

# Young people getting message on peninsula's rare plants

By BEVERLY REARDON / STAFF WRITER

Efforts are under way to help young people understand the importance of preserving rare plants that grow on the Northern Peninsula.

Interpreters Carmella Rose and Ryan Lloyd of the Limestone Barrens Habitat Stewardship Program have been visiting schools in recent weeks. Their message is that the limestone barrens of the Great Northern Peninsula is an ecosystem at risk.

Co-ordinator of the program, Dulcie House, says rare plants, such as Long's Braya and the Barrens Willow, are found along a narrow strip of land along the western coast of the peninsula, extending some 300 km from Port au Choix to Burnt Cape near Raleigh.

Biologically, the barrens are the 'hotspot' of vascular plant diversity on the island — 114 of the 271 vascular plants considered rare on the island of Newfoundland occur on these barrens. Twenty-nine of these species are found only on the limestone barrens.

The school program includes a presentation of slides, which portray the limestone barrens, some of the rare plants, and more common plants. It also illustrates some of the threats that are posed to the barrens and their associated plant life.

After the slide presentation students participate in a game called 'survivor', which reinforces the message of protection and conservation.

Ms. House says "the response we got at the schools was very positive." She adds that students and teachers are in favour of helping to preserve, protect and promote the plants and habitat of the Northern Peninsula. "J u s t knowing that we have rare plants here that are not found in any other part of the world seems to instill a sense of pride in our people," she states.

Presentations were made at St. Theresa's Elementary in Port au Choix, Roncalli Central High School in Port Saunders, and Straits Elementary and Canon Richards High School in Flowers Cove



Keirsten Gould, a nine-year-old student at Straits Elementary, takes part in a game of 'survivor' after receiving a presentation from the interpreters for the Limestone Barren Habitat Stewardship Program.

(Contributed photo)

Mr. House says the program is now looking to town councils and community groups for support.

"The limestone barrens are at risk and support is needed from local people to help ensure the future of the habitat," she explains. "We are trying to help people understand why the plants on the limestone barrens are so special."

Ms. House also says she is hoping people will see economic spin-offs through ecotourism, which will help contribute to a sustainable future for the communities of the Northern Peninsula.

"We would like all residents on the peninsula to gain a sense of pride and ownership of this unique habitat," she notes.

More information on the Limestone Barrens Habitat Stewardship Program is available by contacting Ms. House at 225-3126 or 861-7147.

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