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Proposal to NYFOA for 4-H Forestry and the New York State Invitational (Ingrid Hill)

Nature Deficit Disorder, as coined by Richard Louv in his book, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder* is a sad fact that many of our youth and families experience today. Due to time constraints and many other factors there is an increasing divide between the young and the natural world. Youth are simply not able to make the same strong, effective connections with their outdoor environments of days past creating significant implications toward environmental, social, psychological and spiritual well-being. Educational research demonstrates that connections with the natural world increases a child's ability to learn while improving self-esteem and social behavior. The **4-H Forestry** curriculum provides an easily managed, low cost response to these challenges, providing meaningful out-of-school experiences for youth and cultivating a powerful tool for lifelong learning. Additionally, the curriculum provides opportunity for volunteer involvement and addresses multi-faceted learning strategies that occur "*in*" nature.

As a result of their participation in 4-H Forestry and the New York State Invitational youth gain knowledge and demonstrate forest resource management skills. This increased knowledge and skills will make these youth better informed citizens and potential future policy makers. Participation in the Invitational has also had an influence on future career choices of the participants with many of them going on to pursue natural resource management careers. This is critical at a time in our history when these careers are not being highly sought after. Throughout our weekend event, youth gain direct learning experiences in Tree Measurement, Tree ID, Topographic Map Reading, Compass and Pacing, and Insects and Diseases. Additionally, the curriculum provides a basic overview of Forest Evaluation as well. All learning is hands on, engaging and most of all – FUN! Youth come away from the weekend event having formed friendships and learning the value of rich, wonderful time spent outdoors.

Our weekend 4-H Forestry program has been operational for ten years and it continues to offer strong, positive impact for youth from across New York State. As with all programs, we have growth goals which we continue to work towards and we depend on strong partners in assisting us to meet these initiatives. Currently, we have identified four areas for potential growth as follows:

1. Continued **purchase of necessary equipment** to provide effective field experiences. This year in particular, we are in need of mirrored compasses.
2. Since 2011, we've sent a New York state 4-H Forestry team to the National 4-H Forestry Invitational in Jackson's Mill, WV. This is a pinnacle event that has been aptly named the 'Superbowl' of 4-H Forestry. It is our hope, to continue this tradition and help to strengthen our team through **the inclusion of junior coaches** that can work with our youth in directing their study and focusing their efforts. There is a direct cost associated with this goal and to date, it has been beyond our means to support.
3. We would like to **offer two state-wide scholarship opportunities** for attendance at the weekend program that would provide the opportunity for attendance to a youth who might otherwise not be able to afford the event. Our current weekend cost is \$42.00 and includes five meals and housing. We have worked to keep costs low but for some, it is still not attainable. We hope to eradicate that limitation!
4. Lastly, if possible, a wider reaching goal would be to have funds that would allow us to offset the expenses and **lower the \$42.00 cost to all families** attending the event ensuring a robust participation from across the state.

It is my belief that \$1,000-\$2,000.00 of funding support could help us to be successful in meeting these growth initiatives and adding to our overall sustainability. We have fabulous youth and truly it is my continued goal to provide them with the best possible experiences in outdoor learning that our resources can support. I am continually grateful for organizations such as NYFOA for the recognition and care that come our way. System professionals provide strong role models for the potential in these career tracks and assist in guiding our young people into productive, meaningful career paths. I appreciate your consideration toward our efforts and look forward to a long, thriving partnership as we move forward in forest oriented pursuits.