

**The Lakeshore Guardian, 2010 May**  
**Thumb Habitats**  
**Scouts Conservation Good Turn**  
**by Bill Collins**

From its founding in 1910, the Boy Scouts of America promoted the emerging ideals of conservation. Co-founder, Dan Beard, defined Scouting as, "*The love of outdoors in terms of conservation.*" Today, in practice, BSA leans toward resource development rather than sustainable ecology, but retains a strong environmental legacy.

This article focuses on the Boy Scout program for boys 11 to 18. A much longer article would include the Tiger Cub, Cub Scout, Webelos, Explorer, Venturing, and Varsity Scout programs, but they generally parallel the Boy Scouts. To be fair, I hope to sometime write about the Girl Scouts and Camp Fire USA.

The *Scout Law*, a foundation of Scouting, emphasizes a respect for nature: "*A Scout is Kind ... Without good reason, he does not harm or kill any living thing ... A Scout is Thrifty ... He protects and conserves natural resources ... A Scout is Clean ... He helps keep his home and community clean.*" The *BSA Outdoor Code* charges the Scout to respect the outdoors: "*I will treat the outdoors as a heritage ... I will use low-impact methods of hiking and camping ... I will learn how to practice good conservation of soil, waters, forests, minerals, grasslands, wildlife, and energy. I+will urge others to do the same.*"

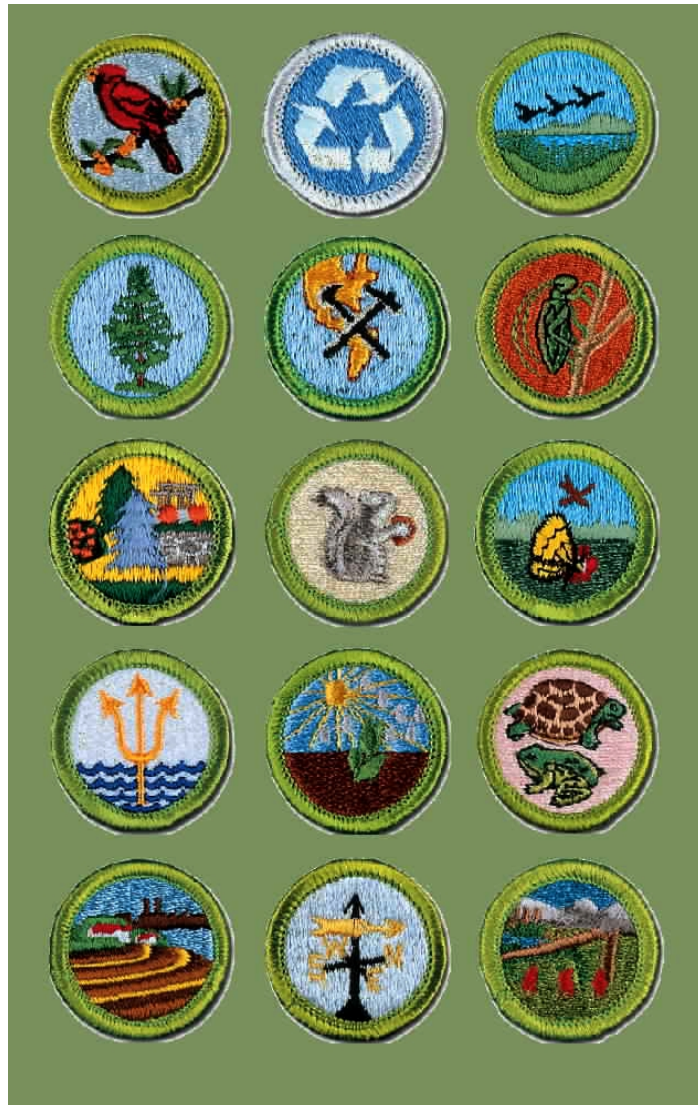
There are 122 Boy Scout merit badges, 14 of which focus on nature, including Bird Study, Environmental Science (required for Eagle Scouts), Fish and Wildlife Management, Forestry, Geology, Insect Study, Landscape Architecture, Mammal Study, Nature, Oceanography, Plant Science, Reptile and Amphibian Study, Soil and Water Conservation, and Weather. Others related to nature or with some environmental requirements include Animal Science, Archaeology, Astronomy, Backpacking, Camping, Climbing, Energy, Fishing, Fly-Fishing, Gardening, Hiking, Nuclear Science, Pulp and Paper, Public Health, Scuba Diving, Snow Sports, Veterinary Medicine, Wilderness Survival, and Woodwork.

The World Conservation Award encourages Scouts to think globally and act locally by completing Environmental Science, Soil and Water Conservation or Fish and Wildlife Management, and Citizenship in the World merit badges.

The Conservation Good Turn award encourages Scouts to work with environmental or conservation organizations in their community. Back in the 1970s, every spring our troop picked up trash at Lakeport State Park and earned Project SOAR patches (Save Our American Resources). Apparently, SOAR is now merged with Conservation Good Turn.

The *Hometown USA Award* is a joint program of Keep America Beautiful Inc. and BSA to recognize outstanding efforts in citizenship and environmental improvement.

The William T. Hornaday Awards recognize outstanding efforts to further conservation and environmental awareness. Dr. Hornaday was founder of the National Zoo, an outspoken champion of conservation, and a leader in saving the American bison from extinction.



Merit badges (top to bottom and left to right): Bird Study, Environmental Science, Fish and Wildlife Management, Forestry, Geology, Insect Study, Landscape Architecture, Mammal Study, Nature, Oceanography, Plant Science, Reptile and Amphibian Study, Soil and Water Conservation, Weather, and Wilderness Survival. Images courtesy of Boy Scouts of America.



The World Conservation Award. Image courtesy of Boy Scouts of America.



Conservation Good Turn awards. Images courtesy of Boy Scouts of America.

Throughout its program, the BSA integrates Leave No Trace Principles, nationally recognized guidelines, skills and ethics to promote low-impact use of natural areas for camping, hiking, and other outdoor recreation. The BSA also has a detailed Wilderness Use Policy.



Leave No Trace patch and principles. Images courtesy of Boy Scouts of America.

One thing that stuck with me from my old Scout Handbook was the suggestion to “*Leave your campsite better than you found it.*” That meant picking up litter, scattering the fire pit, and replacing natural ground cover, among other things. This was solidly reinforced by our Scoutmaster, Reginald Nuss, who made sure the Senior Patrol Leader lined us up side-by-side to “*police the area*” at the end of every campout. We stepped slowly, picking up anything not green. Many are the times we heard one of Mr. Nuss’ favorite phrases, “*Pick it up or paint it baby!*” Upon final inspection, it gave him great pleasure to find the slightest scrap of anything man-made so he could make us line-up again. Despite the military discipline, this attitude of leaving a place better than found and taking care of a little part of the world grew on me. By no ones’ command, I policed our family campsites on vacations, and in later years, expanded the concept to protecting natural areas in my community.

For camp counselors and other program staff, the BSA offers training through the National Camp Schools. In 1982, the Blue Water Council gave me the great privilege of completing the NCS Ecology-Conservation program, a week-long intensive course at Camp Tamarack in Wood Lake Scout Reservation near Three Rivers, Michigan, then in the Northern Indiana Council. I was just one of a few hundred participants in different programs from all over the Midwest. Attending this Camp School compelled me to dedicate myself to a lifetime of ecological study and nature protection.



National Camp School and Camp Tamarack, Wood Lake Scout Reservation patches. Images courtesy of Boy Scouts of America.

Above all, regular outdoor excursions are the most effective BSA environmental program. Whether camping, hiking, canoeing, or whatever, so much is learned and appreciated by getting outdoors. My old Troop 169 camped in the area year-round. Whether a local woodlot, a river trip, or a High Adventure BSA camp like Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico, getting out there makes the difference.

2026 Update:

The William T. Hornaday Award is now the Distinguished Conservation Service Award. This from the Scouting America web site:

*“Conservation and Scouting America have been partners for a long time. Camping, hiking, and respect for the outdoors are a part of the Scouting heritage. Many of the requirements for advancement from Tenderfoot through the Eagle Scout rank call for an increasing awareness and understanding of the natural sciences. Many former Scouts have become leaders in conserving our environment and protecting it from abuse. Right now, Scouts are involved in learning about environmental problems and actively working to make a difference.”*

And this: *"The fundamental purpose of the Scouting America Distinguished Conservation Service Awards program is to encourage learning by the participants and to increase public awareness about natural resource conservation. Understanding and practicing sound stewardship of natural resources and environmental protection strengthens Scouting's emphasis on respecting the outdoors. The goal of this awards program is to encourage and recognize truly outstanding efforts undertaken by Scouting units, Scouts and Venturers, adult Scouters, and other individuals, corporations, and institutions that have contributed significantly to natural resource conservation and environmental protection."*



Not mentioned in the original article was the BSA Outdoor Code, essentially like the 5 commandments of outdoor conduct for scouts: *"As an American, I will do my best to: Be clean in my outdoor manners; Be careful with fire; Be considerate in the outdoors; and Be conservation-minded."*



Scout Badge  
1911

## Boy Scouts of America The Outdoor Code



Scout Sign  
1911

**As an American, I will do my best to:**  
**Be clean in my outdoor manners**  
**Be careful with fire**  
**Be considerate in the outdoors**  
**Be conservation-minded**

**Be clean in my outdoor manners:**  
I will treat the outdoors as a heritage. I will take care of it for myself and others. I will keep my trash and garbage out of lakes, streams, fields, woods, and roadways.

**Be careful with fire:**  
I will prevent wildfire. I will build my fires only when and where they are appropriate. When I have finished using a fire, I will make sure it is cold out. I will leave a clean fire ring, or remove all evidence of my fire.

**Be considerate in the outdoors:**  
I will treat public and private property with respect. I will follow the principles of Leave No Trace (also posted on Troop website) for all outdoor activities.

**Be conservation-minded:**  
I will learn about and practice good conservation of soil, waters, forests, minerals, grasslands, wildlife, and energy. I will urge others to do the same.