

Science trail proposed at National Sports Academy

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LAKE PLACID - The National Sports Academy plans to create a "phenology trail" as part of a new hands-on environmental science curriculum for students. Phenology is the study of seasonal changes in weather, plants and animals.

Ezra Schwartzberg, a local scientist who leads a new consulting firm called Adirondack Research, has been assisting NSA in creating the trail. He said students will be able to walk the path and study the timing of biological events like bud break, first calling of frogs, flowering and the turning of leaves in fall.

"We are creating a phenology trail by marking trees with signs so that high school students and the general public can help record plant phenology," Schwartzberg said.

The 500-meter trail would be on school property and lead across the street to the village park. The trail's signage would point out trees, shrubs and perennial flowers on the properties. About 25 plants would be identified and labeled for students to monitor. A total of five permanent signs would be on the path, and trees will be tagged.

"This phenology trail will allow students to record phenology data as part of their current science curricula using their smartphones," Schwartzberg said. "Students will be able to analyze the data that they collect from year to year from now well into the future. They will learn how to look at climate change data, and at the same time, because all data will be publicly accessible online, they will be contributing climate change research at larger scales."

Students or citizen scientists will be able to access the trail observation record sheet and record phenological information via the National Phenology Network's Nature Notebook website. The Nature Notebook has a smartphone app for the iPhone or Android. Visitors will be able to download the app from a sign by scanning a QR code, Schwartzberg said.

"All data is automatically collected by Nature Notebook and is then available to students for in-class learning activities and to scientists around the world to be used for climate change modeling and research," Schwartzberg said.

The project is tentatively scheduled to be completed next year. Schwartzberg is currently working on getting approval from the village of Lake Placid and then the town-village's review board. The signs are scheduled to be ordered over the winter and installed in spring.

Schwartzberg attended a village board meeting Monday night to get approval to put the signs on village property. The board did not give approval but agreed they will begin working with Schwartzberg to create an agreement. The installation of the signs will be done by NSA staff, Schwartzberg said. The project is not expected to cost the village any money. A grant from Northern New York Audubon for \$2,272 will fund the signage. The locations of the signs are still being worked out.

Kim Dow, head of school, said she is excited to see students learn from the trail.

"We're so lucky to be working with him (Schwartzberg) on this project," Dow said. "It's an opportunity for us to expand our environmental science program and embrace what is known as place-based education. The other obvious benefit is that kids can do something positive in the community."