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Fitting gift from ESF grads

Class of 2004 takes some air pollution credits out of circulation, plants 400 trees.

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By Nancy Buczek
Staff writer

The 2004 graduating class of the State University College of Environmental Science and Forestry plans to give the college a unique gift - clean air.

The class decided to buy and retire \$1,200 worth of air pollution credits, which class officials figure should be enough to take out of the environment about three tons of sulfur-dioxide emissions, one of the causes of acid rain.

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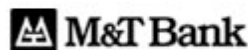
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"It helpsto show that while we are learning about all this stuff that we can do

to save the environment, we're actually going out and doing it right off the bat," said David Crandall, who received his bachelor of science degree in environmental studies from SUNY ESF last month. "Before we've even started our careers, we're already helping to correct the problem a little bit."

The Environmental Protection Agency distributes about nine million sulfur dioxide emission credits throughout the nation, state by state, said John Millett, an EPA spokesman. One credit equals one ton. Each state then assigns emission limits to the individual power companies within the state and distributes the state's credits accordingly, Millett said.

If a company's emissions are below its limit, it can sell its extra credits to a company that has exceeded its limit.

Crandall, of Oswego, said he learned about pollution credits in an environmental economics class. At a senior class meeting, he suggested buying and retiring some credits and giving them to the college as a class gift.

"I think it was the most socially conscious and responsible gift that any senior class at any college or university in the U.S. has been involved with," said SUNY ESF President Cornelius "Neil" Murphy Jr. "To retire pollution credits is a pretty unique gift and very creative. We felt really lucky."

The EPA sets aside about 3 percent of the total allotted credits annually for a public auction. At the auction in March, 250,011 credits were auctioned from the EPA and private brokers, of which 31 were bought by groups other than the power companies, Millett said. Groups at Cornell University bought two credits, according to the EPA Web site.

"In terms of stopping acid rain, people buying one credit isn't necessarily going to do it, but it's a gesture of taking credits off the market. It's a real reduction. . . . It does contribute. It does help," said Scott Lorey, legislative director for the Adirondack Council, an environmental advocacy group.

The average selling price of one credit at the March auction was \$272.82. Crandall said the prices he has been quoted are about \$400 per credit.

"If the commodity becomes more scarce, then the cost goes up," Millett said. "So it's symbolic, but it could have a practical impact as well."

James Heffernan, SUNY ESF's vice president of student affairs and educational services, said the college's graduating classes usually give the school something tangible, like a commemorative bench or clock or money toward scholarships.

In addition to the pollution credits, the class spent \$400 to buy and plant 400 trees at ESF's Heiberg Memorial Forest in Tully and Preble. The class also gave Syracuse University's outgoing chancellor, Kenneth "Buzz" Shaw, a green ESF sweat shirt as a goodbye gift. Shaw is retiring July 31.

"When you actually sit down and talk with some of these young people, you have to fundamentally come away knowing that this world is going to be in good hands when they take action and do things like that," Murphy said.

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