



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

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**EAGLE SCOUT RECORDS SEVERAL "FIRSTS" IN GRANT FROM THE
NORTH AMERICAN WETLANDS CONSERVATION FUND**

Jason Spanel, a 15-year-old Eagle Scout from Eldorado, IL, chalked up several "firsts" in the most recent round of grants from the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund, including being the youngest grantee on record and receiving the smallest grant, \$600, for the smallest wetland, 3.1 acres. Technically, the grantee of record is the Boy Scouts of America, Troop 33, which is also a first for the Scouts.

While Jason's grant and project may be small in size, they make a bold statement about what one determined young person can accomplish. Jason's partners in the project, 36 to date, have contributed \$4,200 in matching funds, goods, and in-kind services to create and interpret a wetland from a water retention basin at a shopping mall parking lot in Harrisburg.

The young entrepreneur went one step further. He wrote an essay about his project and won a \$7,500 first place award in the American Express Geography Competition. He received the award in ceremonies May 12 in Washington, DC, and also received a symbolic "big" check for the \$600 wetlands grant from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Mollie Beattie. His essay was entitled

(more)

"Linking the North American Waterfowl Management Plan to the J.N. Spanel Wetland Restoration and Interpretive Site."

"As a Life Scout," Jason said, "I recognized a unique opportunity to implement the goals and objectives of both the North America Waterfowl Management Plan and the North American Wetlands Conservation Act by developing this water retention basin into a man-made wetland."

The \$600 matching grant, authorized by the Act, will be used to modify an existing outlet structure so that water levels can be manipulated. This will allow the site to be managed as a moist soil unit that will significantly increase biological diversity and provide habitat for various species of wetland birds such as sandpipers, plovers, snipe, and waterfowl.

Earlier, with the help of Scout Troops 33 and 23 of nearby Harrisburg, Jason planted trees, shrubs, and wetland plants. Next, with a lot of help from partners, he designed and constructed a 100-foot long handicapped accessible boardwalk with interpretive signing and a gazebo that can be used as an outdoor learning center.

"This unique wetland will function as a microecosystem and serve as an outdoor learning laboratory for the children of Saline County," he said in describing his project. He obtained a long-term conservation easement on the site to insure that the wetland will be protected.

Jason's was one of four grants approved in March for wetlands conservation projects in Mexico and 12 in the United States. The \$7.5 million in grants approved from the Fund was matched by partnership funds of \$15,455,485. The Fund was established by Congress in 1989 in support of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and other wetlands conservation efforts. Since then, it has supported 275 wetlands projects in 36 States, Mexico, and Canada with \$105 million in Federal funds, matched by \$202 million from partners.

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