

## YOUTH LEADERSHIP

Cultivating youth leadership is another key objective of the Nature Guardians Program. We aim to help young people discover their potential as leaders and nature advocates through conservation volunteering. Young participants work closely with Ontario Nature staff, adult leaders within the Nature Network and other experts who serve as advisors, facilitators and mentors, inspiring passion for and dedication to the conservation of nature. Through the Youth Advisory Council, participants will also have an opportunity to play a defining role in the planning, delivery and ongoing evaluation of the program.



For additional information about the Nature Guardians Program please visit:  
[www.ontarionature.org/natureguardians](http://www.ontarionature.org/natureguardians)

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Cover photo: Deirdre Dimitroff: St. Lawrence River



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Ontario Nature protects wild species and wild spaces through conservation, education and public engagement. Ontario Nature is a charitable organization representing more than 30,000 members and supporters and over 140 member groups across Ontario.

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# THE NATURE GUARDIANS PROGRAM



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[www.ontarionature.org/natureguardians](http://www.ontarionature.org/natureguardians)



## THE NATURE GUARDIANS PROGRAM

Ontario Nature's Nature Guardians Program offers an environmental education opportunity for young people through hands-on activities that focus on nature appreciation and the conservation of wildlife and habitat. Through this program, children and teens get to meet, share ideas and draw from each other's experiences and expertise. An ethic of conservation is cultivated among the next generation of environmentalists through outings and events designed for children and youth of diverse backgrounds aged 5 – 18.



## HEALTHY CONNECTIONS TO NATURE

The Nature Guardians Program responds to an urgent need in society to reconnect children with the natural world. Research has shown that spending time in nature is critical for healthy emotional, physical, mental and social development. The lack of such outdoor experience – a reality for many children – has been linked to childhood obesity, decreased attention spans and fewer coping mechanisms for stress. By providing children and teens with opportunities to explore, discover and protect wild species and spaces, our program offers healthy alternatives to sedentary, indoor activity.



## A LIFE-LONG APPRECIATION FOR NATURE

The Nature Guardians Program supports efforts to introduce young people to wildlife and natural spaces and nurture a culture of conservation. Research indicates that those who connect with nature as children are more likely to become its guardians as adults. Through opportunities for meaningful participation in conservation efforts, the program aims to inspire a life-long commitment to the protection of the natural world and to encourage tomorrow's leaders in the conservation field.



Photo: Theodore Smith

## NETWORKING AND SUPPORT

Ontario Nature has over 140 grassroots member groups across Ontario who make up the Nature Network. Many of these Nature Network groups offer popular, long-standing programs for young people. The Nature Guardians Program builds on the strength of the Nature Network. Through information exchange and assistance with logistics and coordination, the program supports networking opportunities and joint conservation volunteering events, including an annual Youth Summit. The activities offered bring member groups closer together so that they can share experiences and insights on how to bring young people from urban and rural backgrounds into closer contact with the natural world.

## DIVERSITY

The Nature Guardians Program engages young people from diverse ethno-cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. The many benefits of outdoor nature experience should be available to all. To this end, Ontario Nature is getting the word out to organizations serving new Canadians, First Nations communities and youth, and seeking partnerships where there is common interest. At the same time, Ontario Nature is working to address cultural or financial barriers that might inhibit participation in the program.

