



Courtesy Photo

Ella White fourth-graders have been busy building underwater robots to distribute lake trout fry on artificial reefs in Thunder Bay and have received big recognition for their project. The class developed a unique system in order to deliver the trout fry directly to the reef and release them there, and their project is now in the running for a \$10,000 award as part of a challenge called "Teach for the Planet."

Students in running for \$10K

Ella White fourth-graders need votes to win

By **NICOLE GRULKE**
News Staff Writer

ALPENA — Ella White fourth grade students in Bob Thomson's class are in the running for \$10,000 through a challenge from the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation called "Teach for the Planet," and in order to win, the students are asking for the public to vote for their project online.

The foundation is partnering with DonorsChoose.org to identify the most innovative environmental science, climate change and sustainability projects. The students had two projects to make it into the semifinals, one about Shipwreck Discovery which earned another \$750 in credits, and an engineered lake trout delivery system, which was chosen as a finalist and could win the grand prize. Projects are judged based on originality, student engagement, topical importance, rigor and innovative use of materials.

The students have been working with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to help restore lake trout populations in the area, and currently are raising around 650 lake trout eggs in the classroom to release in spring. In the past few years, the students have released the lake trout on the surface, which left around 20 feet of open water for the trout to swim in order to reach safety in reefs set up in the area. Because of that distance, the students couldn't determine how many of the trout actually reached the safety of the reef, therefore, they decided to find a way to release those fry directly onto the reef. This is the main focus of the engineered lake trout delivery system project.

"The students have been working with local research scientists and engineers to find a way to get the fry safely to the reef," Thomson said. "They are working to build two underwater robots

"The students have been working with local research scientists and engineers to find a way to get the fry safely to the reef."

BOB THOMSON
Teacher

that will have two small tanks to hold the trout fry. Each tank has a door that can be opened by the robots, releasing the trout fry when the robot has reached the reef."

This project also will help to monitor whether the young lake trout fry will use the artificial reef they will be released on in the same way native fry would use the reef.

"We also want to test to see if the trout fry raised in our tank will swim down into the reef the way a native fry would," Thomson said. "The hope in this is to increase the use of the artificial reefs by putting the young trout there, so when they are older they will come back and use the reefs to spawn."

The project already qualified for a half-off match offer through its criteria, and has now been selected as one of 15 semifinalists, earning another \$750 in DonorsChoose.org credits. It then went on to be selected as one of three finalists for the elementary school level, adding \$2,000 in additional DonorsChoose.org credits.

Ella White, see page 2A

Ella White,

Continued from Page 1A

Now the class is up against two other projects in its grade level for a chance to receive \$10,000 in DonorsChoose.org credits along with the other awards, and the winner is determined by public vote. Voters may vote once per day on the Teach for the Planet Facebook page.

"We designed our carrier and are working on building our underwater robots," fourth-grader Madysen Gohl said. "We had to figure out how to make our carrier for the lake trout, and how to open it to let them out underwater. We wanted to use something that wouldn't break or cause litter while we were using it. We're using

pop bottles with the ends cut off and we have a door on the bottom that we can open with our robots."

Paige Timmreck said she was excited when Thomson told the class they were in the semifinals, and even more excited to learn they had made it as one of three finalists.

"If we can get the most votes, we'll win \$10,000, and we could do a lot with that in the classroom and for our projects," Timmreck said. "That money could help with bus trips, paying for us to use the boat for research, getting a sturgeon back into the classroom and with our underwater robot parts and equipment."

To cast a vote for the engineered lake trout delivery system project, go to, "<http://bit.ly/TeachPlanet01>" and follow the directions on the page. In order to get to the page where the Ella White fourth grade project is located, voters must cast a vote for a project in each grade group. There are four grade groups with three projects up for vote in each group. Thomson's class is in the Grades 3-5 group and is listed as Ella White Elementary School. Voting ends March 11.

Nicole Grulke can be reached via email at ngrulke@thealpenanews.com or by phone at 358-5687. Follow Nicole on Twitter @ng_alpenanews.