

The John Cooper School Wins at 2009 Texas State Envirothon

The Texas State Envirothon was held April 4 through 6, 2009 at Texas A&M Kingsville and The King Ranch in Kingsville, 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 the current environmental issue which was biodiversity in a changing world. In addition to the field experience, students also participate in an oral component focusing on a real-world environmental problem. Ten schools for a total of 14 teams participated in the competition. Those included were: Clear Lake High School (Clear Lake); College Park Academy of Science and Technology (The Woodlands – Teams A & B); Dobie High School, Pasadena; Klein Collins High School (Spring); The Monarch School (Houston); Moody High School (Corpus Christi); Rio Hondo High School (Rio Hondo – Teams A & B); John Cooper High School (The Woodlands – Teams A & B); John Tyler High School (Tyler); and Westside High School (Houston – Teams A & B). The overall winner of the 2009 Texas Envirothon was The John Cooper School, Team A. Students on the winning team were: Alex Valderrama, Varsha Reddy, Andrew Ghazi, Kevin Bennett, and Ranjeet Paul. College Park Academy of Science and Technology Team B was second place, while, Clear Lake High School took third place.

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 the Texas A&M University Kingsville on Monday afternoon. The winners were John Cooper – Team A in Aquatics, Wildlife, and Current Issue; Rio Hondo – Team B in Soils; Clear Lake High School in Forestry, and College Park Academy of Science and Technology – Team B in the Oral Presentation.

The fun began on Saturday afternoon with optional student training workshops presented by a variety of professionals. Presenters included Michelle Holyfield and Alex Stanton from Eastman

Chemical Company, Marc Bartoskewitz from King Ranch, Thomas Langschied from The Ceasar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute, Jonathon Motsinger from the Texas Forest Service, Shanna Dunn from the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Dr. Shad Nelson from the Texas A&M Kingsville, Dr. Bart Ballard from the Texas A&M Kingsville, and Lari Jo Johnson from the Coastal Bends and Bays Estuary Program. During these presentations, students received training in aquatics, forestry, soils, wildlife, and oral presentation skills. The competition officially began on Sunday afternoon at King Ranch. There were 70 students as well as 20 team advisors participating in the field testing. Questions on the field test ranged from identifying bird nesting sites and tree measurements to describing soil textures and discussing the benefits of wetlands. Over 70 volunteers assisted with a variety of jobs including monitoring the field stations, leading students to each station, grading the field tests and serving as judges for the oral presentations, etc.

To help students prepare for Sunday evening's challenge, which was to develop a proposal addressing a wildlife management plan in south Texas, three guest presentations were held on Sunday morning. Dr. Allen Rasmussen, Dean and Professor of the Dick and Mary Lewis College of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Human Sciences at Texas A&M Kingsville presented on the "effects of fire on natural resources and biodiversity". Following his presentation were Assistant Professor Dr. Randy DeYoung and Associate Professor Dr. Greta Schuster both speaking on the topic of "biodiversity". After the field testing on Sunday, the students were then sequestered for three hours to work on their presentations. The presentations were delivered to a panel of five judges on Monday morning.

The John Cooper School - Team A will represent Texas at the Canon Envirothon competition to be held in Asheville, North Carolina on August 2 – August 8, 2009.

Sponsors of the 2009 Texas Envirothon included: Eastman Chemical Company; University of Houston-Clear Lake, Environmental Institute of Houston; Texas A&M Kingsville; King Ranch; Canon USA; Gulf Coast Waste Disposal Authority, 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; Shell Oil Company – Texas Regional Collaboratives; and Blue Bell Ice Creameries.

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.