

Connor Crowe

TEEA 2014 Winner: Youth



The Georgetown salamander, *Eurycea naufragia*, is a rare species currently found only in Georgetown and has been considered for the endangered species list. After a 500-year flood in September of 2010, the Georgetown salamander's habitat at Twin Springs Natural Preserve was greatly damaged. In comes Connor Crowe, an intrepid 15-year-old Boy Scout, on a mission to help restore this species' habitat and increase awareness about the need for conservation of this unique animal.

Connor, who sought direction from Gary Boyd of the Williamson County Conservation Foundation, needed an expert to guide him with his project and chose to work with Dr. Benjamin Pierce of Southwestern University as his scientific adviser. Under the direction of Dr. Pierce, he enlisted volunteers to help carefully move large rocks that the flood had deposited in piles along the side of the spring. Dr. Pierce and his team then put these rocks back into the spring to restore the salamander's habitat. When it became clear that the flow of the spring, the source of the salamander's water and habitat, was obstructed, Connor organized volunteers to clear large amounts of brush and debris that were diverting the spring onto a nature trail. After returning the spring water to its original route, Connor went a step further and gained permission to install permanent signs to explain the practice of "leave no trace" and educate the public about the Georgetown salamander's rarity and habitat.

Dr. Pierce and his students at Southwestern University have been keeping counts of the Georgetown salamander at Twin Springs Preserve. The year before the September 2010 flood, they counted an average of 35 salamanders. For the three months immediately after the flood, they counted an average of only six. During the six months after the habitat restoration was completed in March 2011, they counted an average of 27 salamanders.

Connor also won a Boy Scouts of America William T. Hornaday Award for his efforts to restore the salamander's habitat and educate the public about its importance. The Hornaday Award represents a substantial commitment of time and energy by individuals to work on a project based on sound scientific principles and guided by a conservation professional. Only 1,100 have been given over the last 80 years.