

Ecology challenge at Houghton MS

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By Garrett Neese (gneese@mininggazette.com) The Daily Mining Gazette

HOUGHTON - A group of Houghton Middle School students are working on a project to educate the public about the importance of local plants and the threat invasives pose to the ecosystem.

The Ecology Challenge Team, made up of 10 eighth-graders, is participating in the Lexus Scholastic Eco Challenge, in which students identify a local ecology issue then create a action plan for addressing it.

"Our teacher picked us for the challenge, and then we came up with what we wanted to do and we just decided that since it was OK with the students here that we were going to come down and inform the students about it," said eighth-grader Kevin Beaghan.



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Houghton Middle School students Bailey Borree and Inseo Yoon talk to students in Ross Coltman's fifth-grade class at Houghton Elementary School about invasive species Friday.

The students picked invasive species because of the number of them in the area, and the amount of devastation they can cause.

"We hope to just raise awareness for the people in our area so they can understand invasive species may not look bad, but they are a serious problem," said eighth-grader Bailey Borree.

Friday, the students spoke to Houghton Elementary School fourth- and fifth-graders about invasive species. Along with playing a video, they brought along a visual aid - a stalk of Japanese knotweed. The students learned it about during a field trip to Michigan Technological University earlier this month. At a spot by a commuter parking lot on Garnet Street, they saw firsthand how hard it can be to eradicate. They also learned several methods for combating it.

Friday, the group brought some specimens of native species for the elementary students to plant - 250 white pines, and for students without the room for a tree, 200 milkweed mixes. The elementary class with the highest percentage of students who plant a tree and go to the group's website will get a tree planted on the HES grounds with a commemorative plaque.

For the middle schoolers' Lexus challenge, the final deadline for submission is Dec. 8. The group has its video and website, but still has to finish a Powerpoint presentation and calculate the results from its field trip. Thirty-two teams - 16 middle school and 16 high school- will advance to the next round of the Lexus competition. They each receive a

\$10,000 prize, including \$2,000 to the ecology non-profit of its choice. If Houghton is one of the teams picked, it will continue with a final challenge next semester.

"We have some ideas on where they're going to take the project if we make it to the next round," said the group's advisor, Houghton Middle School science teacher Sarah Geborkoff. "We're hopeful ... it's a very unique project."

If the Houghton team is one of the top eight middle-school teams, it will win another \$15,000. The top middle school team receives \$30,000 - \$7,000 to the school, \$3,000 to the advisor and \$20,000 in scholarships to the team members.

For more information, go to hmsinvasivespecies.weebly.com.