

Eco project put through paces: Middle-school team demos to third-grade judges

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Daily Mining Gazette/ Garrett Neese Houghton Middle School Eco Challenge members help third-graders how to make magnets out of discarded plastic bottle caps Friday.

HOUGHTON — Houghton Middle School's Eco Challenge team has launched two projects for its competition this year. The team demonstrated both to the third-grade classes at Houghton Elementary School Friday morning.

One team showed the third-graders how nitrates get into the water, and what organisms could be affected by it. Students were also using bottle caps that would otherwise go to landfills to make decorative magnets for their lockers.

"Hopefully they'll educate their parents about what they learned in school," said eighth-grader Logan Sandell.

This is the first year Houghton has entered both the land/water and air/climate challenges.

"This group is motivated," said team adviser Sarah Geborkoff.



Daily Mining Gazette/ Garrett Neese Houghton Elementary School third-graders Rosalyn Bonin and Leah Johnson work on a word search during the visit by Houghton Middle School's Eco Challenge team.

The middle-schoolers let the younger children look at some of the organisms that could be harmed, including minnows, centipedes and earthworms collected at a creek near the school.

The nitrates are getting into the soil through runoff from soil and fertilizer, and can also get into groundwater, Sandell said.

"Certain grasses that we've studied can filter this runoff, like blue stem," Sandell said.

The project is also focused on educating people about alternatives to fertilizers and nitrates, such as compost.

The project on nitrates and runoff will be submitted this week. The other, on plastics, will be submitted in December.

Winners of the previous two challenges go on to compete in a final challenge that ends in March.