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Alcona Elementary School to host natural habitat seminar for area teachers, students

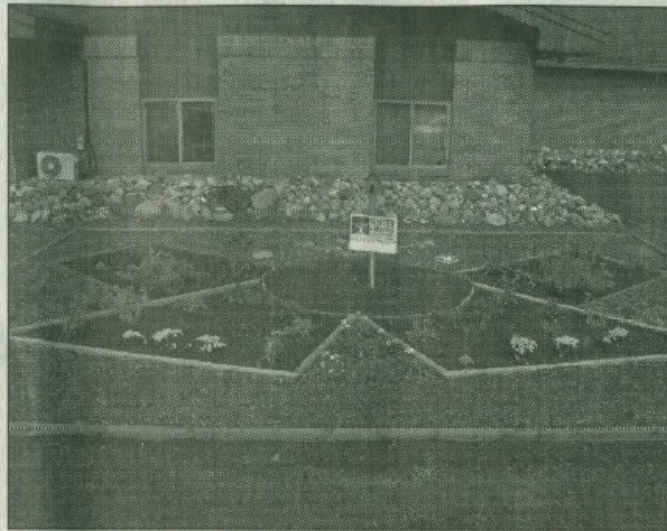
By **ANDREW WESTROPE**

News Staff Writer

LINCOLN — Alcona County MSU Extension Master Gardener volunteers, together with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative, will host a workshop on creating, using and maintaining natural habitats at Alcona Elementary School on Thursday for a dozen teachers and students from surrounding school districts.

Ten teachers and two students from Thunder Bay Junior High, Bingham Arts Academy, Onaway Area Schools, and Oscoda Area Schools, collectively, have signed up to attend the three-hour seminar, at which a handful of speakers from state agencies will use the example of Alcona Elementary School's to explain what schools can do to create their own outdoor projects and curriculums.

Master gardener volunteer Diana Zeiman, who organized the seminar, said the impetus behind the butterfly garden was a grant opportunity for youth gardening from the Community Foundation for Northeast Michigan, which she discovered in April 2011 and brought up at a master gardeners meeting shortly thereafter. Teachers



Courtesy Photo

The Donna Smith Butterfly Memorial Garden at Alcona Elementary School will be the centerpiece of a seminar at the school on Thursday for a dozen teachers from Alpena, Onaway and Oscoda that will explain techniques and available resources for developing curriculum-based school habitats.

and students attended the meeting looking for assistance with the existing community garden, and the group decided to use the grant to make a new garden at the school in memory of late teacher Donna Smith. Zeiman said the master gardeners acquired the grant in June 2011, helped the students prepare the ground last fall, and planted it this spring. She hopes the garden's value as an aesthetic and educational asset to the school will inspire other

teachers to start their own projects.

"(The seminar) is to give teachers additional information on schoolyard habitats, resources that are available to them, and how they can develop their own habitats at their school," Zeiman said.

Sea Grant Extension educator Brandon Schroeder set up registration for local teachers, and speakers from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the GLSI signed on to contribute. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service repre-

sentative Heather Rawlings will speak about the kinds of wildlife and habitats at teachers' disposal; coordinator Maureen Stine will explain "Michigan Green Schools," a nonprofit initiative dedicated to helping schools meet environmental goals; GLSI Education Coordinator Daniel Moffatt will discuss GLSI's sustainable schools learning community; Zeiman will explain the genesis of the garden, how it was made, and what other schools need to know about making one; and Alcona teacher Valorie Haneckow will provide examples of how to use a butterfly garden in a curriculum.

Zeiman said the workshop would be new to Alcona County but not necessarily to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or the GLSI, and there are no others like it scheduled for the time being.

"Maybe down the road, but not in the near future, because we're hitting all the schools that we can in the local area," she said. "They're going to start on their own projects, and then probably what will happen is, teachers from this area will go see some of those projects too."

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