

GUIDE TO ENVIRONMENTAL VOLUNTEERISM



INTRODUCTION

At Upstream we believe in taking action every day to care for our place. By getting involved, you're taking one step closer towards a cleaner, healthier Earth, and a more beautiful and vibrant Minnesota. Furthermore, you'll inspire others to join you in doing the same!

We hope you'll leverage this guide to both create large-scale, impactful volunteer opportunities, but also consider day-to-day ways that you can live to make changes big and small to positively impact our natural community.



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THIS RESOURCE HAS BEEN PRODUCED IN COLLABORATION WITH:



STATEWIDE RESOURCES AND PARTNERS

The following list contains hyperlinks to the websites of numerous environmental partners across the state of Minnesota. Learn more and explore the existing year-round opportunities to partner and take action wherever you are!

[Agassiz Audubon Society](#)

A chapter of the National Audubon Society, based in Warren, MN

[Audubon Chapter of Minneapolis](#)

Representing the National Audubon Society in Greater Minneapolis and Hennepin County

[Environmental Initiative](#)

Powerful Partnerships, Effective Solutions

[Fresh Energy](#)

Practical policy. Brighter future.

[Fresh Water Society](#)

Translates Science into Policy and Action to Preserve Freshwater Resources

[Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness](#)

Protecting, preserving, and restoring the wilderness character of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and the Quetico-Superior Ecosystem

[Friends of the Minnesota Valley](#)

Working to protect and enhance the natural resources of the Minnesota River Watershed

[Friends of the Mississippi River](#)

Working to protect the Mississippi River and its watershed in the Twin Cities area

[Great River Greening](#)

Improving the region's natural resources



**“All we have to
do is wake up
and change.”**

-Greta Thunberg





**“To leave the
world better
than you found
it, sometimes
you have to pick
up other
people’s trash.”**

–Bill Nye



Lake Pepin Legacy Alliance

Advocates for upstream sediment reduction, champions local sediment management projects, and investigates emerging threats to water quality, habitat, and accessibility in Lake Pepin.

Land Stewardship Project

Fostering an ethic of stewardship for farmland, promoting sustainable agriculture and developing sustainable communities

Minnesota Association for Environmental Education

Creating an environmentally literate citizenry.

Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy

Protecting our water, air, land and people

Minnesota Land Trust

Protecting natural and scenic land right here in Minnesota

Minnesota Mycological Society

A Society for the Study of Mushrooms and Other Fungi

Minnesota Native Plant Society

Dedicated to the conservation and appreciation of Minnesota’s native plants and plant communities

Minnesota Naturalists' Association

Advancing natural and cultural resource interpretation for the purpose of fostering wise stewardship of all resources.

Mississippi Park Connection

The nonprofit partner of Mississippi National River and Recreation Area

National Eagle Center

America's Eagle Destination

Nature Conservancy

Protecting Our Lands and Waters

Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness
A region-based wilderness advocacy group

Parks and Trails Council of Minnesota
Acquiring, protecting, and enhancing critical land
for the public's use and benefit

Saint Paul Audubon
Building a community that values and protects
birds and the natural environment

Save the Boundary Waters
Leading the effort to ensure permanent protection
for the Boundary Waters Wilderness from proposed
sulfide-ore copper mining.

Sierra Club - Northstar Chapter
The leading grassroots voice to preserve and
protect Minnesota's environment

Tree Trust
Transforming Lives and Landscapes

Voyageurs Conservancy
The official nonprofit partner of Minnesota's
Voyageurs National Park.

Wilderness Inquiry
Committed to making the outdoors accessible
to all.

Women's Environmental Institute
A place to renew, learn, and organize for
environmental, food, and farm justice.

Zumbro Valley Audubon
A chapter of the National Audubon Society serving
Olmsted and surrounding counties in Southeastern
Minnesota



**“The greatest
threat to our
planet is the
belief that
someone else will
save it.”**

–Robert Swan



6 STEPS FOR ORGANIZING A SERVICE PROJECT



Step 1: Find a need in your community

When deciding on a service project to complete, it's important that you look to your community and consider what needs there are in your area. You can contact nonprofit organizations in your area or visit their website. The list of statewide environmental organizations is a great start! Many nonprofits have a list of project needs and welcome groups of volunteers. Additionally, sites like [HandsOn Twin Cities](#) or [VolunteerMatch](#) also provide a list of volunteer opportunities within your local area.

Step 2: See what you can do to help

Once you have chosen the direction of your service project, it's time to decide on the actionable items you can do to make a difference. If your group will be volunteering with a nonprofit, it's important to talk with the volunteer coordinator to learn about special project needs and let them guide the project. Oftentimes, nonprofits have additional projects and needs that are not listed on their website. See page 6 of this guide for tips and sample messaging for nonprofit outreach.

Step 3: Organize a plan of action

Dive into the details, including: size of group (if applicable), date, time, necessary supplies, appropriate attire, inquire if waivers will need to be signed, physical requirements, if there are minimum age requirements, safety protocols, etc. Communicate these details with any other team members joining to set the group up for success. If possible, you'll want to have a project leader on hand who can help give direction on the day of the project.



6 STEPS FOR ORGANIZING A SERVICE PROJECT



Step 4: Recruit volunteers

Making sure you have enough hands to help is important. Recruitment starts with casting a clear vision. You want to create a clear sense of purpose and let volunteers envision the impact that their efforts will make. Once you've cast vision and helped an audience connect with a cause, you're ready to have them take action!

Create a sign up and invite your audience to participate. Be sure to communicate clear instructions about the project to your volunteers. You will also want to ensure the opportunities make it easy for them to participate. A project that is too large or time consuming can scare away a number of volunteers. It's important to communicate project logistics upfront.

Step 5: Implement the plan

Once you have set up your sign ups and begun to recruit help from your group, make sure that you've collected all the information that you need prior to serving. Get any details needed from your group, even if it's as simple as their t-shirt size!

Send custom and detailed reminders out to participants before your project takes place to make sure everyone is on the same page and ready to serve! This will make the project day less stressful and should lessen the likelihood of a volunteer forgetting something.

Step 6: Follow up

Once your service event has concluded, there is still work to be done. It's vital that you follow up with the volunteers who served alongside you and thank them for the time and energy they devoted to your service efforts.

Another option to keep in mind after your service project is to track volunteer hours with a custom report if you think your service may become an ongoing event. This is also a great way to see who is putting in the time and effort in your group and can allow you to give them an extra shout-out for their outstanding assistance!

TIPS FOR NONPROFIT OUTREACH

If you are interested in an organization but don't see any current volunteer opportunities listed, here's how you can get started.

IDENTIFYING A CONTACT

If you don't have a contact at the organization already, reach out to either the general number or email address listed on the website. Check to see if they have a contact for volunteer inquiries or check the staff page to see if there's a designated volunteer manager with contact information or a contact form.



SAMPLE MESSAGE

Hello,

I'm reaching out to learn more about the work you do and how I/we might support your volunteer needs.

[Share a bit about who you are or who your group or team is comprised of and why you're interested in the organization. Share any potential timeframe you're considering, potential number of volunteers, relevant skillsets, etc.]

I hope to speak to someone who can talk with me about your upcoming available opportunities, or other ways how we might help support your mission. If you could direct me to the appropriate person on your team who oversees volunteers I would greatly appreciate it.

I/We look forward to hearing from you,
[Name and Contact Information]



GROUP PROJECT EXAMPLES

- Plant trees. Consult your local environment authorities or environmental partners to determine the type and number of trees needed, as well as the location for planting.
- Clean up a beach, community space or roadside area. Consider adopting a storm drain to protect our Minnesota waterways!
- Host a community recycling drive where people donate gently used items or trash to support local charity organizations.
- Develop a demonstration garden or landscaping plot using native plant species to encourage restoration of the local natural habitat and water conservation.
- Partner with a local carpenter (or DIY tutorial) to build a rain barrel. Then, hold a training with community members to promote using barrels for watering and irrigation.
- Organize an alternative transportation incentive program in your community to encourage walking, biking, public transportation and carpooling.
- Work with local schools to develop school gardens and composting programs to improve the quality of school meals and reduce waste.



AT-HOME PROJECT EXAMPLES

- Find out the best ways to recycle, reuse, or dispose of items in your own home using this [Green Disposal Guide](#).
- [Consider easy ways to reduce your own food waste](#)
- You don't have to install solar panels to benefit from renewable energy! [Check out these opportunities to do more](#).
- [Reduce your energy consumption](#) and save money on your utility bills!
- [Create habitat for Minnesota pollinators](#). Pollinators are essential for the food we eat, the health of our environment, and the beauty of our world.
- Rain is a natural resource that you can use to your advantage, however, many of us simply pull out our umbrellas and ignore the fact that we can store it for future use. [Make yourself a rain barrel!](#)
- If you are downsizing, decluttering, or simply trying to do more with less, then you likely have stuff to donate. There are a lot of nonprofits and charities that could benefit from your items you are looking to rehome. Before heading out to a donation center, it's a good idea to call or check out an organization's website for donation details at [Reuse Minnesota](#).



ADDITIONAL LEARNING RESOURCES

Learning about the environment connects us to the world around us, teaching us about both natural and built environments. We hope you'll use these tools and resources to understand how your everyday decisions and actions affect the environment and feel empowered to incorporate what you learn into the volunteer action that you take.

Intersectional Environmentalism

We must acknowledge the ways in which injustices that happen to marginalized communities and the Earth are interconnected. We must bring injustices done to the most vulnerable communities, and the Earth, to the forefront of environmentalism and not minimizing or silencing social inequality. As we begin this journey, below are some resources for you to begin to cultivate that shared understanding. For your action, sponsor a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) or buy a CSA from a local BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) farmer or organization advocating for BIPOC growers.

- ARTICLE: [5 ways to Make the Outdoors More Inclusive](#)
- ARTICLE: [Why Every Environmentalist Should be Anti-Racist](#)
- BOOK: [Braiding Sweetgrass by Robin Wall Kimmerer](#)
- VIDEO: [Endocrine disruption, environmental justice, and the ivory tower - Tyrone Hayes](#)

Waste

We have the opportunity to become more sustainable consumers and be aware of our impact. View our resources to learn about the hierarchy of waste prevention, product purchasing awareness, proper disposal techniques, etc. Living more waste-free is not accessible and made for every community, especially for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) and low-income communities. Wherever you are at in your journey, every small step and action you can take matters. And we acknowledge that folks must do what fits best for their current circumstance.

- VIDEO: [Zero Waste Movement Isn't Inclusive](#)
- VIDEO: [Environmental Justice - Van Jones](#)
- PODCAST: [Reframing History: The Litter Myth - Throughline](#)
- VIDEO: [What really happens to the plastic you throw away?](#)
- BOOK: [Cradle to Cradle](#)

Agriculture

We must acknowledge the land and wisdom of our ancestors. Food is not only the foundation for our health – but also for the Earth. Did you know that 30% of our trash is food waste? And that what you choose to eat is one of the most impactful ways for you to reduce your carbon footprint? Through your everyday actions, you can take steps to reduce your food waste and carbon footprint and have agency within the food system.

- VIDEO: [Gather](#)
- PODCAST: [Northern Foraging - Sean Sherman and Mikkel-Lau Mikkelsen](#)
- ARTICLE: [Food Expiration Dates: What to Know](#)





Sustainability

Becoming a sustainable consumer is not just a moment, it's a journey. We hope you become inspired to advocate for policies for the protection of the people and the Earth at your local, state, and federal levels and take your actions further.

- VIDEO: [Climate Change is a Social Justice Issue - Adriana Laurent](#)
- PODCAST: [We Can Solve Climate Change with Paul Hawken - The Rich Roll Podcast](#)
- BOOK: [Drawdown by Paul Hawken](#)
- VIDEO: [Climate change will displace millions. Here's how we prepare - Colette Pichon Battle](#)



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