

Edwardsville Senior Among 2021 Conservation Achievement Scholarship Recipients Announced By Illinois Conservation Foundation

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SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Conservation Foundation (ICF) today announced the selections of Felicity Guttman of Edwardsville, Mariama Bah of Zion, Ava Benstine of Oswego, Levi Buckrop of Taylor Ridge, and Elizabeth Kleinert of Ashkum as the recipients of the 2021 Conservation Achievement Scholarships. The high school seniors each will receive \$2,000 to apply for specified college expenses.

“Supporting this up-and-coming class of dedicated young conservation advocates is what the Conservation Achievement Scholarship program is all about,” said Colleen Callahan, chair of the ICF Board of Directors and director of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. “Thanks to generous donors to the Illinois Conservation Foundation, we are proud to support the academic and conservation stewardship pursuits of five deserving and outstanding young people this year.”

The 2021 Conservation Achievement Scholarship recipients:

Felicity Guttman, Edwardsville; Edwardsville High School

With an interest in agriculture, Felicity Guttman plans to study crop and soil science and pursue a degree in agronomy. Last year, Guttman began raising chickens, with an eye toward protecting the environment in the process. She utilizes chicken droppings in producing compost for use as fertilizer in raised garden beds. As an additional nod to improving her local environment, Guttman always carries a bag on walks and runs to pick up trash along the way. She hopes to promote sustainable agriculture practices that reduce tillage and limit fertilizer and pesticide use. Guttman plans to attend the University of Missouri at Columbia, Missouri.

Mariama Bah, Zion; New Tech High at Zion-Benton East

Mariama Bah, during a visit to a favorite Lake Michigan shoreline beach with her mother, noticed the amount of sand that had washed away. Her academic and environmental curiosity piqued, Bah – through Lake County’s Center for Conservation Leadership – embarked on a stewardship project collecting data and assisting scientists in measuring and documenting the impacts of shoreline erosion at the Zion Park District’s Hosah Prairie natural area. Bah also researched and wrote on environmental justice issues and impacts on people and their communities. A top-ranked student academically, Mariama Bah plans to attend Northwestern University in Evanston.

Ava Grace Benstine, Oswego; Oswego High School

Throughout her high school years, “Gracie” Benstine has always looked for opportunities to get her hands dirty. Volunteering at a community food pantry garden, Benstine composted natural fertilizer, collected rainwater, and helped provide 2,000 pounds of produce for families in need. Working through the local Student Leadership Initiative Program and National Honor Society, Benstine helped remove invasive plants at local forest preserves and participated in cleanups along the Fox River, raised money for tree planting efforts, and organized student-to-student efforts to study and combat impacts of climate change. Her nominators praised Benstine’s community service ethic and student leadership roles. Benstine plans to attend Augustana College in Rock Island.

Levi James Buckrop, Taylor Ridge; Rockridge High School

Growing up on a family farm, Levi Buckrop turned a lifelong interest in the outdoors into a mission to expand and enhance wildlife and natural areas habitat close to home. He has managed the family's farm pond to improve fish habitat, including placing downed pine trees and other structure in the pond. He and his family planted 9,500 oak, hickory, walnut and pecan tree saplings and added grassland plantings to help limit erosion and provide improved habitat for deer, turkey, pheasant, quail, rabbits and doves. Buckrop's love of the outdoors led to interest in pursuing a career as a Conservation Police officer, and he will attend Western Illinois University in Macomb.

Elizabeth J. Kleinert, Ashkum; Clifton Central High School

Land conservation was instilled in Lizzie Kleinert early in life on her family's livestock and grain farm in Iroquois County. Her father promoted the concept of no-till farming. As an FFA member and officer at Clifton Central High School, Kleinert worked with fellow members to secure grant funding for a tree planting initiative prompted by the woodland losses caused by emerald ash borer, planting new native trees near a local ballpark. Her work with the FFA also includes talking to younger students about the benefits of environmentally safe practices on the farm, and efforts such as recycling in rural areas and local communities. Kleinert also worked with her grandfather to plant a community sunflower garden that is enjoyed by wildlife and members of the community. Kleinert plans to attend the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Applicants for the ICF Conservation Achievement Scholarship program must be outstanding high school seniors in Illinois who have demonstrated effective, voluntary, long-term dedication to the preservation, protection, enhancement and/or promotion of Illinois' natural resources. Other criteria also apply. For more information, check the ICF website at www.ilconservation.org.

For information on donating to and supporting the Conservation Achievement Scholarships or other ICF programs, contact the foundation at 217-785-2003, or donate online at www.ilconservation.org.