

News Article
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Roger Vines
County Extension Coordinator

Alabama 4-H'ers Earn National Championship in Utah

The Coosa County 4-H Wildlife Team represented Alabama at the National 4-H Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Invitational in Cedar City, Utah on July 25-29, 2007. They returned home as National Champions. They were followed in the competition by the home team from Utah in second place, and Texas in third place. Nineteen states were represented and all the teams were already state champions.

Team members included Anna Vines, Elijah Phillips, Samuel Cordner and Treavor Abrams and were coached by County Extension Coordinator, Roger Vines and Kristy Abrams. Anna Vines was the overall high scoring individual, Elijah Phillips placed fourth and Samuel Cordner came in at 9th overall. Our fourth member, Treavor Abrams, also did well but placed out of the top ten.

"The competition was very challenging. Our team members had to study really hard to learn an entirely new habitat that was so very different from Alabama. The competition site was on land dominated by high desert sagebrush and rugged mountains. The Utah and Texas teams, which placed second and third had the advantage of being on familiar ground, so that made me especially proud of our Alabama team members who still came out on top" stated Vines. "I have been coaching this team since they were in the fourth grade and so it's great to see them reach this long sought after goal."

The teams competed in several different events, including aerial photo interpretation, wildlife foods, wildlife habitat management practices, a written rural wildlife plan, and a written urban wildlife plan. As always the scores were very close, but Alabama won with a 10 point margin over the second place Utah team. This victory marks the tenth time, Coosa County 4-H has had a team participate in the national wildlife event. Nine of these teams have all placed in the top three, including three national championships and four reserve national championships.

There were also many educational opportunities along the way. The team visited the Grand Canyon National Park, Meteor Crater National Monument, the Painted Desert, the Petrified Forest and Mammoth Cave. They also visited Hoover Dam and Indian Cliff Dwellings in Walnut Canyon National Park. On top of this they made new friends from all across the country and learned about the plants and animals of the American West. But just as important, they learned about commitment to a goal, the value of hard work, and how to support their team mates. The 4-H'ers also learned to appreciate the support of their community, since over \$2700 was raised locally to support the team on their trip. One team member plans to apply to Auburn University and pursue a degree in wildlife biology and so the 4-H Wildlife program has been a great place to start.

The 4-H Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Program, commonly known as WHEP, is an educational program of the Cooperative Extension System to teach youth about the value and principles involved in managing our wildlife resources. It started as a state 4-H program in Tennessee and has grown to a nation-wide event. Participants must first win their state competition to earn the chance to compete nationally. A rule is in place that allows teams to only participate in one national WHEP, so each state winning team only gets "one shot" at winning the national. The contest also moves to a different host state each year, so the contest has been held all over the country through the years. Next year, the event will be held in Oklahoma. The National WHEP is sponsored by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and International Paper.

Our team would also like to express appreciation to our many local sponsors for their support including: Five Star Plantation, Coosa Wildlife Federation, Charles Welden, Coosa Farmers Federation, Sure Shot, Mitchell and Co., Shep & Earlene Phillips, Mike & Jane Gunn, Phillip Neighbors, George & Ouida Hall, Byron & Marsha Taylor, Pri-Care PA, Willard & Marie Shell, Lewis Scarborough, S.W. Dark, Arthur McConnell, Ronald & Cheryl Lawson, Melissa M. Vaughn, David & Laura Willis, Roger & Paula McEwen, Michael McConnell, and two other anonymous donors. We also express a very special thanks to Faye Phillips and Dr. Doug McConnell for their tremendous help with the fund raising efforts.

Special thanks also to volunteers Kristy Abrams, Shelly Wood and Jennifer Ayers who assisted with the team. The team appreciates everyone who supported them and helped make this possible. All of these folks are a part of this victory.