

Youth Program Offers Wildlife Habitat, Environmental Training

Issue:

Faced with escalating environmental and wildlife concerns, the United States needs informed youngsters to become tomorrow's leaders. Through education early on and developing speaking skills, the nation will ensure a new generation of environmental stewards.

What Has Been Done:

In order to provide education in these areas, Extension has developed and provided hands-on trainings and workshops as well as information to the 4-H members in an effort to increase and expand the participants knowledge and understanding of environmental and wildlife issues. Wildlife training is provided in several ways. Leaders were trained and provided materials to use in working with their individual 4-H club members who had selected wildlife as their project area. Extension staff also held judging training sessions to work with members to increase their knowledge. Areas covered related to all types of wildlife animals and included wildlife foods, wildlife habitats, wildlife management practices and developing wildlife management plans. Members were provided the Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Program (WHEP) National manual as well as other resources to further explain this topic area. Members also were trained to provide both written and oral reasons to support their reasoning for the decisions they made. Additional training was provided by taking members to actual environmental and wildlife management sites to provide more of a hands on as well as visual approach to learning. Judging contests were conducted on the county level and top participants competed further with judging at the state level.

As an expansion to our county and state judging, additional emphasis was placed with working with the top individuals to provide opportunities to compete at the National WHEP contest. A WHEP team has been supported on a yearly basis to attend and compete in the national contest. Members are selected based on their placement at the state level judging contest and involves a commitment by the members to work on a continuous basis throughout the year to prepare for this competition. This training has provided for additional learning and knowledge and has expanded the participant's involvement to learn about environmental and wildlife areas in other parts of the United States.

Another aspect of our environmental based training is the participation in the State Envirothon Contest. This contest allows members to gain knowledge and apply it in areas of wildlife, aquatics, forestry, soils, and other topics each year in an effort to learn about and evaluate their environment. Most teams in our state participating in this event represent their high school, many of which are technical or charter schools specializing in science and math. The County 4-H team consists of 4-H members who must practice and prepare on their personal time during the evening or on weekends.

County members have also participated in other environmental and wildlife projects and programs. These projects and programs have included Stream Watch, Watershed Monitoring, State Coastal Cleanup, Delaware Wildlife Exposition, State Beach Grass Plating, Conservation

Overnighters, Adopt A Wetland, and have served as volunteers at state wildlife sites such as Bombay Hook and Killens Pond State Park.

Impacts:

More than 50 members participate each year and have show increased knowledge, interest and concern with environmental and wildlife issues. These participants have shown increased decision-making skills based on their involvement with the county and state judging contests. Increase communication skills have also been seen due to the participation of members learning to give oral reasons in the judging contests. Participants have developed skills to work both individually as well as on a team through their efforts in these events. In addition, based on these experiences, several members have gone on to further their education in areas of forestry, wildlife or vet science.

Funding Source:

Kent County
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