

Tools for Teaching

Tips for Programs: Planning Special Events

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Arbor Day

Arbor Day events run the spectrum from poster contests to community tree plantings. It offers a unique opportunity to promote the value of trees with respect to water quality, especially for preventing soil erosion.

History of Arbor Day

According to the National Arbor Day Foundation, "Arbor Day is a nationally celebrated observance that encourages tree planting and tree care." In 1872, J. Sterling Morton, editor of the Nebraska City News, founded Arbor Day. Morton encouraged settlers and homesteaders in that state to plant trees for shade, shelter, food and fuel, as well as to beautify the treeless plains. More than one million trees were planted on the first Arbor Day.

Traditionally, National Arbor Day is celebrated each year on the last Friday in April. While it is a worldwide event, in individual communities the date is frequently set to tie in with optimum tree planting conditions for the area.

Sample Activities

Some possible Arbor Day water-related activities include:

- Tree plantings in riparian areas
- Arbor day poster contests emphasizing the importance of trees to water quality.

Sample Websites

- National Arbor Day Foundation at: <http://www.arborday.org/>
- Project Learning Tree at: <http://www.plt.org/>
- USDA Forest Service at <http://www.fs.fed.us/>
- National Association of State Foresters at: <http://www.stateforesters.org>
- Smokey Bear at: www.smokeybear.com

County Fairs

County fairs can be a perfect place to promote water resource conservation. This may be done through personal contact, or via unmanned displays, flyers, and other appropriate means. A rule of thumb is to keep the contact short, sweet and catchy, because people are usually passing through rather quickly. Try to take just a minute or two of their time, but remember to make that minute a marvelous one!

Sample Activities

- Offer a prize. People coming through fill out their name, address, and other pertinent information and place it in a container.
- Offer free water and a place for tired fairgoers to sit. Place the seats and water near an educational display highlighting district activities, and fill the display area with lots of brochures!
- Have a wooden board painted with fun wetlands creatures and cutout holes that people can peek through. Be sure to put your organization's name on it!
- Offer face painting with a soil/water theme. Be sure to purchase an allergy free paint kit.
- Display water models if it is a secure site.

Earth Day

Planning events or activities for Earth Day might not be as daunting as it seems. Many of the activities conducted water resource professionals such as watershed festivals, canoe floats, tours, trash pick-up, field days, or poster contests can simply be re-titled and fine-tuned to fit the Earth Day theme. Fortunately, there are also a myriad of websites out there that can help to get a program off the ground. Activities can be low maintenance and inexpensive such as a poster contest, or highly charged and costlier as in the case of a full-scale Earth Day event.

History of Earth Day

Traditionally Earth Day has been observed on April 22nd. Senator Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin came up with the idea in 1969. He wanted a peaceful educational event, and his dream became a reality on April 22, 1970, when nearly 20 million Americans across the nation took part in the first Earth Day celebration. People collected tons of litter along roads and streams, attended educational programs at schools and colleges, and listened to speeches made by environmental leaders. Based on the success of the first Earth Day, annual celebrations occurred in some communities. However, the 20th anniversary in 1990 really made Earth Day an annual event throughout the world. Earth Day has also been observed on March 21st, the Vernal Equinox, or on June 6th, World Environment Day. As SWCD personnel know, however, Earth Day is every day

Sample Activities

Following are a list of activities that your organization might want to sponsor in conjunction with Earth Day. These could be conducted in a school(s), mall, park, library, or at some other location. It is important to identify the primary goal(s) and the target audience before beginning.

- Team up with a recycling agency to conduct a trash cleanup of area streams, highways, parks, trails, vacant lots or other key places.
- Conduct stream seining demonstrations and investigations.
- Conduct a canoe float to increase understanding of nonpoint source pollution.
- Submit Earth Day press releases to local media dealing with topics of soil and water conservation. You might also want to team up with other environmental agencies to have an expanded series of environmental topics for newspapers, radio, and/or television. Topics might also appear as a series in each agency's newsletter.
- Conduct a field day in conjunction with Earth Day.
- Present a workshop on "Planning an Earth Day Event at Your School." Invite representatives from area schools to participate in the workshop, so that they can coordinate an Earth Day event at their school.
- Re-package a watershed festival into an Earth Day event, or plan a completely new event
- Team up with a local theater group or high school drama club to present an Earth Day play at the local mall, area libraries, in schools, and at other locations. Donations or grants can assist with costumes, props, freebies and other things needed to compliment the event. A fashion show comprised of recycled items could also be a part of the fun.
- Ask the county commissioners' or Mayor's office to issue an Earth Day proclamation. (See a sample of an Earth Day proclamation.)
- Conduct a bicycle tour, walking trail, or drive-it-yourself tour to highlight best management practices that address nonpoint source pollution problems.
- Earth Day Event-Case Scenario Agenda

Of all of the Earth Day activities that one could choose from, the Earth Day event is, quite possibly, the most involved and time-consuming. For assistance with the planning of an Earth Day event, a sample "Who, What, When, Where & Why of Planning an Earth Day Event" timeline follows:

Who, What, When, Where and Why of Planning an Earth Day Event--Sample Timeline

I. Who

A. First determine if the event will be conducted for staff and students at a specific school(s), or if it is for the general public. If it is for a school, the following people will need to be involved:

- Principal
- Teachers--all teachers, or a planning committee that informs the other teachers
- Students
- Curriculum consultants for the school districts
- Custodial staff
- Cafeteria staff (if special foods will be served)

B. If the event is for a school or the general public, involve these individuals:

- Resource personnel from environmental organizations, governmental agencies, community groups, and business and industry. (Be sure that their mission statements are compatible with the overall goal of the event)
- Schools who may bring students on a day-of-event field trip and participate in pre- event contests and activities
- Volunteers/Parents
- Government officials who might want to attend and issue a proclamation
- EMS, security personnel, scouting groups for clean-up, and other like-minded groups

II. What

A. School Events:

In-school activities on the day of the event could involve themed rooms (e.g., oceans, stream life, soils, and other environmental subject areas). Children could rotate in small groups from room to room to complete hands-on activities. Whole group activities involving games, presentations, speakers, and other special activities could be held in the gymnasium, or other large room.

B. General pre-Earth Day events:

Some general pre-Earth Day events could include recycling, tree planting, environmental surveys of schools and neighborhoods, and/or contests.

C. Day of Event Earth Day activities:

Activities on the day of the event could involve hands-on activities presented by environmental and other agencies or groups, special displays, speakers, dramatic presentations, and other special programs.

- Participants could complete an "environmental passport" at each station.

III. When

A. Suggested event planning timeline is as follows:

At the minimum, start planning at least five to six months in advance. One to two years in advance is ideal for a large event that will be attended by the general public.

To begin, organize the planning committee (monthly meetings are ideal), determine date and location of the event, and confirm with scheduling personnel. Define theme of the event, identify target audience, establish objectives, determine key activities, identify budget, contact environmental educators, librarians and others to do programs; contact sponsors and, if appropriate, seek grant funding.

- Three to four months in advance (or sooner): Determine supplies needed, start to order and assemble materials, seek and schedule volunteers.
- Two month in advance: Start to generate excitement through contests, publicity, special events, speakers, public service announcements and other methods. Obtain liability insurance if needed

- One month to two weeks: Publicize the event if appropriate, develop media packet, call media for on-site coverage, contact speakers to re-confirm their participation on the day of the event, conduct pre-event activities such as flower planting, speakers, and other related programs if desired; map out floor plan/table set-up assignments, and other logistics for the event.
- Develop one or more evaluation forms geared to students, teachers, volunteers and others as needed.
- Day before the event: Finalize last minute details. Set up room(s), gym, tents, whatever with aid of volunteers and other personnel.
- Day of the event: Have "ambassadors" greet speakers and special guests; Assign a person to hand out media packets. Have volunteers assigned to assist with carrying items, set-up and other tasks; offer restroom and lunch breaks to exhibitors/presenters. Serve lunch if affordable. Collect evaluation forms. If possible, enter those who complete and return the evaluation form in a prize drawing. If you collect their name and address, you might also offer them the option of being included in future mailings related to the event.
- After the event: Rest, self-evaluate, review comments from participants, send thank you letters to everyone involved, especially sponsors and funders, start planning for next year!

IV. Where

- What areas will be utilized? (e.g., parks, museums, schools, mall).
- Is it an indoor or outdoor event?
- Are there any special considerations such as sound or lighting equipment?
- Will exhibitors be offered the chance to use electricity?
- Is parking adequate for cars and buses?
- Are tents needed?
- Are there any fire codes?
- Are fire extinguishers required in tents or other buildings?
- Is liability insurance needed?
- Are there site rental fees?
- If food is served, are there health regulations or placement considerations based on electricity?
- Are restroom facilities and trash receptacles adequate?
- If not, where will recycling containers and portable toilets be placed?
- How will the clientele rotate? Will it be from tent to tent, display-to-display, room to room or at will?
- Is a staging area needed?

V. Why

- Increases knowledge and skills related to the environment and conservation. Supports school curriculum and proficiency test outcomes
- Offers clientele significant conservation experiences

- Motivates people to take environmentally responsible action (positive behavior)
- Provides an opportunity to establish liaisons with outside resource people, local schools, parents, volunteers, government officials and others who are working together for a common goal.
- Could lead to an annual educational event
- Fun!

Resources

For a free copy of *The Happy Earth Day Activities Book*, contact Region 5 EPA at: Office of Public Affairs, Chicago, IL 60604. Ask for document #905-M90-002. The activity pages may be photocopied, and are geared to lower elementary students.

Websites

Earth day Network: <http://www.earthday.org/>

All Species Project: <http://www.allspecies.org/>

Earth Day Grocery Project:

These and many more sites are listed at <https://naaee.org/eeopro/resources>

Earth Science Week

Earth Science Week is sponsored by the American Geological Institute, and is generally held in October. The goal of the week is to highlight earth science. Specific objectives include giving students new opportunities to discover the earth sciences, to highlight contributions that earth scientists make to society, to publicize the fact that earth science is all around us, to encourage stewardship of the earth, and to develop a way for geoscientists to share knowledge. A packet of information is available from the Institute offering ways to celebrate the week.

History

In 1998 the American Geological Institute launched the first Earth Science Week in conjunction with their 50th Anniversary Celebration. That year the governors of 16 states issued Earth Week proclamations and resolutions. The American Geological Institute is a not-for-profit federation of 32 professional earth science organizations.

Sample Activities

Following are some suggested ideas and activities offered by the Earth Science Institute:

- Adopt-A-Teacher by sponsoring a workshop that gives educators the opportunity to perform earth science activities under the guidance of experienced scientists.
- Adopt-A-School and present earth science related programs throughout the year.
- Conduct a field trip or walking tour to show that earth science is all around us.
- Set up earth science displays at local libraries and other public places

Website

Log on to the American Geological Institute's website at: www.earthsciweek.org

Soil and Water Stewardship Week

Soil and Water Stewardship Week is an excellent time to involve the religious community in water conservation efforts. Schools, community organizations and others might also become involved. Early in the winter a packet of materials about Soil and Water Stewardship Week is sent from the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD). Enclosed in the packet are educational materials, religious materials, graphics, fact sheets, ideas for activities, and other pertinent information. Traditionally, Soil and Water Stewardship Week is observed between the last Sunday in April and the first Sunday in May, although it can be held at any time. An annual theme is selected each year. Past themes have included Community Waters, the Living Waters, In the Children's Hands and Habitat for Life.

History of Soil and Water Stewardship Week

Soil and Water Stewardship Week has its roots in Medieval Europe, where a celebration of prayer and penance known as Rogation Days occurred. In seeking God's intervention, this event was designed to help people avoid suffering induced by crop failures, drought or bad weather. Soil and Water Stewardship Week has been observed since the 1950's and in 1995 the NACD began to select an annual theme and develop educational materials for churches of all denominations. Each year lay leaders and ministers from a number of religious denominations review the materials before they are distributed.

Sample Activities

Many environmental activities/lessons can be used in conjunction with Soil and Water Stewardship Week. The annual Soil and Water Stewardship Week literature contains a number of ideas for a full-scale observance.

Planning

The following is a partial checklist from NACD for conducting a successful Stewardship Week:

- Select a chairperson and small working committee to organize and oversee stewardship activities. Consider involving representatives from churches, schools, government and civic organizations.
- Prepare an action plan generated by the committee.
- Contact local ministerial alliances early. Conduct a workshop with ministers in order to preview the resource materials.
- Contact educators and introduce them to the resource materials.
- Order necessary materials from NACD.
- Promote the week with the aid of news media.

Resources

Log on to the NACD site and check the Public Outreach section at: <http://www.nacdnet.org/>

Water Festivals

Many natural resource organizations host water festivals for the general public and/or school groups. A water festival is a gathering, large or small, of citizens, young and old, from a specific watershed or county. This type of event is usually free and features displays, hands-on activities, food, informational handouts and community service projects. Typically, people move from station to station to learn about watersheds, water quality and water conservation. While hosting this community event, you can make the public aware of your organization's activities and services.

History of Water Festivals

While water festival type gatherings have been around for years, even centuries, the Nebraska Groundwater Foundation elevated the significance and visibility of these events. In 1989 they sponsored the first Children's Groundwater Festival, hoping for even 50 children to attend. During the first week of registration, 1,200 children signed up to attend. The numbers have been growing ever since and the concept of a "water festival" has spread nationally and includes general water festivals and watershed festivals. Project WET and its sponsors support a national "Make a Splash" festival day in September. In 2002, 130+ festivals were held serving 60,000 students.

General Planning

In planning your event you will want to answer questions like who, what, when and where. The water festival will be your event; however, the date needs to be when the general public can attend. The best time to host a festival for the general public is during the early evening hours or on a Saturday. For schools, the times usually need to fit with their bus and daily schedules. Check around the community to see what that you don't have any calendar conflicts.

Location

Select your location. It's best to host this type of event near water. This can range from a scenic river to a pond or local lake. Whether using public or private land, always ask permission. If you host the event at a public location (e.g., state park), it's always good to work with the park staff and ask them how they want to be involved. It is important to involve other people and groups to help promote and assist with the festival.

Advertising

When advertising the event through news releases, newsletters, website, flyers and other media venues, make sure you describe what a water festival is, what the participants will be doing, what other groups will be participating. Make sure that your advertisement clearly indicates your date, time, location, rainy day plan, and a contact number for additional information. If you want your audience to R.S.V.P. for an approximate number of attendees, let them know how to register. Also, remember to invite the media. Have a press packet to give to them at the event. Your goal is to get people involved and learning about water. The more you promote the festival, the more opportunity you will have to achieve this goal.

Activities

Some suggested displays to set up are: Ground Water Flow Model, EnviroScape Model, Streamulator Model, and Rain Simulator. Partners and sponsors can give financial and/or in-kind services, including food and refreshments. Some suggested sources for hands-on activities could include: Project WET; Healthy Water, Healthy People; Project WILD Aquatic; Project WILD; Wonders of Wetlands; and other resources. The more interactive the displays and activities are, the better!

News Releases

After the event, be sure you send articles with pictures to the local papers and newsletters. Make sure you include information about water, watersheds, soil, and soil erosion so the reader can learn more about it. This will get people thinking and hopefully wanting to attend upcoming events sponsored by your organization. Remember to follow up with thank you notes to those involved so they will return another time. And lastly, enjoy the festival.

Websites

The Groundwater Foundation: www.groundwater.org

Project WET: www.projectwet.org

United States Environmental Protection Agency: www.epa.gov

United States Geological Survey: www.usgs.gov