

Studying the wetlands

October 29, 2010 - By KURT HAUGLIE khauglie@ mininggazette.com , DMG Writer

HANCOCK - A former potato farm is now a classroom for the study of wetlands ecosystems for students at Hancock Middle School, and the teacher of the program is very grateful to have access to the property.

Heather Bradway, teacher for the school's Science, Self and Community class, said students have been visiting the Paavola Wetlands since 2008 after receiving funding from a \$5,000 Lake Superior Stewardship Initiative grant. A requirement of the grant is to partner with a local organization or other entity, and that role was taken by the Keweenaw Land Trust, owner of the property. That partnership came after a Dinner and Dialogue event conducted by school officials.

"Keweenaw Land Trust needed some more input (on the wetlands)," she said. "They wanted Hancock residents to know about it."

Bradway said the grant money allows the school to buy such things as boots, gloves, visibility vests, tree identification books, water sampling kits and more. "We'd never have this money otherwise," she said of the grant.

Paavola Wetlands is located next to U.S. 41 just north of Quincy Hill. According to information provided to Bradway by the KLT, the original 40 acres of the site was donated by the Copper Country Masonic Lodge in 1999. Another 79 acres with the other half of the 1-acre pond was acquired in 2006 with a local fundraising effort.

Last year, Bradway said the eighth-grade students developed a guide to identify the 16 species of trees on the property to be used along the two-and-a-half miles of trails at the site. That will soon be available at a kiosk at the trailhead.

This year, the eighth-grade students conducted an open house at the wetlands and acted as guides for visitors, identifying trees and explaining the cultural history of the site, including its past as a potato farm.

Bradway said the intent of the LSSI grant is to instruct students and the community how residents' activities may affect Lake Superior, and in turn, the rest of the Great Lakes. "The whole point of this is to have students get outdoors," she said. "We want them to become stewards of the Great Lakes."

Bradway said she intends to take students out to the property again this autumn and even into the winter. "This year, our focus will be developing some water quality posters that tie that area to Lake Superior," she said. In December, Bradway said she wants the students to do more water testing in the pond. "We have snowshoes we bought with the grant," she said.

Other teachers involved with the Paavola Wetlands project include Karen Scholie, who teaches seventh-grade art. Last year, her students made clay tiles with prints of the leaves. The tiles will be made into a display to be placed at the trailhead. Matt Dennis and his eighth-grade communications class made a video about the property which eventually will be put online.