

## Nature experts lead students through Negwegon State Park

By Mary Weber  
Staff Writer

A trip filled with education from a variety of nature experts proved well worth the short bus ride and a bit of rain inconvenience for Alcona Middle School eighth-grade students who visited Negwegon State Park last Thursday.

The field trip was coordinated by Helen-Ann Prince, AmeriCorps Member and Education Coordinator for Northeast Michigan Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative. Educators from the USDA Forest Service, Northeast District Sea Grant MSU Extension, Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Huron Pines AmeriCorps as well as Friends of Negwegon State Park were on hand to enlighten students about the sciences and amenities of the park and answer questions.

Students had been working with their teacher, Christie Thomas, on projects they had started earlier in the year where each student selected and researched a threatened, endangered or a species of special concern that can be found in the Negwegon area.

The group of 47 students began the morning by donning jackets and bug repellent before being divided into smaller groups to begin their walk through Negwegon where stations had been set up to inform students with hands on information and demonstrations.

USDA Forest Service botanist Sierra Patterson and technician Frances Sewell taught students about native plant species found at the park. Students were excited when Patterson asked them to find a plant, study its shape, color, size, texture and smell and then give it their own made-up Latin name. Many imaginative names were chosen by the students. Patterson and Sewell then discussed how plants are classified, named and then identified native species growing at the park such as trillium, named for its Latin word for three.

Jack Guy, former teacher and Friends of Negwegon member, taught students about the different types of soils, soil permeability and the artesian well at the park. He explained that an artesian well works based on the pressure that builds up between layers of soil and rock and how geological features help determine the presence of an artesian well.

Brandon Shroeder, Northeast District Sea Grant MSU Extension educator, taught students about the Great Lakes fishing industry and the importance of conserving our Great Lakes for aquatic and coastal habitat.

Teresa Oke, vice president of the Friends of Negwegon, told students the Native American history of the park and shipwrecks in the area. She explained the park was named after Chief Negwegon, from a local Native American tribe. Oke also discussed how the Indians



Vice president of Friends of Negwegon State Park explains the history of the park to Alcona Middle School teacher Christie Thomas and class. Photo by Mary Weber.



Brandon Shroeder, Northeast District Sea Grant educator, taught students about the Great Lakes fishing industry and the importance of conserving our Great Lakes for aquatic and coastal habitat during their field trip to Negwegon State Park. Photo by Mary Weber.

lived and possibly fished thousands and thousands of years ago; possibly by using containing wells which are still visible in parts of the park. She explained the wells would fill up with fish as the waters rose over the top of the well at night and retained the fish after the waters receded in the morning. She explained who else once lived on the land besides Indians and how trade would be taken from the area. "In some parts of the park, tell tale tracks of horse wagons or stage coaches still exist," Oke said.

Two recreation stations led by Shroeder, Northeast Michigan Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative, Daniel Moffat, Michigan DNR Parks and Recreation, Eric Braun along with Prince explained the various seasonal outdoor opportunities such as swimming, hiking, camping, geocaching, stargazing, wildlife viewing, cross country skiing, snowshoeing, hunting and the unique features the rustic park has to offer.

Thomas led two journaling stations in the afternoon for students to reflect on the day and what they had learned.

Prince explained the reason for the field trip by saying, "Negwegon State Park is such a unique feature in northeast Michigan because it is such a large area of undeveloped land; which is why so many threatened and endangered species can be found at the park. By educating students on the natural resources of northeast Michigan it is helping them understand the importance of protecting Negwegon State Park. Many species are threatened or endangered due to habitat fragmentation. Negwegon is one of the few places left that has not been geographically altered. These students are the next generation of park users; therefore, it is important to instill upon them the benefits natural resources offer us. What better way then to take their classroom outside for the day?"