

Paper, Plastic or Reusable Bags

Alpena Youth 'Bagging It' for Earth Day



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Since 1970, Earth Day reflects an annual, worldwide tradition in paying appreciation for our living planet and the habitats – food, water, and shelter – she affords us. Northeast Michigan communities – rich in Great Lakes and natural resources – may understand more than anyone the importance of caring for clean air, fresh water, our living woodlands and waterway ecosystems. You can celebrate Earth Day this year with some area student artists.

In the weeks preceding Earth Day, area youth in 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grade classrooms around Alpena will participate in the Northeast Michigan Earth Day Bag Project in an effort to raise awareness about the dangers of plastic bags. In partnership with the Northeast Michigan Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative, its community partners, and Neiman's Family Market, students will decorate bags to convey messages regarding conservation and preservation following a discussion about the dangers of using plastic bags. These bags will then be distributed to customers at Neiman's Family Market in Alpena, MI on Earth Day, April 22nd.

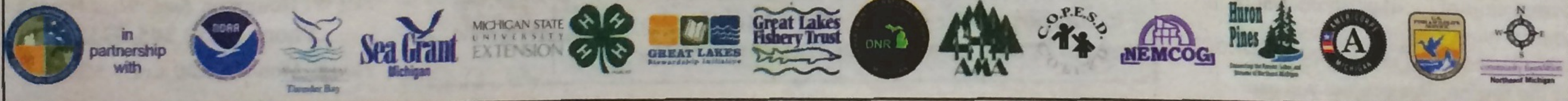
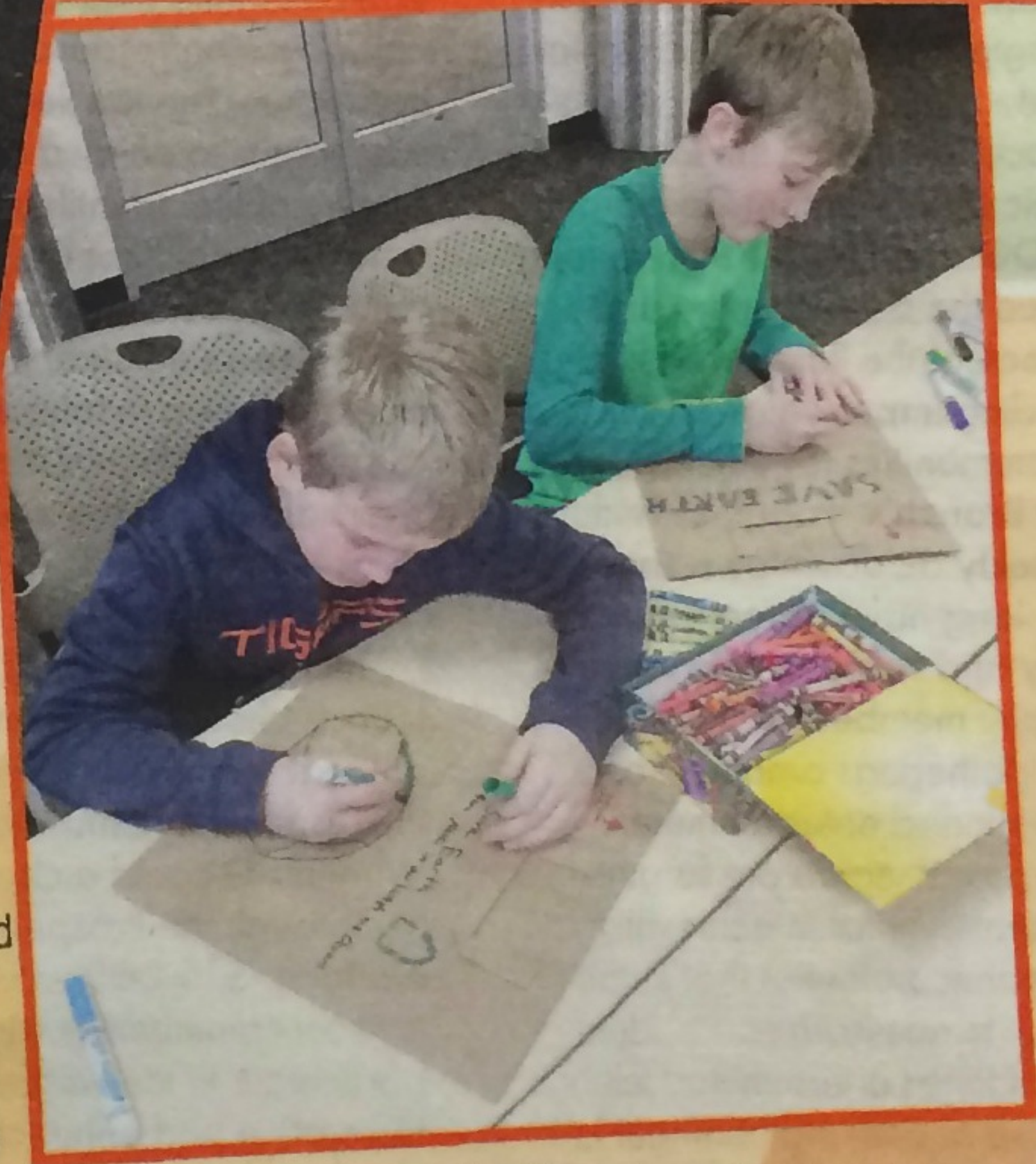
The students' campaign aims to lower the use of plastic bags, which have harmful environmental consequences, and to advocate the use of paper or reusable bag alternatives.

Single-use plastics, like plastic bags, can become harmful when entering into water ecosystems as litter or marine debris. This plastic pollution can weather and break down into smaller and smaller plastic fragments known as micro-plastics. These small pieces of plastic absorb pollutants and confused as food, they can also be consumed by fish and birds; resulting in harm. Attention toward the issue of marine debris and micro-plastics stems from the campaigns to raise awareness toward the infamous floating Pacific Ocean garbage patches. Yet closer to home, marine debris and micro-plastics are an increasingly challenging pollution issue here in our Great Lakes.

No strangers to the issue of plastic pollution, Alpena High School chemistry students have been studying the issue of micro-plastics in Lake Huron. On the water, they monitor for small particles of

plastic and compare micro-plastic levels in Thunder Bay and Lake Huron. In class, they also investigate and raise awareness about personal care products such as facial scrubs, which can sometimes contain tiny plastic beads as exfoliants. Thunder Bay Jr. High students monitor environmental

health and conduct beach clean-ups at local public parks along Lake Huron's shoreline as part of the Great Lakes Adopt-a-Beach program. Elementary youth have also studied the effects of





invasive species, a form of biological pollution, and monitored water quality for signs of chemical pollution. Thus, the Northeast Michigan Earth Day Bag Project is an extension of some of the great projects area students are already doing to limit and better understand pollution in the Great Lakes.

This simple and artful learning project allows students the opportunity to provide a great environmental service as well as the ability to take an active role in making a positive contribution to their community. With this project, youth apply arts and science while learning and raising public awareness about plastic pollution in the Great Lakes. Reflecting place-based education at its best, the Northeast Michigan Earth Day Bag Project offers a hands-on learning experience, allowing these young citizens to actively contribute to the benefit of their local community and environment.

Overall, for these Alpena students, Earth Day is the perfect day to celebrate opportunities to care for our Great Lakes and natural resources in sharing their

artfully decorated grocery bags with you. So, what will you do to contribute to the health of our blue planet on Earth Day – or in your daily lives throughout the year? If grocery shopping at Neiman's Family Market in Alpena on Earth Day, April 22, you can start by answering a simple question – paper, plastic, or reusable bag? In general, using a reusable bag is the better choice, but when given the choice of paper or plastic bags, selecting paper bags both helps promote products from our renewable forest resources and limits the potential for plastic bags to enter into our area waterways. Follow the example of our proactive citizen youth, and you can help protect our area waterways by limiting your own use of plastic bags! ♻️

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