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Students learn about Wading River ponds

BY SAMANTHA BRIX | STAFF WRITER

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ALICE STEINBRECHER COURTESY PHOTO

Second graders at Wading River Elementary School testing the Wading River pond for bacteria as part of a year-long research project during which they'll increase community awareness about pollution problem

Don't feed the ducks! It could be harmful to their health.

That's what second-graders at Wading River Elementary School would tell you if you ran into them on a visit to the hamlet's famous duck ponds.

Educating the public is part of their mission to protect the ponds. The entire grade is working on a one-year project with Brookhaven National Lab's Open Air Stewardship Program, which partners schools with local stewards to take part in environmental research.

"We're trying to get the kids involved in their community and show them how they can make a difference in their own backyard," said Alice Steinbrecher, the second-grade teacher overseeing the children.

On a recent trip to the ponds, students found a tire, a rake and a golf ball in the water, among other pieces of litter, and were horrified, Ms. Steinbrecher said. The effects of pollution on natural resources is hitting home with them, and they want to make change, she added.

With the help of the state Department of Environmental Conservation and New York Sea Grant marine research group, the kids have tested the pond for bacteria, oxygen levels, turbidity, salinity and nutrient levels. The children will conduct bird counts and observe the changes of flora and fauna in and around the pond throughout the seasons.

They'll present their findings at Brookhaven National Laboratory in June and create a pamphlet reporting with their findings, emphasizing the harmful effects of pollution.

"We're hoping the children will go out and teach other people in the community the information they learned," Ms. Steinbrecher said. "They're so excited and it's funny because they are noticing different things and talking about things that I wouldn't even have thought of."

The students also visited the Wading River Historical Society, where they learned about historic events that happened near the pond. Guest speakers are also scheduled to visit the classrooms throughout the year to teach the kids about environmental conservation.

Ms. Steinbrecher said the genius of the project is its all-encompassing aspect; it touches on multiple areas of the curriculum, including history, math, science, arts and career development.

Wading River Elementary School principal Stephen Donahue said the pond is important to the community and more lobbying is needed to preserve it. He commended the students for their advanced research project.

"These kids were really little scientists," he said. "The kids can really make a difference in their own community."

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Jane Alcorn · 4 days ago

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Bravo kids and teachers for making the learning experience one with real world application. I'm so proud of you!

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