

2023 CONSERVATION EDUCATORS FINAL REPORT

Issue

A final report of the 2023 Summer Conservation Education Program's activities and successes is presented to Council.

Motion Proposed by Administration

That the presentation regarding the 2023 Summer Conservation Education Program be accepted as presented.

Report, Analysis and Financial Implications

The annual Summer Conservation Education Program is provided to increase awareness, understanding and participation in achieving environmental stewardship targets in the Environmental Master Plan and the Climate Action Plan. This community based social marketing program is an initiative to create behaviour change through in-person education initiatives that promote long-term environmentally responsible lifestyle changes among Okotoks residents.

The 2023 program employed four (4) non-permanent staff, from May through August, with the purpose of promoting the Town's sustainability initiatives. The main program includes school and community group eco-education programs, the yellow fish road program, workshops, Town day-camps, outdoor public information booths, irrigation assessments, and door to door visits to new utility account addresses and to high water users. The educators also ran Environment Week and Pollinator Week information campaigns and events. Pollinator Week included using funding from Pollinator Partnership Canada to plant a native flower garden in Waller Park.

The educational focus each summer is on the outdoor watering schedule, the water meter portal, waste diversion and the waste app, water conservation, and education about pollinators and the local ecosystem. The educators were also able to assist with analysis and administrative tasks including program and grant research, processing the water rebate program applications, and overseeing the Do-It-Yourself (DIY) home energy audit kit program.

The Conservation Education team delivered eco-education programs to just under 2000 youth and children through 30 programs with schools and eight (8) programs at Town day camps. 151 storm drains were painted with conservation messaging by school groups this spring through the Yellow Fish Road program.

The Conservation Educators host an information table at each Town event during the summer. They relay information about conservation tools, the watering schedule, and ways to enhance the local environment. This year they spoke to over 2100 people! In addition to the booths at events, the team coordinated volunteers to help at the Town's three waste stations. 133 kg of waste was diverted from the landfill this summer!

The Town added a bike valet service, coordinated by the Conservation Educator team, to all large Town special events this summer. Over 200 bikes were checked into the valet throughout the summer. The service will continue next summer, encouraging attendees to leave cars at home and bike to events.

As part of Pollinator Week, an online event on iNaturalist was launched for Okotoks as a method of engaging residents with their local pollinators. The team also installed 11 bumblebee nest boxes in the forest near the Operations Centre. The boxes support citizen science initiatives by the Alberta Native Bee Council. Environment & Sustainability will assess the boxes in October to see if any bumblebees took up residence during the summer.

Nature Fridays is a program day at the Environmental Education Centre where environment-related events and activities are scheduled each Friday of the year. From May through August, a total of 295 people (average of 74 per month) attended the weekly events hosted by the Conservation Education team. Since last August a total of 775 people have attended Nature Fridays.

A total of 820 households with new utility accounts, 300 high water using households, and 49 households non-compliant to the watering schedule were visited through door-knocking efforts. Over 1/3 of residents answered their doors and engaged in conversation with the team.

The program was able to provide information to over 4700 Okotoks residents and of that number, directly engage with over 4100 individuals this summer.

As part of the main goals of the program, the Educators inform residents about the programs and tools available from the Town to help conserve and protect the environment. The Irrigation Assessment program started up in late May, continuing over the summer months. 26 yards and irrigation systems were assessed for water conserving set up and adherence to the watering schedule. Over the summer months there were over 294 water conservation rebate participants, and 141 Waste App downloads. Since last summer, 345 households have signed up to the Water Meter Portal. Going forward, monthly information regarding portal sign ups will be delivered by Sensus.

Strategic Plan Goals

<input type="checkbox"/>	Responsibly Managed Growth	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Demonstrated Environmental Leadership
<input type="checkbox"/>	Strong Local Economy	<input type="checkbox"/>	Enhanced Culture & Community Health
<input type="checkbox"/>	Organizational Excellence		

Equity/Diversity/Inclusivity Impacts and Strategy

Addressed in Town policy.

Environmental Impacts

The Conservation Education program informs Okotoks residents about the programs and tools that the Town offers to protect, conserve, and regenerate the environment both locally and globally. The program provides learning and action opportunities for all ages with the goal of improved local ecosystems and water conservation, lower greenhouse gas emissions, and movement towards a circular economy.

Governing Policies/Bylaws/Legislation or Agreements

Environmental Master Plan

Climate Action Plan

Public Participation Strategy

The Conservation Education Program is announced annually to the public in early May and delivered May through August to engage the public in environmental initiatives. The Program continues on a limited basis by grant funded and non-permanent staff in non-peak months, largely responding to increasing requests for tours, programs and information by schools, businesses and individuals.

Alternatives for Consideration

n/a

CAO Comments

This team contributes to the unique identity that is Okotoks and advances community understanding of conservation. Their efforts are appreciated.

Attachment(s)

1. 2023_Conservation Educator Council Presentation PowerPoint

Prepared by:

Jinny Toffelmire

Environment & Sustainability Coordinator

September 25, 2023