

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
**A NEW SEASON OF
CONSERVATION
LEADERS**

As we enter the dormant winter months, we think back to sunny days in the garden and reflect on new growth in our youth program.



Paul Austin
Executive Director

Conservation Crew is an extracurricular program for middle schoolers that develops leadership skills through designing and implementing conservation projects using a service-learning model. This school year, the program grew from its original 6 pilot schools to 35 schools statewide, 45% of which are Title 1 schools. This initial growth means more students will be empowered to tackle the conservation issues that matter to them, contributing to their schools and communities.

At Conservation Minnesota, we acknowledge the historic lack of diversity within the conservation sector and feel responsible for fostering the next generation of diverse, cross-sector conservation leaders. This generation will face some of the greatest challenges of climate change—Conservation Crew works to help equip them with the tools they need to dig in, find solutions, and create a more inclusive conservation community for our future.



This year's students have already started inspiring projects connected to the needs of their school and community. I look forward to the early spring day when all our schools come together to present their projects for one another and our panel of judges.

The work of Conservation Minnesota is guided by your values and priorities. We listen to Minnesotans and focus on solving the conservation problems that matter most to you.

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WINTER 2022-23 NEWSLETTER

GROWING INTO THIS SCHOOL YEAR

Conservation Crew is a student-led extracurricular program for middle schoolers that develops leadership skills through conservation projects in schools and communities. We're excited to share more about our program and its early successes.

Cultivating Lifelong Leadership Skills

The Conservation Crew program uses a service-learning model to allow students to take ownership of the project design and implementation, giving them leadership opportunities and building confidence. We help connect schools with conservation professionals so students can learn directly from leaders in conservation fields.



Returning Crew teacher Courtney Nagle from Mounds Park Academy has helped her Crew revamp their school's mostly forgotten garden courtyard. **"It has been fun to see some students who would not take on a leadership role in school become leaders in our group,"** says Nagle.

This year her students will share what they learned about pollinator plants from local master gardeners during the pilot year. Other Crews have worked with local park staff to understand the role of forests, county recycling staff to make recycling improvements at their school, and wetland ecologists to restore an on-campus pond.

left Learning about hardwood forests and removing invasive buckthorn at Bertrum County Park



Improving Conservation Access in Under-Resourced Communities

Title 1 schools, which have at least 40% enrollment from low-income families, often lack the resources for high-quality, out-of-school programs. We help bridge the resource gap by providing program advisors stipends and project funding. Our Title 1 schools receive twice the project budget.

Without financial support, at least a few of our schools likely wouldn't have enrolled. Crew teacher Shelbee Jaeger at Hiawatha Academies-Northrup told us, **"Our school doesn't currently offer many after-school activities, so this is an especially exciting opportunity."**

For at least one of her students, this was her first club experience. The student shared her nervousness but made new friends across multiple grade levels.

Teacher Lynell Senden told us that staff at Mankato's Prairie Winds Middle School were thrilled to have a program that came with funding. Senden also appreciates the additional opportunity to talk with parents of Crew students. In one instance, she learned that a student had just moved from Mississippi, and the mom appreciated that her child was getting involved.

right Using recycled tires for a pollinator container garden



Fostering a Deeper Connection to Nature

The Crew program is dedicated to building a love for our Great Outdoors and helping spark a lifelong appreciation and interest in conservation.

In the pilot year, several Crews developed green spaces at their schools and encouraged students outside the club to use the newly created or improved outdoor spaces. Cottage Grove Middle School students designed a garden to provide respite for students with autism. With input from classmates, they created a comforting and calming space that the whole school can use. At Mounds Park Academy, teachers across departments use the garden space as a classroom.

Learn more about Conservation Crew at: conservationminnesota.org/crew



cover & below Maintaining a campus garden

