

# Sierra Club of Canada 101

## A Guide for New Volunteers

### 1 You belong to Sierra Club of Canada

Want to volunteer for Sierra Club of Canada, but aren't sure how to start? Read on...



**Distribute literature and talk to your neighbours.**



**Find creative ways to protest pollution.**



**Take your child to a day of action or a demonstration.**



**Lead a hike through a field of wildflowers.**

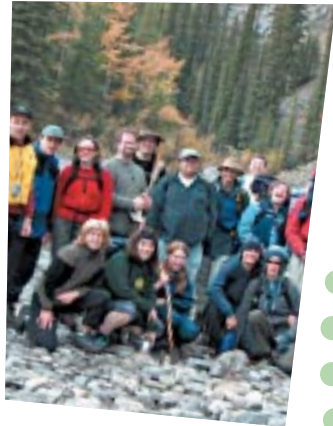


**Take a leadership role in a chapter or a campaign.**

There are many opportunities to get involved in Sierra Club of Canada. This tour will help you find the resources and contacts you need to take the next step. Welcome!

### 2 Who are the people of Sierra Club of Canada

Sierra Club of Canada (SCC) supporters, members and donors are 10,000 of your friends and neighbours. Inspired by nature, we work together to protect our communities and the planet. We have been active in Canada since 1963. Our national office was established in Ottawa in 1989. In the US, the Sierra Club, founded in 1892, is America's oldest, largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization. Both organizations are autonomous in their own countries, but work together for effective transboundary action.



Through grassroots activism, public education, lobbying and litigation, Sierra Club of Canada works to protect the health of our environment and to preserve our remaining wild places.

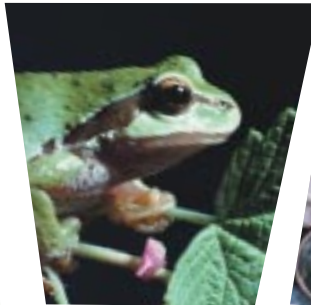
Sierra Club of Canada has played a prominent role in helping to ensure the success of environmental policy and legislative initiatives. Here are just a few of the successes of our campaigns in coalition with others and as a leading advocate. (For a more complete list see <http://www.sierraclub.ca/national/aboutus/successes.html>.)

- Stopping the Windy Craggy planned copper mine to protect the wild Tatshenshini River of northern BC
- GMO (Genetically Modified Organism) Bovine Growth Hormone to boost milk production rejected from registration
- Biosafety Protocol negotiated in Montreal set rules for movement of GMOs
- Clayoquot Sound officially announced as a United Nations Biosphere Reserve
- Existing Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement protected from threatened renegotiation to weaken it
- Passage of Species at Risk Act
- Pesticide bylaws in 72 municipalities to date
- Development of a strong new National Forest Strategy
- Kyoto Protocol ratified despite opposition from Ralph Klein

### 3 Mission Statement

Our goal is to develop a diverse, well-trained grassroots network working to protect the integrity of our global ecosystems. Sierra Club of Canada's mission focuses on five overriding threats:

- loss of animal and plant species;
- deterioration of the planet's oceans and atmosphere;
- the ever-growing presence of toxic chemicals in all living things;
- destruction of our remaining wilderness
- spiralling population growth and over consumption.



### 4 Our Common Bond

This is not about getting back to nature. It is about understanding we've never left. We are deep in our nature every day. We're up to our ears in it. It's under our feet, it's in our lungs, it runs through our veins. We are not visitors here. We weren't set down to enjoy the view. We were born here and we're part of it—like any ant, fish, rock, or blade of grass. We need to reorient our society. We need to treat the Earth as though we plan to stay.



Sierra Club of Canada members know that this planet, alone in our whole solar system, in the known universe, is our home and that we belong to it and owe the wild places respect and love.

Maybe it came to you on a mountain trail, or on a riverbank, or at a windowsill watching a spider. Simply put, it's the sudden conviction that there is something out there, something wonderful. And it is much, much bigger than you. A revelation like this could easily overwhelm a person. We choose to let it inspire us.

Nature, vastly complex and infinitely subtle, is our perfect metaphor. Related to everything, signifying everything, it is the spring where we go to renew our spirit. And it, in turn, asks something of us. It compels us to take responsibility and then to take action.

There is nothing inevitable about the future of our environment. A poisoned stream can get worse, stay the same, or get better. It depends largely on what we choose to do.

Forget the grim cliché of the selfless environmentalist. When you accept your connection to nature, suddenly you can't look at the world without seeing something very personal in it. You are part of it, and you work for the planet because it gives you joy to do so. You work for the planet because you belong to it.

Sierra Club of Canada 101 is also available at [www.sierraclub.ca](http://www.sierraclub.ca)



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## 5 Chapters and Groups

In Canada, there are four bioregional chapters (Eastern Canada will soon split into Ontario and Quebec) and 14 groups which tend to be organized geographically around local issues. For example, the BC chapter comprises 8 groups—Victoria, Quadra Island, Haida Gwaii, Coast Mountain, West Kootenay, Lower Mainland, Sea to Sky (Squamish), Malaspina (Powell River).

To get involved in a group in your area, or to start one, contact your chapter, or the national office.

Each chapter and group is guided by an executive committee elected by the members. Hundreds of volunteers nationwide are elected or appointed to leadership positions, such as chapter chair, chapter treasurer, committee chair, and outings leader. The Club structure allows us to work on multiple levels to solve problems. We work internationally interacting with United Nations negotiations, and work across the border on shared issues with Sierra Club US. Nationwide membership gives SCC clout with federal decision makers, while local groups and chapters help us influence provincial and local decision makers. The local groups also put pressure on their members of Parliament—this one-two punch is a powerful combination.



## 6 In the comfort of your own home

Two important actions Sierra Club of Canada volunteers can take from the comfort of their home are writing letters and making phone calls to support environmental protection. Sierra Club of Canada can give you ideas about letters to write. You can also be an Internet activist working from our web site to “Fax the Feds.”



If you're a member, you already receive Sierra Club Activist News (SCAN), which includes calls to action on a variety of issues. You can also sign up for the Green Gazette, a monthly electronic newsletter that keeps you up to date on current campaigns.

Your local chapter or group newsletter also includes specific requests for actions you can take locally. Many chapter and group newsletters are available online.



## 7 Learn more by getting connected

Sierra Club of Canada's web site has a “Take Action” page where you can find out where your help is most needed. Writing letters to the editor of your local newspaper can reach thousands of people in your community with the Club's message.

Every chapter and most groups have web sites where you can find out about events and issues in your community, and how to connect with other Club members. You can also go to Media, then Press Releases to find out what is happening right now.



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## 8 Join with others

While individual actions like writing letters from the comfort of your home are important, the real strength of Sierra Club of Canada comes from collective action, joining with others to explore, enjoy, and protect the planet.

All local newsletters list a range of activities from river rafting trips to beach cleanups to newsletter mailing parties. At right and below are some activities chapters and groups offer in which you can participate with your neighbours.



**Join your neighbours to plant trees.**



**Collect water samples from creeks and rivers to help build pressure for cleanup programs.**



**Take a hike with new-found friends through a foggy forest.**

## 9 Reach out to your community

The late Cesar Chavez, founder of the United Farm Workers and the Boycott Grapes Campaign, was once asked what the secret to good organizing was. His response: **“The only way I know to organize is to talk to one person, then talk to another person, then talk to another...”**

Sierra Club of Canada is most successful when it reaches out beyond its members and makes new friends.

This can take a variety of forms, from tabling at community events to knocking on doors to participating in public hearings to asking strangers outside the supermarket to sign petitions.

Sierra Club of Canada also works to build alliances with other groups, like labour unions, religious groups, international development organizations and social justice groups. For example, in the fall of 2002, SCC brought together a wide variety of prominent Canadians to sign on support for the Kyoto Protocol, and took out a full page advertisement in a national newspaper.



**Talk to your neighbours by tabling at public events or knocking on their doors.**



**Engage your community in public outreach events such as Earth Day.**



**Hold a bake sale or a garage sale to support wilderness.**

## 10 Participate in planning and decision making



Once you've participated in volunteer activities, you can contribute even more by leading these activities, and taking part in the planning and operation of your group or chapter or the national organization. You can volunteer for a committee, lead an outing, write articles or take photos for the chapter or group

newsletter, attend public meetings representing Sierra Club of Canada, help plan fundraising activities or help recruit volunteers.

Decision-making within the Sierra Club of Canada is democratic. Members vote for the national board and for chapter executive committee officers, who in turn appoint leaders to serve other roles. Groups send delegates to chapters. Volunteer leaders keep us vibrant and effective.

All conservation policies are approved by the board of directors.

Sierra Club of Canada is inclusive and participatory and has all the messiness that comes with a democratic decision-making structure. As a result, the Club culture has a high standard for treating others respectfully, finding common ground, and moving forward to fight the polluters and despoilers, not each other.

## 11 Sierra Youth Coalition

Sierra Youth Coalition (SYC) is the for-youth-by-youth arm of Sierra Club of Canada serving as an effective action centre for youth concerned about issues surrounding the environment and social justice. Through grassroots action, SYC's mission is to address globalization, consumption and climate change through a solutions based approach of promoting bioregionalism sustainable communities, education for sustainability and lifestyle simplicity.



Since its inception in 1996, SYC has acted as a networking and resource centre for youth between the ages of 15 and 25, concerned about environmental and social justice issues.

SYC strives to empower youth to become active members of their communities, create a widespread understanding that all things are connected, challenge unjust and unsustainable systems with a solutions-based approach, and ensure that the voices of future youth are heard by decision makers.

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## 12 Sierra Club of Canada priority campaigns

**Sierra Club of Canada works on dozens of issues.**

The Sierra Club works on dozens of issues, but every year the board of directors, with guidance from chapters and groups, specifies our top priority campaigns and programs. The purpose of these priorities is to focus public attention on the priority campaigns.

The major national priority campaigns fall into four thematic areas: Protecting Biological Diversity (forests, endangered species and oceans), Energy and Atmosphere (climate change, promoting renewable energy, opposing fossil fuels and nuclear energy), Health and the Environment (working to clean up our air, eliminate toxic sites, oppose chemical pesticides and other persistent pollutants), and the Transition to a Sustainable Economy (international issues, including population, trade and the environment, ecological fiscal reform).

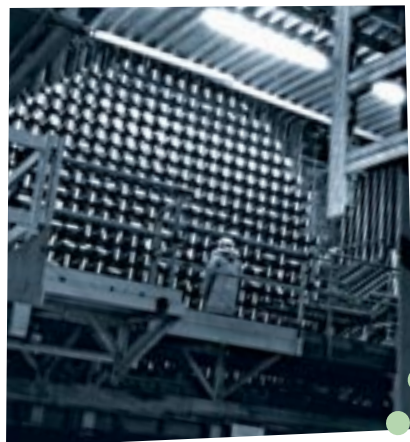
Chapters specify priority campaigns as well, some of them overlapping with national campaigns.

For example, the Atlantic Canada Chapter's priorities include preventing the introduction of oil and gas development into the near-shore coastal waters along Cape Breton Island, improving forest management practices in Newfoundland and Labrador, and cleaning up the Sydney Tar Ponds.

The Eastern Canada (Ontario) Chapter priorities for 2004 are curbing suburban sprawl development, promoting alternative modes of transportation, protecting provincial parks and the boreal forest, and ending coal-fired electricity generation.

The Prairie Chapter priorities include helping individuals lower their production of greenhouse gases, create healthy and self-renewing communities, and eliminating pesticide use.

The BC Chapter protect wilderness and promote forest stewardship, promoting sustainable economies, and protecting the integrity of marine ecosystems.



## 13 Become a leader worth following

With four chapters, 14 groups, a youth section, and dozens of issue committees and activity sections, there are a wide variety of leadership roles open to you, depending on your interests and skills.

There are two types of leadership positions—elected and appointed. Within chapters and groups, the core positions that make up the executive committee are elected by the members. The executive committee, in turn, appoints other leaders to positions such as issue committee chairs. In chapters and groups with activity sections there are many more leadership opportunities. Chapter executive committees at times appoint leaders to committees of the national board.

Sierra Club of Canada depends on effective leaders to inspire and motivate volunteers, members and citizens. An effective leader:

- guides the chapter, group, or committee to choose which goals to focus on;
- facilitates inclusive decision-making and builds communication and collaboration between the different levels of the Club;
- plans a range of opportunities for people to participate in Club activities;
- guides the Club in reaching out to communicate the ideas and visions of the Club; and
- guides the chapter, group, or committee to choose which goals upon to focus.

Sierra Club of Canada leaders are ordinary people who do extraordinary work.

Want to become one?

Contact your local chapter on our web site at [www.sierraclub.ca](http://www.sierraclub.ca).

## 14 Make the world a better place

Once dreamed of making our world a better place? This is the place to start. Here, what you do will make a difference.

Absolutely.

Unconditionally.

You **will** make a difference.

Sierra Club of Canada is a grassroots organization. We provide a framework within which you, as a member, get to decide for yourself what campaigns you'd like to pursue and how you'd like to contribute. You can follow your passions, making a difference for our planet.

You can even create your own campaigns. If you see an ecological disaster looming on the horizon that no one else seems to have noticed, you can do something about it. Our leaders provide guidance and teach by example, but eventually you may find yourself doing some of your own campaign trail-blazing. You are encouraged to put your talents to good use.

Sometimes you might get wet, tired, dirty, but you'll have lots of fun doing it, and when it isn't fun, you can chalk it up as a character building experience.

You'll meet people, good people, and make friends.

We know that this planet needs saving and we need you to help us do it.

Whether you're a student, a parent, or an executive, make your dreams a reality.

