

NEWS FROM THE CREW

CONSERVATION CREW SUMMER 2023

FROM THE TRAILHEAD

School's out, and summer is here, which means the 2022–2023 Conservation Crew program year has come to an end. Over 25 schools and 250 students participated in conservation projects that impacted their schools and communities. **Conservation Crew students from across the state gathered at Elm Creek Park Reserve in Maple Grove on May 6th for the annual Conservation Celebration** to recognize their accomplishments and share their projects with peers. The top projects received an achievement award and an additional \$500 grant to support future activities.

Prior to the Conservation Celebration, a panel of 4 judges, all Conservation Minnesota board members, reviewed projects based on creativity, impact, resourcefulness, execution, and presentation. They selected **Achieve Language Academy in St. Paul, Black Hawk Middle School in Eagan, Lake Middle School in Woodbury, and John Adams Middle School in Rochester** for their outstanding projects. “This year’s Conservation Crew winners highlight how creative and driven students can be when given the resources to succeed,” said Isabel Istephanous, Youth Program Manager for Conservation Minnesota. **“By awarding the work of young conservationists, we hope to inspire the next generation of climate leaders.”**

CREW VIEWS

2023 Conservation Crew Project Winners

- **Protecting Water Resources**

Achieve Language Academy in St. Paul focused on the effects of microplastics in our waterways. Using Beaver Lake as a case study for their project, students learned how to take water samples and measure plastic levels using filters to capture microplastics. Students also collected garbage around the shoreline to protect the lake’s wildlife and plants.

To showcase the impact of plastic used at the school, the students organized an all-school collection of plastic bottle caps. They collected 24,700 plastic caps and created sculptures of a sea turtle and jellyfish, which was displayed outside the school's main office.

Achieve Language Academy Crew members hope their work will inspire community members to take better care of water resources and are excited to use the prize money to continue their work at Beaver Lake.

- **Recycling for the Earth**

Students from **Black Hawk Middle School in Eagan** focused on creating a strong recycling program. To help reduce waste, they implemented several new programs, including improving recycling bin signage, creating a plastic bag collection site, and hosting a clothing and shoe donation drive.

Black Hawk Middle School Crew used Earth Month to educate the student body on the importance of recycling with weekly school announcements and educational videos on Dakota County's school recycling program. They organized a conservation scavenger hunt using an interactive smartphone option to engage fellow students.

- **Protecting Green Spaces**

Students from **Lake Middle School in Woodbury** spent this year revitalizing their school's forest. The Crew started by removing invasive buckthorn and cleaning up the garbage on the forest floor. Students also increased native species for pollinators on school grounds and learned how to grow hydroponics.

The Crew plans to do more trash clean-ups, plant additional native species, remove more invasive buckthorn, and increase accessibility in the school forest through wheelchair accessible paths next year.

- **Cycling for Change**

Crew students at **John Adams Middle School in Rochester** noticed many of their classmates had broken bicycles and decided they would provide peers with tools and knowledge to increase the number of bicycle commuters. With help from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and Olmsted County Parks & Recreation, students created a school and community Fixit station with an air pump.

By connecting with local experts, students learned what bike resources they needed and how to pick a central location that would be visible for the whole community to use.

They quickly saw a record number of students using the Fixit station and caring for their bicycles.

TEACHER SPOTLIGHT

“Helping our homeroom learning community find their voice in regard to stewardship of the school environment has been a rewarding experience. Conservation Crew is a great vehicle for authentic, deeper learning.”

—Donna Brunskill, John Adams Middle School Crew Teacher

GROWING THE FUTURE

At Conservation Minnesota, we are proud of all the work Conservation Crew students accomplished this year and can't wait to see what the future holds. We are dedicated to continuing this work and investing in programs that equip leaders of today and tomorrow.

We hope to welcome new schools in the 2023–2024 school year and reach 50 schools statewide. If you are interested in being a part of this growing Conservation Crew program, check out our website and to sign up: conservationminnesota.org/crew

The deadline to apply is September 4th, but we encourage you to apply early as spots will fill quickly.

CONSERVATION CREW

CONSERVATION MINNESOTA