

Alachua County 4-H Forest Ecology Senior Team Qualifies for the National Competition

Each year the Alachua County 4-H Forest Ecology team competes in the Florida Forest Ecology Contest at Austin Cary Forest's Roland T. Stern Learning Center near Gainesville, Florida. Teams from other counties across the state gather to take part in the competition. Forest ecology students learn how to identify trees, forest health issues (insects and disease), read maps and compasses, measure trees and manage forests for products like lumber and turpentine. Practice begins in January and the students meet one or two times each week to hone their tree, insect, and disease identification skills. The coaches also set up courses for the students to practice finding compass bearings and distance between two points by understanding their pace length. The Alachua County team travels to different parks across the state and consults with specialists from the University of Florida to get hands on experience with the contest material.



4-H youth are categorized by age; Cloverbuds are 5-7, Juniors are 8-10, Intermediates are 11-13 and Seniors are 14-18 years old. Each age group competes as a team and as individuals but only the first place Senior team gets to go on to represent Florida at the National 4-H Forestry Invitational. This annual competition is held July 24th – 28th at Jackson's Mill State 4-H Conference Center in Weston, West Virginia. In 2018, we won the State competition and placed third at Nationals. This year, our Senior team again placed first and qualified for nationals! Furthermore, the first place Senior individual, Abigail Pruden, was from the Alachua County team. The first place individual also receives a \$2,000 scholarship to the UF/IFAS School of Forest, Fisheries, and Geomatics Sciences. The younger students were very competitive this year as well and we were the second place Intermediate team, had the second place Intermediate individual and the first place Junior individual. We did not have enough Juniors to compete as a team. The hard work ethic of the Alachua County 4-H Forest Ecology team is nothing short of inspirational. I look forward to traveling with the team to West Virginia and representing Florida at the National level. If you are interested in supporting the team and would like to contribute to our travel funds, please contact Dr. Kevin Korus at 352-955-2405 or kkorus@ufl.edu.