

Making Ripples

by Amanda Bancroft

Looking for a great environmental education program for the kids? Or just as likely, the kids are asking you to sign them up for a nature-based activity. Well, the new Green Team program released in March by Saving Nature Now may be the answer. While there are a variety of programs for children of all ages (scouting groups, summer camps, and themed clubs) these usually take quite a bit of regular attendance, transportation, and money. This new program is more flexible: no consistent transportation is required, and it's free! It's been applied in local schools, as a fun family activity to do at home, and at regional events.

The non-profit organization Saving Nature Now pursues its mission "to raise public awareness about biodiversity – why it is important, why it is in trouble, and how individual actions can result in sustainable outcomes." Board member Tom Krohn has seen initial success with the Green Team program. "This is the first year of the Green Team and we've helped 382 kids so far." Not bad for just a few months!

The program is straightforward and designed for youth ages eight and up, but children younger than eight can participate with help from an adult. Follow instructions in the booklet to complete nine activities in order to earn your Green Team patch. The patch, pictured here, is similar to the Girl Scout badges and decals in other programs. The nine activities are: create a nature journal, study insects, plant a native species, save electricity, read about an endangered animal, save water, build a bee condo, create recycled art, and make a leaf rubbing. One bonus activity lets you invent your own nature topic to either substitute for one of the previous nine or as a tenth option.

In the hopes of "saving nature one activity at a time," the Green Team is a way to raise awareness about taking small actions that make a difference. The program not only teaches environmental topics but also encourages "working with others, critical thinking and planning skills, finding and gathering resources, reading, and STEM fields." Future booklets will offer opportunities for earning future patches.

To begin at any time, download a pretty PDF booklet for free online, complete the activities, submit a copy of the completion certificate, and receive the free patch. Alternatively, you may order a booklet and patch for \$5, and pay \$3 for each additional patch, or order for a group at a discounted rate of \$3 for both booklet and patch (minimum order is ten).

For a boost towards earning that patch and to get more information, the next optional Green Team event is happening Saturday, June 29 from 11am - 3pm at Shiloh Museum in Springdale for children in grades 2 - 6. Children and their families will complete three of the nine activities that count towards earning the patch. If you can't make it, there is another event coming up July 20 at the famously fun Firefly Fling at the Botanical Garden of the Ozarks. For more information, email info@savingnaturenow.org or visit SavingNatureNow.org/GreenTeam.

Amanda Bancroft is a writer, artist, and naturalist living in an off-grid tiny house on Kessler Mountain. She and her husband Ryan blog about their adventures and offer tips to those wanting to make a difference at www.RipplesBlog.org.