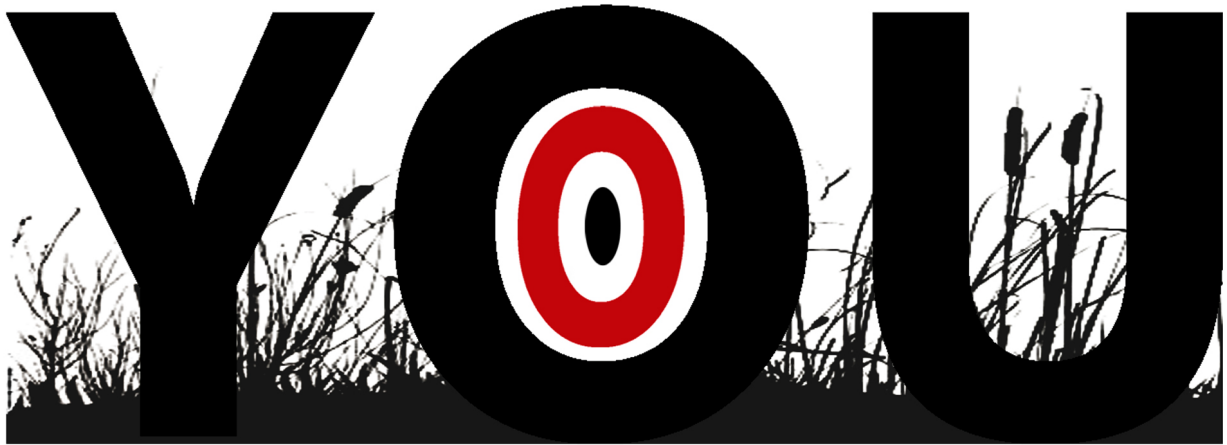


YOUTH AND THE OUTDOORS UNITED



fostering memories and stewardship in the outdoors for generations

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INTRODUCTION

Think back to your days as a child. For many of us, some of our fondest memories involve experiencing the outdoors. Regardless of your specific experience, your encounter with nature as a child was likely fueled by relatives or close friends with both the experience and the resources necessary to help you carry out your desire to participate in outdoor activities. However, the sad reality is that there are many children living in our community who are not as fortunate as you might have been. Far too many youth in our community do not have the support necessary to fulfill their desire of encountering the outdoors. For instance, many of the single parents living in our community have neither the time nor the money to invest in outdoor activities with their children. Without sufficient guidance and support, it is obviously very difficult for a child to learn how to properly and safely participate in outdoor activities. In light of this troubling reality, Youth and the Outdoors United (YOU) was formed.

BACKGROUND

Kosciusko County offers residents a wide variety of outdoor opportunities. Affectionately referred to as “Lake City,” Warsaw and the surrounding towns and municipalities of Kosciusko County boast over 100 lakes including the largest (Wawasee) and deepest (Tippecanoe) natural lakes in the entire state. Furthermore, Kosciusko County also includes several properties protected by the Department of Natural Resource (DNR), many of which are available for public use. In light of impressive natural resources such as these, Kosciusko County residents maintain a strong tradition of outdoor activities such as: boating, fishing, hunting, trapping, cycling, and conservation. In addition to contributing to the overall health and happiness of the

community, outdoor activities such as these also have a very significant economic impact on Kosciusko County. The community's natural resources have ultimately made it a tourist destination with attractions including: guided muskellunge fishing tours, boat, cabin, paddle-board, and kayak rentals, a ride or even a party on the Dixie boat, and many other activities. Moreover, with such a rich tradition in outdoor activities, Kosciusko County is also the home of a plethora of different outdoor groups and organizations including: hunting and fishing clubs, competitive outdoor sports teams, conservationist groups, and several others.

PROBLEM

As we continued to research youth involvement in outdoor activities in Kosciusko County, we noticed a significant disconnect between the many existing outdoor organizations and the families living in our community. Kosciusko County has a variety of organizations that continually struggle to effectively reach out to the youth in our community. Moreover, many parents interested in learning about potential outdoor opportunities for their children are simply unaware of these organizations existence. Of the parents who are aware of the many outdoor organizations in our community, the majority of them are still unaware of the specific opportunities these organizations offer for youth. According to our research, many of the parents and children currently involved in outdoor activities through a specific organization are still grossly unaware of the many other opportunities available through other similar organizations. Furthermore, several of the parents we talked to claimed they simply had no idea where they would even start in order to get their children more involved in outdoor activities.

SOLUTION

The disconnect between the outdoor organizations and families of Kosciusko County explained above presented an obvious solution. These two parties simply need to be more effectively connected. This obvious solution is ultimately what resulted in the creation of YOU.

YOU Mission Statement:

Youth and the Outdoors United exists for the benefit of the youth in Kosciusko County to engage and instill a passion for outdoor recreation and conservation. This will be accomplished by forming an alliance of like-minded outdoor organizations with the focus of providing ample opportunities for youth to discover and experience the outdoors as much as possible.

As the mission statement above displays, YOU exists to bridge the gap between the existing outdoor organizations and families in Kosciusko County. This will be accomplished by establishing an alliance of virtually every outdoor-related organization in our community with the sole focus of promoting outdoor activities to the youth of Kosciusko County. Thus, the benefit of this simple solution is twofold. The outdoor organizations gain access to a database of the youth in the community who have expressed an interest in the outdoors, while the families gain access to the many outdoor organizations offering youth activities all in one central hub.

Once we established this solution, we scheduled a meeting with leaders from the local outdoor organizations with some of the most popular youth events and activities in order to present our idea. After a short pitch, every individual present expressed a genuine excitement to be involved in the formation of YOU. Moreover, a unanimous decision was made to establish a YOU advisory board and each individual committed to serving as the representative from his or her distinct organization for the first term.

Before presenting our implementation plan, we want to make it clear that YOU does not exist to develop or run youth outdoor events and activities. Rather, it exists to promote the events and activities of existing outdoor organizations. Therefore, in addition to greater access to the youth in our community, the primary value YOU offers its member organizations is added marketing for its youth events and activities. The goal of the YOU board is to allow each member organization to focus completely on running youth events and activities, while YOU works to promote these events and activities for them.

IMPLEMENTATION

In order to ensure the success and longevity of YOU moving forward, we have developed an aggressive, yet attainable implementation plan. The overall plan includes three distinct phases spanning a ten-year timeframe with flexibility to grow and change as necessary. The three distinct phases are as follows:

1. Phase one: Year 1 (the remainder of 2016)
2. Phase two: Years 2-4
3. Phase three: Years 5-10

PHASE ONE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Rather than simply developing a mere white paper to hand off to someone else to actually implement, we took the initiative to begin working toward our phase one goals. Therefore, we have already completed several of the tasks we set out for phase one. Each task that has already been accomplished is listed below:

- **Establish volunteer advisory board to meet monthly/bimonthly (At least 5 people)**

As previously mentioned, our first primary goal was to meet with leaders from local outdoor organizations in order to present our idea. Therefore, we identified several of these individuals and scheduled a meeting at the WACF Education Center in Syracuse. After a short presentation, we received immediate and unanimous confirmation concerning the validity and necessity of our organization. Furthermore, each individual present expressed his or her desire to represent his or her respective organization on the YOU advisory board.

- **Establish communication with potential partners (10-15 groups)**

Considering YOU was developed in order to eventually hand off to the organization's formal board, we made it clear from the beginning that we wanted to involve local outdoor groups in the planning and design of YOU. Therefore, utilizing a variety of communication channels, we have successfully merged our ideas with those of several existing organizational leaders. Since the inception of our YOU, we have confirmed partnerships with: Wawasee Ducks Unlimited, Michiana Delta Waterfowl, ICO Camp Mollenhour, IDNR Fish & Wildlife, KOSKO Shooting Sports, WACF, Wawasee Yacht Club, Little Elkhart Trout Unlimited, and the Center for Lakes and Streams at Grace College.

- **Establish Social Media presence & monthly newsletter**

Social media is an effective, yet highly inexpensive means of promotion. Therefore, we have already established a YOU Facebook page and are in the process of developing Twitter and Instagram accounts as well. YOU plans to use

social media to promote member organizations through posts, shared links, and photos of previous events. Furthermore, we have also developed a framework/template for a monthly newsletter that will be distributed to both YOU member organizations as well as youth and parents in the community. The newsletter will essentially work to keep YOU member organizations and local families up to date concerning upcoming events and opportunities.

- **Finalize Mission Statement, Logo, & Name**

As the first portion of our white paper displays, we have obviously completed the YOU mission statement, logo, and name. With the help of several creative individuals, we created a catchy, yet meaningful name as well as an eye-catching logo. Our goal as an organization is to serve “YOU,” the members of our community. In other words, “YOU” are our target. This fact is also reflected in our mission statement, which serves to guide our decisions moving forward.

- **Develop directory/database for organizations**

As a part of our ongoing communication with local outdoor organizations, we have already started building the YOU database with information such as key contacts and resources. However, this will obviously be an ongoing process as YOU continues to grow.

PHASE ONE NEXT STEPS

Although we have certainly made significant progress toward our overall objectives for phase one, there are still several tasks yet to be completed for the first year. The remaining tasks for phase one are listed below:

- **Setup non-profit status**

One of our most pressing next steps is to establish YOU as a federally recognized 501(c) non-profit organization. Once we have acquired this status, we will be eligible for additional grants and funding. In order to accomplish this task, we have already received confirmation from a local lawyer to provide us with volunteer assistance regarding our non-profit status as well as our organizational by-laws.

- **Develop formal Board**

Our volunteer advisory board has been a great asset to YOU as a part of the developmental phase. However, as our organization grows, we believe a formal board will better serve YOU long-term.

- **Develop youth Sponsorship Program**

Perhaps the most direct way YOU can support youth is through sponsorship. Therefore, we plan to secure funding that will enable YOU to sponsor youth for certain activities and events such as Camp Mollenhour in Silver Lake. The sponsorship program will essentially support youth who would otherwise not be able to participate due to financial constraints.

- **Develop Interactive Website**

In today's world, a functional website is a must for any organization. Therefore, we have already secured a domain name and are in the process of creating a website that is both visually appealing and easy to navigate. In addition to displaying photos and general info, we plan to develop an interactive calendar that will allow families to view all outdoor events and activities.

PHASE TWO

Transitioning from phase one to phase two, the implementation plan becomes more flexible. Whereas the tasks for phase one are relatively detailed and specific, the tasks for phases two and three become purposefully less detailed and specific in order to allow for any changes that might be made along the way. However, we are still confident that the tasks for these phases are attainable. The tasks for phase two are listed below:

- **Seek funding via grants and sponsorships**
- **Develop YOU fundraising events (e.g. fishing tournament)**
- **Grow partnerships with existing and perhaps newly established outdoor organizations**
- **Work with member organizations to coordinate existing youth events and activities in order to increase participation and minimize overlap**

PHASE THREE

As YOU continues to grow and expand, phase three represents the final stage of the organization's implementation plan. This stage presents the tasks necessary to meet the organization's long-term goals of sustainability and longevity. The tasks for phase three are listed below:

- **Maintain one large-scale annual fundraising event.**
- **Develop a mentoring program for adults to "adopt" children who do not have anyone in their lives who can help them encounter the outdoors**
- **Develop a scholarship for kids interested in a career in the outdoors or conservation.**
- **Build or purchase a "club house" to serve as Youth and the Outdoors United headquarters as well as a meeting or event space for any of our member organizations.**

- **Maintain a full-time staff of 1-3 people to maintain daily operations and assist youth, parents, and member organizations.**

OUTDOOR ORGANIZATIONS

As previously stated, YOU exists to promote existing outdoor organizations.

Therefore, developing and maintaining relationships with existing outdoor organizations will certainly be crucial to the success of YOU. Currently, we have met with individuals from the following groups and organizations and have received confirmation that each one plans to become a YOU member and maintain a presence on the board:

- **Wawasee Ducks Unlimited**



- **Indiana Department of Natural Resources**



- **Michiana Delta Waterfowl**



- **Kosko Shooting Sports**



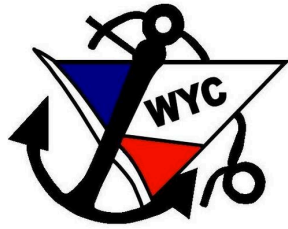
- **Camp Mollenhour**



- **Wawasee Area Conservancy Foundation**



- **Wawasee Yacht Club**



- **Little Elkhart Trout Unlimited**



- **Grace College Center for Lakes and Streams**



Furthermore, YOU plans to meet with and establish relationships with the following groups and organizations in the near future:

- **National Wild Turkey Federation**



- **Kosciusko 4-H Shooting Sports**



- **Hoss Hills Bowman**



- **Nappanee Conservation Club**



- Pheasants Forever



- Sea Scouts



- Baker Youth Club



- Kosciusko Community YMCA



- Boy Scouts of America



- Big Brothers Big Sisters



- Girl Scouts of America



COMMUNITY IMPACT

YOU's overall impact on the greater Kosciusko County community can ultimately be categorized into three primary areas: environmental, economic, and social.

ENVIRONMENTAL

Many of these partnering organizations have concentrated efforts beneficial to our community and beyond. Conservation of natural resources efforts play a major factor in many of these organizations with a common theme of educating future generations about the importance of the conservation efforts to ensure these great outdoor activities can be enjoyed for many generations to come. Our community is blessed to have local organizations focused on the impact of natural resources within our community as well as organizations that spread efforts across our nation. It has been proven in history that no better advocates for conservations of natural resources are the sportsmen and women who have a passion for outdoor recreation. Our county is home to a large amount of lakes and streams many other communities would love to feature. It is also home to a large Indiana Division of Natural Resources managed property in Tri-County Fish & Wildlife Area. This 3,500+ acre area offers a large variety of outdoor activity opportunity for anything ranging from fishing to bird watching or hiking. Wild places such as these are becoming harder to come by in a nation riddled with progress and innovation. We firmly believe that with the implementation of YOU we will be able to promote proper usage of these fragile natural resources.

ECONOMIC

Single handedly the economical benefit our community has with regards to the natural resources is our abundant lakes. Research completed by the Center for Lakes & Streams has indicated sport-fishing alone in our county produces a staggering \$27.8 Million annually. That number alone is astonishing for just one outdoor sporting activity available within our community. Diving into more detail on many of the other recreational activities will lead to an even larger impact we are think of on a daily basis. Many of these outdoor enthusiasts travel from outside of our county who will frequent local shops, restaurants and even utilize lodging accommodations for extended stays. With consideration to these economic impacts we want to challenge our community to focus on enhancing the already established organizations in our community. One highlight is Kosko Shotgun Sports Complex located just outside of Warsaw has been host to not only Indiana State Competitions, but also multiple Olympic and International Competitions right in the heart of our county! Our vision is to promote great organizations such as this one so our community can coin the title of the outdoor recreational “hot spot” of Northern Indiana.

SOCIAL

What better way is there to experience true joy than to watch a youth experience the thrill of an outdoor activity for the first time? Each partnering organization we met with had multiple success stories which their group has experienced. It was rewarding to know that there are a large number of individuals volunteering their time, talents and treasures for the simple reward of seeing the fulfillment in a child’s eyes after finding a new passion in outdoor recreation. The social impact can prove to be the most fulfilling

by helping change the course of a young child's life. Whether it is a youth finding a purpose, a new passion or activity, a sense of community or simply enjoying the wild nature that surrounds us it's YOU's goal to have a hand in making these activities easily accessible for future generations. While building relationships with youth in our community, we believe that the everlasting impact can span for generations to come.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Youth and the Outdoors United is the solution to the current disconnect between outdoor organizations and families plaguing Kosciusko County. By creating a separate organization with the sole purpose of promoting opportunities for youth to experience the outdoors, YOU is essentially bridging the gap between youth interested in the outdoors and organizations with outdoor events and activities for youth. Through the YOU's existence: youth receive more opportunities to encounter the outdoors; parents are provided with a convenient, central location for everything they need to know concerning youth outdoor events and activities; local outdoor organizations gain a valuable marketing and recruitment service; and the rest of the community reaps the benefits of a healthier environment, boosted economy, and a more well behaved younger generation. In the end, YOU is a simple solution with a profound impact.

"There are no words that can tell the hidden spirit of the wilderness, that can reveal its mystery, its melancholy, and its charm."

- Theodore Roosevelt