

## **The Wild Center to send delegation to upcoming U.N. climate talks in Scotland**

Nine delegates from the museum and its Youth Climate Program to observe COP26

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TUPPER LAKE—When world leaders convene in Scotland for critical climate change negotiations later this month, The Wild Center’s Youth Climate Program will be there.

The organization is sending a nine-person delegation to Glasgow for COP26, the 26<sup>th</sup> United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties. The Wild Center’s delegates will have a front-row seat as representatives from 197 countries seek solutions to mitigate ongoing effects of climate change.

The Wild Center’s delegation includes six college students and recent graduates, as well as three members of the museum’s leadership team.

“Youth voices need to be part of the discussion on climate change action, because youth are going to be needed for leading climate change action,” said Stephanie Ratcliffe, The Wild Center’s executive director. “Our Youth Climate Program has already empowered thousands of students around the world to be forces for change in their communities. Participating in COP26 is an incredible opportunity for our delegates not just to be heard, but to gain critical understanding into the way power works—and how they use their own.”

Since 2009, The Wild Center’s Youth Climate Program has led efforts to increase climate literacy among students and teachers both in the U.S. and around the world. Using The Wild Center’s Adirondack Youth Climate Summit as a model, students as far away as Sri Lanka have implemented solutions in their own schools and communities. So far, Youth Climate Summits have been held in 45 communities in six countries.

The Wild Center is one of just two museums worldwide to be awarded observer badges to the upcoming COP26 talks, which run from Oct. 31-Nov. 12. The accreditation will allow Youth Climate Program delegates inside access to panels and discussions closed to the public.

Presidents and prime ministers from more than 100 countries, including President Joe Biden, are expected at the conference, which UN officials expect to lead to major reductions in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. The Wild Center delegates will also contribute to a youth-led policy statement being developed during the conference, and post regular updates of their observations online.

“We want to use our presence at COP26 to drive a greater awareness of the power of our Youth Climate Summit model,” Ratcliffe said. “But we also want to use our participation to highlight to all our visitors that they can take action, also. This work needs to be done on multiple levels. We’re all responsible for doing what we can.”

Youth delegates include:

- Andrew Fagerheim (Homer, NY), Columbia University
- Gina Fiorile (Saranac Lake, NY), coordinator, Climate Literacy and Energy Awareness Network, University of Colorado-Boulder
- Elise Pierson (Lake Placid, NY), St. Lawrence University
- Silas Swanson (Saranac Lake, NY), Columbia University
- Witter Swanson (Saranac Lake, NY), Sustainable Energy Advantage, Boston, MA
- Emma Venarde (New York City), Brown University

In addition, The Wild Center will send Ratcliffe; Karen Thomas, chair of the museum's Board of Trustees; and Jen Kretser, director of climate initiatives, to COP26.

"I have been involved in local, regional, and state-level climate action and youth mobilization, and I am very excited to apply those experiences to international climate deliberations," said Andrew Fagerheim. "This is a critical time for international cooperation on climate action and youth voices are all the more important. I am excited to discuss how young people can affect meaningful change in all levels of the climate movement."

In 2015, Wild Center representatives attended COP25, the U.N. climate talks where 196 countries adopted the so-called Paris Agreement. That wide-ranging pact called on nations around the world to slash greenhouse gas emissions.

Kretser, who attended the Paris conference, said the experience would likely affect The Wild Center's youth delegates in ways they can't imagine. "It's incredibly empowering to be in a place with thousands of other people, all pushing world leaders to do the right thing for people and the planet," Kretser said. "We've led the way for communities across the globe to do what they can. But true societal changes take bigger action than any one place can act on. Knowing that our youth delegates will have a chance to not only attend, but witness these discussions firsthand, gives me incredible hope for what's to come."

Thomas, who has been on The Wild Center's board since 2003, said delegates want the world to know: Education on the local level can have a big impact on attitudes and actions toward climate change. "Climate education is an increasingly critical part of what we do at The Wild Center," she said. "We've always tried to cultivate a love of the Adirondacks by helping people forge a personal connection to the environment. When we show them what's at risk, and how they can help, we can move mountains."