



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

June 18, 2019

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New Jersey High School Student Wins 2019 U.S. Stockholm Junior Water Prize, Will Represent the U.S. in International Competition

ALEXANDRIA, Va. – The Water Environment Federation (WEF) proudly announces that Sonja Michaluk has won the 2019 U.S. Stockholm Junior Water Prize (SJWP), the nation's most prestigious youth competition for water-related research.

Michaluk, a student at Hopewell Valley Central High School in Pennington, N.J., explored the use of DNA barcoding to measure the health of waterways with larval Chironomidae (order Diptera), the most widespread macroinvertebrate family. She won \$10,000 and an all-expenses paid trip to Stockholm to represent the United States at the international competition in late August.

Students from 45 states and Puerto Rico competed in the national finals June 15 at the Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio. The Stockholm Junior Water Prize aims to increase students' interest in water issues, research, and careers, as well as to raise awareness about global water challenges. The competition is open to projects focused on improving water quality, water resource management, water protection, and drinking water and wastewater treatment.

The two U.S. runners-up were Noel Lange of Alabama and Ankush Dhawan of Indiana, who each received \$1,000. Haley Jostes of Minnesota received the Bjorn von Euler Innovation in Water Scholarship Award from Xylem Inc. Mehaa Amirthalingam of Texas received the James L. Condon Recognition for Environmental Stewardship.

"The health and future of our global water environment depends on the kind of ingenuity and innovation the Stockholm Junior Water Prize competition showcases," said WEF Executive Director Eileen O'Neill. "WEF takes pride in supporting these young scientists as they work to solve some of the most complex challenges facing the water sector."

Michaluk's winning project, "A Novel Method of Monitoring the Health of our Global Fresh Water Supply using DNA Barcoding of Chironomidae (Diptera)," emphasized a forecast that 66 percent of the U.S. population will experience water scarcity within a decade, leaving residents more dependent on surface water for drinking. Current surface water monitoring methods rely on expensive and technically challenging manual identification of biological samples. DNA barcoding, Michaluk noted, "results in more accurate and precise waterway health data, adding significant value for monitoring scarce water resources."

The judges commented: “Beyond the very impressive research Sonja performed in her study of Chironomidae DNA barcoding to determine water quality health, she also applied her knowledge to a local non-profit water institute to improve her own community watershed. These students are creating solutions to improve communities across the world, and the Stockholm Junior Water Prize is a testament to the importance of investing in the future of our industry. The diversity of students and ideas this year demonstrated solutions for our world’s water challenges will come from young people of all backgrounds.”

In the U.S., WEF and its Member Associations organize the regional, state, and national competitions with support from Xylem Inc., who also sponsors the international competition.

For more information on the Stockholm Junior Water Prize, click [here](#). For a list of state winners, click [here](#).

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About WEF

The Water Environment Federation (WEF) is a not-for-profit technical and educational organization of 35,000 individual members and 75 affiliated Member Associations representing water quality professionals around the world. Since 1928, WEF and its members have protected public health and the environment. As a global water sector leader, our mission is to connect water professionals; enrich the expertise of water professionals; increase the awareness of the impact and value of water; and provide a platform for water sector innovation. To learn more, visit www.wef.org.