

Activist Tool Kit

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, concerned citizens can change the world. Indeed it's the only thing that ever has."

-Margaret Mead

We at WildEarth Guardians are using every tool available to fight to protect wild nature. While sometimes that means utilizing litigious and scientific strategies, ultimately people like you are the strongest force for nature there is. When we organize we bring people together working to build power and win real victories. By bringing people together and pressuring policy makers to protect and strengthen environmental laws, we are constantly working to give wild nature a fighting chance. We build power in numbers and bring about immediate and concrete improvements for people, wildlife, and wild places.

Here are just some of the ways you can help organize your community and enhance WildEarth Guardians' efforts in fighting for wild nature.

If you would like to get involved and utilize some of these tactics, please fill out our Activist Questionnaire or contact our Conservation Organizer, Rebecca Sobel at rsobel@wildearthguardians.org or 505-988-9126 ex. 1152, for tools and resources that help spread the message and win real victories for our planet.

Library Outreach

Library displays are a simple, but effective tool activists can use to educate the public about environmental issues and potential actions. Many libraries make space available to community groups or individuals who are willing to design, assemble, and erect their own displays.

Tabling

Tabling is an excellent way to reach out to the general public and educate individuals about environmental issues and action they can take. Tabling increases general visibility for environmental issues while building public support. At the same time, tabling allows you to engage others from your community who are also concerned about the environment and provides an opportunity to build public and political pressure.

Leafleting, Fliering or Petitioning

Leafleting, fliering or petitioning are simple ways to educate thousands of people on a variety of issues — from the dangers of oil and gas to the iconic endangered species that need protecting. Handing out literature or collecting petition signatures and having one-on-one conversations with individuals in our communities are inexpensive yet powerful ways to influence people to lead more environmentally friendly lives.

Demonstrations

A demonstration for wild nature is an effective way to bring wide public exposure to environmental issues, garner public support, and instill political pressure on policy makers to better protect our environment. You don't need hundreds of participants to make a demonstration successful. With proper planning, organization and the right materials, a handful of activists can reach and teach thousands of people about the threats to our environment — and what they can do to stop it.

Establishment Outreach

Some of the most powerful entities in any community are the businesses that keep local economies afloat. As a consumer who patronizes many of these businesses, you have the power to impact the decisions local owners and management teams make — decisions that directly affect the environment and our natural resources. Whether you're helping to recruit WildEarth Guardians Businesses for Biodiversity or just spreading information, reaching out to establishments is an effective tool for fighting for wild nature.

Vote

Big businesses and special interest are certainly having their voices heard in politics, but our decision makers need to hear from you and represent their constituents who care about wild nature. Use <http://www.fabnit.com/nvra-update-09-12-06.pdf> to register to vote.

Contact your Policy Makers

One of the most effective ways to speak up for the environment is to contact your legislators. The role of a lawmaker is to listen to, and carefully consider, the viewpoints of his or her constituents. You can influence their votes on important pieces of legislation by voicing your concerns about threats to the environment or suggesting political action you would like your representative to take. A letter, a five-minute face-to-face conversation, even a phone call or a short email can positively impact countless wildlife and wild places.

Important Tips for Contacting your Law-Makers

THE BASICS

Federal Legislation:

To get the names and contact information of your U.S. senators and representatives, contact your local library or call the congressional switchboard at 202-224-3121 or visit www.vote-smart.org

For phone calls, simply call your representative or senator's office and ask to speak with the legislative aid who handles that issue. Be sure to share your views with the aid, and ask for his or her e-mail address so that you can follow up directly.

For letters, simply address your envelope with the following information:

- For Senators:

The Honorable _____
U.S. Senate
Washington D.C. 20510

- For Representatives:

The Honorable _____
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington D.C. 20515
State Legislation

- For the names of your state representatives, look in the government pages at the front of your local phonebook or visit www.vote-smart.org
- When you contact your representative, always request that your position on any environmental protection bill be recorded so that it will be remembered when the bill comes up for a vote.

Composing Letters and E-mails to your Legislators

- Use plain paper and a business letter format.
- Include your name, full address and phone number.
- When sending an e-mail, compose it as if it were a traditional letter. Do not include attachments.
- Your letter should focus on one environmental issue. For multiple issues, send multiple letters.
- Use www.govtrack.us and be sure to include the correct bill number in your letter is appropriate.
- Use the League of Conservation Voters scorecard to assess your legislators' voting record on the environment: <http://www.lcv.org/scorecard/>
- Keep your letters brief. Just as an employer often will not read beyond the first page of a resume, legislative staff members may limit their focus to only a few, short paragraphs.
- Make sure the information in your letter is accurate, and your tone respectful. Legislators will respond much more favorably to courteous and knowledgeable constituents than they will to

those who seem aggressive and uninformed.

Setting up Personal Meetings with your Legislators (Lobbying)

If you plan to be in your state capitol or in Washington D.C., set up a personal meeting with your senators or representatives. Simply call your legislator's office and schedule an appointment with a staff member. You can also meet with your legislators or their staff in their district offices at any time of the year.

- Remember that you will most likely be meeting with a staff member rather than the actual legislator. Staffers deal with the details of issues and often advise legislators on what position to take.
- Explain to the staff member the specific environmental issue that is important to you and why. Make sure you are reasonably knowledgeable about the issue you are going to discuss before you schedule a meeting. Know the title and number of the bill you are lobbying for, and bring fact sheets to back up your position.
- Dress conservatively and be professional.
- Be respectful, polite, and positive. Remember to congratulate legislators on past achievements. It's always best to start off a meeting on a positive note.
- Do not speak as a representative of a national organization. You are strongest when you represent yourself as a registered voter and constituent.
- Be brief. You should not expect more than five minutes of the staff member's time.
- When you get home, send a thank you letter to the person you met with. Follow up is the most important part of this process.

Remember to take notes after your meeting and record any action items you or your legislator promised to take. Send your notes to our Conservation Organizer, Rebecca Sobel at rsobel@wildearthguardians.org so WildEarth Guardians can follow up on your great work!

Media Outreach

Media attention is crucial for any individual or organization hoping to deliver an important message. Whether your goal as an activist is to expose the public to the threats to endangered species, bring attention to a demonstration you are holding on behalf of the environment or clean energy, or spark interest in an article you have written about the threats of oil and gas, the media can be your greatest ally.

Letters to the Editor (LTEs)

Because many people read letters-to-the-editor (LTEs), they are a quick, effective and continuing means of communicating environmental messages to a wide audience. If you can spare just a few moments to write a letter to your local newspaper, you can reach countless individuals with your message of concern for protecting wild nature. LTEs can be used to correct and clarify facts in a news story, editorial or op-ed piece, oppose or support actions of an official agency, direct attention to a problem, spur news editors to cover an issue that is being overlooked, and urge readers to support our cause. Most newspapers have direct links to submit LTEs on their websites, otherwise you can find an address or email for the Opinion Editor within your paper.

Here are some tips for writing a good LTE:

- Pick a timely topic — Newspapers rarely publish letters about topics that are not being covered in the news. Referring to a previously published article or column will increase your letter's chances of being published. Respond to an article or editorial as soon as possible; we recommend submitting your LTE via email the day that the article on your topic is printed.
- Research the guidelines — Most papers' length limit on LTEs is around 250 words. Stick to this so that an editor does not cut out the important points of your letter. If your letter can be under 150 words, that is even better. Often newspapers want your address and phone number so they can verify that you wrote the letter. You can usually find a paper's guidelines on the letters page. If not, call the paper directly or

- visit its website.
- Do your own research - This doesn't have to be an in-depth study, but you need enough knowledge about the issue to relate to those who may have no grasp of the issue. Use websites and research done by WildEarth Guardians to obtain background information.
 - Assume nothing – Do not assume that your readers are informed on your topic. Give a concise but informative background before plunging into the main issue. Refer to any newspaper article or editorial by date and title. Also include any relevant credentials that prove you are informed about your topic.
 - Be brief – State your position as succinctly as possible without eliminating necessary detail. Keep your paragraphs short. Long rambling sentences and digressions will cause people to lose interest quickly. Stick to one subject.
 - Maintain composure – It is okay to express outrage, but it should be kept under control. Avoid personal attacks and focus instead on criticizing specific policies or ideas.
 - Find a local angle – Readers are more interested in an issue when they see how it affects their lives and communities. Find a way to show how budget cuts or environmental policies will affect this particular readership.
 - Avoid form letters – Do not send the same letter to two competing papers in the same circulation area. A form letter sent to papers in different markets should look like an original and all letters should be signed individually.

Remember to send a copy of your LTE to our Conservation Organizer, Rebecca Sobel at rsobel@wildearthguardians.org or 505-988-9126 ex. 1152. We like to track our activist's efforts and make sure your letter gets the attention it deserves!

These are just some of the activist opportunities WildEarth Guardians can help you facilitate. Be sure to fill out our Activist Questionnaire so we can get you more involved. Thanks for fighting for wild nature and doing your part in making our world a more sustainable place.