



## ANNVILLE SWEEPS ELEMENTARY ENVIROTHON

Twenty-four teams from nine elementary schools throughout the county competed in the 15th Annual Lebanon County Elementary Envirothon at Coleman Memorial Park on May 16, 2008. The theme, Endangered Species of Pennsylvania, had students examining the various plants and animals of Pennsylvania and the reasons for their endangered/threatened status.

Over 100 students in grades four through six competed in the event. Students worked together in teams (3-5 members per team) and rotated through three testing stations. They were evaluated on their understanding of habitats, plant and animal adaptations, human impact, and environmental factors which influence a plant's or animal's ability to survive.

At the Learning Station, students wrote letters to their legislators regarding their concern for endangered species and their loss of habitat. Rich Schwartz, aide to the Honorable Maureen Gingrich, assisted in the Learning Station and explained the power of one's 'voice' and how a person's registered concern or complaint is received at the legislative level. Mr. Schwartz delivered the letters to Representative Gingrich, Swanger, Folmer, & Holden.

Upon completion of all four stations, the scores were tallied and the following schools/teams were awarded:

- ◆ 1st Place—Annvil's Dodos
- ◆ 2nd Place—Annvil's Screeching Eagles
- ◆ 3rd Place—Annvil's Thorny Plants
- ◆ 4th Place—Annvil's Gallant Golden Eagles
- ◆ 5th Place—Union Canal's Save Our Species
- ◆ 6th Place—Lebanon's Ecstatic Egrets



L-R: Matt Reigle, Mrs. Bonnie Hill, Mitchell Rodkey, Benson Beidler, Mrs. Jackie Rita, Lida Lech, and Grace Grieve-Carlson

Awards included a variation of medallions, ribbons, Dairy Queen gift certificates, field guides, certificates of participation, T-shirts, and books. These awards were made available due to generous sponsors from Dairy Queen East, Quittapahilla Audubon Society, and the Lebanon County Conservation District.

Congratulations to all the teams who participated in the 15th Annual Elementary Envirothon and who took the time to learn more about Pennsylvania's Endangered Species and ways to protect them.

## NO CHILD LEFT INSIDE

Unplugged, unstructured time in nature is hard to come by these days-especially for U.S. children with packed schedules and a knack for media multi-tasking.

Nature has also lost status in the academic world. Even teachers who value environmental education lack time and resources to explore topics that aren't directly measured on yearly standardized achievement tests.

On Earth Day, members of Congress took to the great outdoors at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center to hear testimony about the need to reverse this trend by passing the proposed "**No Child Left Inside Act.**"

If passed, the act would raise the status of environmental and outdoor education in public schools and back it with more federal funds.

Rep. John Sarbanes, D-MD, who co-sponsored the bill, said that schools can play an important role in helping future generations become better stewards of the planet and of the Chesapeake Bay. "**No Child Left Inside** will pave the way for a new era of environmental stewardship in this country," Sarbanes said.

The veranda where the hearing took place was packed with students, educators, and environmental professionals. Many were members of the **No Child Left Inside** Coalition, which includes more than 200 organizations from across the nation representing education, business, public health, outdoor recreation and conservation interests that want to heighten the role of conservation education.

"If we truly wish to prepare our children for the challenges of tomorrow, we must recognize that education can be about so much more than reading, writing, and arithmetic," Maryland Gov. Martin O'Malley told the Congress members.

He said that the act would provide a balance to portions of the current national education law, known as **No Child Left Behind**, that emphasizes student performance on annual achievement tests. As a result, many schools have scaled back on subjects that don't directly address

the content of reading and math tests. Hands-on learning and environmental education are among the casualties.

The **No Child Left Inside** Act would make \$500 million available to the states and territories over five years to strengthen outdoor education programs, curriculum and teacher training.

Only states that develop environmental literacy plans would be eligible to receive the funds. Environmental literacy plans would create a more uniform expectation for all students to graduate with a base level of environmental knowledge. Specific strategies would be set by the states and the schools within their systems.

"We're asking states to ensure that every student has some exposure to the environmental challenges we face and has the chance to get into the outdoors and use it as a learning tool for all kinds of things," Sarbanes said. "We'd like to see every state in the country develop this kind of a framework."

O'Malley announced at the hearing that Maryland would develop what he hopes will be the first statewide environmental literacy plan in the nation.

The task is assigned to the new Maryland Partnership for Children in Nature, which includes the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Maryland State Department of Education, and other state, local, private and nonprofit organizations.

"If we invest in environmental education today, there will come a time when our young people graduate high school not only with the intellectual ability to tackle complex environmental challenges, but also with the will and desire to care for and save our planet," O'Malley said.

Oliver Pergams, co-author of a study for the National Academy of Sciences, testified that people are spending less time in nature than ever before. Visits to state and national parks have dropped by as much 25 percent since 1987, and the average child has only 30 minutes of unstructured outdoor time each week.

That's a problem, according to Pergams, because direct experiences with nature help children with motor coordination and cognitive skills. Green settings also tend to raise self-esteem and decrease the symptoms of attention deficit disorder.

He emphasized the value of direct outdoor experiences, especially with mentors and ample time to explore "wild" nature. The vicarious experience of nature through books and videos is "a very distant third choice indeed."

Sarbanes said that public and Congressional reaction to **No Child Left Inside** has been positive. "It strikes a chord," he said. "For a variety of reasons, environmental awareness has been heightened. When we offer this up as a more structured response to the anxiety, people respond very well. There's been a real outpouring around the effort, and our coalition is growing by leaps and bounds."

Supporters say the **No Child Left Inside** bill may move forward on its own or become part of the current national education act, known as **No Child Left Behind**, when it is reauthorized.

The **No Child Left Inside** Act is a proposed federal law that would provide \$100 million a year to support environmental education in public schools. But helping schools to use these funds depends in part on reforming other aspects of education policy.

The current federal education law, the **No Child Left**

**Behind** Act, places heavy emphasis on standardized achievement tests for reading and math.

The "high stakes" results of the tests shape a school's reputation and trigger a range of official actions for under-performance. As a result, many schools have turned to scripted, scheduled curricula that they believe will deliver acceptable scores.

More creative teaching styles—including hands-on, outdoor learning—are in decline, along with time for environmental science, art, music—and even recess.

Teachers with an interest in environmental education often have little or no time to pursue it. Outdoor learning takes too much time from the classroom. Planning hours are too short to find grant money or to forge partnerships with local resource professionals.

"It's a pretty universal critique," said Rep. John Sarbanes, D-MD. "There has been a lot of attention at the hearings we've held on bringing flexibility back into the process and restoring a more holistic approach to the curriculum. Legislation like **No Child Left Inside** is making the point that we need to weave other things back into the equation."

The Lebanon County Conservation District is here to help schools and teachers weave environmental education back into—and out of—the classroom. Whether it's a field trip to a local park, a lesson in the classroom, or resource materials, the Conservation District is available to help teachers provide an environmental education experience students will enjoy and remember. All our programs focus on hands-on learning. For more information on resources and programs available, call 272-3908 ext. 4.

By Lara Lutz, Bay Journal, June 2008 Issue, pg. 3

## BAT DIE-OFFS MYSTIFY EXPERTS

Biologists are stumped as to why bats are dying at alarming rates. Tens of thousands of bats have died in the northeastern states recently from the "white-nose syndrome," so named for the white fungus which appears on the bats' noses and wings.

Scientists have been unable to diagnose the problem. First spotted in four New York caves in 2007, the white nose syndrome spread to 24 caves by March, killing 90 percent of the bats in some locations.

One bat can eat more than a pound of night-time insects in one week, including mosquitoes and numerous agricultural pests, which would increase the risk of West Nile Virus and crop damage.

Bats travel hundreds of miles in the summer and scientists fear that the syndrome will spread to neighboring states. Researchers suspect Pennsylvania may be the next outbreak site.

USA Today— July 8th—Dan Vergano



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