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## Illinois Wesleyan University Student Addresses Forest Service Centennial Congress

February 8, 2005

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. - Illinois Wesleyan University sophomore Jessica Farrar grew up playing in the creek behind her rural southern Illinois home, building forts in the woods and spending time at her family's lakeside cabin. Involvement with the Girl Scouts solidified her appreciation for nature, providing her with "life-altering" wilderness trips to Oregon, Maine and Canada.

When she recently told a gathering of U.S. Forest Service leaders that attention is needed to continue programs that inspire environmental passion in today's youth, they took note.

Farrar was one of six young people - one of two college students - selected to address the Forest Service Centennial Congress in Washington, D.C., last month. The event convened Congressional leaders, agency partners, media and academic leaders, and state and local representatives to honor the agency's 100 years and assess its future. Farrar took part in a panel on "Conservation Leaders: Today and Tomorrow," which drew a standing ovation from the crowd, followed by a long reception line of professionals offering praise and pressing business cards into Farrar's hands.

Farrar rose to national attention within the Girl Scouts of America three years ago, when she won the organization's Gold Award and "Young Woman of Distinction" honor for her project planting trees to protect the shoreline of J.C. Lake in her home town of Mt. Vernon. When the Forest Service looked to the Girl Scouts to gain new perspective at its congress, Farrar was nominated.

She used her speech to alert representatives that two programs influential in her own devotion to nature - the Kids for Conservation program and the Schoolyard Habitat Action Grant (the latter provided trees for her Gold Award project) - have disappeared or are suffering cuts.

"Most youth don't even think about the environment, mainly because they are not introduced to the outdoors and they are not educated on its benefits," she told the congress. "It is important to spark interest from the youth in the ecosystem."

Farrar later saw a copy of a missive from the Forest Service Chief to his top staff, which included some key points from her own speech.

"It's really amazing to know I made that difference," she said. She in turn learned much about the Forest Service and its efforts to maintain a balance between conservation and obtaining needed resources.

Farrar found she was well equipped for the experience by a recent course at Illinois Wesleyan, "Thinking Like a Mountain," with Associate Professor of English Alison Sainsbury. Farrar said the course included reading about nature and observation-based assignments.

"It really prepared me to get into the mood of nature and know the background of famous people who have written on conserving the environment," she said.

A business administration major, Farrar continues to work with the Girl Scouts. She interns with the Bloomington-based Centrillio Council and strives to encourage more involvement among girls in junior high and older.

To discuss her experience with Farrar, contact Ann Aubry or Jeff Hanna at (309) 556-3181.



Jessica Farrar