

GREEN FOR GOING GREEN - WINNING STUDENTS TACKLE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN 2020 LEXUS ECO CHALLENGE

April 16, 2020



PLANO, Texas (April 16, 2020) – The globe’s young students are becoming increasingly aware of our planet’s environmental challenges, and their collective commitment to helping alleviate humans’ negative impact is nothing less than stunning. For the 13th year running, the efforts of these students have been supported and rewarded through their participation in the Lexus Eco Challenge, a program, in partnership with Scholastic, that invites more than 2,000 US-based students in grades 6–12 to tackle environmental issues in their communities, create and submit their action plans and results, and compete nationally for a total of \$500,000 in grants and scholarships.

Lexus and Scholastic, the global children’s publishing, education, and media company, reviewed the finalists’ innovative submissions and selected one middle and one high school team as the 2020 Lexus Eco Challenge

Grand Prize winners. The Grand Prize–winning teams each receive a \$30,000, divided into a \$7,000 grant for the school, a \$3,000 grant for the team’s teacher advisor, and \$20,000 in scholarships for the students to share. Eight First Place–winning teams are awarded a \$15,000 in grants each.

This year’s high school Grand Prize–winning team is The Turtle Trackers from Arlington High School in Lagrangeville, New York. The Grand Prize–winning middle school team is R.E.M. Remote Environmental Monitoring from P.S. 28 Christa McAuliffe School in Jersey City, New Jersey.

For the first two phases of the Lexus Eco Challenge, 32 middle and high school teams were selected as finalists. Each finalist earned a \$10,000 prize to be shared among the team, teacher, and school, and was invited to embark on the final challenge to reach beyond their local community to inspire environmental action. The teams communicated their innovative ideas to a wide audience in the last round, broadening the reach of their work to people outside their communities.

The Turtle Trackers and teacher advisors Tricia Muraco and Maribel Pregnall decided to address the decline of the local Blanding’s turtle population, a federally-endangered species. The students were shocked by their initial research and the negative impact of their own school and their communities’ actions.

The students recognized that losing the Blanding’s turtle would be a significant blow to the planet’s biodiversity. Over the next seven months, the Turtle Trackers reached out to turtle researchers and centers across the country to gain more knowledge and conducted their own field research in the local wetlands to monitor the turtle’s nesting patterns and track hatchlings. The students realized that they needed to educate and inform the public about the decline in biodiversity. They created educational videos and interactive lesson plans for local K–2 classrooms, presented to hundreds of local community members, partnered with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and their local representatives in Congress, and conducted an extensive public relations campaign, securing features in local media outlets and an extensive social media following.

“The Lexus Eco Challenge provides an invaluable bridge for my students between the ability to conduct real research and to convey their findings and recommendations,” said teacher advisor Maribel Pregnall. “They have truly partnered with our community and are ensuring a lasting positive impact for their work.”

Aided by teacher advisors Joel Naatus and Mahvish Haq, R.E.M. Remote Environmental Monitoring helped their Jersey City community identify harmful environmental problems by developing and implementing remote environmental monitoring systems across their community.

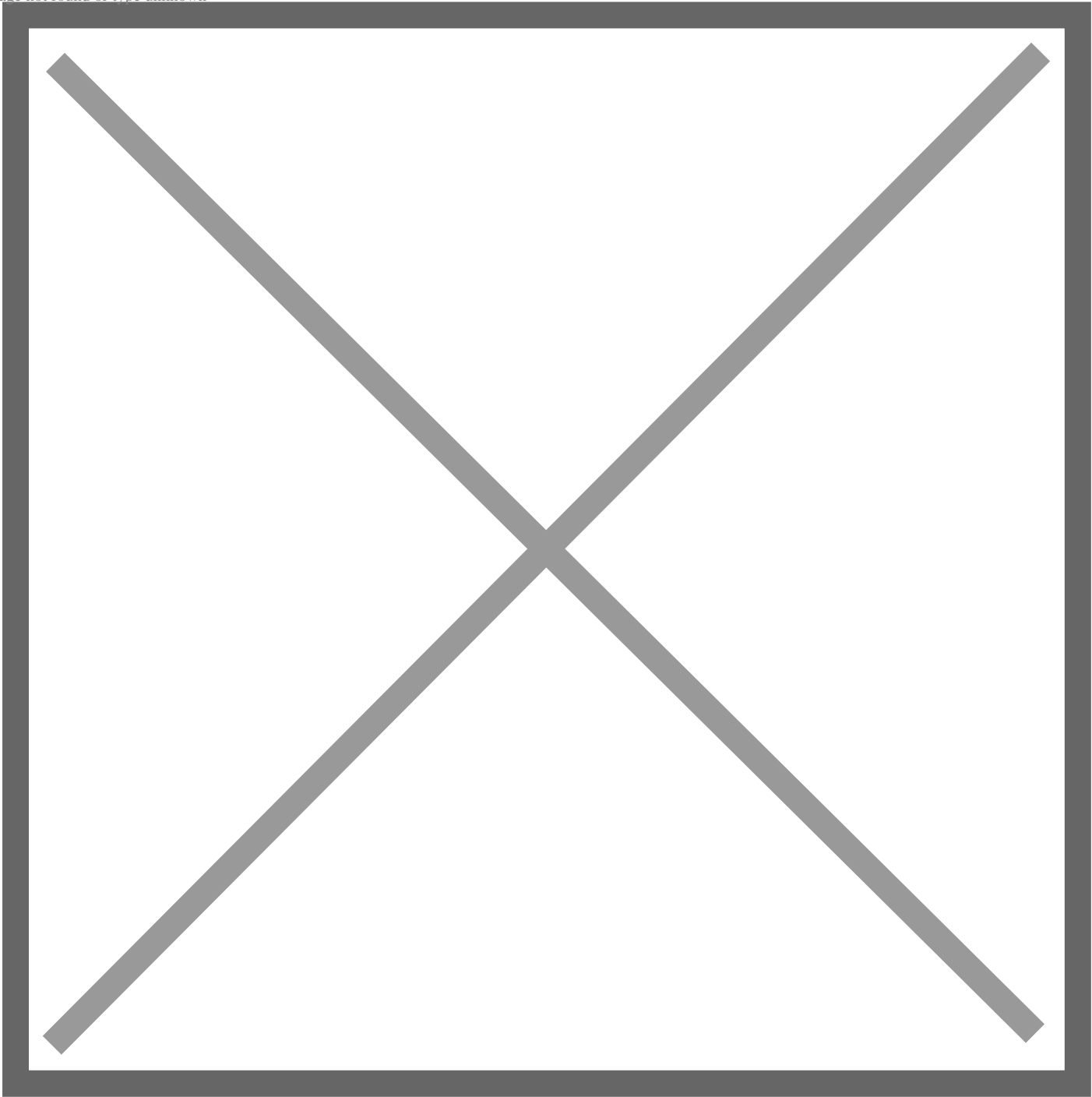


The students set up one system to detect temperature and humidity, another to check hydrogen sulfide and air-quality levels, and a third to detect potentially harmful algal blooms in a local lake. All of the systems will help ensure the public will be able to check readings and know if the areas are safe to visit in the future.

“The students were very proactive about broadcasting their research both in our community and across the country,” said teacher advisor Joel Naatus. “They created a website, including podcasts and blog posts, used Twitter and Instagram to get the word out and even taught a fourth-grade class about their work.”

The Grand Prize– and First Place–winning teams that best addressed environmental challenges are listed below.

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In support of the United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda, each year the Lexus Eco Challenge helps the more than 2,000 participating students implement their localized ideas and solutions in the positive proliferation of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) around the world. The Lexus Eco Challenge is part of The Lexus Pursuit of Potential, a philanthropic initiative that generates up to \$3 million in donations each year for organizations that help build, shape, and improve children's lives. (To learn more about the program and winners, visit: [scholastic.com/lexus](https://www.scholastic.com/lexus).)