

ALPENA

Alcona students helping to bring project closer to fruition

By **PATTY RAMUS**
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An eco-tourism project for Negwegon State Park is closer to becoming a reality, thanks to an Alcona High School class.

On Thursday, students from teacher Brian Matchett's environmental science class presented their draft designs of display signs to 15 members of the Friends of Negwegon State Park group and Brandon Schroeder, Michigan Sea Grant extension educator. Since late September, the students have been involved with the project, which has the potential to be modeled by other schools and classes. The signs one day will be erected at the park.

The idea for the project came about during the fall of 2007, when Dan Mullen, Michigan Department of Natural Resources supervisor for Negwegon and Harrisville State Park, spoke to Matchett's environmental science class about how the DNR works. Mullen and Matchett began discussing about how they could get more students involved with Negwegon. Schroeder later became involved with the conversations and the project evolved from there. Sea Grant invested \$1,000 of seed money into the project to

cover costs for things that might not get funding elsewhere.

The students were divided into groups specializing in five subject areas: wildlife ecosystems, forest ecosystems, soils and dunes, Great Lakes and water quality/watershed and history and human interactions. Each group had a professional advisor assisting them with their portion of the project. In early October the students decided to create interpretive signs for the park.

"The students have done a really nice job the whole semester," Matchett said. "I'm really proud of them for taking on a project that they knew probably wouldn't be completed at the end of the semester."

Students from each of the five groups presented the draft designs. The history group developed three signs which discussed recent general history of the Negwegon, rock formations and the Marshall homestead. The Great Lakes ecology group developed signs about human impacts on the Great Lakes, Great Lakes food web and coastal shorelines.

The wildlife group's signs describe animals found at Negwegon, meadow ecosystems and wetland ecosystems. The forestry group designed

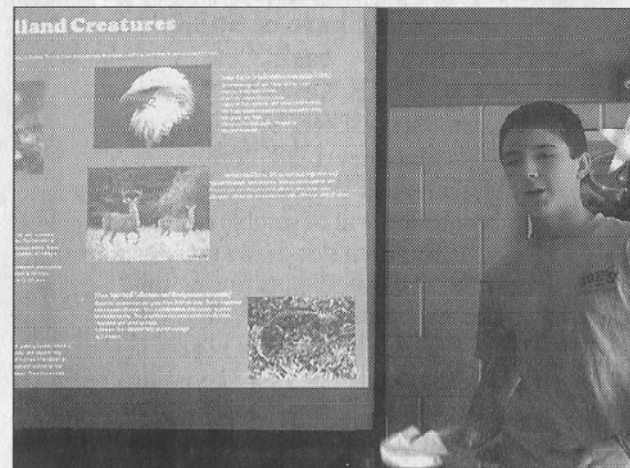
signs to inform people about forest succession, common trees of Negwegon and logging history. The soils and dunes group created a design for one sign, which describes sand dunes formation and stabilization, Matchett said.

Matchett said the students used three feet by two feet templates for the designs. Following their presentations, students took suggestions from the friends group members. Recently the friends group agreed to support the project.

The environmental science class is offered once per year. The project will likely be continued by an Alcona FFA Organization chapter member as a personal project or the next environmental science class in the fall of 2009. Whoever continues the project will touch up the designs before they are sent to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources for its approval.

"It's going to depend on the interest of the students," Matchett said.

Matchett said he expects to submit the designs to the DNR about a year from now. The extra time will allow Matchett and Schroeder to secure funding sources to pay for the printing and installation of the signs. The estimated cost at this time is around



Courtesy Photo

Austin Scott, a freshman in Brian Matchett's environmental science class at Alcona High School, presents a rough design of a display sign detailing animals of Negwegon State Park Thursday afternoon at the school. Matchett's class has been involved with an eco-tourism project with the park, which has the potential to be modeled by other schools and classes.

\$700-\$800 per sign.

Schroeder said Michigan State University Extension and Sea Grant were pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to the project.

"This was a tremendous opportunity to engage Alcona's environmental science class students and enhance their learning experience through their semester long study of the history and habitats of Negwegon State Park," he said. "The students put a tremendous amount of

energy and research into developing these designs. Beyond their learning experience, these signs represent a valuable service and contribution to the DNR Parks staff who manage the park, local community members and visiting tourists who enjoy the area, and for the valuable historical and natural resources of Negwegon itself."

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