



Ohio Environmental Council

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Ohio School Wins Presidential Environmental Youth Award

West Geauga School's environmental efforts one of only ten to be nationally recognized

Washington, D.C. – A group of students at the West Geauga Middle School in Geauga County has been awarded a President's Environmental Youth Award for its efforts to restore and protect Ohio's remaining wetlands – important ecosystems that are part land and part water.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency presented the award to West Geauga Middle School's Project Wetlands Education Team (Project WET) at an awards ceremony in Washington, D.C. on Wednesday.

The Ohio Environmental Council helped nominate Project WET's for the award.

After learning that Ohio has lost more than 90% of its original wetlands (less than 2% of Ohio land mass is now wetlands) the Wetlands Education Team decided to work on preserving the remaining wetlands. Their efforts include constructing platforms in urban areas for ospreys that can take the place of trees lost due to over development. The Wetlands Education Team consists of Shawn Cooper, Zak Kucera, Clay McMullen, Isabella Todaro, and Kelli Wright.

The students began the project by educating their fellow students and community about the values of wetlands – a habitat for ospreys. Wetlands provide many benefits; they reduce flooding, control erosion, purify runoff water, provide recreational opportunities, and supply food, shelter, and habitat for thousands of species.

Project WET created a hands-on outdoor classroom to educate their classmates about wetland benefits. Now, there are native plants, signs, birdhouses and feeders, trails, and a weather station. Additionally, the students created educational kits to assist science teachers when using the outdoor classroom.

“We can think of no higher honor than receiving an acknowledgment from the President that our work is worthwhile. We hope this award will get more people thinking about the value of wetlands,” said Clay McMullen, 9th grader at West Geauga High School.

“Many organizations and businesses have helped us raise awareness about wetlands. This is really a commendation for our community and its efforts to live sustainably,” added Kelli Wright, 8th grader at West Geauga Middle School.

Project WET also assisted the Ohio Environmental Council in hosting its Northeast Ohio Vernal Pool Monitoring Workshop, earlier this year. This workshop provided educational and monitoring materials to local water enthusiasts on how to properly monitor vernal pools.

“Vernal pools are seasonal wetlands that are being destroyed at a rapid rate in Ohio,” said David R. Celebrezze, Director of Air & Water Special Projects for the Ohio Environmental Council. “The efforts of Project WET are reassuring that the next generation is taking steps to make tangible improvements to Ohio’s natural heritage.”

Project WET has raised more than \$63,000 in grants, awards, prizes, and donations to support its successful efforts.

Project WET is working to have the spotted salamander (a vernal pool species) designated as the official state of Ohio amphibian. Project WET has testified at Statehouse hearings and coordinated a letter-writing campaign in support of the legislation, sponsored by State Senator Tim Grendell (R-Chesterland) and State Representative Matt Dolan (R-Novelty).

Citizens can learn more about vernal pools at the Ohio Vernal Pool Partnership’s website: www.ovpp.org and the OEC’s website: www.theoec.org.

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The mission of the Ohio Environmental Council (OEC) is to secure healthy air, land, and water for all who call Ohio home. The OEC is Ohio’s leading advocate for fresh air, clean water, and sustainable land use. The OEC has a 40-year history of innovation, pragmatism, and success. Using legislative initiatives, legal action, scientific principles, and statewide partnerships, the OEC secures a healthier environment for Ohio’s families and communities. For more information, visit www.theOEC.org.