

# Service-learning Builds Lifelong Conservation Leaders

## ■ Key Points

Service-learning is more than just providing a service. It is an educational approach that includes hands-on projects, key knowledge and reflection on lifelong skills by:

- Connecting youth to nature, conservation and community through structured, hands-on projects that benefit communities
- Building agency, skills and lifelong stewardship through experiential learning
- Strengthening leadership skills, civic engagement and pathways to green careers

## ■ What is the Issue?

Canada faces an urgent need to cultivate the next generation of conservation leaders — youth who are equipped with ecological knowledge along with the confidence and agency to act. Service-learning experiences, such as those provided by the [Canadian Conservation Corps \(CCC\)](#) and [WILD Outside](#), immerse participants in projects that benefit both ecosystems and communities while developing transferable skills.

Learning is most powerful when it includes:

1. Knowledge about an issue
2. Action taken on the issue in a meaningful way
3. Reflection about how the knowledge and action can be incorporated into one's daily life

Service-learning activates all three stages — making it a highly effective model for conservation education.

## ■ Trends and Challenges

Service-learning is gaining recognition as a powerful educational approach that connects youth directly to conservation and community impact. Across Canada, [programs](#) that combine hands-on action with structured reflection have shown that young people not only develop ecological knowledge but also long-term civic commitment. Participants report stronger leadership, collaboration and problem-solving skills — attributes that align with the growing demand for green careers.

**Nationally, there is an increasing emphasis on experiential and land-based education.**

Governments, schools and non-government organizations (NGOs) are beginning to integrate service-learning into their strategies, but the approach remains unevenly available and underfunded. Youth from underserved communities in particular, often face barriers to accessing experiential and land-based education despite being the most likely to benefit. Scaling service-learning requires sustained investment, cross-sector partnerships, and recognition of its role in shaping both conservation outcomes and Canada's future workforce.

## ■ Why is this Important?

[A recent evaluation of CCC and WILD Outside](#) found that:

- **88 per cent** of participants reported increased confidence to take conservation action
- **84 per cent** developed leadership skills through community engagement
- **80 per cent** indicated they were more likely to pursue a career in conservation

Service-learning helps bridge the gap between technical knowledge and the soft skills, like communication, teamwork and public engagement, essential for today's conservation workforce.

## ■ Recommendations

1. Integrate service-learning into environmental education funding programs at provincial and federal levels (e.g., [Canada Service Corps](#), ECCC education streams)
2. Recognize conservation service-learning as a formal career and educational pathway
3. Incentivize cross-sector partnerships between schools, NGOs, and Indigenous communities to scale experiential, land-based learning
4. Support longitudinal tracking of service-learning participants to assess impacts over time



## ■ CWF'S Role

The Canadian Wildlife Federation (CWF) is a national leader in advancing service-learning as a cornerstone of conservation education. Through flagship programs like the [Canadian Conservation Corps \(CCC\)](#) and [WILD Outside](#), CWF has demonstrated how structured service experiences can transform young people's relationship with nature, build transferable skills and strengthen conservation leadership across Canada.

**CWF provides youth with opportunities to engage in hands-on projects that restore habitats, conserve species and support community resilience.** These programs embed reflection, mentorship and leadership development, ensuring that participants not only gain ecological knowledge but also the confidence and agency to act.

Beyond direct programming, **CWF advocates for service learning** as a formal pathway to green careers and works with governments, schools and community partners to expand opportunities nationwide. By aligning its initiatives with national education and workforce priorities, and by supporting Indigenous- and community-led approaches, **CWF is helping to scale service-learning as a powerful driver of conservation and civic engagement.**

## ■ Sources For More Information

- [From Strategy to Impact: How Young People Create Social and Environmental Change Through Youth Service Programs \(2025\)](#)
- [Kolb, D. A. \(1984\). Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development](#)
- [Stanford analysis reveals wide array of benefits from environmental education \(2022\)](#)
- [OECD \(2023\). Agency in the Anthropocene](#)
- [Government of Canada: Canada Service Corps](#)

## ■ Contact

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