

4-H and FFA Students Compete to Earn Top Honors at Wildlife Habitat Education Program National Contest

High schoolers representing 15 states from across the United States visited the Iowa Lakeside Laboratory on the shores of West Lake Okoboji near Milford, Iowa to compete in the 2023 4-H and FFA Wildlife Habitat Education Program (WHEP) National Contest. Teams from Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Iowa, Indiana, Kansas, Mississippi, North Carolina, New Mexico, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, West Virginia, Utah, and Pennsylvania competed and learned together in the three-day event.

Representing Kansas were Jaden Boyle (Phillips County), Carter Kendall (Phillips County) and Kyle Bannon (Cowley County). The team placed 11th overall.

On the first day of the event, participants met and mingled with one another, sharing facts and souvenirs representing their respective states at a welcoming ceremony and share fair. On the second day of the gathering, participants learned about wildlife conservation in Iowa from wildlife biologists, researchers, and educators from the Iowa DNR, Iowa Lakeside Laboratory, Clay County Conservation, and Iowa Lakes Community College. Coaches and participants enjoyed hands-on learning experiences related to land and wildlife management techniques including fish shocking, aquatic insect sampling, invasive species management, and radio telemetry. A 40-mile bus trip around the region also took the group to unique ecological sites including a fen, a number of remnant and reconstructed prairies, a kettle hole wetland, and glacial lakes.

On the third day, participants competed in multiple hands-on events related to wildlife and habitat conservation. The competition tested students' wildlife identification skills and their ability to recommend habitat management practices in tallgrass prairie ecosystems for various wildlife species. Participants also worked as a team to write and orally defend a wildlife habitat management plan.

The event concluded with an awards ceremony recognizing top teams and individual competitors in 4-H and FFA divisions.

Iowa State University Extension and Outreach, the Iowa Lakeside Laboratory, Whitetails Unlimited, the Department of Natural Resource Ecology and Management at Iowa State University and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources provided support for the 2023 National Contest.

The Wildlife Habitat Education Program started in 1977 and is designed to teach youth about wildlife and fisheries science and conservation. More information about the National 4-H Wildlife Habitat Education Program can be found at whep.org.

Figure 1. Fifty-seven youth participated in the 2023 WHEP National Contest from 15 states across the U.S.



Figure 2. Representing Kansas were Rachael Brooke, Team Coach, Carter Kendall, Kyle Bannon and Jaden Boyle.

