

The John Cooper School Wins at 2006 Texas State Envirothon

The Texas State Envirothon was held March 25 through 27, 2006 at Eastman Chemical Company's Nature and Wildlife Habitat Center near Longview, Texas. Envirothon is an academic, extra-curricular environmental and natural resource education program and competition designed for high school students. Teams of five students work together to answer questions focusing on five areas of study: aquatics, forestry, soils, wildlife, and a current environmental issue (which changes each year). In addition to the field experience, students also participate in an oral component focusing on a real-world environmental problem. Nine schools for a total of 14 teams and five first-time school districts participated in the competition including: Berkner High School (Richardson); Conroe Academy of Science and Technology (Conroe – Teams A & B); John Cooper High School (The Woodlands – Teams A & B); Klein Collins High School (Spring); Montgomery High School (Montgomery – Teams A & B); North Lamar High School (Paris); R. L. Paschal High School (Ft. Worth); John Tyler High School (Tyler – Teams A & B); and Westside High School (Houston – Teams A & B). The overall winner of the 2006 Texas Envirothon was returning champion John Cooper – Team A. R.L. Paschal and Conroe – Team A came in second and third, respectively.

In addition to the overall winners, awards were given to the top scoring teams on the field/written exam, by topic and for the top team in the oral presentations, during a ceremony held at LeTourneau University Campus on Monday afternoon. The winners were John Cooper-Team A in Aquatics, Forestry, and Wildlife; Montgomery – Team B in Soils (a first-time team to the competition); Conroe - Team A in Current Issue; and John Cooper – Team B in Oral Presentation.

The fun began on Saturday afternoon with optional student training workshops presented by natural resource professionals. Presenters included Adam Whisenant and Greg Conley from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Jacob Donellan and Allen Smith from the Texas Forest Service, Dennis Brezina from the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and Nancy Leary from Harris County Precinct 4 Parks Department. Students received training in aquatics, forestry, soils and wildlife during these presentations. The competition officially began on Sunday afternoon at the Eastman Nature and Wildlife Habitat Trail, on the property of Eastman's Texas Operations facility, where 70 students, as well as 12 team advisors, participated in the field

test. The teams of students were led from station to station by volunteers from Eastman and the Gregg County Master Gardeners answering questions relating to each of the five topic areas at each station. Questions ranged from testing water quality and measuring trees to taking soil samples and identifying animal skulls. Each station had volunteers monitoring the test taking; they were representatives from Eastman, Gregg County Master Gardeners, The Environmental Institute of Houston/University of Houston-Clear Lake, and the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board. Members of a local 4-H club brought the completed tests to the test graders who represented the following organizations: Environmental Institute of Houston/University of Houston – Clear Lake, Texas Forest Service, Harris County Precinct 4 Jesse Jones Park, and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. In most cases the test graders were the same people who developed the challenging test questions.

To help students prepare for Sunday evening's challenge, which was to develop a proposal addressing drought in Texas, Dr. Bob Stewart from Texas A&M University's Oceanography Department, Jacob Donellan of the Texas Forest Service and Oralia Gil from Lab Aids presented three talks on "water stewardship in a changing climate". The students were then sequestered with volunteer supervision for three hours to work on their presentations. The presentations were delivered to a panel of five judges on Monday morning. Judges included representatives from Eastman, Gregg County Master Gardeners, Hallsville High School, National Association of Conservation Districts, Texas Forest Service, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Harris County Precinct 4 Parks Department, and Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board.

John Cooper High School - Team A will represent Texas at the Canon Envirothon competition to be held in Manitoba, Canada, July 23 – July 29, 2006.

Sponsors of the 2006 Texas Envirothon included: Eastman Chemical Company; University of Houston-Clear Lake; Environmental Institute of Houston; Canon USA; Harris County Soil and Water Conservation District; Montgomery County Soil and Water Conservation District; Texas Association of Environmental Professionals; Association of Texas Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Texas Association for Environmental Education; National Environmental Education and Training Foundation; Shell Oil Company – Texas Regional Collaboratives; Sam Houston Resource Conservation and Development; Lyondell Chemical Company; Blue Bell Ice Creameries, East Texas Branch; Richardson Environmental Action League; Upshur-Gregg Soil & Water Conservation District; Davy Crockett-Trinity Soil & Water Conservation District; Bedias

Creek Soil & Water Conservation District; Alamo County Soil & Water Conservation District; Piney Woods Soil & Water Conservation District; Smith County Soil & Water Conservation District; Sulphur-Cypress County Soil & Water Conservation District; Parker County Soil & Water Conservation District; Walker County Soil & Water Conservation District; and Navasota Soil & Water Conservation District.

For more information about the Texas State Envirothon, contact Wendy Reistle, Environmental Institute of Houston/UHCL, at (281) 283-3045 or visit www.texasenvirothon.org.