



Alex Jamal, Matt Morris, Mike Browne, and Graham Strang “Get the Lead Out of Fishing” at a 2009 Fishing Derby at Houghton’s Pond, Milton, MA. The Scouts gave educational brochures and non-lead fishing weights to more than 200 anglers at the event.

GET THE LEAD OUT OF FISHING

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, while Michael Browne was out fishing with his father, he posed a seemingly innocent question: “Dad, what happens to all the lead weights we lose in the water?” Like any good parent might, Ed Browne urged, “Why don’t you go look it up, son!”

Mike did, and years later when searching for a project to earn his Eagle Scout Award in the Boy Scouts of America, he decided that “getting the lead out of fishing” was an issue he wanted to tackle. Mike’s outreach and educational efforts – with the assistance of fellow Scouts Matt Morris, Alexander Jamal, and Graham Strang from St. Agatha’s Parish, Troop 5, in Milton, Massachusetts – have garnered many awards, including a 2009 SeaWorld/Busch Gardens Environmental Excellence Award (EEA).

The Izaak Walton League sponsored the boys’ winning “Get the Lead Out of Fishing” project at the EEA ceremony April 30 – May 2 at SeaWorld in Orlando, Florida. Each of the 8 winning teams received a \$10,000 check from the SeaWorld/Busch Gardens Conservation Fund and gave a presentation showcasing their efforts to other teams and their sponsors – conservation organizations like the League that participate in the final round of award judging.

“If there are ponds with birds in them, lead is an issue,” asserts Browne, now a high school junior. According to the Scouts’ informational brochure and Web site (www.replacelead.com), lead poisoning is harmful to humans and animals. But in particular, lead tackle causes death in great numbers of birds who eat the toxic weights.

Browne and the other Scouts attend fishing derbies to educate anglers about the problem and exchange their lead tackle for only slightly more expensive non-toxic sinkers made of nickel alloy, bismuth, tin, ceramic, and other materials. Browne also spoke before the Massachusetts legislature in support of a bill to ban the use of lead tackle for fishing.

The troop’s latest educational efforts have focused on using public service announcements and news stories to get the word out to anglers before they even purchase lead weights. For more information about the hazards of lead tackle in the environment, including how easy it is to replace lead weights with non-toxic ones, visit www.replacelead.com.