

Eco Advocate

It's called Mother Earth or Mother Nature because every living thing depends on nature to survive. What are your priorities when it comes to valuing and protecting nature?

As an eco-advocate, you'll learn how environmentalists work on issues from helping endangered species to the destruction of rain forests. Then you'll discover a nature issue important to you, find solutions, and make a difference.

Steps:

1. Learn what eco advocates do.
2. Find an issue you're passionate about.
3. Come up with a solution.
4. Advocate for your issue.
5. Teach others how to advocate for your cause.

Purpose:

When I've earned this badge, I'll have learned how to advocate for environmental issues concerning nature.

Prepare Ahead: Take the LNT Awareness Course

Before you begin this badge, go to the Leave No Trace [website](#) and take the 30- to 60-minute awareness course that includes questions about Leave No Trace practices and techniques. (Note: The course doesn't work on a mobile device.) Learn about the Leave No Trace history and mission and find out about visitor-created impacts in recreational areas. You can print a certificate when you complete the course.

Here is a great [video](#) to sum up LNT.

Step 1: Learn what eco advocates do.

There are many ways you can advocate for nature. You can be part of an organized effort or do something in your daily life. You can take photographs, volunteer, do research, impact laws, fundraise, or craft a career around protecting the environment. Find out what environmental advocates do and how you can fit in.

Choices – do one:

Research a local environmental advocacy group to learn what they do. Find out about their mission, their priority issues, and the tips and techniques they use for successful advocacy. Here is a great [list](#) of Indiana organizations that advocate for the environment.

OR

Search for someone on your city council or a city employee with an environmental position or cause. Look on websites for your local city council members and committees

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and find out who is involved in environmental issues. Email or call the councilperson to set up a meeting for you (and your troop, if desired) to find out how they use advocacy and their influence to tackle local environmental issues.

Issue Alert: Tossing “Natural” Items

Many people believe that it’s ok to throw “natural” food items, like apple cores or banana peels, outdoors. In fact, some insist it will actually help wildlife. Leave No Trace teaches that feeding wildlife damages their health, alters their natural behavior, and exposes them to predators. Leaving behind natural food items or feeding squirrels trail mix out of your hand are examples of what *not to do* to keep nature safe. What can you do with your food instead of throwing it out? [Watch](#) how you can use decomposing food to create compost!

Step 2: Find an issue you’re passionate about

Everything in nature is important and worth protecting. Is there a local issue that concerns you most? Start by researching environmental issues by scrolling through “Environmental Topics” on the Environmental Protection Agency website to read about issues from acid rain to ocean dumping. You can also search Wikipedia’s “Index of Conservation Articles” to find what resonates most with you and your community.

Analyze This

When you’re passionate about a cause, it’s easy to believe all the information that supports it. But sometimes “facts” are misleading or downright false. That’s why it’s important to investigate your sources carefully before spreading information. Are your sources trustworthy and reliable? Is there scientific data to support the facts? Log on to a trusted fact-checking [website](#) to verify statements and assertions.

Choices – do one:

Read news about the environment. This can be environmental newsletters, blogs, and websites. Also check local news websites for environmental issues in your area. Choose one issue you want to advocate for.

OR

Host a community virtual forum with family and friends or simply reach out to people on social media. Find out about local environmental concerns and learn what they care about and why. Focus on one environmental issue you’re passionate about and want to advocate for. Talk to participants about solutions and ask how they would like to be involved.

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Issue Alert: National Parks & Problems

Utah's Zion National Park recently considered requiring reservations to its already overcrowded park. If instituted, this would be a first for a national park, but others might follow suit: including Yellowstone, Yosemite, and Grand Canyon. Tight staff and budgets are some reasons parks may struggle to conserve nature. Besides overcrowding, parks have challenges when visitors scratch names on monuments and boulders, fly drones to take photographs, make new paths off established trails, and even wash laundry in water sources (really!). What consequences can you name that tourism has on the environment? Read this [article](#) about the negative impacts tourism has and think about how you can make less impact on your vacations.

Step 3: Come up with a solution

You targeted a nature issue that concerns you and did the research. Now come up with a possible solution. You might have one in mind or you might need to brainstorm it further. Keep these questions in mind: How will your solution help? Is it the most practical and realistic idea? Will your solution provide a lasting impact?

Choices – do one:

With a focus on your issue, talk to an expert. Talk to someone—a professor, a scientist, an environmental advocate—who can help you find out about or brainstorm solutions for your issue. You could email them, plan a virtual meeting, or call a local environmental organization to speak with someone who could help. Choose one to implement.

OR

Find an environmental group or activists working on solutions to your issue. Learn about the impact each solution is making and choose one to focus on.

OR

Organize a team to do research. This might be your troop or a group from school. Work together to research and come up with one solution that will impact your issue.

Solutions Found

These three legendary eco heroes found solutions to environmental problems (click on their names to learn more):

- Use of pesticides
- Solution: [Rachel Carson](#) wrote *Silent Spring* to reveal the devastating effects pesticide usage has on the environment. Her work resulted in policy changes for pesticide use. Carson is credited with laying the groundwork for the Environmental Protection Agency.

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- Conservation for wildcats
 - Solution: Biologist and conservationist [Shivani Bhalla](#) works to protect lions and other large carnivores in Kenya by showing people in local communities how to coexist with these animals and help preserve their habitats. She partners with local people and encourages them to lead the charge.
- Degradation of public land and forests
 - Solution: Professor [Wangari Maathai](#) introduced the idea of community-based tree planting in Africa that would reduce poverty and conserve environments in areas of need. She won a Nobel Peace Prize in 2004.

Step 4: Advocate for your issue

When you advocate for nature, it can include volunteering with local environmental organizations, changing policy on a nature issue, gathering petition signatures, writing blogs, participating in awareness campaigns, and so much more. You can organize environmental events, recruit people to join an advocacy group, and spread the word about finding solutions. All you need is commitment, perseverance, and a passion to seek justice for nature.

Take a look at the “Advocacy Skills” flyer to get some great advice on being an advocate!

Choices – do one:

Create and implement a campaign. Communicate to the public about your issue by using your choice of media—music, art, or photography—to enhance your campaign.

OR

Volunteer with an existing environmental group. Find a group that is working on your issue; help them find solutions and advocate at the state or regional level. Virtual volunteering is taking off right now, especially regarding the planet! Ask the group if there is anything you can do virtually to help. Take a look at what [Keep Indy Beautiful \(KIB\)](#) did to help clean up trash around the Indianapolis area.

OR

Organize a virtual event to advocate. Use your skills to organize an event that keeps people safely at their homes but brings them together metaphorically to share awareness or help come up with solutions for your cause. Evaluate your event and determine next steps in your advocacy efforts.

Issue Alert: Outdoor music festivals

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Being in a natural, outdoor setting is a cool way to watch music, but when thousands of people gather for an outdoor music festival, it leaves an enormous carbon footprint. Concert organizers have become “greener” over the years by encouraging recycling, carpooling, and offering solar energy power for established campsites. Some eco-minded festivals sell eco-friendly merchandise, compost or donate leftover food, and build performance stages from sustainable materials. What are some ways you can think of to make music festivals zero waste? Here is a [list](#) of the top ten eco-friendly festivals. How can even those become more environmentally friendly?

Step 5: Teach others how to advocate for your cause

Success with advocacy often depends on the people you can rally to help support your cause. Whether you are recruiting one or many, the same skills apply: be passionate about what you’re doing, share your issue and solutions articulately, and have solid goals for the future. By inspiring others to your cause, you ensure that your work will continue to make a difference.

Choices – do one:

Put together resources about your cause. Compile your resource materials from your research so others can learn how to impact your cause. You might create a handout, a social media page, or blog. Include helpful information about your cause, such as statistics, websites, reading lists, studies, environmental organizations, and more. Encourage others to contact you if they find new information about your cause.

OR

Organize a group to continue working on your cause. Make sure to explain why you chose this cause and how you’ve made a difference so far. If you can, write a short mission statement about the issue and your plan for the future.

OR

Empower a group of children or a younger troop. Encourage young activists by having them develop games, songs, or activities that support your issue.

To help you plan, use the “Purpose/Mission/Goal/Impact Worksheet.”

Share your campaign with Girl Scouts by sending Lexy, aphilley@girlscoutsindiana.org, the progress you’ve made on your cause!

Eco Advocacy Careers to Explore

If you’re passionate about environmental advocacy, explore a major in Environmental Studies or Environmental Science. Depending on your goals, you might seek a degree in environmental law or political science with a focus on environmental politics and policy. Some eco advocacy careers to explore:

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- Campaign and Grassroots Manager
- Digital Content Specialist
- Environmental Educator
- Environmental Engineer
- Environmental Lawyer
- Environmental Lobbyist
- Environmental Planner
- Environmental Writer
- Fundraiser
- Government Regulator
- Marketing and
- Communications Director
- Nonprofit Director
- Park Ranger or Naturalist
- Photographer and Videographer
- Policy Analyst
- Policy and Communications Director
- Sustainable Design Specialist
- Wildlife Rehabilitator

Now that I've earned this badge, I can give service by:

- Teaching younger girls about an environmental issue and how to advocate for something they believe in
- Creating or being involved in an effort for my local community park or school that helps protect nature
- Researching colleges, courses, and careers in the environment and sharing the information with others who are interested in environmental advocacy