

Cleaning up

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Waverly-SR team wins environmental contest; heads to state tournament

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WAVERLY

Say you have this polluted lake in this town where dogs outnumber people 3-to-1. How are you going to clean it up?

Take the easy way out to find the answer — ask the conservation team at Waverly-Shell Rock High School. It has already figured it out, and won first place in the Iowa state Envirothon competition by doing so.

On Monday, the all-female team bested a field of 14 in the first-ever Iowa Envirothon held in Madrid. The team will represent the state at the national competition in Omaha this summer.

The competition — the brainchild of Cedar Falls resident Jeanette Winegarden, chairman of the Iowa Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts — tested participants on their knowledge of environmental issues in four categories: aquatics, forestry, wildlife, and current events.

It also required students to practice critical thinking — hence the fictitious problem of Lake Woof in the town of Tailawaggin. Teams were scored on the feasibility of their plan of action to clean up the lake, which was polluted with sediment and fertilizer runoff, as well as the — ahem — consequences of an inflated canine population.

The victory was a shock to Waverly-Shell Rock team members Thea Bauman, Amber Dilger, Julie Rick and twin sisters

Anne and Laura Koenig, all juniors, who formed the team because “it just sounded like fun,” according to Anne Koenig.

“We like doing things together,” added Dilger, a student in team adviser Stacey Newbrough’s conservation of natural resources class. She recruited her teammates, who had all taken the class before.

To prepare, the students heard presentations from Darrin Siefken of the Bremer County Conservation Board, Steve Martin of the Butler County Conservation Board, and Kurt Hoeft, district conservationist for the Bremer County Natural Resources Conservation Service. They conducted study sessions with Newbrough at least once a week, and met on their own more frequently as the competition drew near.

Still, walking into the competition was intimidating. Most of the teams came from an FFA chapter or science club, and most were all male, as well.

“When she first said we were ahead, we were like, ‘no,’” Laura Koenig said of the team’s reaction to Newbrough’s news during the competition.

“When you look back, it doesn’t even seem like we competed,” Bauman said. “We just had fun.”

Oh, and in case you’re wondering what to do about that lake, put a wetland strip around it to filter out the bacteria and runoffs, and pass one ordinance requiring a permit to fertilize your lawn and another mandating use of “poop-scoopers.”



GREG BROWN / Courier Staff Photographer

Waverly-Shell Rock High School captured first place in the first-ever Iowa Envirothon last week. Clockwise from top of tree, team members are Thea Bauman, Julie Rick, Laura Koenig, coach Stacey Newbrough, Amber Dilger and Anne Koenig.