



# Coastal Classroom ‘Adopts’ Area Beaches

Thunder Bay Junior High students join a regional effort through the Alliance for the Great Lakes’ Adopt-a-Beach™ program to clean, observe, test and protect local beaches; and in doing so provide an example for other northeast Michigan schools.

## a·dopt

**1 :to take by choice into a relationship; 5 :to sponsor the care and maintenance of**

### Joining the effort

More than 150 students from Thunder Bay Jr. High (Alpena Public Schools) have adopted their city beaches, launching into studies and projects focusing on Lake Huron shoreline habitats. Through their learning, this student effort is fostering valuable school and community partnerships benefiting their school, Alpena area communities, and healthy Lake Huron ecosystems.

### A ‘ready-made’ partnership

Adopt-a-Beach™ is the Alliance for the Great Lakes’ premier volunteer program, using the Great Lakes – a rich, living ecosystem in its own right – as the starting point for instruction while emphasizing hands-on, inquiry-based, real-world learning. The goal of the Adopt-a-Beach™ service-learning program is to move beyond cleaning up the coastlines to stopping debris and pollution from ever being a problem.

To accomplish this, Adopt-a-Beach™ teams both remove debris and record their findings on debris items. They also conduct beach observations and science-based testing to determine potential pollution problems. This information is entered into an online system that can be accessed by schools, volunteers and the general public, and can be used to make real world, positive changes for this ecosystem and our drinking water.

### Bringing it close to home

Coordinated with the Adopt-a-Beach™

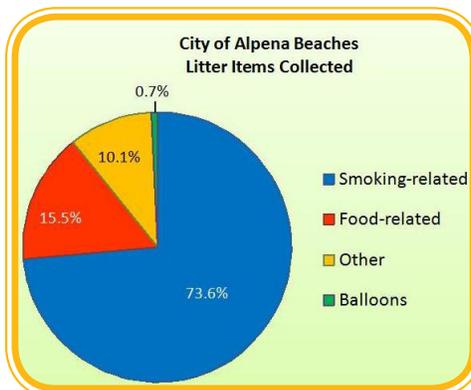
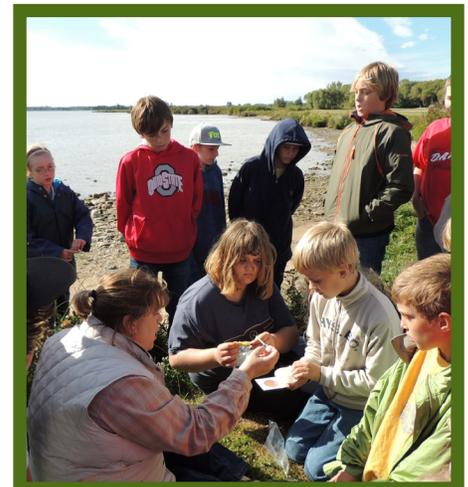
program, teacher Cheryl Mack’s 6th grade students are monitoring several public beaches and coastal wetland areas in Alpena, along a one and one-half mile stretch of the U.S. 23 Heritage Route, including Bay View Park, Thomson Park, Blair Street Park and Pier, Starlite Beach and Mich-e-ke-wis Park.



*“We collected garbage, took water samples and looked at how many and what type of animals were out there. [It’s important] so you can help your environment and keep it clean for the future.”*

*Josh Beatty, 6th grade - TBJH*

Supported by NOAA B-WET and 4-H2O programs, their research project will gather valuable water quality data, monitor water habitats and populations of aquatic invasive species impacting local coastal wetlands, and generally improve these publicly accessed shorelines within the City of Alpena.



## Project Partners



*“We talked about how phragmites blocks beaches for wildlife and uses its red roots to spread long distances. If you don’t use an herbicide it can reproduce and take over.”* -Glenn Carter, 6th grade - TBJH

Learning with Huron Pines and Michigan Sea Grant, students focused on the growing issue of one aquatic invasive species, phragmites (frag-MY-teez), currently affecting coastal wetlands in Thunder Bay, Lake Huron. Identified as an invasive plant, phragmites is expanding into and negatively affecting northeast Michigan coastal wetlands, and is the target of local management and control efforts.

### Everybody Wins!

This project enhances student learning through a yearlong, real-world connection with both their natural environment and community, alike. Students learn applied science – biology, chemistry, and physics – math, social studies and more, while having fun in the process.



The school gains a portfolio of dedicated community and resource stewardship partners in support of their school improvement efforts, including funding, curriculum, and technical expertise that these partners bring to this project. The community gains valuable water quality data, cleaner beaches, and a greater public awareness about the importance of protecting these valuable coastal Lake Huron resources.

### Expanding on the Experience

Mack’s class is working on finding solutions for some of the issues that arose during the cleanup. “Students were absolutely shocked at how much cigarette litter they discovered at the beaches,” Mack said. “This concern prompted a student group to present the data to our local city council and propose some ideas that could be implemented at area beaches. As a class, students are also working on interpretive signs, posters and PSA’s about dangers of cigarette litter to the coastal ecosystem and the need for proper disposal methods.” Student initiative led the discussion about these surprising findings showing that plenty of auxiliary assignments become available giving opportunity for interdisciplinary connections as well.

Visit [www.nemiglsi.org](http://www.nemiglsi.org) for this and more Projects In Action.

### What is Place-Based Education?

Place-Based Education (PBE) or Community Based Education (CBE) utilizes the local, natural and built environments 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!

#### 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:

Teachers and students are supported through project mini grants, connection to resource partnerships, 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.

### 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 Michigan’s “sunrise side.” 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 nine regional hubs through which GLFT furthers the principals and practices of place and community-based education as the Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative.

#### 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.

Phone: 989.356.8805 x41 or [daniel.moffatt@noaa.gov](mailto:daniel.moffatt@noaa.gov)

Northeast Michigan GLSI network programs and materials are open to all without regard to race, color, national or ethnic origin, gender, gender identity, religion, age, height, weight, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital status, family status, or veteran status.

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](http://www.nemiglsi.org)

Who Can I Contact?

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