

Ending Obscurity: William T. Hornaday Conservation Programs

William O'Brochta and Ken Zabel

Since their founding, the Boy Scouts of America has been concerned with conservation and the environment. Camping and respect for the outdoors have been a part of the Scouting heritage for over a hundred years. Boy Scout advancement requirements call for an increasing awareness and understanding of the natural sciences, from joining through becoming an Eagle Scout. Scouts learn about environmental problems as they actively work to make a difference while becoming leaders in conserving our environment.

The fundamental purpose of the Hornaday Awards program is to encourage learning by the scouts 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 BSA National Council describes the Hornaday Award as being "equivalent to an Olympic medal bestowed by the earth." There are eight categories of Hornaday projects: Soil and Water Conservation, Fish and Wildlife Management, Forestry and Range Management, Air and Water Pollution Control, Invasive Plant Species Control, Hazardous Material Disposal and Management, Resource Recovery (Recycling), and Energy Conservation.

William O'Brochta tells his story:

Conservation excellence need not mean obscurity. In 2007, the William T. Hornaday Awards for Distinguished Service to Conservation received only a small mention on the National Scouting website. Fortunately, that was enough to spark my interest. I had just completed my Eagle project and earned the rank early in my Scouting career, at the age of thirteen. Looking for something else to do in addition to racking up Eagle Palms I came across the Hornaday Awards. The Hornaday Badge, with its one project requirement and five conservation related Merit Badges, was an attractive and, I thought, simple enough award to earn. As is the case with most of the Scouts I help with Hornaday today, my Eagle project was unwittingly environmentally focused and fit pretty well into one of the Hornaday project categories. I figured applying and getting a Hornaday Badge should be straightforward, thus I resolved to complete the requisite three additional projects and four additional Merit Badges for the William T. Hornaday Silver Medal, the highest conservation honor in Scouting.

Started in 1914 by the famed and somewhat infamous Dr. William T. Hornaday, first Director of the Bronx Zoo and the man credited with singlehandedly saving the American Bison population, the Permanent Wild Life Protection Fund, was always about conservation; it morphed into a Scouting program in 1937 after Dr. Hornaday's death. Initially geared toward all-star financial contributors, the Boy Scouts greatly modified the award requirements to place emphasis on actual conservation work, seeking to fulfill Dr. Hornaday's vision that "unusual prizes are only to be won only by unusual services." Today, one hundred years later, the seven-tiered Hornaday Awards Program remains faithful to that focus. For Scouts, Merit Badges and Eagle sized projects with heavy emphasis on research, education, lasting impact, and conservation prowess are the name of the game; one project is required for the Hornaday Badge, three for the Hornaday Bronze Medal, and at least four for the Silver Medal. Scouters can receive the Hornaday Gold Badge or, very rarely, the Gold Medal for service to conservation for three to more than twenty years. All Units who involve sixty percent of their Scouts in a Hornaday project can receive the Hornaday Unit Award Certificate as recognition and non-Scouters are sometimes recognized by the Hornaday Gold Certificate. With Hornaday it is all about rarity: an average of 1.5 Silver Medals per year awarded in the Nation means earning Hornaday is more than

15,000 more rare than earning the Eagle rank. That and the 1,500 hours invested in a typical Silver Medal effort makes Hornaday one's job for two hours a day for the average three year time it takes to earn.

Armed with strong enthusiasm I set out to find someone who knew something, anything, about the Hornaday Awards Program. That became exceedingly difficult because, as I later learned, a Hornaday Badge had never been awarded in my Council and the only Silver Medal was granted twenty years ago. Though I did eventually find some Scouters with a working knowledge of the Hornaday Awards Program, I was constantly greeted with the fact that the general Scouting body was unaware of these awards. As I completed my Hornaday Badge and had it approved by my Council's Conservation Committee and began looking toward a Silver Medal, the lack of information on the requirements for this award and, more importantly, anyone with first hand knowledge of the award process was quite surprising. Further, I quickly found that my Council, being located in one of the most outdoor friendly sections of Virginia and indeed the country, was years ahead in terms of both the implementation of conservation policies at our Scout Reservation and promotion of the Hornaday Awards.

Being the first Scout in my Council to work on Hornaday projects in years made it very difficult for those with whom I was working to understand what I was doing and what the standards are for such projects. Virtually all aspects of my earning the Silver Medal, from project design to final review by the National Hornaday Committee, were wrapped in mystery. I have come to believe that my five projects got me the Hornaday Silver Medal in 2010 partially because I was able to hit an invisible target.

There were plenty of bumps along the way: confusion about project categories, the importance of fundraising, and the impact projects were supposed to have; all of which resulted in my completion of an additional project. As the only Scout actively involved in the Hornaday Awards Program, I was invited to join the Council Conservation Committee to help teach others about these awards. What I really would have appreciated when I was going through the process of completing Hornaday projects was some sort of guide that told me how projects have been successful in the past and showed me the steps to take for my projects. Unfortunately, no one involved in my projects could find that type of information. Some had put out information on the Hornaday Badge and National had some brief descriptions, but I figured a step-by-step document would be most helpful.

Thus, in order to attack this issue and start promotion of conservation awards and programs, the ***BRMC Hornaday Awards Guide*** was born. Now in its third edition, the eighty page Guide was the first comprehensive, step-by-step Hornaday manual in the country and it has been downloaded and used by thousands of Scouts and Scouters. Unlike many other publications, the Guide is meant to be read cover-to-cover and used throughout the entire Hornaday process. It includes examples and project write-ups. And it has dramatically increased Hornaday awareness and participation in the Council and Nation, being also the training document used at the 2013 Jamboree Hornaday Tent. Our strategy of creating a comprehensive guide and then building presentations, one page handouts, and videos off of it and distributing these items many times over within the Council led directly to the half dozen Scouts working on Hornaday Awards last year. Half of the reason that so few Hornaday Awards are earned is because they present a large challenge and this aspect should in no way be diminished. My goal is to use the Hornaday Guide to raise one of Dr. Hornaday's crowing achievements to more prominence, addressing the other half of the reason so few awards are earned: lack of awareness.

William O'Brochta's Hornaday Projects included creating a habitat for insects and plants to live while providing a place for school kids to interact with animals (**Fish and Wildlife Management**). William

conducted research showing that “green” laundry detergent has less harmful effects on the environment when compared to regular laundry detergent (**Air and Water Pollution Control**) and implemented an energy conservation program (water, gas, recycling) for families moving into Habitat for Humanity houses in a small remote town in the Country of Hungary (**Energy Conservation**). He researched and selected plants to control soil erosion at Claytor Lake Aquatics Base (**Soil and Water Conservation**); a second project at Claytor Lake created new habitats for fish, which also helps to stop further erosion and prevent shifts in the soil makeup of the lakebed (**Fish and Wildlife Management**).

Ken Zabel talks about Troop 319’s Hornaday Awards:

In 2010 I become a Founder and an Assistant Scoutmaster for a new troop in Brooklyn, a suburb of Cleveland, Ohio. My son and sixteen fellow Webelos II Scouts were going to be split up into five different area troops. During the first meeting of Troop 319, Scoutmaster Tom Schloemer took these new Boy Scouts on a hike through the 68 acre wooded area behind our chartering organization. The scouts were excited – many had not even seen the woods that are landlocked between Brooklyn and Cleveland – and they are in our backyard! Scoutmaster Schloemer had taken five trash bags with him to pick up trash they encountered, but scouts came running back twice for more bags. It was immediately apparent that these young men were concerned about the environment and very motivated to help keep it clean. During their hike they also noted numerous discarded items in the woods that they could not just pick up and carry back with them – car axles, numerous tires and rims, sections of fencing, car hoods, furniture, and a refrigerator! We looked for additional ways that these young men could develop their understanding of conservation as wise and intelligent management of natural resources – at the local, state, and national levels.

The next weekend the Boy Scouts worked with their former pack to clean up a nearby city park (*city*). A nearby troop was planning to cleanup a section of county highway which ran between where our troops met, but they could not locate enough volunteers. Our scouts eagerly joined this effort (*county*). An effort was being organized to clean up the Towpath Trail area of Northeast Ohio. Scouts joined the efforts of “RiverSweep!” to clean the watershed areas that lead to the Ohio-Erie Canal, the man-made canal which flows into Lake Erie (*regional*). Scouts were eager to work on these projects – and their desire to learn more about how they can help was evident. This enthusiasm was greatly increased when they learned about the next two areas we had found to help with. Lakefront Park is an Ohio State Park along Lake Erie. One Saturday scouts wore their swimsuits and Class B Shirts as we joined “Trash and Pancakes” and ate breakfast on the beach and ‘swept’ the beach for trash and discarded items (*state*). The scouts used the skills that they had learned from Park Rangers at Cuyahoga Valley National Park where they had been trained and joined Saturday ‘Trail Sweeps’ to clean and maintain park trails (*national*) – **Hornaday Unit Award 1 (Soil and Water Conservation)**. Many of the scouts were also awarded National Park Scout Ranger patches. This was not a typical Hornaday Project, but the Greater Cleveland Council Advancement Committee was very impressed with all of Troop 319’s activities to clean and maintain city, county, regional, state, and national properties; after they learned about the Hornaday Award Program, they awarded Troop 319 the first William T. Hornaday Award in Greater Cleveland Council’s history!

A subsequent work day was set up to collect the large trash items the scouts had noted in the woods. The scouts and area volunteers located and carried out the trash found discarded in the woods. They separated the trash and took found hundred pounds of metals to be recycled – **Hornaday Unit Award 2 (Resource Recovery – Recycling)**.

During trail sweeps in Cuyahoga Valley National Park, one scout, John Moynihan, learned about an invasive plant that was invading the park. Autumn Olive is a large bush that had overtaken the fields where the Audubon Society had counted and tagged Monarch Butterflies for many years. The primary counting field had been completely overtaken by this invasive species. John coordinated 31 volunteers for more than 165 hours to remove 8,275 square feet of this area – 1/5 of an acre. When this field had been cleared, only one tree and two bushes had survived! John received a Hornaday Badge, and since at least sixty percent of Troop 319 assisted - **Hornaday Unit Award 3 (Invasive Plant Species Removal)**.

Mason Kuhr was concerned about trash and chemicals being dumped into Brooklyn storm drains. He learned about a grant program to upgrade regional sewers and storm drain systems. He applied for a \$4,000 grant which allowed Troop 319 to purchase, and install over one thousand 5” aluminum markers which included a fish and a notation “Do not dump – drains to lake.” He designed and scouts hung a door hanger on each of the front doors of the houses on these streets to inform the residents of the project, and help educate them that anything dumped into the storm drains will flow into Lake Erie. Mason received a Hornaday Badge and Troop 319 was awarded **Hornaday Unit Award 4 (Air and Water Pollution Control)**.

John Moynihan was also concerned about trash and other materials being dumped down the storm drains in his Cleveland neighborhood. These drains also drain into the streams and creeks that lead directly into Lake Erie. John researched other ways to educate residents about this environmental concern. His second Hornaday Project was to mark the storm drains with a painted message (“Do not dump – drains to waterways”) and distribute door hangers in the Old Brooklyn neighborhood of Cleveland - **Hornaday Unit Award 5 (Air and Water Pollution Control)**.

Zack Schloemer was also concerned about the woods behind where the troop meets. In the two years since the original troop meeting, careless people had littered the area and discarded more items in the woods behind the troop meeting place. Zack organized the troop and area volunteers to clean and remove trash from 68 acres in the Big Creek Watershed and received a Hornaday Badge was the troop was awarded **Hornaday Unit Award 6 (Soil and Water Conservation)**.

These projects completed by Troop 319 caught the attention of the National Boy Scout Office. Tim Beaty, Chairman of the National William T. Hornaday Awards Committee wrote: “I wish to congratulate the young men of Troop 319 for having earned an unprecedented six William T. Hornaday Unit Awards for outstanding service to conservation. Earning a single Unit Award is indeed an accomplishment, especially for a Troop that is just over two years old, but to have earned six Unit Awards in that time frame speaks highly of your dedication and commitment to service to our environment. By earning these Unit Awards you have demonstrated that the vast majority of your unit comes together time and time again to make a change in our natural resources and through your example that the people around you are becoming more aware of the needs of our environment.”

Let’s look at Hornaday Projects in the other Hornaday Categories:

Fish and Wildlife Management: Sean McCarthy of Troop 2193 of the Flint River Council worked to build bat houses to house bats in the County Fair Grounds area. He received \$1800 in donations and ordered bat houses and fifteen foot poles. He and his helpers assembled, varnished, and installed the bat houses to be around and useful give many years of service to house 250 bats to reduce mosquitoes

in the fairground area and the possibility of people contracting the West Nile virus carried by the mosquitoes (this was also Sean's Eagle Scout Project).

Hazardous Material Disposal and Management: Robert Marks, Eagle Scout, and Member of Venturing Crew 306 of the Laurel Highlands Council (Troop 358, Sea Scout Ship 1942) was concerned about old personal computers containing materials (such as lead) that are potentially harmful to the environment piling up in landfills creating a large burden on the environment and widespread environmental pollution. Instead of ending up in a landfill, this equipment was shipped to a company that dismantled and recycled it.

Energy Conservation: Robert Marks also organized "Green Energy Week" at Edinboro University of Pennsylvania. Events included the green movies "FUEL" (dependence on foreign oil) and "The Age of Stupid" (depicting devastated world of 2055). Green Job Panel discussions and guest speakers, meetings to discuss biomass fuels and hybrid cars, a Green Energy Fair, and an e-Cycling drive were also included in the weeks' educational activities.

Forestry and Range Management: Sam Hudnall of Troop 29 of the Blue Ridge Mountains Council built a fire pit to prevent soil erosion, and reduce the number of blackened rocks caused by digging and using multiple fire pits. By using one fire pit with a concrete floor, soil sterility from the heat is reduced. Sam was also concerned about reducing habitat disturbance and minimizing the ecological footprint left by campers.

Some projects can be in more than once category; choose the one that is most applicable. Josh Bakr and Troop 216 of the Des Plaines Valley Council removed several invasive plant species from Bemis Woods South, a forest preserve of Cook County, IL. They cut and removed black raspberry (*Rubus occidentalis*), Japanese Honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*), and European Buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*) - **Invasive Plant Species Removal**. . In order to restore the woodlands, they planted seeds from native species that were collected during the previous fall season: Tall Anemone (Thimbleweed), Anemone Virginiana Woodland brome, *Bromus pubescens* Tall Bellflower, *Campanula Americana*, Riverbank wild rye, *Elymus riparius* Bottlebrush Grass, *Hystrix patula*, Marsch balzing star (gayfeather), *Liatris spicata* Mullein foxglove, and *Seymaria macrophylla* - **Forestry and Range Management**.

Hornaday Awards for Venturers:

Hornaday Awards for Venturers are designed to provide requirements for youth who cannot or did not earn the merit badges required under the Boy Scout program. Of course if a male youth did earn all the required merit badges then he does not have to use the alternate Venturing requirements. The alternate Boy Scout merit badge requirement for the Venturing Hornaday Badge is to earn the Ranger Conservation core requirement.

The alternate Boy Scout merit badge requirements for the **Venturing Silver or Bronze Medal includes earning the Ranger Ecology and Plant & Wildlife electives and the Ranger Conservation core requirement**. The complete requirements for Venturers can be viewed on the BSA website under [How Applications Are Judged](#). In addition to the required project documentation, as outlined above, Venturers are expected to provide additional information on:

- **The research performed in connection with the conservation projects undertaken.** The relevant research must be cited at the appropriate location in the conservation project documentation. A bibliography must be provided that lists sources cited. The bibliography must be formatted according to established standards.
- **The applicant's entire Hornaday effort.** This evaluation, included in the application in a separate section, should contain information on alternatives considered for each project and an explanation of why each specific conservation project was selected, procedures used, processes used, staffing levels used, funding requirements, and so on.
- **The lessons learned.** Included in the report in a separate section, this details what the applicant, in hindsight, would do differently on each project. The section should include recommended changes in project selection; procedures, processes, and staffing levels used; funding requirements; and evaluations of project effectiveness over time.

Editorial notes: Your Hornaday Advisor does not need to be a part of your Council. The specific Hornaday Projects included here are examples of projects which have been completed. The scope of the project categories (i.e. Soil and Water Conservation) are general enough to allow for a wide range of projects. If you are not sure if your project will be considered to be a Hornaday Project, please contact a Hornaday Advisor, including the authors of this article for assistance.

The authors of this article invite you to send them an e-mail if you have any questions, or if you are looking for a Hornaday Advisor to work with. If an Eagle Project could also be considered to be a Hornaday Project, a Hornaday Report can be written and submitted to your Council for review (typically by the Hornaday, Environmental, or Advancement Committee).

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