

How to keep visitors off restricted trails

By Jake Storey

North Hastings High School's Northern Outdoor Studies and Northern Environment Research and Development Studies classes attended a special ICE (Innovation, Creativity, Entrepreneurship) training program at JOY Bible Camp. They were tasked with coming up with a solution to a unique problem faced by the Eagles Nest trails committee: how to keep visitors off of restricted trails?

?It's a real challenge. It's something that the trails committee has been working on, and so far it hasn't solved the problem yet. It is hoped that you guys will come up with some possible solutions today,? said Collen Drew-Baehre, a teacher at NHHS and a member of the trails committee.

The Eagles Nest area is an archaeological site, with some findings dating back more than 9,000 years, according to Ethan Huner, a member of the trails committee. This does cause some issues, as it is also a popular area for both locals and tourists. With so many visitors, it's quite possible to accidentally disrupt an archaeological area.

?You can walk over something today and not even notice it,? said Huner, a senior resource technician with the Algonquins of Ontario Consultation Office.

Huner, along with fellow Eagles Nest trails committee member, and Bancroft Area Stewardship Council chair, Steve Wilkins, spoke to the students about some of the history behind the Eagles Nest and the work that has gone into improving it recently.

?There's some incredible history if you look at the period after the European settlers. There's even more incredible history if you go back even farther to the Algonquin stories,? said Wilkins.

Huner educated the students on the the ancient history of the area and the stories of the local Algonquin. Traditionally, the Eagles Nest was believed to be home to the a spiritual being known as the thunderbird. Due to its secluded nature and connection to the spirits, it would also have been used for vision quests.

Huner added, ?It's a pretty dramatic landmark. You can't drive by it without looking up and wondering about that huge cliff face.? Wilkins spoke about how much work had already been done in improving upon the Eagles Nest, exclusively through the aid of volunteers and with donated materials.

?A person came to us and said, we have to memorialize the people that put their hours, and hours and hours into community service. So what can we do? Up in the Eagles Nest would be a great place, so let's have a vista and a bench,? said Wilkins.

Throughout the course of the day, the class divided into five groups and developed strategies for resolving this issue. They put together models to illustrate their plans. Their ideas ranged from planting poison ivy and other unpopular plants to ward visitors away from certain areas, to the use of educational storyboards, signs, artifact displays and scavenger hunts to lure visitors to more preferable areas. These concepts are to be taken and presented to the Eagles Nest trails committee for further consideration.

?You guys aren't just a class at the high school anymore. You are absolutely and totally integrated into the community. I just wanna say thanks so much, for all you do,? said Wilkins.