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FINAL REPORT: Small Project #00-069

CONTRACTOR: Chicago Audubon Society

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INTRODUCTION:

The Chicago Audubon Society (CAS) distributes a set of educational materials annually. The materials, called Audubon Adventures, are developed by the National Audubon Society for use by elementary and middle-school classes. In 1999 CAS applied for and received a grant from the Wildlife Preservation Fund, to be used for purchasing material kits. CAS requested \$1,000, to be matched by \$1,000 of its own funds.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

The Audubon Adventures kit contains newspapers on four different topics, a videotape produced by Disney on a related topic, a teacher's manual that provides additional information and age-appropriate projects, and sources for additional information, including direct telephone numbers and e-mail addresses for the Education staff at the National Audubon Society and different web sites. The kits contain enough newspapers so that each student could receive one to keep for each of the four topics. In addition, CAS sent a letter to each teacher providing the name, telephone number, and e-mail address of a local contact to assist with any questions they might have.

The 1999-2000 newspapers were titled "Sharing the Earth"; "The Mighty Forest"; "Wild Alaska"; and "Our One and Only Everglades". These are all explicitly concerned with wildlife and habitat, in keeping with the goals of the National Audubon Society and CAS. The videotape showed the biology of the Bald Eagle.

Classrooms were solicited for the program in a variety of ways. Last year's teachers provided an initial base of support. Members of the CAS Board of Directors made contacts with schools in their home area and generated some requests for the program. An article in the CAS newsletter invited teachers, as well as parents and grandparents, to nominate their own class, and several teachers signed up based on these contacts.

RESULTS:

The additional money provided by the Wildlife Preservation Fund allowed us to be more aggressive in promoting the program. Though somewhat lower than last year, the 26 classes supported still represent a substantial increase over the 18 we were able to support two years ago, before any WPF money was available to us. In addition to the Audubon Adventures kits, we were also able to provide posters and additional curricular materials to several classrooms. Teachers assure us that these extra materials, especially the posters, are very useful in stimulating student interest in environmental issues.

Classes that received materials were located throughout the Chicago metropolitan area, consistent with the wide area served by CAS. Most of the classes were located in Chicago this year, but other cities served include Des Plaines, Evanston, Midlothian, and Oak Lawn.

DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY:

While we were not able to sponsor as many classrooms as we had hoped, we are quite pleased to have increased the size of the program so quickly. It is surprisingly difficult to persuade administrators in some schools to accept free science materials; parents are much more likely to get the teachers interested than is a blind contact by CAS. However, once a teacher has used the materials, she or he is generally very interested in continuing in the program the following year, and often has several colleagues in the same school who are also excited to begin once they see how the program works. We are therefore very optimistic that many of the schools we sponsored this year will have more classes enrolled next year. I have also provided a set of materials to the Education Department of a local college, and as these students begin their student teaching they may be interested in acquiring a set of Adventures materials for their own use.

All in all, the additional money from the Wildlife Preservation Fund has allowed us to expand the program considerably and created what we are certain will be a broader base of support for programs in future years. The program itself is, we feel, a very valuable step in helping instill our children with an appreciation for the importance of wildlife and habitat, and the problems faced by the same.