

April/May 2013

The Guide

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The Guide celebrates NE Michigan's past, present & future

TWO SCHOOLS, TWO COASTAL PARKS AND A TOO COOL LANGUAGE ARTS PROJECT



Wet Feet - This writing project allows students hands-on, feet-wet opportunities combining ecology and biology with language arts, all while learning a sense of place in their community.



By **BRANDON SCHROEDER** and **DANIEL MOFFATT** special to The Guide

Trading text books for hiking shoes and their classrooms for Thompson's Harbor and Negwegon State Parks, students from Rogers City and Alcona County schools are working to increase public awareness and contribute to the stewardship of these public lands

In partnership with Friends groups from each park, the adventure-some students launched their second year of

exploration and writing about the many unique habitats that are home to threatened and endangered species found within these properties.

Supported by the Department of Natural Resources, Michigan Sea Grant and other community partners through the Northeast Michigan Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative, the elementary and middle school

students trek shoreline and trail as budding researchers, exploring the biological diversity of coastal Lake Huron, woodland and wetland habitats, looking for the rare threatened and endangered plants and animals that are found here.

Aside from the learning experience, their



Students explore and write about THSP's coastal fen, a wetland community of certain soils, rare plants and noteworthy animals unique to northern Michigan.

purpose and challenge is to share what they learn.

This past autumn, working alongside resource experts and volunteers from the park's friends group, Rogers City students experienced Thompson's Harbor State Park

first hand and some for the first time. Multiple field trips found students exploring coastal dunes, limestone cobble shores, wetland marshes and coastal fens, experiencing the diversity of coastal habitats for which Thompson's Harbor State Park is known.

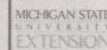
Reflecting on the field trips, these students are now researching their projects and writing reports. Middle school students selected a rare species found in Presque Isle County to research and profile. Their completed research booklets will include photos, status and ecological information about the threatened or endangered species

they studied. Meanwhile, elementary students map out the places, plants, and animals they found most interesting, in the sincere hope that other visitors will want to experience them as well.

Two counties south, middle school students from Alcona Community Schools are similarly launching into a study



in partnership with





Alcona teacher, Christie Thomas, introduces students to local species as Negwegon State Park acts as an outdoor classroom.

and swale habitats abutting the Lake Huron coastline. In complement to the work being done by youth in Rogers City, Alcona students will be also researching and writing

about these natural areas that characterize the ecological richness of Alcona County and Northeast Michigan.

Looking ahead to spring, students from both schools are planning to get back out to the parks for further exploration and discovery of the habitats, plants and animals that they have been writing about.

Through their experience students gain a better understanding of the ecological and community values each park provides for Northeast Michigan. Perhaps best of all, they will be sharing this information through interpretive resources they develop for all visitors to the parks. 📖

— Brandon Schroeder is the MSUE Northeast District Sea Grant educator. Daniel Moffatt is the school liaison for the Northeast Michigan Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative. Both work tirelessly to educate Northeast Michigan youth on the importance of conservation.

Northeast Michigan is well known for its diverse and ecologically rich Lake Huron coastline, where sandy beaches and ranging dunes intermingle with vegetated coastal wetlands, limestone cobble shores and other rare habitats.

Many of these remain undisturbed within state managed Negwegon, Rockport and Thompson's Harbor State Parks, where these coastal habitats are home to several threatened and endangered species such as the Hine's emerald dragonfly, dwarf lake iris, Pitcher's thistle and eastern massasauga rattlesnake, among others.

Increasing awareness and interest in these rare species may offer ecotourism development opportunities within the region; while promoting conservation of these important habitats and the biodiversity of life they support within the Lake Huron watershed.

Learn more about Lake Huron biodiversity conservation efforts and strategies online at www.MiSeaGrant.umich.edu/explore/biodiversity

of coastal habitats and rare species found locally within Negwegon State Park.

In partnership with agency and university resource experts, as well as volunteers from the park's Friends, students set off to explore Negwegon State Park, known for its sizeable and undisturbed dune



The Northeast Michigan Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative

www.NEMIGLSI.org

The Northeast Michigan Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative is a regional partnership of schools and community partners working to promote place-based, community-based learning experiences. This network serves to engage youth as partners in protecting our Great Lakes and natural resources of Northeast Michigan through hands-on, feet-wet learning in (and with) the community.

Visit **NEMIGLSI** online to see projects in action & learn how *you* can participate
www.NEMIGLSI.org

The NE MI GLSI supports:

- **Place-based education programs with youth:** Hands-on, place-based education is a proven method for developing knowledgeable and active stewards of the environment.
- **Educators and school improvement:** Through training and professional development for teachers, NEMIGLSI supports the use of best practices that maximize the effectiveness of PBE.
- **Strong school-community partnerships:** Schools and communities working together producing powerful partnerships that are beneficial to all.

Help NE MI GLSI support youth development and environmental stewardship in our communities!

To donate contact:
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