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IMPORTANCE OF YOUTH-A CHALLENGE

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IMPORTANCE OF YOUTH—A CHALLENGE

HOLLY DAVIS, President, Snohomish County 4-H, Natural Resources, Snohomish County, 600 128th Street SE, Everett WA 98208

As I was looking through your program for the next few days, I noticed that several of the workshops had to do with the future—Perspectives on Natural Resources Extension for the 21st Century, A Perspective on the Past, Present, and Future Extension Wildlife and Fisheries Programs, Extension Technologies for the 21st Century, and on and on. But it is our youth with whom we should focus. It's the young generations now that are going to be doctors, pilots of major airlines, presidents, UN Peacekeepers, but most important of all—keepers of our planet earth. Our future is going to be built around the youth of today. What you teach and how you treat the youth now will have a great impact on tomorrow. These youth are looking to you as role models. My name is Holly Davis and I am 18 years old. I have been involved in Snohomish County 4-H Natural Resources for the past 9 years—a group in which a majority of the responsibility falls on our teen leaders, from selecting, to arranging, advertising, running, and participating in 25 to 30 outdoor events, community activities, and meetings a year. All open to the public.

I am here to give you an insight into how some children think through my story of youth leadership—a case history that applies to the youth in many of your states. I was a shy child and whenever I went anywhere I stayed right at my parent's side. In 1987 I joined 4-H dogs and natural resources. I had previously gone on several fishing trips with my father and still several more camping trips with my family, so this natural resources group sounded just perfect for me.

One of the first activities I participated in was the tours at the Skykomish Salmon Hatchery. At the age of 10, I was too young to give tours so they set me up with a booth to promote 4-H and it was my job to pass out pamphlets. Though it was a small job, it was important to me and I worked hard doing it—making sure that every single tour goer received one. I felt that I had to prove something—to show them that I was responsible enough to run tours the next year. In the years to follow at the hatchery I was able to give tours by myself, but that first time—when I held a salmon out to the children and saw both the amazement and wonder in their eyes and realized how I had made that come alive in them, I was proud knowing that I held the key to a child's curiosity.

In the following trips of my first year, I started to pull away from my parents and looked up to the teen leaders. They became my mentors and my friends and I couldn't wait to be them. I didn't start setting up my own trips for a few years but I helped the older members by making phone calls or running games—nothing very large, but just enough to learn responsibility. As the years went by, I

learned about mother nature, wildlife, the environment, and how to love planet earth through native American teachings.

In my junior year of high school I became involved in the 4-H Wildlife Habitat Evaluation contest at both a state and national level, from which I learned a great deal. I learned the habitat needs and diet of 68 different species of animals and how to alter the land to create the environment needed to produce a maximum population of that species. I felt I had to prove to myself and others that I could do well, so I studied for months and won first at the state level. I became a part of a four-person team to attend the nationals in North Carolina. I then had to learn about new species of animals, new practices, and how to apply them to the different environment that is found in North Carolina. When I arrived at the national contest, I had the chance to use my knowledge in a competition against several other teams from different states. I met and became friends with many other competitors and learned about their states and their lives.

My senior year started and I decided to run for the office of president of our club. I had never run for a position until this year but I had visions of what could be accomplished with this group of people so I decided to become president. I since have learned about problem solving, being a mediator, conflict resolution, communication between the leaders, teens, and public, and the management of a county-wide project. At the same time trying to integrate my ideas for the improvement of the group.

I have gained confidence in my leadership and speaking abilities and feel that I can deal with almost anyone. I know I can accomplish great things and have high expectations for my future mainly because of the leadership skills I have learned these past 9 years.

From the age of 13 I wanted to be a cardiac specialist but just within the past 6 months I have decided to create a career for myself in the field of fisheries and wildlife. I think that being a mentor to children and being fortunate enough to have a mentor like John Munn in my life has given me the courage to change direction. I think we are all out to prove our identity whether it be to others or just to ourselves. I think it is most prominent in childhood and in the teen years. These are the years we decide what type of adults we want to be. We challenge the system, we rebel against our families and school in the way we dress and the attitudes we have. We must make our own way and we must make good decisions. It's very hard being a child these days with so many expectations to fulfill. No generation yet has had as many choices as we do.

Children need guidance and the encouragement to take responsibility and you as Extension specialists are the ones to give it to them.

A week ago I graduated from high school and received an Associates of Arts and Science degree at the local community college through the Running Start program. I have only 3 months left in my 4-H career as a teen. I feel confident in attending Washington State University and in my career choice in environmental science. It is one of your compatriots that influenced me. But the question you should be asking yourselves is "How does this apply to me?"

Thank you.

