

Youth explore water quality issues at 4-H camp

Nineteen Alcona County youth recently attended a four-day, three-night summer camp held at the Ocqueoc Outdoor Center in Millersburg, Mich. The camp, one in a series of four, was designed by local 4-H staff to acquaint youth ages 9-12 with water quality issues and environmental stewardship as well as help them explore careers related to natural resources and conservation.

The other three camp themes - Fur, Fins and Feathers, Science-Engineering and Technology (SET) and Go GREEN - are held in succession so campers can attend for four years and not repeat major themed content.

The camp, coordinated by MSU Extension staff covering Alcona, Alpena, Antrim, Montmorency, Otsego and Presque Isle counties, offers youth an opportunity to learn and grow in an environmental setting that inspires independence, builds resilience and offers a recreational break from electronic games and television.

In addition to the eight hands-on sessions, youth were treated to a presentation by Harriet Smith from

the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary on remotely operated vehicles (ROVs). The 45 minute presentation touched on the practical applications of ROV technology as well as career opportunities related to the engineering field.

Campers also participated in a scavenger hunt, swimming, fishing, and team building games led by a group of 13 volunteer teenage counselors. The counselors, including three from Alcona County, helped campers get to sessions on time, prevent homesickness, solved problems as well as worked one-on-one with campers that had special needs.

"They really are our biggest asset," said Otsego and Antrim 4-H Coordinator Michelle Pietrzak. "Despite some bumps in the road, our camp goes very smoothly thanks to volunteers -- especially the teen counselors."

Camp sessions were led by agency professionals as well as volunteers from across northern Michigan. Each session was 90 minutes and included both hands-on learning and instructional games that helped campers under-

stand the intended lesson. Sessions included: Invasive Species, ROV Build, Ground Water/Water Quality, Macro Invertebrate Study, Archery, Canoeing, Conflict Resolution and Nutrition Education.

Part of the camp's success

rests in the fact that it is a very low cost option for families -- mostly due to the efforts of the numerous volunteers involved. Camp volunteers this year included archery instructors Tom Keerl and Chad Kamischke; water

quality instructor and kitchen assistant Meggie Spens; canoeing instructors Vicki and Dennis Habitz; lifeguard Michelle Davis; and camp health officer Chris Mutchler.

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Sixteen campers and three teenage counselors attended the four-day, three-night camp, held at the Ocqueoc Outdoor Center in Millersburg, Mich. Attending this year were (back row, from left) counselors Eric Hampton and Schuyler Bates, campers Matt MacMaster, Billy Jones, Kelsey Karas, Hunter Clark, Danny Jones, Patrick Bates, Mason Clark, 4-H staff Les Thomas, camper Isabella Bates, counselor Tori Keerl, (front row) campers Ben Thomas, Darien Panich, Haley Spalding, Janae Kierzek-Harte, Chloe Schram, Jimmy Bolanowski and Keegan Gilmore. Missing from the photo is Savannah Servia. *Courtesy photos*

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Partners for this year's camp included Michigan State University Extension's Greening Michigan and Health and Nutrition Institutes, Huron Pines Resources -- conservation and development, NOAA Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary as well as AmeriCorps members assigned to the aforementioned organizations.

Two of the major partners involved again this year were the county of Presque Isle and the Friends of Ocqueoc

group. Presque Isle County owns the facility which was at one time a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) Camp. The group's responsibility is to keep the grounds and building in good shape and make capital improvements as resources are available.

The group only charges a very small amount to use the grounds which also helps keep the cost to families low. Additional support for Alcona campers was given through the Alcona 4-H Advisory

Council providing scholarships totaling more than \$600 for the event.

"Eleven of the 13 counselors this year had attended 4-H camp at least once as a camper, and a few counselors as many as four times. This demonstrates that we are also helping to develop leaders... That's very exciting," Pietrzak said.

(Editor's Note: This story was written by Les Thomas, Alcona County 4-H Program Coordinator.)

The macro invertebrate study offered youth a chance to collect, sort and identify numerous aquatic macro invertebrates (water critters) using a dichotomist key, which sorts the invertebrates by visible features. Helen-Ann Prince, an AmeriCorps member sponsored by Michigan SeaGrant and currently housed at the MSU Extension Office in Harrisville, helps youth collect samples to take back to their outdoor classroom.



Volunteer teenage counselors from four counties helped make camp a positive experience for the 57 campers from six northern Michigan counties. Back row, from left: Josh Cumper, lead counselors Schuyler Bates and Caroline Davis, Eric Hampton. Middle row, from left: Alyssa Axel, Olivia Skrine, Miah Courtier, Jake Ross, Katie Deming, Blake Fessler. Front row, from left: Tori Keerl, Rebecca Bannasch and Colton Fessler.



Sarah Adcock, an AmeriCorps volunteer stationed at the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary, helps youth deploy the Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV) that they designed and built. The team consisted of Matt on controls, Billy on the tether and Drake on deployment.