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A fitting Earth Day celebration – Minnesota Envirothon at Lake Bemidji State Park

More than 100 high school students, representing eight school districts from north central Minnesota, gathered at Lake Bemidji State Park on April 22 to celebrate Earth Day by participating in the Area VIII Minnesota Envirothon. The annual event, coordinated by area Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs), is a hands-on outdoor competition, designed to promote natural resource involvement and education.

Throughout the day, students rotated through five learning stations, presented by natural resource professionals in the fields of wetlands, wildlife, forestry, soils, and a current environment issue. Working in teams of five, the students worked collaboratively to answer 20 questions at each learning station, and presented an 8-10 minute oral presentation, competing for a chance to advance to the state and national Envirothon events.

"The kids really seemed to enjoy the interactive aspect of the Envirothon," said Corryn Trask, Lake of the Woods SWCD and event coordinator. "Hands-on learning in the great outdoors -- What an appropriate way to celebrate Earth Day!" Local staff from the Koochiching SWCD provided volunteer support. District Technician Justin Berg served as a presenter at the wildlife station while Program Assistant Krystina Meyers and District Coordinator Pam Tomevi assisted with score sheets and refreshments.

Winners of the 2009 Area VIII Envirothon:

- First Place – Cody Carlson, Ryan Cooper, Kevin Beckel, Zach Lockner, and Devlin Reasy of Lake of the Woods; Lisa Brien, Teacher/Advisor
- Second Place – Colt Anderson, Boone Johnson, Ben Olson, and Ethan Rarppinen of Grand Rapids; Shawn Linder, Teacher/Advisor
- Third Place & Top oral presentation team – Taylor Grey, Cody Mueller, Ashley Pemberton, Erick Platner, and Jake Young of Walker-Hackensack-Akeley; Kyle Duclos, Teacher/Advisor

All three teams will advance to the state competition to be held May 18 at Ironwood Springs Ranch near Stewartville. The winner of Minnesota competition will then compete in the National Canon Envirothon held in August at the University of North Carolina, Asheville.

Other participating schools: Clearbrook-Gonvick, Kelliher, Menahga, Park Rapids, and Pequot Lakes.

Partners in this year's event: SWCD of Beltrami, Cass, Clearwater, Crow Wing, Hubbard, Itasca, Koochiching, Lake of the Woods, and Wadena counties; Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources; Minnesota Department of Natural Resources; United State Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service; and individual volunteers.

For more information on the Minnesota Envirothon, visit www.bwsr.state.mn.us.