



Conservation Habits = Healthy Habitats

Conservation of our natural resources is important in every community, and can bring together people looking to participate and lead others. Conservation habits can help conserve water, increase food supply and provide shelter for animals, birds and insects. By working to improve our environment, everyone can develop good habits that will last a lifetime and also inspire others around them. This feature story provides basic as well as additional supportive information and highlights how conservation districts can help to create a healthy habitat for the area you inhabit.

The first step in educating adults and students about Conservation Habits = Healthy Habitats is to develop a common understanding. To help do just this, below are some basic definitions of terms:

Conservation: the careful management of the environment and of our natural resources, or as Aldo Leopold, author of *A Sand County Almanac* said, "Conservation is a state of harmony between men and land."

Habit: something we do frequently or automatically, and can be difficult to stop.

Healthy: a flourishing condition, a sense of well-being.

Habitat: the place where something—plant, animal or other small organism—lives because it is adapted to find food, water, shelter and space. Habitats can be found in forests, grasslands, deserts, wetlands or arctic tundra around the world, as well as in our communities and right outside our back doors.

Thus, conservation habits are consistent actions that can help protect and manage our natural resources. Many of those habits will help establish and maintain healthy habitats, which are flourishing places for animals and others to live. As Aldo Leopold envisioned, "environmental progress ultimately resides in the efforts of all of us to apply a caring hand to the landscape. It resides in our own actions, in our backyards, at our places of work, on our farms and ranches and factories, and in our communities."

Healthy habitats provide a plethora of resources for the organisms that exist within them. The soil—whether loamy, sandy or clay—functions to provide nutrients and sustain life. Native plants to the soil and climate—like grasses, shrubs and trees—can provide sustainable food sources and protection. Birds and insects contribute by pollinating plants, and animals live in balance, eating and being eaten.

Habitats can be restored and new ones developed almost anywhere; it only requires one organism adapting to a location to make it a habitat. A few ideas for maintaining and supporting these essential locations are listed in the "Do Your Part!" boxes on the next page. Resources and assistance are abundant, and conservation districts across the country can help you do your part to encourage healthy habitats no matter where you live. Some of the many sources available are listed on the back page of this handout.



Trees and Plants Do Their Part!

Trees can...

- ...remove carbon dioxide from the air.
- ...release oxygen into the air.
- ...provide food, shelter and a place for some to raise their young, including people.

Animals, Birds and Insects Do Their Part!

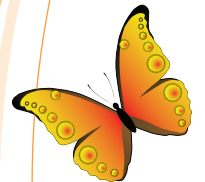
Animals, birds and insects can...

- ...pollinate flowers.
- ...eat fruit and berries, eliminating the seeds as waste, which in turn grow into new plants.
- ...eat dead plant material and provide nutrients for the soil so more plants can grow.

Do Your Part!

People can...

- ...add a bird bath or other water source for animals.
- ...plant native flowers, trees, shrubs and plants with food sources like berries, nuts or fruit.
- ...let a corner or strip of the yard or playground grow naturally to provide shelter and food for wildlife.
- ...plant grass or ground cover on a bare patch of soil where erosion has occurred.
- ...install or build a rain barrel to collect rainwater.
- ...consider pervious or porous concrete when installing sidewalks.
- ...recycle materials so that habitats don't have to be destroyed for additional landfill space.
- ...volunteer to plant trees or develop habitat areas in our communities.
- ...protect natural resources around the community from contamination.
- ...do a lot!





Education Programs for Adults and Youth – Redlands, California

The Inland Empire Resource Conservation District (IERCD) offers free educational programs to any community group or school within the District's boundaries. Adults can learn about water-use efficiency, stormwater pollution, composting, rain gardens and native plants. The latter teaches people how to create a native plant garden, including the best time to plant and species to avoid. For school programs, staff visit classrooms and review the necessary learning materials. For example, "Backyard Conservation" teaches students the importance of conserving natural resources in their own backyards. Other topics include "Trees Please," "Wonders of Wetlands," "Stormwater Pollution," "Toil of Soil," "Water Use Efficiency," and "Recycle, Energy Conservation, Reduce, Reuse." For more information, contact Jennifer Ares at jennifer.ares@ca.nacdnet.net.

An educator works with students in California on the Toil of Soil program.



Community Beautification – Greenville, South Carolina

Long Branch Baptist Church, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Greenville County Conservation District, Foothills Resource Conservation and Development Council and the South Carolina Forestry Commission are transforming a drug-infested city block into a community park. The church purchased lots adjacent to its property and demolished 18 abandoned houses. The pastor contacted NRCS for assistance in stabilizing a tributary, and the project grew to city block beautification. The partners hosted a tree planting workshop and 38 community members planted 40 trees selected for site conditions, aesthetics and urban wildlife. The next phase involves restoring stream banks and creating a native rock seating area. The District will host monthly after-school workshops for neighborhood children so they can learn about local natural resources. For information, contact Kirsten Robertson at kirbertson@greenvillecounty.org.



Pastor Sean Dogan and his church members are partnering with NRCS and the Greenville County Conservation District to build a community park.

Kansas Districts Advance E.A.R.T.H. – Ottawa, Kansas

Launched by Kansas State University Research and Extension, Earth Awareness Researchers for Tomorrow's Habitat (EARTH) focuses on environmental education during a year-long middle school program. Conservation districts in more than a dozen counties promote EARTH and its curriculum to schools and youth programs statewide. The mission is "to provide youth with innovative, experimental learning opportunities that highlight the relationships and interdependence of our natural resources." The Franklin County Conservation District provides curriculum books and supply kits to four school districts. The kits include supplies necessary to complete more than 30 hands-on lessons that explain the relationships and interdependency of soil, water, air and living resources. The program culminates with an EARTH Festival in April, where environmental professionals volunteer and provide engaging activities for the students related to the curriculum topics. For information, contact Keri Harris at keri.harris@ks.nacdnet.net.



Students participate in "H2O Olympics" to learn about cohesion and adhesion of water molecules with a festival volunteer at the Franklin County EARTH Festival in Kansas.

Grassland Habitat Restoration – Scituate, Rhode Island

The Northern Rhode Island Conservation District, NRCS, Providence Water and conservation organizations are using the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program to restore grassland and early succession habitats on an old farm near the Scituate Reservoir. In the early 1900s, the area existed as hay and pasture land, but reverted to mostly forested land since then. As a result, many species dependent upon grasslands for food and cover have declined in population, including Bobolink, Eastern Meadowlark and Grasshopper Sparrows. The team will work to expand the existing grasslands, along with shrub/sapling edge. Newly cleared areas will be seeded with warm-season grasses. Over the next five years, work is staged to transition the land gradually. With time and proper management, the property will benefit a variety of wildlife. For information, contact Gina DeMarco at gina-demarco@nricd.necoxmail.com.

Local residents tour the Joslin Farm in Rhode Island, learning about the ongoing Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program project and its intended results.



Resources for Healthy Habitats



NACD 2010 Education Materials www.nacdnet.org/stewardship

Educational materials for all ages are available on Conservation Habits = Healthy Habitats, the 2010 stewardship theme.

People's Garden Initiative US Department of Agriculture

www.usda.gov/peoplesgarden

The People's Garden illustrates how USDA works to provide a sustainable, safe and nutritious food supply while protecting and preserving the landscape. USDA employees are encouraged to look for opportunities to volunteer in this effort at their local offices or community gardens.



Pollinator Partnership

www.pollinator.org

Pollinator Partnership works to protect the health of managed and native pollinating animals vital to North American ecosystems and agriculture, including information for consumers, gardeners, land managers, educators, resource managers, producers and farmers.



Backyard Conservation NRCS, NACD, Wildlife Habitat Council

www.nrcs.usda.gov/feature/backyard

Backyard Conservation provides information and booklet tip sheets on how conservation practices used on agricultural land can be adapted for use around individual homes.



Garden for Wildlife National Wildlife Federation

www.nwf.org/gardenforwildlife/certify.cfm

The National Wildlife Federation's Certified Wildlife Habitat™ program recognizes thousands of wildlife enthusiasts across the country for creating havens for neighborhood wildlife in their own yards.



Backyard Woods US Forest Service, NACD, National Arbor Day Foundation

www.arborday.org/backyardwoods

Backyard Woods provides a guide and tip sheets on how small acreage owners can enhance the scenery in their backyard woods, provide habitat for wildlife and utilize the land as an extra source of income.



Habitats: Home Sweet Home National Geographic Society

www.nationalgeographic.com/geography-action/habitats.html

Information, videos, lesson plans and maps are available on habitats such as cities and suburbs, deserts and tundra, forests, fresh water, oceans and coasts, and prairies through *Geography Action!*



Education for Conservation US Fish and Wildlife Service

www.fws.gov/educators/educators.html

The website provides information on birds, fish, wildlife, plants, habitats and more, and includes links to Scout recognition certificates, curriculum resources, community service projects and professional development opportunities.



Backyard Conservation Resources Wildlife Habitat Council

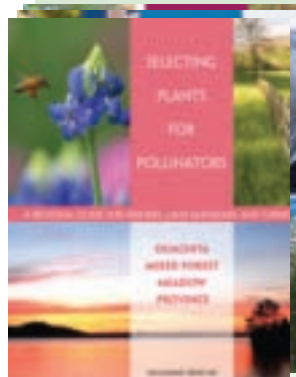
www.wildlifehc.org/managementtools/backyard.cfm

The Wildlife Habitat Council is a nonprofit group dedicated to restoring and enhancing wildlife habitat by helping large landowners, particularly corporations, manage their unused lands in a way that benefits wildlife. WHC also works to broaden understanding of wildlife values through environmental education, volunteer participation and community outreach programs.



Invite pollinators to your neighborhood: Plant a pollinator friendly habitat in your garden

Pollinators are needed for the reproduction of 90 percent of flowering plants and one third of human food crops. Each of us depends on these industrious pollinators in a practical way to provide us with the wide range of foods we eat. In addition, pollinators are part of the intricate web that supports the biological diversity in natural ecosystems that helps sustain our quality of life.



The Pollinator Partnership, of which NACD is a member, has 24 Ecoregional Planting Guides available free of charge at <http://www.pollinator.org/guides.htm>. Download yours today to find native planting information tailored to your region.



conserving
natural resources
for our future

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NOTE: Share this Conservation Habits = Healthy Habitats feature story with your local schools, garden clubs, service organizations and others by downloading the PDF file at <http://nacdn.net.org/resources/> or linking it to your district's website.