

Youth, Careers, and Climate Change Eco-Summit returns April 23



By Nate Smelle

On Wednesday, April 23, the Bancroft Area Stewardship Council, in partnership with Trent University, the Whitney and Area Algonquins, Algonquin Provincial Park, the Algonquin Forestry Authority, and the Township of South Algonquin will host the highly anticipated bi-annual Youth, Careers, and Climate Change Environmental Summit. This year's event builds upon the success of the inaugural Environmental Youth Summit held in March 2023, which brought together approximately 150 high school students for an immersive learning experience focused on environmental careers and sustainability.

The first Environmental Youth Summit was initially planned for 2020 but was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. When it finally took place in 2023 at the Algonquin Provincial Park Visitor Centre, students from North Hastings, Madawaska Valley, Haliburton Highlands, St. Peters, and Holy Cross high schools had the opportunity to attend. The summit featured a wide range of interactive breakout sessions on topics such as forest management in a changing climate, wildland fire management, human-wildlife coexistence, and Indigenous perspectives on the environment. The event was a resounding success, with positive feedback from both students and teachers.

Participating schools in 2025 include North Hastings High School; Haliburton Highlands Secondary School; Madawaska Valley District High School; Huntsville High School; and Cobourg District Collegiate. Given the financial barriers to participation, BASC prioritized covering the cost of transportation. Thanks to dedicated fundraising efforts, they were able to ensure that students could attend without financial constraints, a goal they continue to uphold for the upcoming summit.

The 2025 Environmental Summit will follow a similar structure in the morning but introduce significant changes in the afternoon, says BASC Steering Committee Member Ian Hendry. To begin the day, he said, students will have an opportunity to explore booths hosted by local organizations, many of which are actively seeking summer students and future employees. The event will then officially kick off with a welcome ceremony led by the Whitney and Area Algonquins, BASC representatives, and other partners.

Having served as an active member of BASC over the past decade, Hendry has been involved with virtually every event and initiative the council has organized in that timeframe. Looking back on his experience in this role, he says the first Youth Environmental Summit in 2023 has been his favourite event.

?I've been on the council now for like 10 years, and out of those 10 years I think the biggest day I've had?and we've done a lot of

things together?but the first youth summit was for me the best day that I've ever spent being involved with the council,? says Hendry. ?To see the excitement of the kids, and how it's such a great opportunity for them to learn about furthering their careers; and, maybe put them on a path.?

Hendry says the morning will feature three 30-minute breakout sessions, offering students a choice of expert-led discussions on topics ranging from ecology and conservation to climate change and sustainable resource management. He says these sessions will build upon past themes while introducing new speakers and perspectives.

BASC's Colleen Baehre is once again playing an instrumental role in making this year's eco-summit a success. With the big day fast approaching, Bancroft This Week had a chance to speak with Baehre about what makes the 2nd bi-annual Environmental Summit even more exciting than the inaugural event.

One of the most exciting changes to this year's summit, Baehre says is the introduction of off-site workshops in the afternoon. After lunch, she says students will travel to their first workshop location, where they will spend an hour engaging in hands-on learning experiences. They will then move to a second off-site location for another hour-long session before returning to their buses.

According to Baehre, these field workshops will provide students with a unique opportunity to observe and interact with professionals in environmental and resource management fields. Participants may find themselves learning from Indigenous elders, loggers, foresters, biologists, park naturalists, ecologists, and fish and wildlife researchers. In some cases, they will even get to see these professionals at work using their specialized equipment, offering a real-world glimpse into potential career paths.

?This time there will be these more in depth and more interactive [sessions], which will enable small groups to talk to these researchers or loggers or whoever,? explained Baehre. ?So there's more opportunity for a little more detail whereas before it was really quick. Some of them will be quick in the morning, but the afternoon will be better, giving the students more opportunity to really dig into the need of some of these topics.?

By bringing together students, educators, and professionals, the summit fosters a deeper understanding of the connections between youth, careers, and climate change. With an engaging mix of expert talks, interactive discussions, and immersive field experiences, the 2025 summit promises to be an inspiring and impactful event for the next generation of environmental leaders.