

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Youth Recruitment and Retention

**REPORT OF THE YOUTH RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION COMMITTEE
of the NATURAL RESOURCES ADVISORY BOARD to the
ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES and
CONSERVATION CONGRESS**

October 19, 2009

The Youth Recruitment and Retention Subcommittee of the Natural Resources Advisory Board (NRAB) held public meetings to discuss how to improve youth participation in Department of Natural Resources (DNR) activities to foster the next generation of conservationists in Illinois, and develop a report to be heard by the Conservation Congress. This issue was chosen by NRAB because trends in youth outdoor activities have declined and DNR needs to address the declining constituent dilemma. Past generations were more connected with the outdoor world. Today, the population of the U.S. has shifted to more metropolitan areas where entertainment is found primarily in screen media. This affects DNR's support base because the Agency depends on license revenues for traditional outdoor activities. Throughout the state, many non-governmental organizations are working to address the diminishing numbers of young conservationists and environmental advocates. Partnerships are being forged to offer numerous education, recreation, and conservation activities for youth and families. Despite these efforts, the number of participants continues to decline. Barriers are identified as lack of interest, competition with other activities and responsibilities, misunderstanding of the outdoors and nature, lack of access and opportunities, and perceived lack of skills necessary to participate in outdoor activities. To address these barriers and bring more youth into the conservation field, the Youth Recruitment and Retention Subcommittee makes the following four recommendations.

Recommendations

- Educate, in schools and through informal programs, youth on conservation issues and natural resources.
- Market, promote, and advertise existing programs and activities.
- Develop, with non-government partners, a mentoring program that will pass on the hunting and outdoor traditions.
- Improve access to land, people, and resources that offer recreational and educational opportunities for youth.