

Reclaiming a State Park

Sugarite State Park is located in the rough, mountainous area of Raton, New Mexico. In the 1900s, the Sugarite area was mined for coal. Miners dumped the waste, or tailings, from the mines in the park area. Over the years, the tailings eroded and created acidic waste that ran into nearby streams. The waste affected water quality and endangered wildlife in the park.

Students of the local chapter of Future Farmers of America (FFA) learned about the problem in the park and decided to take action. With the help of their chapter leader, they applied for and received a contract from the state to help reclaim the park. To reduce stream erosion, the 80 teenagers dug more than 1,000 seed basins, constructed more than 50 rock dams, terraced 780 feet (238 m) of steep slopes, and built a diversion channel to change the flow of a small stream.

The determined group also cleaned up a 4.5-mile (7.2-km) trail in the park and made 150 trail markers. They used their shop classes to weld 65 metal frame picnic tables, which they set up throughout the park. Finally, the FFA students planted an

experimental tree farm, complete with a special water-saving irrigation system, and they operated a center to care for injured wild animals.

Bob Salter, of New Mexico's natural resources department, marveled at the FFA group's accomplishments. "The work they did was better than we get from professional contractors." As part of the contract with the state, all participants in the project were paid for their efforts. But they agreed that they got more than money from the project. Remy Martinez felt comradeship. "It was hard work and we got really dirty. But everybody helped everybody else out, and we got it done."

And the reclamation project provided a chance for Elizabeth Morgan to grow personally while she helped her community. "I gained leadership skills I was lacking.... In [a project like Sugarite], students build themselves as well as their communities."

Tips for Getting Media Coverage

Getting media coverage is not always easy. Here are some suggestions to increase your chances of success:

- Use your imagination to create an interesting story angle that will catch the media's interest.
- Write your news release or public service announcement for a general audience. Consider that the more people it affects, the greater your chance of coverage.
- Write clearly and simply.
- If possible, include a digital or print photograph for newspapers or a videotape for television. Pictures add visual interest to a story.
- Send out lots of news releases. Coverage may not happen each time you send out a release.

Tips for Writing a News Release

One goal of a news release is to alert the media and the public to an important problem in your community or school, and to tell what you are doing to resolve it. Use action words and short sentences. List the most important information in the first paragraph by including who, what, when, where, why, and how.

Give less important information and exploratory details in later paragraphs. If possible, use direct quotations from people in your group or class, or from people who know details

about the problem or solution. Be accurate and honest. Do not exaggerate or alter facts to support your views.

Tips for Writing a Public Service Announcement

The goal of a public service announcement (PSA) is to inform the public about a meeting or other event they may want to attend or know about. Write the PSA in the words you want read on the radio or television, or posted on a website or in the newspaper.

Use "high impact" words that create images people will remember. Briefly state who, what, when, where, why, and how.

For radio and television, time how long it takes to read your words aloud. It should be no more than 20 seconds long. Write the time in seconds on the PSA.

Tips for Writing a Letter to the Editor

The goal of a letter to the editor is to express your position on a problem or issue, and to explain how your group or class is resolving it. Keep your letter short. It is okay to give your opinion, but be sure that you do not say anything unfair about someone else. You must sign your letter, or it may not be printed.

Adapted with permission from Lewis, Barbara. *The Kid's Guide to Social Action*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing, 1991.