

2009 Envirothon Oral Presentation Problem

Biodiversity in a Changing World

The Nature Conservancy has identified the Southern Rivers Conservation Project as a priority in meeting their mission “to preserve the plants, animals and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive.” This 4,000 square mile project area is recognized for its exceptional breadth of biological diversity including over 100 rare plant and animal species in natural communities. As part of the Southern River Conservation Project Area and located within the “pine belt” of Virginia are the Blackwater River Preserve containing extensive swamps harboring centuries-old cypress trees and the Piney Grove Preserve containing the northern most existence of a longleaf pine savannas. Also found at the Conservancy’s 2,700 acre Piney Grove Preserve is the northernmost occurrence of the Red cockaded Woodpecker (Virginia’s rarest bird). The Nature Conservancy’s Southern Forests Conservation Project - which is part of the Southern Rivers Conservation Project area - helps protect portions of three river systems that includes habitat for the endangered Roanoke logperch, imperiled freshwater mussels, and such migratory fish as herring and shad.

The 4,900 acre “Big Woods” tract in Sussex County near the Wakefield 4-H Center has recently been purchased by the Commonwealth of Virginia from The Nature Conservancy. The adjacent 15,000 acres is held by a timber management company and The Nature Conservancy is working with the timber management company to obtain easements on the bottomland forests.

Envirothon Challenge: Your group is a newly established non-profit organization dedicated to protecting and increasing biodiversity. *Your goal is to help Virginia set aside a Heritage Area Preserve in the Big Woods acreage of at least 100 acres.*

The Issues Include: Invasive species, conservation and management practices, public access-requirements/ restrictions, recreational impacts, water quality and quantity for surrounding communities, potential Langley Air Force Base new runway landing, landfills, peat fires, logging interests, and most importantly maximizing biodiversity in a changing world.

The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation’s Division of Natural Heritage (DNH), has challenged your organization to:

1. Design a public outreach campaign describing the values of the area’s biodiversity, the threats, the importance of biodiversity in a changing world and the associated economics of protecting the area’s biodiversity.
2. Develop a management and long term maintenance plan for the Heritage Area Preserve. Include whether public access or research access should be allowed, and explain why or why not. (Management tools can include: fire, pond building, timber harvest, invasive species, water management, etc.)
3. Describe and provide the rationale for the 100 acres your team would choose for this preserve.

Note: No actual “in-the-field” work is allowed by Envirothon teams, as this land is privately held. If it is discovered that a team conducted any type of field work on the site, the team will be disqualified.