

Working With Your Community

“We must adjust to changing times and still hold to unchanging principles.” — Jimmy Carter

One of the best tools you have as a community activist is your passion. Sharing this passion and your knowledge about an issue will inspire others to get involved. You might not even realize just how many people you have the potential to reach out to and inspire. Not only do you have family, friends, neighbors and co-workers, but also fellow participants in all sorts of networks, activities and organizations. Use these connections to rally people to your cause. Change comes when society demands it. By recruiting others you can make that happen.

Three easy ways to get started—hosting an event in your community, setting up a table and distributing information at public events in your area, and drafting a resolution in support of an important wildlife issue for official endorsement by community leaders—are laid out below.



NORTHERN SPOTTED OWL | JOHN AND KAREN HOLLINGSWORTH, U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Tap Established Networks

One easy way to reach out and get other people in your community involved—and increase the number of voices speaking to your elected officials—is to work through already established community networks. Local Rotary or Kiwanis groups, garden and other clubs provide great opportunities to talk to different groups of individuals. Libraries, schools, religious institutions, community and retirement centers are other good places to bring people together.

Host an Event

Hosting a house party or other event allows you to bring people together to learn about a wildlife conservation issue and what they can do about it. You and your group can take action on the spot by preparing handwritten letters to your elected officials, composing a letter to the editor of your local newspaper, planning another event to reach out to your community-at-large, drafting a resolution, or doing all of the above. Whatever you choose to do, it's important to plan and be prepared by attending to details and having everything you need. Here are the basic steps involved:

Before the event:

- **Choose a format and location.** First, decide what kind of event you want to host. You can hold a house party for friends, family, neighbors or any community group in your home. For larger groups, you can use your local library, community center or other public place. To get to know people, you can plan an outing to a local wildlife refuge, wilderness area, park or even a local wildlife rehabilitation center. These places can inspire your guests and remind them why it is so important to them to help protect wildlife and the special places they need to survive.

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- **Draw up a list of invitees and spread the word.** Create an invite list and spread the word by phone, e-mail, flyers and posters hung in public places. If you have the room, encourage people to bring a guest or two.
- **Gather information to distribute.** You can obtain general information about wildlife and the latest challenges facing conservation at www.defenders.org. Call Defenders to see if there is a local staff person who can get involved or if additional materials are available to help educate your guests. (See inside back cover for Defenders' field office and national headquarters contact information.)
- **Assemble the materials you need for planned activities.** If you're going to write letters, make copies of the tips on pages 7-9 of this handbook. Have paper, envelopes, stamps and the addresses of your targets available to make it easy for your group. If you're focused on Congress, each person could write up to three letters—one to their representative and one to each senator—so have plenty of supplies on hand.

At the event:

- **Pass around a sign-in sheet.** Ask for names, e-mail and mailing addresses so you can stay in touch and keep your group informed of the latest developments.
- **Give a brief presentation.** You could also feature an activity such as watching a wildlife documentary or a relevant movie. If you're at a refuge or other scenic venue, remind your participants how important it is to protect these wild places.
- **Distribute materials.** Provide copies of fact sheets and writing tips to all attendees.
- **Involve the children.** If you have kids in your group, encourage them to draw pictures of their favorite wildlife to include with their parents' letters.
- **Have fun!** Order pizza, bring snacks and enjoy yourself and your group.

After the event:

- **Mail the letters you've collected.** Don't forget to do this immediately after your event.
- **Follow up.** Use the contact information to keep your guests informed and engaged. Encourage them to visit <http://action.defenders.org> and join Defenders of Wildlife e-activist network.
- **Tell us about it.** Let us know about your event (use the Action Form on page 15). If possible, share your letters and any responses you received with us.

Be Creative

Defenders activists have come up with some novel ideas for bringing people together...a wine tasting at an environmentally friendly vineyard...a wildlife photography show at an art gallery...an evening with a jewelry maker who works in natural fibers and stones. Use your imagination and plan an event people will come to and remember.

Go “Tabling”

“Tabling” is short for the advocacy activity of setting up and staffing an informational table or booth at a public event such as a community action day, fair or Earth Day celebration. Tabling serves many purposes, including educating the public, collecting signatures on a petition, passing out postcards for mailing to elected officials, or registering people to receive more information on a topic. Moreover, tabling is fun! It’s a great way to meet people in your community while working on issues that concern you. Here’s all you need to know to set up shop.

- **Pick an event.** Look for special events that attract crowds that are scheduled for your area (check civic center bulletin boards and community newspapers), and find out if tabling is allowed. Some events require you to register in advance to secure space.
- **Bone up on the issues and have materials available.** You don’t have to be an expert to staff a table. Defenders of Wildlife and other organizations involved in the issues you care about can provide you with the information and action items you need for a successful day.
- **Don’t be afraid to say, “I don’t know.”** It is always better to get back to someone with the correct information than provide incorrect or incomplete information.
- **Offer an option to take action.** Have sign-up sheets, postcards addressed to legislators that people can fill out, petitions or other action items available.
- **Follow through.** When the day is over, collect your sign-up sheets for future reference and follow-up. Mail signed postcards to the identified elected official.

Don’t Forget

Check with Defenders on the availability of fact sheets, forms, sample letters and other materials you can use at your event. Defenders also may be able to provide a staff member to speak at your event or help at your table. Contact your nearest Defenders field office (see list inside the back cover).

Pass a Resolution

Communities hold incredible power—the power to reach out to local constituencies and join forces to make their collective voices heard by Congress. Passing a resolution is an excellent way to focus the power of your community. A resolution in support of the ESA, for example, could call attention to the threats facing this landmark legislation as well as demonstrate to Congress the strong and widespread support in your community for protecting threatened and endangered species and the habitat on which they depend.

The tips that follow cover the steps to passing a resolution in your community. (For more details and sample materials, contact Defenders.)

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- **Do your research and draw up a draft.** Look over the sample resolution in support of the Endangered Species Act passed by Pima County in Arizona (opposite). In drafting your resolution, include provisions important in your community—accurate information about local endangered species and habitat, for example.
- **Understand your local government and how it makes decisions.** Contact a local government office for information about the decision-making process and determine who to approach about your resolution. It could be your mayor, city council or county commission.
- **Build support.** Collect information about the leaders who are the most concerned about conservation and may be willing to sponsor or support the resolution. Find people who have good relationships with the politicians you need to approach and who can help you figure out how best to garner their support for the resolution.
- **Meet with the appropriate elected officials or staff members.** Schedule meetings with the appropriate officials. Present evidence of public support for your resolution and its importance to the health and economic benefits of environmental protection. Visit <http://action.defenders.org> for materials. If available, bring recent supporting clips from your local newspaper.
- **Involve your community.** Encourage others in your community—including business owners, local organizations and other community leaders—to call, write and visit leaders and write letters to the editors of local newspapers in support of the resolution.
- **Speak at public meetings.** Attend city or county council meetings and testify publicly on behalf of the resolution.

Certificate of Clerk
Board of Supervisors of Pima County, Arizona
State of Arizona
County of Pima

Resolution No. 2005-210

A RESOLUTION OF THE PIMA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS RELATING TO THE ENVIRONMENT AND ENDANGERED SPECIES, UPHOLDING AND AFFIRMING THE PRINCIPLES OF THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT AND REQUESTING THAT THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES RETAIN THE PROTECTIONS OF SUCH ACT IN ORDER TO PROTECT ENDANGERED SPECIES OF THE SONORAN DESERT.

WHEREAS, Pima County has a long and proud tradition of respect for, and protection of our native plants and wildlife and natural resources, and

WHEREAS, Pima County has collaboratively undertaken a visionary Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plan under Section 10 of the Endangered Species Act to ensure the protection of 55 priority vulnerable species of special concern, and

WHEREAS, this plan, the Sonoran Desert Conservation plan, is an award winning inspiration to many communities across the nation seeking ways to ensure a balance between urban development and the protection of native plants and wildlife, and

WHEREAS, we have a responsibility to the children and future generations of Pima County residents be good stewards of our environment and to leave behind a legacy of protecting endangered species and the special places they call home, and

WHEREAS, the strength and vitality of our community is inextricably linked with the health of all species and the places they live, and

WHEREAS, the wonder and beauty of nature and our wildlife is a key reason many people choose Pima County as a home, and

WHEREAS, we have a responsibility to use the best available science to ensure we protect this legacy for future generations, and

WHEREAS, for over 30 years, the Endangered Species Act has served as the nation's safety net for wildlife, saving hundreds of plants and animals from extinction, putting hundreds more on the path to recovery, and safeguarding the habitats on which they all depend,

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that Pima County hereby upholds the Endangered Species Act and calls on our federal Congress to ensure this law remains strong and vibrant so it may continue to protect the special plants and animals of the Sonoran desert from the finality of extinction.

Passed by the Board of Supervisors of Pima County, this 15th day of August, 2005.

ATTEST:
Clerk of the Board

APPROVED AS TO FORM:
Deputy County Attorney

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Once your resolution passes, spread the word. Enlist the aid of local officials. More than likely they will be eager to highlight their good work. Try the following tactics to share your success with others:

- Release a statement to the media.
- Publish the resolution in community newsletters.
- Encourage other communities in the state to pass similar resolutions.
- Send a letter to your state senators and you representative along with a copy of the resolution to encourage their support.
- Write a letter to the editor praising the passage of the resolution and encourage others to write similar letters to Congress.
- Share your success with Defenders using the Action Form at the end of this handbook.
- Encourage activists in other communities to pass similar resolutions. Once they do, work up the chain together to get your state legislature or even your governor to pass a state resolution.

Volunteer for Projects on the Ground

Activism isn't all lobbying and organizing. There are also plenty of opportunities for you to dig right in and help with projects on the ground. From invasive weed removal to bird counts, Defenders of Wildlife and local, state and federal land and wildlife management agencies often need volunteers to assist with species and habitat protection projects. Many national wildlife refuges, national parks and state and local public land areas have volunteer days or regular volunteer programs. Most of these public lands are underfunded and welcome your help. Contact the natural resources/land-management agencies in your area for information or become a Defenders of Wildlife e-activist and receive e-mail notification of volunteer activities.

RESOURCES

Defenders of Wildlife

www.defenders.org (information about wildlife and conservation issues)

<http://action.defenders.org> (information and links to action items and materials; membership and e-activist enrollment)

Federal Resource-Managing Agencies

www.fws.gov (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)

www.nps.gov (National Park Service)

www.fs.fed.us (U.S. Forest Service)

www.blm.gov (Bureau of Land Management)

Congress

www.house.gov

www.senate.gov

Legislation in Current Congress

www.thomas.gov