



Photo: Youth Climate Summit students from the Lake Placid Environmental Club alongside Mayor Clyde Randall after signing the New York State Climate Smart Communities Pledge. The newly formed Climate Task Force will officially include youth involvement as the Lake Placid community looks to reduce its carbon footprint.

## Youth at the Helm of Building Community Climate Empowerment

The Wild Center's Youth Climate Program is a global initiative that convenes, engages, and empowers young people to act on climate change related activities in their schools and communities through Youth Climate Summits. Each Youth Climate Summit is a one or two day event that brings youth together to learn about climate change science, impacts, and solutions. Through speakers, workshops, and activities, the Summit culminates with student participants writing a Climate Action Plan that can be implemented in their schools, communities, and regions. Students gain the knowledge, confidence, and skills necessary to communicate with decision-makers. The solutions-focused education they receive at the Summit inspires them to begin a collaborative and productive dialogue with their respective civic and government leaders as they seek participation in their communities' climate change mitigation and adaptation plans. Organizing a Youth Climate Summit is a great way to educate and motivate students, connect with new partners, showcase green job pathways, and build capacity for youth leadership. This

Youth Climate Summit model has been replicated and scaled in over 30 sites around the globe from New York State to Finland to Sri Lanka. The Wild Center's free [Youth Climate Summit toolkit](#) offers a detailed organizational framework, templates, budget, agenda, and timeline that can be replicated in communities and municipalities world-wide.

## Case Study

**The Case Study below outlines the impact of the Youth Climate Summit on one community and the story of how one school can make a difference.**

“Young people have been instrumental in advancing the sustainability work of Lake Placid through educational campaigns, presentations and open dialogue that raise awareness about the local impacts of and solutions to climate change. Lake Placid is a showcase community that draws visitors from all over the world for its world-renowned events and natural environment. The village board recognizes the vital role young people play in protecting our natural ecosystems so that Lake Placid can continue to build on this legacy.”

Lake Placid Mayor Craig Randall and Village Board member Jason Leon

Lake Placid is located in the Adirondack Park, a 6-million acre state park in upstate New York. It was home to the 1932 and 1980 Winter Olympics, making it a premier winter sports and tourist destination. Climate change threatens the basis of the region's winter economy and way of life, which has led the village of Lake Placid to take steps toward building a more resilient community and economy. Supporting the implementation of these steps is the village's youth population. Since 2008, Lake Placid's high school students have attended The Wild Center's annual Adirondack Youth Climate Summit. Following the students' Climate Action Plans over the past several years, participating students from the Lake Placid High School Environmental Club have been actively engaged in conversations with their elected officials. They have attended Village Board meetings and worked with the Board to determine how they can work together to increase energy efficiency and transition away from fossil fuels. In addition to their conversations with local leaders, Summit alumni in the Lake Placid region have been leading community-wide climate education events centered on the impacts of climate change on its winter tourism-based economy. The students have also made the village's current climate actions more visible by being active members of key committees. To build on the momentum of all of this work, Governor Andrew M. Cuomo announced in late 2017 that the three New York State-owned ski resorts - Belleayre Ski Resort, Gore Mountain, and Whiteface Mountain - have pledged to be powered with 100 percent renewable energy by 2030. The Summit alumni's work also encouraged the Lake Placid community to sign New York's Climate Smart Community Pledge in the spring of 2018. With youth at the helm of the town's climate action plan, this community culture encourages sustained action.

## Overview

The Wild Center's Adirondack Youth Climate Summit brings together a diverse set of nearly 200 high school and college students, teachers, and faculty from 30 schools across the northeastern U.S., combining informative sessions and workshops in an engaging atmosphere for a powerful two-day experience. The program has been instrumental in building the environmental literacy necessary for Lake Placid's climate resilience through a programmatic focus on climate change impacts in rural and urban New York. This crucial information is presented with an overarching theme of project-based learning, making resilience a more relatable issue by allowing the students to understand how *they* can take action. The culmination of each Summit is the student's creation of a Climate Action Plan for a project to improve resilience in their school or community. For many participants, this is a transformative opportunity to understand the effects of their actions on the world around them. Students make essential connections between their lives and the natural world while acquiring leadership skills, cooperative abilities, a sense of community, and an enduring passion for the environment and a sustainable global future.

Among the goals of the Summit, a few stand out for their importance and direct relevance to the Lake Placid youth community:

### **Learn place-based strategies to respond and adapt to climate change**

Concrete action plans for the greater Adirondack area give student participants an understanding of the stakes for the Lake Placid region and encourage participant leadership to share and implement the strategies within their community. Providing information on the state of the science reinforces the urgency of climate change and its economic and ecological impact. This 10-year old place-based approach has been replicated across the world in over 30 locations through the use of the [Youth Climate Summit Toolkit](#).

### **Develop a climate action plan to inform school and community activities**

Armed with community-focused action plans, Summit participants can transform the knowledge and experience gained into tangible, local change. As an example, Lake Placid's small population magnifies the actions of its climate-minded youth. In smaller communities, youth have a greater opportunity to affect community resilience building and climate literacy.

### **Network with regional schools and experts to learn about successful climate action**

Discussing specific place-based strategies with students from across New York and beyond works to empower students in developing their climate action plans. The Summit also works to maintain connections among current community resilience initiatives, educators, and its youth participants. Individual participants often maintain contact with other students or schools following the Summit, encouraging future collaboration and continued encouragement. School districts have a large presence and large community influence in cities across the country. To give students within these local institutions the tools to bridge their education into the greater

community, and to make connections between communities through their local students' shared climate education, is a powerful dynamic that Lake Placid leaders have recognized.

## Regional Impact

"My experience at the Adirondack Youth Climate Summit taught me so many things about climate change and action. Knowledge is power and the youth climate summit gives students the knowledge and skills to take on climate change at full force."

Nathalie Munn, age 17, Saranac Lake High School

To date, the Adirondack Youth Climate Summit has directly reached over 2,000 students at over 60 schools across the northeastern U.S. By implementing climate action plans in their schools and communities, participants have reached over 20,000 of their peers each year for the last nine years. Their dedication has created a network of sustainability initiatives, climate actions, and youth leaders across the state of New York and beyond.

Climate change is a complex phenomenon, and many local government leaders struggle to understand how best to respond and protect their communities. Dazzle Ekblad from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's Office of Climate Change (OCC) has found, "Education is a fundamental first step in taking action. The most effective local climate action programs are rooted in smart planning and educational processes that involve gathering information and helping communities evaluate their options." The Wild Center's Youth Climate Summit supported local students by providing guidance on how their communities can plan for climate action through their educational campaigns, which were key components to expanding local Climate Smart Communities programs.

As seen in the Lake Placid region, the climate action plans of youth leaders encouraged the Village to sign New York's Climate Smart Community Pledge. The community has committed to taking stock of emissions, decreasing energy use, shifting to renewable energy, and enhancing community resilience to climate change, among other goals.<sup>1</sup>

The Youth Climate Program is actively engaged in New York State's climate resiliency planning through collaborations with the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation Office of Climate Change, NYS Energy Research Development Authority, and NOAA's Climate Program Office to provide accurate scientific information, resources, and tools through a three year Environmental Literacy Grant from NOAA's Office of Education. The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's Office of Climate Change (OCC) works to develop policies that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, increase resiliency for the State, empower its communities, and provide low-emission options for all New Yorkers.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.dec.ny.gov/energy/65494.html>

“The vision and enthusiasm that youth bring to local climate action is powerful. The abundant energy and creativity of young people can open minds and unite communities in the fight against climate change. This is why the OCC supports youth climate empowerment. The OCC is honored to join The Wild Center in this work and values every opportunity to participate in Youth Climate Summits.”

Mark Lowery and Dazzle Ekblad, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's Office of Climate Change (OCC)

## National/International Impact

In the years since the Summit's inception in 2008, participants and facilitators have encouraged implementation of the Summit model. Their "[Youth Climate Summit Toolkit](#)," a guide to replicating and scaling the Adirondack Youth Climate Summit, has reached communities not only across the U.S., but also around the globe. Summits have been held in Seattle, WA; Detroit, MI; Burlington, VT; Columbus, OH; Raleigh, NC; Carbondale, CO; New York City, NY; Houston, TX; Munich, Germany; Liberia; Sri Lanka; and Helsinki, Finland. Summit participants and facilitators have also represented the U.S. on larger global platforms, including the UNESCO World Youth Forum, the UN Youth Assembly, the One Young World Summits in Thailand and Arizona, and the UN COP 21 Climate Talks in Paris. The Summit was also recognized in 2014 as a model for Climate Education and Literacy by the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy.

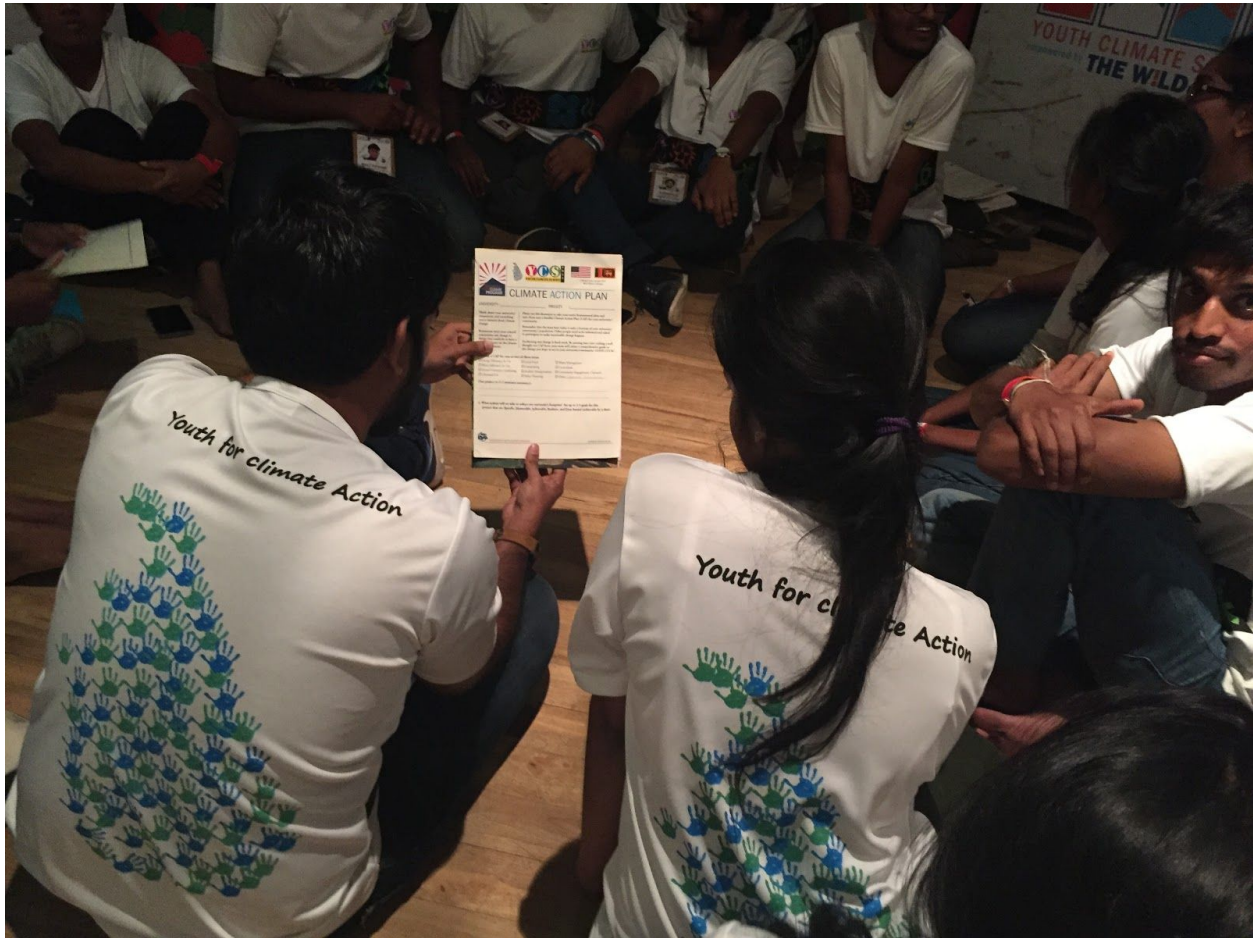


Photo: Youth Climate Leaders at the 2017 Sri Lanka Youth Climate Summit get to work on their climate action plans. Over 100 students from 10 colleges across the country attended the 3 day residential Youth Climate Summit that focused on climate science and impacts, leadership, disaster preparedness, and working towards climate action through the Global Goals.



Photo: Youth Climate leaders from the United States and Sri Lanka gather to celebrate Sri Lanka's Youth Climate Summit. The Summit was organized through Sri Lanka's Community Resilience Center, the Climate Change Secretariat/ Ministry of the Environment, the US Embassy, and Asia Pacific Alliance for Disaster Preparedness.

## Lessons Learned

Youth play an important role in building resilience and climate literacy in their communities. As the next generation of leaders, change-makers, and activists, youth are key to a climate resilient and post-carbon future. The Summit and its impact on the Lake Placid region are evidence for several takeaways:

### **Everyone benefits from convening youth**

While youth participants gain confidence, networks, and opportunities for leadership, cities ensure resilience building and community investment. Together, climate-minded students can encourage climate action by a community.

### **Fostering a sense of community ownership among youth is central to climate action**

Providing opportunities for youth to directly respond to local impacts of climate change encourages a sense of community responsibility. Youth empowerment, encouraged by opportunities to respond to the local threats of climate change communities, results in action.

### **Summits can be implemented to serve communities worldwide**

The Wild Center's partner Youth Climate Summits around the U.S. and globe are testament to the successes, and need for, convening youth around climate-centered discussion, and the effectiveness of place-based, and project-based learning.

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### **Partners**

[NOAA](#)

[New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's Office of Climate Change \(OCC\)](#)

[New York State Energy Research & Development Authority](#)

[Alliance for Climate Education](#)

[Association for Science Technology Centers](#)

### **Resources/Website**

[The Wild Center: Youth Climate Program](#)

[Youth Climate Summit Toolkit](#)

<https://sites.google.com/wildcenter.org/adkyouthsummit/home>