

# Written Submission for Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of Budget 2021

Prepared by: Earth Rangers and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority



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**Recommendation 1:** That the government provide funding to continue the Engaging Canadian Kids in Wildlife Conservation funding program, administered through the Canadian Wildlife Service.

## Introduction

Environmental education at a young age plays a critical role in influencing lifelong attitudes towards our natural world. But we can't just equip children with knowledge—to create long term behavioral change, we must empower them with the ability to act on that knowledge. Preparing the next generation to be conservationists is some of the most important work that any of us can do, and the time to do it is now.

Increasing pollution in our air and waterways, diminishing biodiversity, and the ever-present threat of climate change all conspire to create images of a bleak future that can at times seem inevitable. The growing sense of unease about the fate of our planet has become so prevalent that the term "eco-anxiety" has entered the common lexicon. To address the issue, we must demonstrate to young people that their actions have meaning and there is reason to be optimistic for the future.

**To that end, Earth Rangers and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) are seeking a renewal of the Engaging Canadian Kids in Wildlife Conservation program, administered by the Canadian Wildlife Service. Both organizations are currently in the final year of three-year agreements valued at \$1,250,000 each for projects that have achieved overwhelming success during that time.**

## About Earth Rangers' Creating a Generation of Conservationists Project

Earth Rangers is the kids' conservation organization, committed to instilling environmental knowledge, positivity, and the confidence to take action in every child in Canada. We do this through a suite of programming that children can participate in at school, at home, and in their communities. These programs are educational and engaging and show children that it's not too late to help the planet, and the things we do today will matter tomorrow.

Our project consisted of two parts: education and action and sought to achieve these and other key objectives:

- Grow Earth Rangers Membership to 250,000 children across Canada, engaging them and their families year round in conservation-related activities.
  - This has already been achieved and we are on track to grow the community to 265,000 by the project's end date of March 31, 2021.
- Develop and deliver 3 new nature and conservation focused activities for our members, engaging 40,000 participants.
  - We have developed 4 activities and engaged over 62,000 children thus far, already surpassing the goal by over 50%.
- Deliver our School Assembly Program featuring live animals and highlighting current Canadian conservation projects to 1,250 schools, reaching 375,000 students.
  - We have surpassed this goal, having delivered the program to 1,687 schools, reaching 452,210 students in just the first two years.

## **Earth Rangers Supporting Canadian Families During COVID-19**

A lot has changed in just a few short months. The social, economic and societal impacts of COVID-19 have only begun to be realized and life will likely not return to normal for quite some time. While the pandemic caused our School Assembly program to shut down temporarily, our other programs have grown and flourished. More than anything, this difficult time has shown us how important positive, proactive and nature-based learning and action is to the mental, physical and emotional well-being of Canada's children. It has also clearly demonstrated our ability to provide value to Canadian families, regardless of external circumstances.

### **Daily Eco-Activities**

When schools and offices shuttered this past March, Earth Rangers launched a daily e-mail series with a new environmental activity every day to support parents began looking for educational and enriching activities to engage in with their families. The initiative has seen great success, with over 13,000 subscribers across Canada and feedback from parents indicating that they find the activities and content to be a vital educational tool and that they appreciate Earth Rangers' positive approach now more than ever.

### **The Earth Rangers Podcast**

Already a staple for many families across Canada and the English speaking world, The Earth Rangers Podcast saw its highest monthly download numbers ever at almost 100,000. Designed for co-listening with parents, the podcast follows Earth Ranger Emma as she explores the mysteries of nature.

### **Reimagining In-school Delivery**

Earth Rangers is recreating our flagship School Assembly Program for the 2020/2021 school year in a way that reflects the changed world we all now find ourselves in. This virtual version of our live assembly will take advantage of all that technology has to offer us so that we can deliver something innovative, exciting, and never before experienced by schools.

The assembly will be delivered in real time, be led by Earth Rangers presenters, and will continue to feature our beloved Animal Ambassadors demonstrating their natural behaviours and helping students to make the connection between their love for animals and the importance of protecting them. We will use technology to bring a new level of interactivity to the program, like a question submission process for students and choose-your-own-adventure section that allows students to direct the focus of the content. Virtual Presentations will be broadcast live from the Earth Rangers Centre and delivered via a secure custom delivery platform. A link to the show, along with instructions, will be sent to the school to be shared amongst teachers so that multiple classrooms can participate.

Two specialized studio spaces have been created for delivery of this new program out of the Earth Rangers Centre in Vaughan. Each studio features multiple camera angles, modular lighting, wired network connectivity, modular backdrops, green screens, and soundproofing so that two presentations can be performed simultaneously. While this initiative is a direct response to changes due to COVID-19, we believe this program also has long-term potential. A powerful virtual assembly will allow us to reach schools and students in remote communities, reducing ongoing travel costs.

## About Monarch Nation

Monarch Nation, a program of TRCA, brings together a collective of partners focused on ensuring Canadian children are knowledgeable about species at risk, and empowered and inspired to act on behalf of Canadian wildlife. Working with children, educators, community, and likeminded organizations, Monarch Nation creates a sustainable model of engagement to extend this project's reach well into the future.

The program is focused on five main objectives:

- **Build knowledge and awareness amongst 55,000 – 65,000 6-12 year-olds.** Through a mixture of in-school and community programming, children learn about what it means to be a species at risk and how we can best support them. To ensure sustainability, programming is developed locally by partners and is tailored to meet the needs of individual communities. To date, Monarch Nation has reached over 48,000 children across Canada and is on track to meet and surpass the target before the end of March 2021.
- **Complete 650 action projects generated by partners, children, and the community.** Monarch Nation supports actions such as habitat creation, contributions to citizen science and advocacy campaigns, deepening knowledge and engagement, and demonstrating to participants they can effect change in their community. To date, Monarch Nation has supported over 800 action projects, surpassing our original goal.
- **Install 70,000 plants that will support Monarchs and/or other identified species at risk.** 50,000 plants have been installed so far across Canada, through a mix of school and community plantings. Partners continue to install habitat and we fully expect to reach the target of 70,000 plants this year.
- **Educate 1500 teachers and community leaders through train-the-trainer workshops.** With this model, we extend awareness building and species at risk activities to wider audiences over a greater expanse of time. The program has already reached over 1200 educators and we anticipate exceeding the target of 1500 before the end of March 2021.
- **Create partnerships to extend reach of the program to every province and territory in Canada.** Thanks to a rich diversity of partners, Monarch Nation offers programming in every province and territory, mostly in person and where needed in a virtual format. Thus far, over 75 external organizations across the country have contributed to the delivery of Monarch Nation, including conservation authorities, municipalities, museums, school boards and zoos. We expect the list to continue to grow, particularly through the Flight of the Monarch Day event on August 22nd 2020.

## Monarch Nation Adapting to COVID-19

Naturally, there have been shifts to the program this year, but we are confident that we have found ways to complete deliverables as planned, and to address particular needs that have arisen because of the pandemic. Before COVID-19, many of us were already concerned at the paucity of regular outdoor time Canadian children enjoyed; this situation has thrown that into even sharper relief and we believe that Monarch Nation is well positioned to address this deficit.

**Engaging Children and Educators:** With schools closed in March, program delivery necessarily changed in format, largely shifting to an online setting. Partners moved swiftly to embrace the array of online platforms that are now familiar to many of us, and are now delivering through a mix of webinars, live and pre-recorded videos, as well as through social media platforms. We have leveraged the broad range of skills and experience amongst partners to ensure the quality of programming is maintained.

We have also maintained what we see to be a particular strength of the program, its regional specificity: whilst shifting to an online platform, partners are still responsible for delivering to their local communities and have been able to maintain their unique connection with their own network.

**Habitat Creation:** During the pandemic, it has been difficult to arrange planting in the usual way, but we have observed an increased interest in gardening to which Monarch Nation has been able to respond. We have been working with external groups to provide plants to households and smaller groups. For families striving to keep children occupied at home, this has provided a valuable focus for outdoor, non-screen activities.

As restrictions have eased, outdoor activities have become feasible and we have been able to organize limited group planting events, providing an outlet and focus for much needed outdoor time for communities across Canada, as well as supporting the initial goal of spreading awareness of the need to support species at risk.

**Flight of the Monarch Day, August 22nd 2020:** This event, originally planned to be a festival of small, in-person events across the country, has been transformed into an online event and almost 200 groups from across Canada are now registered to take part. The event has helped us forge new relationships to strengthen and grow the program and is providing a vital focus for positivity and environmental action amongst local communities.

## Creating Lasting, Meaningful Change

We continue to be very pleased with the Government's focus on protected areas and conservation. As part of these efforts, there is a need to continue to educate Canada's children about the importance of conservation today, for a healthy environment tomorrow. Of equal importance is demonstrating progress and celebrating successes as they occur as a way to ensure continued engagement, optimism and confidence that we can succeed in our national environmental goals.

Overwhelmingly, children identify the threats facing animals as their number one environmental concern. Our experience and external research confirms that the most effective way to connect children with conservation is by focusing on wildlife. Providing kids with meaningful actions they can take is of critical importance for seeing environmental challenges as solvable, even when negative news tends to dominate the narrative.

In just three years, funding provided through the Engaging Canadian Kids in Wildlife Conservation program has made a significant impact on our ability to deliver programs that meet these objectives. Between the two projects outlined above, hundreds of thousands of children have been positively impacted and our organizations have built up knowledge and capacity to deliver even greater results going forward. Now is the time to build on this momentum by renewing this important program.