

Upper Peninsula Environmental Coalition
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For Immediate Release

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UPEC supports diverse K-12 environmental education projects

UPEC recently awarded six environmental education grants totaling \$3,000 from a record 14 applications. An anonymous \$1,000 donation helped UPEC fund the proposals. UPEC also received a \$500 contribution from Conserve School to begin developing next year's fund. Conserve, just south of Watersmeet, offers an environmental education program and scholarships for high school juniors.

Grant recipients include the Michigan Tech Center for Science and Environmental Outreach, Grant Township School, **Jeffers High School**, the Iron County Historical Museum, the Yellow Dog Watershed Preserve (YDWP), and a sixth recipient that requested to remain unnamed until it receives project approval from another organization. Projects include a regional water festival, a study of a watershed currently threatened by metallic sulfide mining, a new day camp program, trail and habitat restoration, and outdoor classroom studies focused on watershed health. The pending project would focus on fisheries health and management.

“This year we received the most quality grant applications since the program began,” said UPEC President William Malmsten. “It was difficult to decide which six to fund because all proposals had merit. UPEC salutes the area educators who help young people appreciate nature and the environment. Today’s young people will be tomorrow’s voters and leaders who will determine the destiny of our beautiful peninsula.”

Three programs will engage students from multiple school districts. The Lake Superior Water Festival, sponsored by the Michigan Tech Center for Science and Environmental Outreach, will offer a day of activities in October for students in grades 4-8. The project will address students’ lack of knowledge about the Great Lakes Basin's ecology and deepen their understanding about how scientists study the Great Lakes. In Marquette County the Yellow Dog Watershed Preserve (YDWP) will offer an opportunity for community youth to better understand how watersheds work and how impacts from

metallic sulfide mining can hinder a river's ability to recover. The project will primarily engage youth from Powell Township School, but interested students from other area schools are also encouraged to participate in establishing baselines, data collection, analysis, and comparison to other areas. The Iron County Historical Society will use UPEC support to offer a one-day environmental program in August for girls from UP and northern Wisconsin troops in conjunction with Girl Scouts' 100th anniversary.

"We are excited to put on a Lake Superior Water Festival for students from every school in Houghton and Baraga County at the new Great Lakes Research Center, a state-of-the art research facility at Michigan Technological University," explained Science Educator Lloyd Wescoat. "Students will have the opportunity to interact directly with MTU scientists and graduate students, and learn firsthand about their research. Our goal is to prepare students to become stewards the Great Lakes as future citizens and decision-makers."

"Working with local youth to ensure they have an understanding of how watersheds work is a central tenet to the work of the Yellow Dog Watershed Preserve," said YDWP Program Assistant Julie Christiansen. "We will show students how to use sound science to determine the health of the watershed and where potential sources of pollution are coming from. The watershed is facing development issues related to mining, timber, and road building and those will all be discussed."

"Iron County's first Environmental Day Camp is geared toward making a difference in young people's sense of responsibility toward their community and their understanding of their relationship to the environment," Maggie Scheffer said. "The educational goals of this program are to enable children to learn how to think about environmental issues, not what to think; to identify present and potential threats to their natural environment; and to begin approaching solutions as stewards of our natural resources."

All projects have hands-on aspects that utilize the environmental education opportunities that are close to many regional schools. The two remaining projects involve activities in proximity to regional schools.

Grant Township Schools students in Copper Harbor will work in partnership with a private landowner through access to undeveloped acreage adjacent to the school as an outdoor learning environment. They will trace water flow from a local stream through a beaver pond, into a larger pond, a swamp, a lake, stream, and finally into Lake Superior. Teacher Diane Trudgeon said UPEC's support of hands-on science will continue to energize her students.

"Science has become the students' favorite subject because it's so hands-on," Trudgeon

explained. “They are actively participating and experiencing science inquiry on a regular basis. The students are learning science through discovery - investigating and collecting data. As one student stated, 'Science is awesome.'”

Jeffers High School students in Painesdale will address the degradation around Lake Perrault. They will engage in clean-up activities, nature study and nature trail development. They will also learn about the Salmon-Trout watershed and how impacts in that watershed affect the Lake Superior watershed.

“There was so much glass and litter from visitors and parties, that an elementary teacher in the district said, 'Don't ever bring my students here again! It's disgusting!' Jeffers Assistant Principal Mike Benda said. “Older community members described how Lake Perrault was once a popular place used by the community for family picnics, school field trips, and fishing and swimming during the summer. Teachers and students decided they wanted to do something about the lake and restore it to its past prominence in the community.”

“The screening committee had a difficult time this year evaluating the 14 applications,” Chairperson Connie Sherry said. “Educators from throughout the UP had excellent proposals for getting students and teachers into the outdoors to learn about this wonderful place where we live. The current unstable economic times have affected UPEC and, as a result, there was less money to distribute. While no applicant received the full amount of money requested, we think the ones that were awarded grants represented the best programs to reach young people. The proposed projects are so important to the UPEC's goals that it was disheartening not to be able to fund more of them. It is obvious that a great deal of care and thought went into their preparation. We hope that more donations will be made available in the future for the UPEC mini-grant project.”

In addition to educating and advocating about a wide range of regional environmental issues, UPEC, as the region's oldest environmental organization, organizes an annual celebration of the region's natural heritage. This year's Celebrate the UP event will occur March 30 and 31 in Marquette at the Three Corners (Ridge and Front Streets). The event will include recognition of environmental education programs past and present. To learn more about the event as well as how to become involved in supporting regional environmental education and advocacy go to www.upenvironment.org.

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