



Local Students put Negwegon on the Map

Seventy five Alcona high school students take on a three-year project to develop interpretive signs for Negwegon State Park, in an effort to document the history and the park's natural resources.

Trading text books for hiking shoes, a group of Alcona High School students set out to explore and explain the extraordinary natural history of Negwegon State Park

The activities were part of three, consecutive years of semester-long projects aimed at documenting the park's history and natural resources and promote eco-tourism opportunities.

"Negwegon State Park was a really great place to visit," said junior Michael Suitor. "I didn't even know it was there until this project!"

Thanks to the work of these intrepid High School students, the area's unique ecology—complete with the student photos and detailed explanations—is now the subject of several new interpretive signs posted around the park.

From the Ground up

From the project's inception, Alcona Agriscience Teacher, Brian Matchett placed his students in charge of all the details. They developed the project proposal—to support resource education through interpretive signage—and they conducted meetings with Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) park staff to ensure their work was aligned with park management goals. Student teams also met with community partners, such as the Negwegon-Rockport-Thompson's Harbor (NRTH) committee.

The project gained momentum in September 2008 when DNR park staff gave the students an overview of Negwegon State Park's unique coastal resources and management history.



"As a result of this project, students gained valuable skills in communication, research, and sign development all while meeting many of the Biology standards required by the State of Michigan. My students learned the importance of working with agencies such as the DNR, National Forest Service, and Michigan Sea Grant, to develop their knowledge of the Park's unique ecosystems. Students were excited to come to class each day and contribute to this service learning project!"

— Brian Matchett, Alcona HS

Armed with this knowledge, students divided themselves into themed "investigation teams" and headed to the park to meet with resource experts and technical advisors representing the project's several partners (see logo bar below). Together they explored the park with the charge to not only learn about its unique natural and human history but also to consider an appropriate educational or interpretive product that they would eventually develop for their DNR Parks "client."

Thinking Big

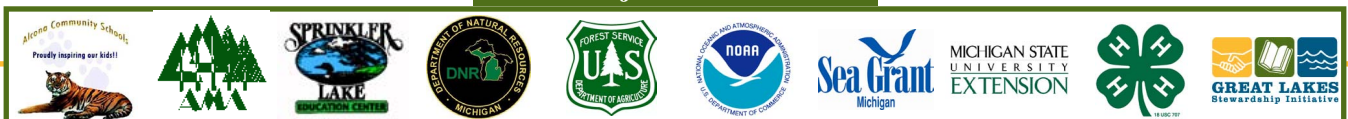
Expecting a simple, three-fold brochure, the DNR was surprised and impressed when Alcona High School students instead proposed to develop interpretive signage. With support from their DNR and Michigan Sea Grant mentors, the students not only developed original content, they took the additional steps to submit original designs for five interpretive signs.

Signed, sealed, and delivered

In 2010—with funding and support from the Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative, the DNR and Michigan Sea Grant—the third generation of what amounted to over 75 Alcona High School students, headed out to Negwegon State Park to install the completed interpretive signage (see picture above and below).



Project Partners



Conservation Planning in Action

Whenever natural resource managers get together to develop management plans, they frequently discuss the importance of education and interpretation as critical vehicles for protecting Michigan's critical natural areas. Alcona High School's Negwegon State Park project exemplifies these ideals, and further highlights the value of collaboration in achieving conservation goals.

Supporting Economic Development

In their efforts to promote a broader understanding and appreciation of Negwegon State Park, Alcona students contributed to a surge of visitation to what had previously been a forgotten corner of Alpena and Alcona Counties.

This renewed interest in the Park has captured the attention of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources,

the US 23 Heritage Route, as well as local government officials resulting in increased investment in the future of this unique resource.



"This was a tremendous opportunity to engage Alcona's students and enhance their learning experience through their semester long study of the history and habitats of Negwegon State Park."

— Brandon Schroeder,
Michigan Sea Grant

A Friend in need: Fostering a long term partnership

Fueled by the Alcona students' efforts, and identifying the value and opportunities of a revitalized Park, a group of local residents rallied together to create *The Friends of Negwegon State Park*. Underscoring the significance of the signage project, *The Friends'* Board of Directors now includes a former Alcona High School student as its Treasurer. The group has since partnered with Mr. Matchett to support several field trips to the Park and has envisioned new, joint projects engaging a variety of grade levels and subject areas at Alcona Schools.

What is Place-Based Education?

Place-Based Education (PBE) or Community Based Education (CBE) utilizes the physical landscape as a context for learning and in doing so brings students into closer contact with their communities. This method is proven to develop knowledgeable and active stewards of the environment. When schools and communities work together, everybody wins!

Who:

The Northeast Michigan Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative (NE MI GLSI) is a regional network of schools and community partners working to promote high quality place and community-based learning experiences.

What:

NE MI GLSI brings students into closer contact with their communities by facilitating youth-led stewardship projects designed to enhance the quality and integrity of northeast Michigan communities and the natural environment on which they depend.

Why:

This education strategy protects Great Lakes ecosystems, strengthens Northeast Michigan communities and provides critical support to schools as they strive to serve the academic and developmental needs of their students.

How:

The NE MI GLSI leadership team facilitates Community-School Partnerships resulting in projects that serve the unique needs of Northeast Michigan communities.

Teachers and students are supported through Project Grants and High-Quality Professional Development that provides essential tools and techniques for fostering a collaborative culture of place-based learning within and among schools and their communities.

When:

Each spring, NE MI GLSI (via the Community Foundation for Northeast Michigan) provides project grants to teacher teams in Cheboygan, Otsego, Presque Isle, Alpena, Montmorency and Alcona Counties. These grants directly support place-based education programming and specialized learning experiences for teachers and their students. Application information is available online from www.nemiglsi.org.

You are invited:

If you care about Northeast Michigan and want to make a difference for the future of our region, please contact NEMI GLSI to find out how you can get involved.

Supporting Community Development and Resource Stewardship Priorities through education:

Since 2006, numerous local and regional partners have engaged in Great Lakes education, networking and planning efforts across the "sunrise side" counties of Alcona, Alpena, Cheboygan, Otsego, Presque Isle and Montmorency. These efforts mobilized a network of school and community partners committed to identifying needs and developing strategies for enhancing coastal access, education, and sustainable resource management. Empowered through funding support from the Great Lakes Fishery Trust (GLFT), this collaboration now comprises the Northeast Michigan Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative, one of several regional hubs through which GLFT furthers the principals and practices of place and community-based education.

Who is Involved?

NE MI GLSI supports over a dozen school-community projects linking in-school educators with: local, state and federal agencies; universities; non-profit conservation and community organizations; non-formal education programs; and, representatives from area businesses and industries.

How can I participate in the NE Michigan GLSI Network?



Many partners are currently exploring community- or place-based education development opportunities within the NE Michigan region. For more information, visit us on the web: www.nemiglsi.org

Who Can I Contact?

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