

Today's Youth: Becoming our future as environmentally-aware, action-oriented citizens.

More than 500,000 high-school students have jumped on the environmental band wagon thanks to Envirothon, an environmental program designed to reach today's youth. Combining in-class curriculum and hands-on field experiences, the Envirothon program is an excellent way to supplement environmental education inside and outside the traditional classroom.

Students that are involved in this worthy program acquire hands-on environmental problem-solving skills in five natural resource areas; soils, aquatics, forestry, wildlife and current issues. The Envirothon works in partnership with local conservation districts, forestry associations, educators, and cooperating natural resource agencies to organize and conduct competitions on the local, regional and state levels. Winning teams from each state advance to the national Envirothon for an opportunity to compete for recognition, scholarships and prizes.

We, at Highlands Soil and Water Conservation District are very proud of our Highlands County teams. Avon Park High School and Lake Placid High School both participated in the recent regional competition held at Caloosahatchee Regional Park on December 7th. All of the teams did very well and Avon Park HS won an award for scoring high on the test on wildlife. The team of five students; Ray Arango, Casey Cliett, Brandi Goodwin (alternate), Gary Hawkins, Matt Jordon and Cody Kindrick, with assistance from teacher Cheryl Moffat and HSWCD staff, has been studying for the past year in an effort to prepare for the event. They will go to the state competition in April of 2008 and we are confident that they will do well there as well. If they should be successful in winning the state competition, they will go on to the national competition held in Arizona.

Staff from Highlands Soil and Water Conservation District (HSWCD) has been working with the team. Hands-on training and exercises working with the students has helped to prepare them for these competitions. These educational sessions will continue between HSWCD and the students until the time of the state challenge. It is a joy to see our youth so interested in the environment and so willing to compete with other students from around the state in an effort to expand their knowledge.

“The mission of the Envirothon is to develop knowledgeable, skilled and dedicated citizens who are willing and prepared to work towards achieving and maintaining a natural balance between the quality of life and the quality of the environment. The Envirothon mission is accomplished by developing in young people an understanding of the principles and practices of natural resource management and ecology and through practice dealing with complex resource management decisions.”

Sarah Larose, a student has this to say about the Envirothon; *“I've participated in the Envirothon for three years and it has been a wonderful experience. I have gained years of experience that will definitely help me in college and in my future career as a biologist.”*

Today's students are tomorrow's future. It is important that they are educated about the world around them. Field trips to natural resource sites, museums, presentations given by professionals and careful study of environmental materials are just a few of the opportunities given to students

with Envirothon. Not only does this program educate our youth, it teaches the value of team work and healthy competition.

If you are interested in getting involved with Envirothon, please visit our website at <http://www.highlandsswcd.org/> or contact our office at (863) 402-6545 for more information. Or you can visit the Envirothon website at www.envirothon.org. We, at HSWCD, would love to sponsor even more teams from Highlands County and are looking for interested schools and students for next year's competition. This is a wonderful opportunity for students to "get involved" and learn about their natural surroundings. In addition, monetary prizes, scholarships and recognition are awarded to winning teams, including the teachers.

Congratulations to our Avon Park team for meeting the state competition criteria. It is good to know that these kids, from this experience, will become environmentally-aware, action oriented citizens.