YES! Youth Eco Solutions

2025- 2026 Activity Checklist

Directions:
Complete three or more items from the following checklist. Submit photos and descriptions to jake@yesmn.org and YES will supply doughnuts to celebrate YOUR Teams' accomplishments. Deadline for checklist items: **April 30, 2026**

Animal Habitat & Health

- ☐ **Activity:** Visit Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center in Spicer, Minnesota, and further expand your knowledge of Minnesota wildlife through their "Mammals" class. **Virtual option available*
- ☐ **Research:** Learn about Minnesota's beloved state bird - the loon - and the importance of sharing our shoreline by watching this presentation by the **National Loon Center**.
- ☐ **Research:** Learn about wolves by visiting Minnesota's **International Wolf Center** located in Ely and/or sign up and attend one of their webinars.

CLIMATE CHANGE

- ☐ **Research:** Watch **"Minnesota Stories in a Changing Climate: Where Cattle Meets Climate"**
- ☐ **Research:** Watch **"Minnesota Stories in a Changing Climate: Where Climate Meets Community"**
- ☐ **Activity:** Plant Trees or Native Plants - Organize a tree-planting event or create a native pollinator garden.
- ☐ **Activity:** Design a Climate App or Website - Create tools that help people reduce their carbon footprint or learn about climate issues.
- ☐ **Activity:** Data Collection & Citizen Science - Participate in projects like iNaturalist, Globe Observer, or local water/air quality monitoring.

ENERGY CONSERVATION

- ☐ **Activity:** Connect with your regional CERTs (Clean Energy Resource Team) representative.
- ☐ **Research:** Learn about **Energy Assessment and Benchmarking**
- ☐ **Research:** Learn about **Energy Efficient Lighting**
- ☐ **Activity:** Conduct a simple energy audit at school. Borrow a thermal camera from Youth Eco Solutions to check how energy efficient things are at your school.
- ☐ **Activity:** Create DYI Energy-Saving Kits. Assemble and distribute kits with LED bulbs, outlet gaskets, power strips, window insulation film and instructions. Partner with local energy companies or hardware stores for donations.
- ☐ **Activity:** Host a "Lights Out!" Campaign and encourage students and teachers to turn off lights when leaving rooms. Post signs near switches and share weekly progress stats school-wide.

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

- [ ] **Activity:** Engage younger students through environmental education and activities.
- [ ] **Activity:** Plan a local workshop for your YES Team to learn about something you are interested in, such as: water conservation, land restoration, waste reduction, climate change, green careers, environmental justice, local foods & gardening, solar energy and/or energy conservation.
- [ ] **Activity:** Host a nature-based learning event in your local community. Lead guided nature walks, bird watching sessions, or tree ID hikes in local parks. Incorporate lessons on local ecosystems and the importance of native species.
- [ ] **Activity/Research**: Environmental Book Club or Film Series - Choose an eco-themed books or documentaries to watch and discuss as a team or with the public.

GIS (Geographic Information Systems) Mapping

- [ ] **Activity:** Learn more about GIS Mapping by completing MN GreenStep Schools **"About Youth Mapping Progress GIS Training"** Modules
- [ ] **Research**: Environmental Monitoring & Data Collection - Use GIS mapping to monitor land use and land cover by tracking changes in urban sprawl, agriculture, forests, and wetlands through satellite imagery; assess water quality by collecting data on pH, turbidity, and temperature to visualize pollution patterns; and analyze air quality by using low-cost sensors to measure pollutants and overlay results with traffic and industrial data to identify environmental health risks.
- [ ] **Activity:** Use ArcGIS StoryMaps to present a local environmental issue to the community.

GREEN CAREERS

- [ ] **Activity:** Connect with a local green career professional to mentor your YES Team throughout the season.
- [ ] **Activity:** Take a field trip to green workplaces - possibilities include recycling facilities, solar farms, nature preserves, green architecture firms or environmental labs.
- [ ] **Research**: Choose a green career to research (e.g., environmental engineer, conservation biologist, urban planner) and create a presentation on required skills, education, salary, and job outlook. Share this presentation with fellow peers.

LAND RESTORATION

- [ ] **Activity:** Campus clean up.
- [ ] **Activity:** Native Plant Restoration - Remove native species on school grounds (e.g., buckthorn, garlic mustard)
- [ ] **Activity:** Native Plant Restoration - Plant native grasses, trees, or wildflowers in degraded prairies, woodlands, or wetlands. Monitor plant survival and growth overtime.
- [ ] **Activity:** Participate in Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center's prairie restoration project by volunteering. Receive a $10 Target gift card.
- [ ] **Activity:** Tree Planting and Forest Regeneration - Plant native tree species in deforested or urbanized areas. Use GIS mapping to track planting locations and growth over time. Conduct forest health assessments (canopy cover, tree density, species diversity).
- [ ] **Activity:** Pollinator Habitat Creation - Design and plant pollinator gardens with native nectar and host plants. Include bee hotels or butterfly houses to support species diversity. Track visitation rates of bees, butterflies, and other pollinators.
- [ ] **Activity:** Soil Health Restoration - Conduct soil tests for pH, organic matter, and compaction. Apply compost, mulch, or cover crops to improve soil structure and fertility. Educate others about regenerative agriculture techniques.

LOCAL FOODS & GARDENING

- [ ] **Activity:** School or Community Garden - Design, build, and maintain a vegetable, herb, or pollinator garden. Use raised beds, in-ground plots, or container gardens depending on space. Grow seasonal, local crops and donate surplus to food shelves or school cafeterias.
- [ ] **Activity:** Visit Local Farms or Farmers' Markets - Tour organic farms, permaculture sites, or urban agriculture projects. Interview farmers about sustainable practices, challenges, and career paths. Use visits to inspire garden planning or food system research.
- [ ] **Research:** Watch **"Minnesota Stories in a Changing Climate: Where Food Meets Farming"**
- [ ] **Activity:** Composting Projects - Start a compost system for garden and food scraps (backyard, vermicompost, or in-school). Teach about decomposition, soil health, and reducing landfill waste. Use finished compost to enrich garden soil and close the nutrient loop.
- [ ] **Research:** Local Food System Mapping - Research and create a map showing local farms, community-supported agriculture (CSAs), food co-ops, and farmers' markets. Identify food deserts or areas with limited access to fresh produce. Share findings with community leaders or use GIS tools for analysis.
- [ ] **Activity:** Seed Saving & Native Plant Gardening - Learn how to collect, dry, and store seeds from heirloom vegetables or native plants. Start a school or community seed library. Encourage biodiversity and adaptation to local conditions.
- [ ] **Activity:** Food Miles & Climate Impact Investigation - Compare the carbon footprint of local vs. imported food items. Conduct research projects or simulations on how food choices impact climate change. Promote "Buy Local" campaigns or host zero-waste lunch days.

RECOMMENDED READING

- [ ] **Research:** Read ***The Seed Keeper*** by Diane Wilson - A powerful novel rooted in Dakota culture that explores seed sovereignty, environmental justice, and generational healing. Relevant to Mankato, MN history.
- [ ] **Research:** Read ***Braiding Sweatgrass*** by Robin Wall Kimmerer - Blends Indigenous knowledge and scientific understanding with beautifully written reflections on ecology, gratitude, and restoration.
- [ ] **Research:** Read ***No One Is Too Small To Make A Difference*** by Greta Thunberg - A short collection of speeches from the young climate activist, encouraging youth to take climate action.
- [ ] **Research:** Read ***Generation Green: The Ultimate Teen Guide to Living an Eco-Friendly Life*** by Linda Siversten & Tosh Siversten - Offers tips, facts, and project ideas for teens interested in sustainable living.

RECYCLING

- [ ] **Activity:** School Waste Audit - Conduct a waste audit to analyze how much waste is being recycled, composted, or sent to landfill. Use data to create graphs and recommendations for improving recycling systems.
- [ ] **Activity:** Recycling System Redesign - Improve or redesign the school's recycling system (color-coded bins, better signage, clear sorting instructions). Work with custodial staff and administration to make changes sustainable.
- [ ] **Activity:** Recycling Awareness Campaign - Create posters, announcements, or short videos to teach students what can and cannot be recycled. Host "Recycling Challenges" or trivia to increase engagement and correct contamination.
- [ ] **Activity:** Bottle and Can Redemptive Drives - Collect returnable bottles and cans to raise funds for eco projects. Track how much is collected and share the environmental impact (e.g., CO_2 saved, money earned).
- [ ] **Activity:** Hard-to- Recycle Materials Collection - Set up collection stations for items not usually accepted in regular bins, like: crayons and markers. Find a local business who recycles these items or contact Youth Eco Solutions to assist in this process.
- [ ] **Activity:** Reuse and Supply Swap Program - Create a "ReSupply Station" for gently used school supplies, clothing, or materials. Encourage reuse before recycling or buying new.

SOLAR ENERGY

- [ ] **Research:** Learn about the **Simple Steps to Solar**
- [ ] **Research:** Learn about **Minnesota's Renewable Energy**
- [ ] **Research:** Watch **"The Power of Minnesota"**
- [ ] **Activity:** Solar Energy Demonstration Project - Build and test small solar-powered devices (e.g., solar ovens, fans, cars, or phone chargers). Host a solar showcase day to display creations and explain how they work.
- [ ] **Activity/Research:** School Solar Feasibility Study - Research your school's electricity use and rooftop space. Use tools like Google Project Sunroof or PVWatts to estimate solar potential and cost savings. Present a proposal to school leaders for future solar installations.
- [ ] **Activity/Research:** Solar Scavenger Hunt or Audit - Identify existing solar panels in your community (homes, businesses, schools). Create a solar map or photo journal using GIS tools or Google My Maps.
- [ ] **Activity:** Visit a Solar Farm or Energy Center - Tour a local solar installation to learn how large-scale systems operate. Interview solar engineers or technicians to explore green career paths.
- [ ] **Activity:** DIY Solar Charging Station - Build a solar-powered phone or device charging station for a classroom or outdoor learning space. Involve students in planning, budgeting, building, and monitoring usage.

UPCYCLING

- [ ] **Activity:** Upcycled Art Projects - Use bottle caps, fabric scraps, old magazines, and other "trash" to create environmental art. Host an eco-art gallery or display student creations at school or community events.
- [ ] **Activity:** T-Shirt or Clothing Upcycling - Transform old T-shirts into tote bags, reusable produce bags, or new clothing pieces. Organize a fashion show featuring upcycled outfits or host a clothing repair/mending workshop.
- [ ] **Activity:** Container Repurposing - Use jars, cans, and bottles to create planters, organizers, lanterns, or bird feeders. Start a classroom or garden upcycling station where students share ideas and materials.
- [ ] **Activity:** DIY School Supplies - Make notebooks from scrap paper, pencil cases from old jeans, or desk organizers from cardboard. Host a "Zero-Waste School Supplies" workshop at the start of the school year.
- [ ] **Activity:** Community Upcycling Workshop - Organize a workshop for families or community members to learn upcycling skills (sewing, crafting, building). Include repair stations to encourage a repair-over-replace mindset.
- [ ] **Activity/Research:** Research and Educate About Waste Reduction - Research the environmental benefits of upcycling vs. recycling or landfilling. Create infographics or presentations that show the lifecycle of common items and how upcycling saves resources.

WATER CONSERVATION

- [ ] **Activity:** Water Audit of School or Home - Measure water use from sinks, toilets, showers, and outdoor irrigation. Identify leaks, wasteful habits, and opportunities to reduce use. Create a water-saving action plan with measurable goals.
- [ ] **Activity:** Behavior Change Campaign - Design posters, announcements, or social media content to promote water-saving tips: turn off the tap when brushing teeth, shorten showers and only run full loads of laundry and clothes. Launch a "Water Challenge Week" and track participation.
- [ ] **Activity:** Water Quality Testing & Stream Monitoring - Collect and test local water samples for pH, nitrates, turbidity, and temperature. Partner with a local watershed group or participate in citizen science programs like GLOBE or River Watch. Share findings with the community and connect water quality to conservation efforts.
- [ ] **Activity:** Rain Barrel or Garden Installation - Install a rain barrel to collect water for gardens or native plant beds. Design and build a rain garden to absorb stormwater runoff and reduce erosion. Teach about stormwater pollution and how to manage it naturally.