Informational Paper

"THE 4-H SUPERIOR EXPERIENCE"

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Situation

Northern Minnesota and Wisconsin are rich in natural resources. 4-H should be capitalizing on these resources in its programming efforts. Currently, 4-H conservation and natural science project areas are plagued by low member enrollment, a lack of leadership and a need for new project literature. Therefore, a program should be established to provide leadership and interest in this area.

Lake Superior and the immediate surrounding region are unique in geology, weather, history, plant life, wildlife and recreational resources. Educational opportunities regarding Lake Superior in Minnesota and Wisconsin have been offered by Sea Grant and the National Science Foundation. Both programs have been held as statewide experiences to meet an educational need but have recently been discontinued from lack of funding. According to participants and instructors in both states, the programs were valuable learning experiences. Therefore, a "Superior Experience" for older 4-H youth could once again fill the need of developing natural science skills in the Lake Superior Environment.

Further evidence that points to the need for this program includes low enrollment in a project area earmarked as a recent national 4-H thrust and a need for junior and adult leaders to become skilled in teaching conservation and natural science projects. There is also the need for implementation of the new Wisconsin Naturespace program, the need for training sessions in the natural sciences beyond the county level, and the need for youth to develop a greater knowledge of the Lake Superior region.

Objectives

Representatives from University Extension in Minnesota and Wisconsin, Minnesota Sea Grant and the Wisconsin Point Field Station determined that the Superior Experience should give participants an opportunity to:

1. Increase their knowledge and skills base in the 4-H conservation and natural science project areas.

2. Learn skills that can be applied toward developing a healthy lifestyle.

3. Develop leadership skills to be utilized in the community, 4-H club, and county 4-H programs.

4. Increase awareness in careers related to the areas of conservation and natural science.

5. Develop a better understanding of the uniqueness of Lake Superior.

6. Share ideas across county and state lines.
Methods

Participants in the program in 1983 were 25 junior leaders and adults from Northwestern Wisconsin and Northeastern Minnesota. The event, designed as an intensive outdoor education program, was held at the Wisconsin Point Field Station on Lake Superior in Douglas County. Operation expenses averaged $40.00 per participant.

The actual implementation of the 4-H Superior Experience was carried out in a number of ways. Each day focused on specific subject matter that was taught by youth and professionals through education and recreation sessions.

DAY 1  - Focus on Forestry
  - Pretest
  - Naturespace and U. S. Forest Service Process Approach Activities
  - Local history instruction through music
  - Astronomy with binoculars, telescopes, and handouts

DAY 2  - Focus on Lake Superior
  - Discovery of lake properties on a research vessel
  - Orienteering skills, canoeing skills and aquatic plant identification through a canoe relay
  - Natural science instruction from five minute speeches

DAY 3  - Focus on Lake Shore
  - Plant succession hike
  - Geology through map reading and core sample analysis
  - Leadership skill-a-thon
  - Fish boil for donor recognition
  - Friendship ceremony

DAY 4  - Focus on the Field Ecosystem and Natural Science Careers
  - Fragile ecosystem hike and discussion
  - Career presentation by DRN, forestry, government and industry representatives
  - Post test

Sessions were led by County and University Extension faculty, Sea Grant Staff, U. S. Forest Service and DNR resource people, local hobbyists, university interns and faculty and by the 4-H participants. Methods most often used were "hands-on" discovery through games, simulations, experiments, and group participation. Discussion and lecture were minimal.

During the four day period, youth also had a chance to live in tents, cook their meals over an open fire, and participate in outdoor leisure activities. Fishing, sailing, swimming, horseshoes, and volleyball were all popular events.
Conclusion

Participants were given a pretest and two post tests on the subject matter presented during the 4-H Superior Experience. The median score of the pretest was 46%, the median score of the first post test was 67%, and the median score of the second post test given 65 days after the event was 70%. The results suggest that considerable knowledge was gained during the event and was retained for quite some time. Possible reasons for the additional increase of the second post test score may be that it was taken by fewer participants who had greater knowledge of their environment or a greater personal interest in the subject matter.

Numerical and prose surveys were also administered for the event. Almost all the educational sessions were rated highly as were structured recreation and social activities. Meals and food preparation were not popular since delegates were not used to cooking meals over a fire. Appetites were also suppressed by the hot weather. Overall, members rated the experience as very good to excellent.

The 4-H Superior Experience has resulted in a large amount of positive impact. Several observations indicating this are listed below:

- Junior leaders who received training at the Superior Experience have taken the materials back to their home county. Ex: St. Louis County - project meeting on orienteering and compass reading. Douglas County - has used the skill-a-thon technique in training sessions learned at Superior Experience.

- More visibility for the 4-H program was created through donors and the media.

- Teaching techniques were piloted to explore effective methods in teaching youth sailing, canoeing, camping skills.

- A careers seminar was held that explored professional and vocational opportunities in the natural resources.

- Lake Superior's uniqueness was examined from many perspectives.

- The Superior Experience will be held in 1984 by Minnesota and Wisconsin.

Implications

The 4-H Superior Experience is an event that can promote the following:

- Increased membership and leadership in the natural science project areas.

- A workshop available to teens focusing on the uniqueness of Lake Superior.

- A kickoff for 4-H adventure programs.
- Junior leader training for Sea Camp, 4-H Camp Naturalists and other activities.

- Continued sharing and work across state lines.

The Superior Experience has more than achieved its original objectives. The event has created positive impact for many youth and adults in the Twin Ports region. Future plans are to build on this positive support to allow the Superior Experience to become a statewide natural science/conservation award trip for older youth from Minnesota and Wisconsin.