

Awesome Opossums go to State Envirothon Contest

On April 17th and 18th, five high school students from Avon Park High School took part in the State Envirothon Contest held at Hillsborough River State Park. They call themselves the Awesome Opossums and along with their teacher, Cheryl Moffat, they earned the right to attend the competition. Ashley Calhoun, Tyler Ann Cook, Cody Kindrick, Norma Badillo and Edwin Rivera scored the highest of the Highlands County teams in the Regional contest that was held on December 12th, 2008.

Staff from Highlands Soil and Water Conservation District have been coaching and teaching the students throughout the year in an effort to prepare them for the event. The Florida Envirothon is a 17 year old environmental education program that has captured the support of educators, public agencies and corporations. The competitive program is a "hands-on" educational program that involves team problem-solving in 5 natural resource areas; aquatics, soils, wildlife, forestry and a current environmental issue.

The Envirothon competition demonstrates the interdependencies of our environment; it educates, creates partnerships and promotes teamwork.

The Envirothon began as a competition in Pennsylvania in 1979. Three Soil and Water Conservation Districts held a local competition and dubbed the event the "Environmental Olympics." Since then, this program has been adopted all over the U.S. and providences of Canada. Since 1993 the Florida Envirothon has involved more than 31,500 students and 6,500 volunteers.

"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."

After participating in the Envirothon competition, many students have come away with a motivation and excitement to persue careers in environmental studies, environmental law, natural sciences and natural resource management.

Not only is the Envirothon a great way to educate our youth about environmental issues, it is an opportunity to allow them to compete and learn about team work. The team of 5 must work together; each covering a different subject, while working toward the same goal and sharing knowledge with each other.

It is also a chance for the kids to have some fun. The competitions are always held in a natural area, allowing the students to roam from station to station and see the environment up close and personal. A delicious picnic lunch is provided at each event, which allows all participants a time to unwind and relax after the tests are over.

We, at Highlands Soil and Water Conservation District are very proud of all of the students that have participated in Envirothon over the years. The Supervisors on the HSWCD board continue to support this valuable program. Each year the board contributes financially toward the event as well as supporting staff with their hands-on training. Donations and sponsorships from various organizations make the yearly event possible.

We are very proud of all of the students in Highlands County who participated in the Envirothon competition. We hope that the experience has been a positive one and that they have learned information, values and how to be part of a team. We, at Highlands Soil and Water Conservation District hope to be part of more teams in the years to come.