

# ESSAY EIGHT

BY DeAnna Pope

## Don't Forget Us

**W**hen I was 11, I witnessed the transformation of Boy Scout Lake into a cleaner and healthier ecosystem by our local land trust, Great Rivers Land Trust (GRLT), in Alton, Illinois. My brother is an Eagle Scout, and his troop was involved in the project. GRLT's main goals with the lake were sediment control, community education about land conservation and natural corridor protection. The lake itself was first created by the Boy Scouts to work on getting their shallow-water canoeing and swimming badges, but after a few years of runoff from nearby development, the lake began to fill up. GRLT re-dug the lake, and a portion was restored as an enhanced wetland. The land on which the camp stands is now protected by a conservation easement.

I saw how grateful the local residents were for what Great Rivers Land Trust did for the lake. I wanted to know more about what land trusts do, so that's when I started to learn about land conservation. The more I learned, the more I wanted to spread the message.

About this time, I also became passionate about how easily we all can repair and maintain habitats in our own backyards. I took a good look around me. I realized that where I live is a special place, with lots of meaning for me. The breathtaking limestone bluff on which we live, overlooking the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers, is an inspiration to me. I am blessed to see it every day. I came to understand that people all around the country feel that way about special places in their lives, and that land trusts play a vital role in helping to protect those places.

Since I became aware of land conservation, I have wanted my friends and family to be formally involved, and as a teenager myself, my target audience is currently my own age group. In 2010, I founded the Great Rivers Land Trust Junior Board to:

"We are the future leaders, ambassadors and stewards of this planet."

1. Motivate more passionate and environmentally conscious high school kids to learn about land trusts and why we need to save land for the future.
2. Inspire teenagers to teach their own families and friends about the importance of land conservation. No one can be louder and more passionate than teenagers!
3. Encourage the local youth to get OUTSIDE! Other teenagers need to experience this great Riverbend area—geologically, ecologically, historically. We teens need to move off the couch, get off the computer, turn off the TV and meet new friends with similar interests.
4. Create social media outlets (Facebook and YouTube) to enable teenagers to share our message of saving land and to get them involved with our land trust events, raising the noise level about saving our beautiful area.

To get started, I asked what I call the "big board" (the GRLT board of directors) at one of their monthly meetings to allow me to tell them about my idea of engaging our area youth. They were sincerely interested, and I felt welcomed as they first listened and then encouraged me to pull some details together on how a junior board might work.

The junior board project was so successful that the land trust and I decided to submit a presentation proposal for Rally 2011. My mother and I traveled to Milwaukee to Rally, and I enjoyed describing how the junior board came together to an audience that was eager to learn how to engage young people in land trust work.

DeAnna Pope



JULIE HARPER

**"The more I learned [about land conservation], the more I wanted to spread the message."**

Here are a few ideas from that session:

- Schedule your orientation meeting for high school students one week before school starts, as students are returning from vacations.
- Create a take-home packet of information about "What Is a Land Trust?" to share with family and friends.
- Ask the junior board to review the land trust's website and Facebook pages and suggest how to make them more succinct, visually interesting and accessible.
- Post a picture and short bio on each student on your land trust's website under "Current Junior Board Members." (This helps colleges verify participation.)
- Try offering one big annual event to attract young people as opposed to lots of smaller events. We found success with one theme, one goal and one event, with months of advertising leading up to it.

I strongly believe that my generation—every generation—makes up an army of young environmentalists, complete with members who have creative skills as unique as each person. Teenagers today understand modern technology and how to communicate to an increasingly global world. Now, more than at any other time, the environmental movement is not only relevant and an increasingly urgent cause, but it is also in vogue,

and the noise level is increasing. I don't know anyone else better at cranking up the volume than teenagers. Land trusts need to tap into this energetic resource that's durable and definitely sustainable—us!

To ensure support, relevance and continuance of your organization, engage young people. I feel that a land trust's credibility increases when it engages the community, and there is no better way to engage the community than through its youth. If you're a parent, think about how persistent your child is when he or she has a good idea to share with you.

As teenagers, we are extremely passionate. I want to encourage land trusts and other environmental organizations to enlist high school students to your ranks. Create a junior board, ambassadors club or even a teenage speakers bureau to get young people excited and "talking green" at community or civic events. We want you to teach us, train us and take us into your groups, and we want to watch and learn from you. In return, we can teach you about social media and new communication avenues.

Don't forget about us kids: we are the future of land trusts and the conservation movement, and we are the future leaders, ambassadors and stewards of this planet. 🍀

**DEANNA POPE** PRESENTED HER JUNIOR BOARD PROJECT AT RALLY 2011 IN MILWAUKEE AND WILL PRESENT AGAIN AT RALLY 2012 IN SALT LAKE CITY. SHE CURRENTLY ATTENDS JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY IN BALTIMORE AND CONTINUES TO SPREAD THE CONSERVATION MESSAGE TO HER PEERS.



LEWIS & CLARK COUNCIL

**Boy Scouts enjoying the lake restored by Great Rivers Land Trust**