



Summary

The Next Generation Forest Ambassador program is a 4-day/3-night youth summit hosted by the Georgia Mountains Children's Forest Network. Each year approximately 25 Ambassadors ages 14-16 are selected to participate in two nights of expert-led camping and a 1-night excursion to the Len Foote Hike Inn – a rustic, backcountry lodge accessed by a 5-mile guided hike through Chattahoochee National Forest in North Georgia. Ambassadors have fun camping and hiking while lending their powerful voices to find ways to connect other young people to the public lands that belong to us all.

The program is free for participants, and gear and transportation are provided for all who desire. Paired 1-1 with mentors in conservation careers, Ambassadors complete stewardship projects and are awarded small stipends for successful completion.

Due to COVID-19, the 2020 Next Generation Forest Ambassador Youth Summit was moved to a virtual format with layers of outdoor skill-building and instruction from experts. We are in awe of the great work that each of these Ambassadors put into the program and their stewardship projects, and want to highlight accomplishments that required innovation and inspiration during this challenging time.

Program Details

Ambassadors attended **4 Essential virtual sessions** that covered core themes including: the meaning of an Ambassador, identifying **obstacles** and **actionable-solutions**, brainstorming action plans, discussing **outdoor access for all**, and learning concrete **skills** such as **Leave No Trace**, while **celebrating** each other.

In addition, each ambassador was also asked to attend at least **2 Ambassador's Choice** sessions (though many registered for more.) The Ambassador's Choice menu, all led by area experts, included regional stories of the **Eastern Band of Cherokee** with member and revered teacher Gil Jackson, **Birding** with naturalist and birding expert Jason Ward, **Nature Hike** with

North Georgian rooted nature guide Forest Hilyer, **Tree ID** with ethnobotanist Marc Williams, and **Ephemeral Nature Art** inspired by The Organic Artist.

Each ambassador was provided with a toolbox of **resources for success** while working towards completing their **stewardship project**, including **1-1 mentor support**, drop shipments of books, reading lists, and peer connections.

Outcomes/Impacts

18 Ambassadors led over **250 hours** of stewardship projects in their communities. These teens oversaw projects that included environmental outreach and education across four social media platforms, two podcasts, six trash pick up events, one scavenger hunt, informational flyers and identification guides, leveraging of local organizations, an online fundraiser for three nonprofits, and creation of original art and music.

So far, **2** Ambassadors will share their stories on the *SheExplores* podcast series, **1** Ambassador has educated a USFS staff on how to use his twitter bot that serves a search engine that responds to tweets in real time helping people locate public lands near them, and **1** ambassador has been highlighted in ATC's *Journey's* magazine about his time with the program, his everlasting connection with public lands, and dreams of being a wildland firefighter with the US Forest Service.

Numbers

18 Ambassadors	2 Alumni	7 Educators in Conservation Careers	1-1 Mentorship	4 Whole Group Sessions	5 Ambassador's Choice Sessions	3 Drop Shipments of Books & Resources	18 Stewardship Projects
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Program Details List

[Program Outline](#)

4 Essential Virtual Sessions

Each Ambassador was required to attend all four group sessions.

1. Welcome: What does it mean to be an ambassador?
2. Youth Summit: Brainstorm obstacles & solutions, make action plans
3. Outdoors For All: Focused conversation on diversity and access for ALL
4. Skills & Celebration: Hiking, cordage, bow drill fire, ceremony, celebration

5 Ambassadors Choice Virtual Sessions

Each Ambassador required to attend at least two Ambassador Choice sessions.

- Hidden Treasures: Stories of the past and present Eastern Band of Cherokee of Georgia with Gil Jackson
- Birding: Learned to identify birds with naturalist and birding expert, Jason Ward.
- Nature Hike: Virtual nature walk with a North Georgia rooted nature guide, Forest Hilyer.
- Tree ID: Learned to identify trees near you with Ethnobiologist, Marc Williams.
- Nature Art: Make ephemeral nature art inspired by The Organic Artist!

Resources List

- 1-1 Mentor support
- Covid safe stewardship suggestions
- Resources: drop shipments of books, reading lists, peer connections

Outcomes List

270 Stewardship Hours including:

- [Twitter Bot](#), [Instagram Account](#), [Facebook page](#)
- Leave No Trace informational flyers
- A [podcast](#) about Ambassador's experience with NextGen
- Six Neighborhood Clean-up/Trash pick-up/invasive species removal events
- A Tree-ID themed scavenger hunt young children
- [The production of an original song](#)
- An original painting inspired by nature meditation
- Leveraging of 4-H, YMCA, and School networks to grow food for distribution to food-insecure community members
- An audio reading of conservation-focused book
- Creation of a Plant and Animal ID guide
- [Website Coding](#) to inform people about local park access

- Tri-fold pamphlet creation on themes of nature
- Online [fundraiser for environmental and conservation non-profits](#)
- Peer led outdoor excursions

More Info

Stewardship Project Slideshow

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Iz6MPAQPQHE3ANprHJdFk8yxZ2R4P1PJ/view?usp=sharing>

Inspirational Quotes

- **Mentor**, Khidhar McKenzie, “Every year I get more and more inspired by the next generation of leaders and I know that the world is in good hands.”
- **Ambassador**, Beatrix Clark: “I feel energized and hopeful for the future”
- **Alumni Ambassador**, Avery Adams: “going to work and school is not all this world has to offer, there are thousands and thousands of acres of land that can change a person, it did for me”
- **Staff**, Kelsey McNicholas: “NextGen is effective on many levels. It inspires teen leaders to be stewards of their public lands, and equips them with tools, resources, and connections to do so. Their strengths shine through in projects that have direct and immediate impacts on their local communities.”

Impact Quotes

*“Thank you so much for the NextGen program. I know making the switch from the outdoor program to the virtual one took a ton of work, creativity, and flexibility, and it's all so much appreciated. **Congratulations on your success!**”*

*I wanted to let you know about the impact that my boys' work project has made so far. First of all, the time we spent **working together in the woods together was really, really significant**. The two of them **cooperated with each other and problem-solved in ways that I haven't seen in a very long time**. In a summer full of altered plans and little direction or focus, **they were able to achieve goals that they made and feel a real sense of accomplishment**. One morning we were out very early to avoid the heat, and it was just so lovely being out there working hard together. We were able to have a great conversation about all they've been hearing about police and prison reform, so that was a really special added bonus.*

*In the 12 hours since I posted on Facebook photos of the trash they collected out of the creek and woods, **117 people have reacted to the post on my page and 18 people have commented with tons of praise and encouragement**. I also posted on our neighborhood...page, and from there it was reposted to the South River Watershed Alliance and the South River Forest Coalition, with lots more likes and comments, including from Save Ormewood Forest. A neighbor I've never met friended me and then added me to a neighborhood text chat group that I had no idea existed, and the boys got a bunch more encouraging comments on that. And **another neighbor asked if we could help get a tetherball pole out of the creek**, so we have a date to get together with others to make that happen. **I am blown away by the response of neighbors** and the fact that they've been noticing our work over the last few weeks and have appreciated it. They're pointing out other places in the neighborhood that need attention . . .*

who knows where this might lead??

*Anyway, I wanted to share all that with you so that you know that **all your efforts do have ripple effects beyond what you might imagine. For our family, one of those effects is a greater sense of community with our neighbors, and especially in this time of social isolation, that's pretty wonderful.*** -NextGen Parent

*"First of all I want to say thank you both so much for such an amazing experience. I had so much fun, and I'm excited for the next chapter in my journey as a Forest Ambassador! I look forward to following everyone's projects, and seeing all the incredible change that has, and will be made because of this program. **I feel energized and hopeful for the future.**"* - NextGen Participant

Photos from NextGen 2019

<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?vanity=GreeningYouth&set=a.10155917799950870>

Faces of NextGen 2020: Staff, Instructors, Mentors, Organizations

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1pozdz8MboqYTSEVUgdGHfcz01B9ksOvh/view?usp=sharing>

Faces of NextGen 2020: Participants and Alumni Leaders

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1wV-tbo6nopOemltFj6l04nuVldozgZnG/view?usp=sharing>