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## Olympians go green as they go for gold

By Eileen Blass, USAT

They don't just spend hours each day training to be the world's best athletes. They also recycle, compost, drive hybrids or volunteer for environmental causes. Who are these green Olympians?

As the Winter Olympics begins Friday in Vancouver, Mother Nature Network profiles a dozen eco-minded members of Team USA. One built a home using renewable resources, another designed a 100% recycled polyester snowboarding pant and jacket and yet another has a charity that sells hemp sweatbands.

Here's its look at athletes eager to save the planet:

Angela Ruggiero, hockey (pictured above.)

Three-time medalist Ruggiero, who's set to make her fourth Winter Olympics appearance this year as a defenseman on the American women's ice hockey team, is an active member of 350.org, an international campaign focused on inspiring the world to find solutions for the climate crisis.

Seth Wescott, snowboarding.

Wescott comes to the 2010 games as the reigning Olympic gold medalist in snowboard cross — that's a downhill race with a lot of bumps and jumps involved. He's on the board of directors for Maine Huts and Trails, a 180-mile recreational corridor in western Maine. He also built a home at Sugarloaf ski and golf resort using renewable resources and other green practices.

Julia Mancuso, alpine skiing.

Mancuso earned a gold in giant slalom in 2006. Nicknamed Super Jules, she climbed Mount Kilimanjaro in 2008 to raise money for Right to Play, which helps underprivileged kids around the world through sports. Mancuso also focuses on the environment with WWF Climate Change and LIV NGO, an organization that promotes global wellness including environmental health.

Lowell Bailey, biathlon.

Bailey says biathlon and music are his two life passions, but the environment can't be far behind cross-country skiing, rifle shooting and guitar. After majoring in environmental studies at the University of Vermont, this athlete worked for the Adirondack Council, which helps protect New York's Adirondack Park.

Gretchen Bleiler, snowboarding

2006 Olympic Silver medalist Bleiler clearly wants the snow to stick around. The snowboarder works with The Climate Project, the Natural Resources Defense Council, Aspen Snowmass Save Snow campaign and StopGlobalWarming.org. The multitasking athlete even designed a 100% recycled polyester snowboarding pant and jacket for Oakley.

Katie Uhlaender, skeleton

A need for speed drew Uhlaender to skeleton and that's also the reason why she also loves skiing, snowboarding and kite boarding. When she's not using the snow and sea for thrills, she volunteers with the National Wildlife Society, Environmental Conservation Society and World Wildlife Society.

Shannon Bahrke, freestyle skiing

One of the most accomplished U.S. Ski Team athletes, Bahrke is set to ski moguls in her third Olympic Games in Vancouver. Off the slopes, she is the co-founder of Silver Bean Coffee Co, selling six sustainable blends, most of which are 100% organic and fair trade. Plus, a portion of the price for every pound sold is given back to the farmers and their families.

Nate Holland, snowboarding

After winning the snowboard cross gold four years in a row at the Winter X Games, Holland is heading to Vancouver hungry for another Olympic medal. Off the hill, Holland is involved with Protect Our Winters, a non-profit formed by professional snowboarder Jeremy Jones. The group wants to unite the winter sports community to reverse global warming.

Hannah Teter, snowboarding

Teter, who eats an organic vegetarian diet, won the halfpipe gold in Torino and hopes to repeat. Since 2006 she's been active with causes around the world. The Vermont native sells Vermont-made maple syrup and organic cotton and hemp sweatbands through her charity, Hannah's Gold. The proceeds help provide clean drinking water and plots of land for homeless AIDS victims in Kenya.

Katherine Reutter, short-track speed skating

The 2010 Games will be Reutter's first, but the breakout star could win a medal in the 1500m or the 1000m. Beyond going for the gold, the speed skater practices eco-habits such as shopping at the farmers market, using a reusable water bottle, recycling as much as possible and when the weather permits, riding her bike to the rink.

Hannah Kearney, freestyle skiing

"Protecting the Earth is important as a citizen and especially as a winter athlete who competes on a surface created by nature," says Kearney. The 24-year-old freestyle skier has several good green habits including composting, recycling, bringing her own shopping bags, driving a hybrid and keeping her thermostat at 60 degrees or lower.

Zach Lund, skeleton

When Lund slides down the skeleton track in Vancouver, it will mark his first Olympic competition, though he holds World Cup and America's Cup titles. The athlete bets money on improving the environment by investing in alternative energy through All Access Utah. He also drives a Prius, chooses wind energy on his power bill and started a recycling program for his condo association.