



Mount Desert Island High School students (from left) Isis Heyman, Amber Wiggins and Eddaejia Keene, on the stage at Ellsworth High School, explain their Eastern Maine Skippers Program research into ways to improve year-round demand, and stabilize prices, for lobster. PHOTO BY STEPHEN RAPPAPORT

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Student presentations show a bright future for state's lobster industry

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ELLSWORTH — Whatever the state's economic and political future may hold, the students from the eight coastal high schools who took part in the Eastern Maine Skippers Program that wrapped up last month suggest that the future of the lobster industry will be bright.

Two weeks ago, more than 65 students in the program climbed the



members of the lobster industry, Maine legislators, representatives of the Department of Marine Resources and, of course, friends and family members.

The students came from Ellsworth, Mount Desert Island, Deer Isle-Stonington, Narraguagus, Jonesport-Beals, North Haven and Vinalhaven high schools and George Stevens Academy.

The question each of the projects addressed was "How can I or we impact lobsters or the lobster industry?"

The answers were as diverse as the eight high school communities they represented, and each presentation did its community proud.

A panel of judges, each connected in some way to the lobster industry, had the unenviable job of choosing which project — and approximately five-minute presentation — was the best.

After considerable deliberation, the nod went to Grayson Demmons, David Edwards and Easton Adams from North Haven. Demmons, the project leader, presented for the group. The students pursued development of an idea Demmons had while fishing from his outboard-powered skiff last summer.

His idea led to the "BuoyScrubber," a device that attaches to a lobster pot hauler and is an environmentally friendly alternative for cleaning buoys without using bleach while lobster fishing.

The students researched the effects of bleach on marine life and humans. Working with an attorney from Portland they investigated whether they should get a patent and decided — at least for the time being — not to.

Most impressive, the students actually manufactured and tested a prototype of the BuoyScrubber using a 3-D printer and a lot of craftsmanship. Demmons has made a connection with a manufacturer in China and has begun marketing the device, starting sales calls with local marine supply stores.



George Stevens Academy's (from left) John Hassett, James Marsh and Michael Austin explain how they designed, built and began testing a new kind of lobster trap.

PHOTO BY STEPHEN RAPPAPORT





- Ellsworth High School students Hayden Sattler and Jillian Dow studied the process of shipping lobsters internationally.
- Students from George Stevens Academy, Narraguagus High School and Deer Isle-Stonington High School all examined the fishing efficiency of traditional lobster trap. Each group decided that there was room for improvement and each designed and began testing a new, and distinctly different in each case, design.
- Mount Desert Island students searched for ways to make lobster more accessible to consumers year-round and tried to stabilize the price fishermen get for their lobsters.
- The students from Vinalhaven took on the task of designing improved lobster handling and storage system for boats that would provide better handling — and less damage — for lobsters.
- The Jonesport-Beals group examined the history of lobster boats within their fishing community and studied the increase in fuel consumption that came along with the bigger boats and engines that lobstermen now use.

The students presented their projects to a panel of judges, who scored them on presentation style, data collection, potential impact and overall creativity. The judges included Reps. Robert Alley (D-Jonesport-Beals) and William Tuell, (R-Machias); Stephenie MacLagan, an economic development associate at the Island Institute; Deputy Commissioner Meredith Mendelson and Katherine Thompson, chief lobster sampling program scientist, of DMR; College of the Atlantic Professor Chris Peterson; and Hugh Reynolds, owner of Greenhead Lobster in Stonington.

The judges awarded each presentation a score based on a 100-point maximum. North Haven earned the Lobster Project Award with a score 95 out of 100 for its design and presentation of a buoy scrubber. Vinalhaven came in a close second, earning 91 points for its lobster box design.

Both projects have the potential to directly help lobster harvesters and demonstrate the impact individuals can have on the lobster industry.

According to the five-year old Eastern Maine Skippers Program, this year's investigations gave students an opportunity to think "outside the box" and to look more deeply into the industry which they live with and participate in. They focused on how the economy of their respective communities function and sustain themselves in relation to our fisheries.

The projects also have application beyond students' high school education by connecting "real world" research that can be used as Downeast communities strive to sustain the fishing economies that are





year, testifying before the Maine Resources Committee. They also learned about the local and international market chain for lobsters and about the difficulties in securing a patent.

Those experiences, the Eastern Maine Skippers Program said in a statement, will help prepare the students both for fishing careers and for postsecondary education.

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