOU and experience the outdoors with us!

BACKGROUND

In 2016, four KLA (Kosciusko Leadership Academy) cadets came to the conclusion that there was a disconnect between the youth in Kosciusko County and participation in organizations focusing on outdoor activities, such as archery, kayaking, and fishing. YOU's focus was primarily to be a clearinghouse to connect youth to the

existing outdoor organizations and to provide a database for families to learn of opportunities in the county.

Many local outdoor organizations were interested in supporting YOU, therefore, an advisory board was formed. YOU's goal was to have the member organizations develop and oversee their own events and activities for youth and families. YOU would assist in spreading the word about the events and activities in order to gain interest and attendance.

Three phases were set in place to map out the formation of YOU and create a sustainability plan. Phase One tasks that were completed were as follows: establishing an advisory board, communicating with potential partners, creating a social media presence and monthly newsletter, finalizing YOU's mission statement, logo, and name, as well as developing the database for the outdoor organizations. Other tasks under Phase One, Phase Two, and Phase Three did not come to fruition due to member's time constraints and family obligations. Although the team did not complete the phases to make this project a reality, they did receive the Jean Northernor Award for their idea and efforts toward their goal. In 2025, a new KLA team decided to help revive the project and continue the creation of Youth and the Outdoors United to serve the youth in Kosciusko County.

PROBLEM

The original team's research showed a variety of issues contributing to the disconnect between the already existing outdoor organizations and the families living in the community.

- The variety of existing outdoor organizations continually struggle to effectively reach out to a majority of the youth in our community.
- These organizations struggle keeping the youth engaged all year.
- Parents that are interested in getting their children involved in outdoor activities are simply unaware of the many opportunities Kosciusko County has to offer.
- Barriers, such as cost, prevent the youth from experiencing some of the many outdoor opportunities that Kosciusko County has to offer.

The research concluded that a majority of parents didn't know where to start when getting their children involved in outdoor activities and, for those that were already involved, they were grossly unaware of the many other opportunities that were available to them.

SOLUTION

The solution has shifted since the original whitepaper, the new mission statement states:

Empower youth to connect with the outdoors through immersive, hands-on experiences fostering appreciation and fulfillment in outdoor recreation, while collaborating with local outdoor experts and organizations.

Since 2016, this project has changed from a clearinghouse approach connecting youth and their parents with organizations, to choosing to be the organization that puts on events. This shift was made to still partner with certain organizations and businesses with like-minded thoughts, but wanting to have a more hands-on approach with running events and shaping what a child's experience would be like. Being the driver of these events will allow the board and volunteers to be more nimble and decisive in what events to do, how to structure events, and how to cater to the group of children noted in the "problem".

In addition to the main flagship Annual Kids Fishing Derby event, the hope will be to have approximately four service projects throughout the year, such as park clean-ups, tree planting, and wildlife habitat restoration. These projects not only help to preserve and protect the environment but also teach the importance of environmental stewardship and giving back to the community. There will also be seven other "experience" events that will cater to smaller groups and will be an opportunity to partner with other organizations and individuals in the community. Later in the paper, we

will talk about potential experience events that have been discussed thus far by the group and organization.

IMPLEMENTATION

The KLA group and YOU Board have thus far made significant progress getting the organization back off the ground since the fall of 2024. Below is a list of the large accomplishments that have been achieved, as well as background for those accomplishments.

Completed Goals

- YOU Board - The KLA group, in conjunction with Ryan Christner, identified key individuals in the community that expressed interest in getting the organization off the ground. This resulted in nominating seven individuals to serve as officers of the board.
- Large Committee - Having awareness that the organization needs support from beyond just the board, there was a callout meeting in North Webster on March 13, 2025 with approximately twenty-five vested individuals that will help with different events throughout the year.
- Articles of Incorporation - Articles of Incorporation were filed with the Indiana Secretary of State on February 28, 2025 for Youth and The Outdoors United. All legal documents were drafted with the assistance of Adam Turner.
- Bylaws - Bylaws were drafted, reviewed, and approved by the YOU board on March 14, 2025.
- Federal EIN - This was filed for, and received, on March 6, 2025.

- 1023-EZ Filing - The 1023-EZ was filed on March 24, 2025, applying for Federal not-for-profit status, 501(c)3, for the organization. The IRS has historically taken up to three months to rule on this status.
- Budget - The group created a pro-forma income statement to give guidance on current year and future year fundraising and expenses.
- Fishing Derby - See below for further information on the inaugural Kids Fishing Derby that will serve as the primary fundraiser for the organization.

Future Goals

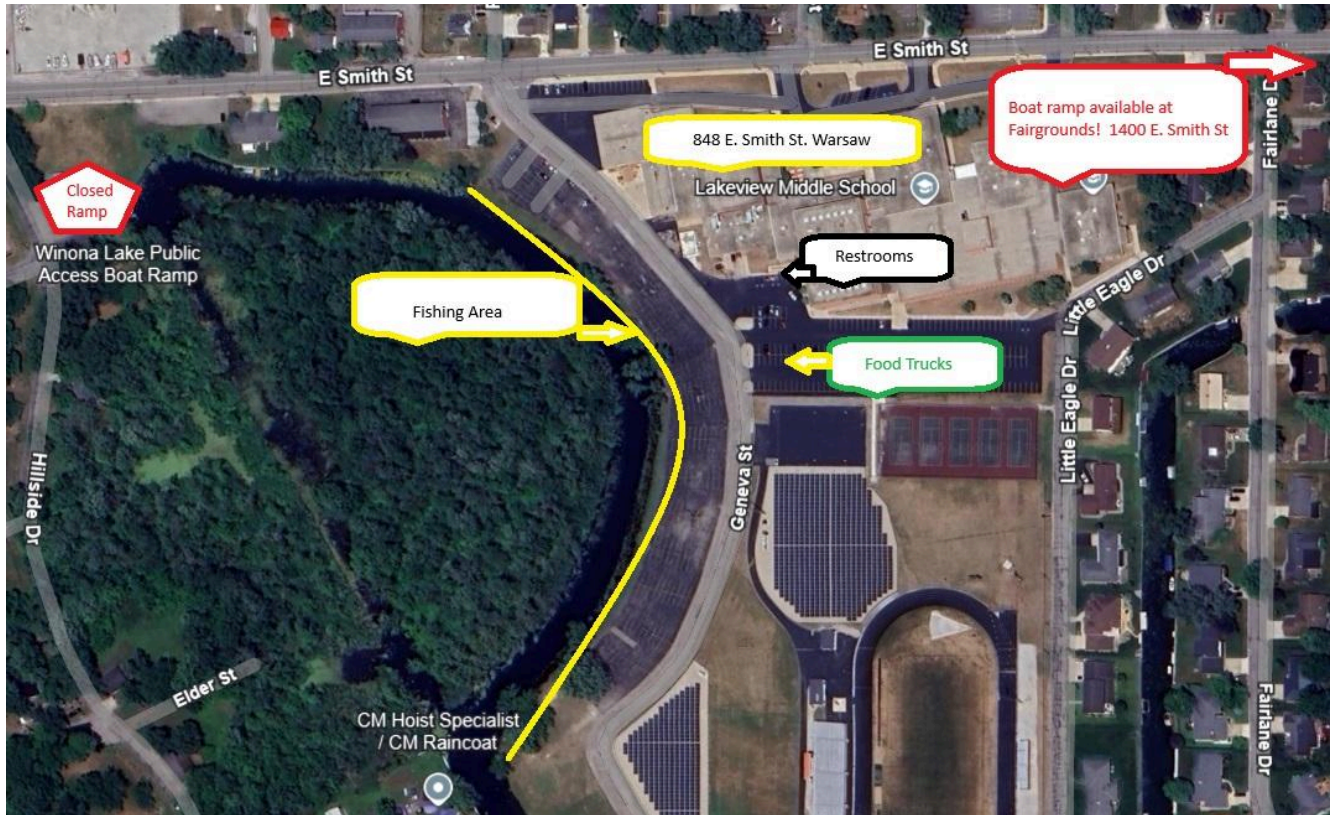
- Sustainability - The goal would be to continually recruit new individuals to serve on both the board and large committee in order to grow YOU and maintain fresh leadership and ideas. This will be done through the continued partnerships with organizations around the county to gain awareness and interest in YOU.
- Clubhouse - The future hope would be to have a permanent home to host experiences or training events in house.
- Grant Applications - The treasurer will be in charge of applying for grants through local and national sources that apply to outdoor enrichment of children's lives.

Next Steps:

- In process activities
- Future milestones
- Cost Estimates, endowment
- Expenses
- Sustainability plan
- Goals
- Timeline
- Scheduling

LAUNCH EVENT

YOU will be starting off with a Kids Fishing Derby. Leading up to this event, planning was a cooperative effort from researching prior events to talking with others who have attended similar events. The first step was establishing an event location that was convenient for everyone and could host a large group safely. The event date, June 14, 2025, helped with the location that was selected. The location chosen was Lakeview Middle school, located at 848 E. Smith St. Warsaw, IN. (See below for location map).



This location provides the room, accessibility, and convenience needed to have a successful event and the ability to host a large group with ease. The derby will be hosting one hundred children ranging in ages from five to sixteen. Children will be placed in groups of three or four participants with different age ranges. The goal is that each child is provided a fishing rod, event t-shirt, and tub of worms.

A guideline for each participant is that a parent or guardian must be present and assists with their child. Each group assigned will have a designated fishing area marked off (zone to be in). After the derby, each child will be presented with a coupon to receive food from the food truck vendor. The event timeline will be as follows:

- 8:00am - 8:30am - Registration
- 8:30am - 9:30am - Educational Clinic

- 9:30am -11:15am - Fishing Derby
- 11:15am - Noon - Lunch and Awards

The educational clinic will have four stations, be approximately ten minutes each, and include the following:

- Fishing knot tying
- Practice casting
- Basic lure setup
- Fish/water ecology

Awards will be for the following age classifications:

- 5-7 years old
- 8-10 years old
- 11-13 years old
- 14-16 years old

Award Categories:

- Total Weight (Top three per division plus overall)
- Biggest Fish – Overall

Safety Concerns:

With the selected location, there is access to the channel of water right off of the parking lot. One of the concerns was boat traffic. The public access to Winona Lake boat traffic would be passing through the derby location. To remedy this, a plan was put in place to restrict boat traffic during the event. The Kosciusko County Fairgrounds boat ramp has been secured to provide public access to the lake (cost \$100). Signage will be provided for convenience.

Another concern was access to restrooms. Lakeview Middle School will allow use of the restrooms in the school during the event.

Also as a precaution, EMS personnel will be onsite or made aware of the event and first responders will be present during the event. In the case of severe weather, the Lakeview Middle School will be available for attendees to take shelter as well.

OTHER OUTDOOR OPPORTUNITIES

Another vision of YOU is to create monthly experiences for youth to participate in other outdoor activities and educational events. One goal is to have local organizations join YOU in providing outdoor experiences as well. Below is a list of potential activities.

- Hunting
- Archery
- Frog gigging
- Mountain biking
- Boat safety
- Kayaking
- Water safety
- Gardening
- Foraging
- Forestry
- Snow shoeing
- Camping

OUTDOOR ORGANIZATIONS

Ryan Christner, President of YOU, stated, "Our supporting organizations are currently being formed, and we aspire to offer a dynamic representation of outdoor organizations who share in our vision to expose local youth to outdoor experiences, education, and service."

COMMUNITY IMPACT

YOU will enhance our communities by providing environmental, economical, and social benefits as explained below.

Environmental

Kosciusko County is fortunate to have a variety of resources related to the outdoors at our fingertips. There are over one hundred lakes in our county to use for fishing and boating. In addition, we have six hundred miles of streams for water recreation as well as rivers, such as the Tippecanoe River. The county also offers an abundance of wooded areas for hunting and foraging, along with organizations that provide many outdoor activities and education for youth and families. Outdoor activities include mountain biking and educational events among many others. Providing these activities and educational opportunities to our youth is essential to not only engage them in the entertainment aspect of the outdoors but also to teach them the importance of preserving our environment. YOU will be able to offer experiences to peak the interest of youth and their families. The following statement from the 2017 Youth and the Outdoors United report shows the important relationship between people and the environment, "It has been proven in history that no better advocates for conservation of

natural resources are the sportsmen and women who have a passion for outdoor recreation” (Hollis et al.).

Economic

The natural resources that Kosciusko County has to offer is truly unique and the economic impact that they have is just as profound. Research, conducted in 2016 by the Lilly Center for Lakes and Streams at Grace College, concluded that the lakes in Kosciusko County are responsible for generating over \$300 million annually. About half of this revenue was generated from activities directly involving the lakes, such as boat sales or bait and tackle, and the other half was from activities indirectly involving the lakes, such as lodging or food and dining. YOU would aim to generate growth in lake-specific activities, such as sport fishing, which produces \$27.8 million annually, by providing a way for youth to get interested and involved earlier. Additionally, the Lakes and Streams study attributed much of the attraction of our lakes to the health and quality of our waters (Bingham and Bosch). YOU will promote awareness about conserving the environment in Kosciusko County, thus contributing to the sustainability of the economy around our natural resources.

Outside the lakes, YOU can also create additional economic opportunities by promoting the other natural resources and outdoor organizations that Kosciusko County has to offer, like the Winona Lake bike trails or Kosko Shotgun Sports Complex. The vision for YOU aims to conserve and promote our natural resources so our community can earn the title of the outdoor recreational “hotspot” of Northern Indiana.

Social

One of the most fulfilling parts of the YOU initiative is the potential to impact the lives of young children in our community. Partnering organizations can provide stories of life changing experiences not only from children they help but from the individuals volunteering their time and talents. These experiences and relationships can provide a sense of community, help find new purpose or passion, improve mental and physical health, and build confidence. YOU's goal is to help provide opportunities for youth to build relationships with others and with nature that will have a generational impact in our community.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Youth and the Outdoors United will provide opportunities for youth and families in our community to connect with each other, with nature, and also to other outdoor activities that Kosciusko County has to offer. Through YOU, the youth in our community will be able to experience more of the benefits that Kosciusko County's natural resources have to offer, cultivate new and lasting relationships, and gain valuable knowledge of nature. YOU is a simple solution that will change the local culture to one that desires a deep connection with nature and with each other.

JEAN NORTHERNOR AWARD

Were we to be granted the Jean Northernor Award, our group would utilize this money to continue helping the mission of YOU in their first kids fishing derby. With the goal to provide a number of items to each kid at the event, the money would help fund

some (or all) of the following for each kid that attends: fishing pole, meal, t-shirt, and tackle. It could also help to purchase awards for the derby such as biggest fish, littlest fish, or most fish, amongst other potential awards. Overall, we believe these funds would be a great way to entice kids and their families to attend, while balancing the additional fundraising that has to be done for this first event.

WORKS CITED

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