



VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION OF SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

7308 Hanover Green Drive, Suite 100 • Mechanicsville, Virginia 23111

(804) 559-0324 or 1-800-727-6354 • Fax (804) 559-0325

Youth Conservation Leadership Institute

October 2026 - June 2027

The Youth Conservation Leadership Institute (YCLI) is a program focusing on volunteer service, environmental stewardship, leadership and connecting students with environmental issues in their local communities. The YCLI program is designed to engage high-school students in the resources and topics of Soil & Water Conservation District programs beyond the limits of a single camp program or competition. It is the intention of YCLI to connect the knowledge gained through programs such as Youth Conservation Camp and Envirothon with specific environmental concerns and needs in one's local community.

As a participant in the Youth Conservation Leadership Institute, students will **develop and implement a project of their choosing** with assistance from the YCLI program director and the local Soil & Water Conservation District and will be required to **complete a minimum of 20 hours of community service with a focus in the natural resource conservation field**. Students are encouraged to focus work with the local Soil & Water Conservation District but any work that contributes to pollution prevention, natural resources conservation, and/or promotion of environmental literacy will be accepted. All projects will have a confirmed mentor which may be a local SWCD, government agency, community leader, or similar local organization.

YCLI is open to any Virginia High School student in grades 9-12th committed to the entirety of the program including:

- Developing their own Project Proposal based on student interest and implementing that project with the help of a mentor.
 - Completion of at least 20 community service hours to be approved by the VASWCD staff.
- Submission of one interim, final report, & presentation on the community work completed.
- Attendance at the final recognition program to be held June 2027
- Read an assigned book on environmental leadership and participate in a virtual group discussion
- Participate in scheduled virtual group meetings throughout the program.

YCLI student goals include to:

- Engage with your local community & collaborate with fellow YCLI students across the state
- Develop project management skills and professional relationships through working with your mentor, local SWCD, and YCLI program director
- Meet deadlines and maintain a progress log with documentation of your work
- Practice presentation skills at the final program presentation
- Learn more about a topic of your interest and be a self-starter in developing your own project!

Specifics for the program will be announced along with the acceptance letter that will be sent via email in October 2026. Questions? Contact Byron Minson at byron.minson@vaswcd.org or (804) 559-0324.



Youth Conservation Leadership Institute 2026-2027 Application

Completed applications should be received by the VASWCD no later than
Thursday, October 8th, 2026.

Applications should be emailed to byron.minson@vaswcd.org or mailed to
7308 Hanover Green Drive Suite 100, Mechanicsville, VA 23111

Please type or print responses legibly.

A. Personal Information

Applicant's Name _____

Home Address _____

County of Residence _____

[Local Soil & Water Conservation District](#) _____

Telephone Number _____ Email: _____

Name of High School Attending (2026-2027) _____

Grade for the 2026-2027 School Year _____

B. Environmental Leadership & Activity Experience

List any environmental leadership or activity experience you may have, including participation in Envirothon, Youth Conservation Camp, 4-H, Future Farmers of America (FFA), etc. Attach additional information as needed.

C. Essay:

Attach a typed essay of your own words of a minimum of 500 words describing yourself and your involvement/interest in conservation and the environment. Address what you feel is the most important environmental issue in your community and why. Why are you interested in participating in the Youth Conservation Leadership Institute?

D. Recommendation (teacher, scout leader, SWCD staff, etc.):

Please submit at least one letter of recommendation from an unrelated adult that can attest to your interest in conservation and community service, and your ability to work independently and as part of a team. Your recommendation writer may email their letter to byron.minson@vaswcd.org or you may include it in your application.

Recommendation Contact: Name _____

Mailing Address _____

Phone # _____ E-Mail _____

E. Signatures/Certification:

Parent/Guardian:

I acknowledge that my student has applied to participate in the Youth Conservation Leadership Institute, a program focused on volunteer service, environmental stewardship, and connecting students with local environmental issues. I understand that some travel may be necessary to attend community service events and the final awards program. I understand that some travel and project costs may be reimbursable at the discretion of the VASWCD education coordinator. Electronic signatures are considered equivalent to physical signatures and are fully accepted.

Parent/Guardian Name (Print): _____

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____ Date: _____

Phone Number: _____

E-Mail Address: _____

Applicant:

I acknowledge by completing and submitting this application that I am committed to completing a minimum of 20 community service hours related to an environmental conservation project. I am committed to working independently to complete this task and provide an interim report to the VASWCD. I am committed to reading the assigned book and participating in the group discussions. I am committed to providing a final report on my project at the final recognition program to be held in June 2026. Electronic signatures are considered equivalent to physical signatures and are fully accepted.

Applicant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

**Questions and Applications should be emailed to byron.minson@vaswcd.org or mailed to
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