

2008 Massachusetts Envirothon Current Issue Problem

Outdoor Recreation and the Environment

Background

By the time you read this, you should have spent some significant time exploring the outdoors in your community, trying out new forms of outdoor recreation, learning about how people in your community use the outdoors for fun, and understanding the impact of these activities on the environment. By now you should have several ideas about what might be done both to encourage outdoor recreation and to protect the environment in your community.

Now it is time to draw on this experience to make a proposal to your community that will promote environmentally sound outdoor recreation. To prepare, you will need to do some investigation beyond the outdoor explorations you have done so far. In particular, we recommend the following steps:

- Review the strategies for community investigation on page 4 of *Questions and Resources for Team Preparation* at <http://www.maenvirothon.org/2008%20Envirothon%20Current%20Issue.doc>
- Take a look at your town's Open Space and Recreation Plan (for background, see <http://www.mass.gov/envir/dcs/openspace/default.htm>, then contact your town offices to see the plan)
- Talk to conservation and recreation advocates in your community, both individuals and organizations
- Talk to staff at local state parks and consider what role parks can play in an outdoor recreation in your community

If you have questions about your research or your presentation, contact Will Snyder (wsnyder@umext.umass.edu or 413/545-3876).

The Problem

Outdoor recreation can be good for people and good for the environment. However, studies show that we are spending less everyday time outdoors than we used to. And when we do spend time outdoors, our activities often damage natural resources and ecological systems. Sometimes our activities conflict with other benefits from this green infrastructure. And sometimes we find ourselves in conflict with others trying to use the same resource for outdoor recreation.

You have done some first hand investigation of outdoor recreation issues in your community. You have experienced the value of outdoor recreation, and you have also encountered some of the problems and needs for outdoor recreation in your community.

Now you have been asked by your municipal government to make a report and recommendations based on your investigations.

Your presentation is a two part opportunity. First, this presentation is a chance to introduce a wider group of citizens (including young citizens) to the outdoor recreational resources that are available to them, and to the responsibilities that accompany recreational use of the environment. Second, this presentation is an opportunity to provide your community with your judgment about where their priorities should be in supporting outdoor recreation.

You know that budgets are very tight, so your recommendation will be most successful if it is specific and compelling. You should aim for a wide audience, and to encourage the whole community to think together about the future of recreation in your area. You should also make your pitch in a way that makes connections with efforts already underway -- for example, your town's Open Space and Recreation Plan and activities in nearby state parks and other state-owned lands. Finally, you should explain how you have considered future changes in energy use and changing climate in this proposal.

Some Tips for Your Presentation

You will be presenting in a tent, outdoors. The day of the Envirothon is often surprisingly windy and cold. Dress accordingly!

Practice your presentation! Practice makes it easier for you to be poised and at ease in your presentation, including being able to make good eye contact and speak naturally with the judges.

You will present to a panel of five to eight judges. Their job is to listen, ask good questions, score your presentation, and give you feedback on your research, your proposal, and your presentation. You will have 15 minutes for your presentation, followed by a 10 minute question period. Your coach and team alternate will also be able to observe the presentation.

In Your Presentation, You Should:

Show the judges how you know what you know, and how you came to your conclusions. Tell them about where you visited, who you talked to, what new activities you tried. Give your audience a vivid picture of outdoor recreation in your community.

Use visual aids, especially maps, to introduce the judges to your community and to your proposal. Mount your visual aids on sturdy boards in case of wind.

Provide an overview of the outdoor recreation resources and issues in your area

- Describe the outdoor landscape of your community. Tell the story of your own explorations of the local outdoors.
- Who uses what places for what kinds of recreation in your area?
- Report on your conversations and interviews with people in your community. What are the opportunities they see? What are the problems? Where are there differences of opinion?

Focus on a specific outdoor recreation issue that you believe should have a high priority

- Where is the issue? Is it tied to a specific place?
- Who is involved? Who is affected? What are the various opinions?
- What are the possible solutions that people have proposed?
- What are the energy considerations in this issue? Does the issue have anything to do with climate change?
- Why should this issue be a high priority? What are the downsides if the issue is not addressed?
- What information is still needed, and how could you get it?

Present your proposal for next steps to address the issue

- Who should be involved?
- Is there a time urgency?
- What specific steps need to happen?
- What will it cost? What are the benefits that will make the cost worthwhile?

Additional activities that can help you prepare for your presentation:

Your Envirothon Story: Every Mass Envirothon team is invited to create a one page summary of your Envirothon year to be shared with other teams. Putting this together helps you see what you have learned and what's most important, so this is a great activity to go along with preparing your presentation. Your coach has instructions.

Community Awards: If you do a good job in your Current Issue investigations, you will not only score well but you can qualify for the Community Research Award. And if you take what you learn and apply it in service to your community, you can qualify for the Community Action Award. See <http://www.maenvirothon.org/community.htm> for more, including a research checklist.

Roundtables: At lunch time on the day of the Envirothon, ALL Envirothon teams are invited to share their Current Issue or other work informally with other teams and interested adults at the "roundtables" session. It's easy and fun: Just bring the display materials from your presentation and be prepared to start a conversation about what your team learned from your community explorations and/or service projects. For more, click on "roundtables" at <http://www.maenvirothon.org/event06.htm>