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### **Kids Go 'Green' at Department of Energy/Citizens' Advisory Board Eco Fair**

*By Joe Walker  
LATA Kentucky*

Sixth-graders came away 'greener' than ever after attending the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Eco Fair, which the U.S. Department of Energy and Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant Citizens' Advisory Board (CAB) hosted May 18-19 in the West Kentucky Wildlife Management Area.

"What sticks in my mind is you can recycle so many things – like changing plastic bottles into a jacket," said Eli Mitchell, who attends Ballard County Middle School and wants to be an aerospace engineer.

Eco Fair drew about 550 sixth-graders from four area middle schools: Ballard, Community Christian Academy, Lone Oak, and Heath. They participated in hands-on activities including banding and tracking waterfowl, monitoring fish population, cooking with solar heat, radiation in everyday life, predator-prey relationships, and the essential role wetlands play in the ecosystem.

"Kids are our future," said Reinhard Knerr, the Department's Site Lead at Paducah. "We want them to be good stewards of the environment."

Ralph Young of the Greater Paducah Sustainability Project, a Paducah nonprofit organization that runs the Recycle Now! program, used a made-from-plastic jacket to show students a viable alternative to throwing plastic bottles in the trash. Young, who doubles as the advisory board's vice chairman, said plastic bottles dumped in landfills take roughly 1 million years to decompose.

Community Christian Academy student Madeline Downs said her family recycles aluminum cans. Will Kitchen, a Lone Oak Middle sixth-grader, said his family delivers paper, plastic bottles, metal cans, and cardboard to Recycle Now! Recycle Now! ships more than a tractor-trailer load of material weekly to a recycling plant in northwest Tennessee, Young said.

"We only have one garbage can now," Kitchen said of his family of six. "And recycling is good for the environment."

The Department owns the Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant and oversees environmental cleanup. The CAB is an independent group that advises the Department on cleanup issues.

Eco Fair is a way of building community rapport through schools, Young said. "We wanted to extend outreach because we have a lot of key decisions coming up regarding plant cleanup."

Eco Fair took place near a small lake just west of the plant. Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources personnel showed students how waterfowl are banded and tracked with transmitters, and how fish are stunned with mild electrical charges so they can be examined to monitor their population.

Heath Middle students Drew Cradick and Tyler Griffith were excited to hold a banded mallard drake.

"It's pretty fun," Cradick said. "I'm interesting in hunting."

Other Eco Fair participants were LATA Environmental Services of Kentucky, LLC, the Energy Department's cleanup contractor; Paducah Power System; Murray State University Environmental Education Department; and the University of Kentucky Engineering Program on the West Kentucky Community & Technical College campus. GEO Consultants, LLC, and Swift & Staley provided support.

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John Brunjes of the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources' Migratory Bird Program demonstrates to Ballard Middle School sixth-graders how a transmitter tracks banded waterfowl. The students attended the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Eco Fair, hosted May 18-19 by the U.S. Department of Energy and Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant Citizens' Advisory Board.



Ralph Young of Recycle Now! explains to Lone Oak Middle School sixth-graders the importance of recycling plastic bottles. Young is vice chairman of the Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant Citizens' Advisory Board, which with the U.S. Department of Energy co-hosted the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Eco Fair.



Lone Oak Middle School sixth-graders pet banded mallard ducks at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Eco Fair in the West Kentucky Wildlife Management Area.



Heath Middle School sixth-graders pretend to be rabbits chased by coyotes in predatory food chain activities at Eco Fair 2011, hosted by the U.S. Department of Energy and Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant Citizens' Advisory Board. Representatives from the Murray State University's Environmental Education Department led the predator-prey activities.

*Photos by Jim Ethridge and Dylan Nichols, LATA Kentucky*