

This year, the topic that served as the basis for each school's study was how individuals and communities manage and restore local issues.

Each school identified different issues and came up with unique approaches for solving problems as diverse as: the shortage and high cost of bait, the interaction between lobster gear and endangered whales, the restoration of historically important runs of river herring such as alewives and how to keep more of the income generated by the fishing industry in the communities where the income is generated.

In an order chosen at random, teams from North Haven Community School, George Stevens Academy, Deer Isle-Stonington High School, Ellsworth High School, Narraguagus High School, Jonesport-Beals High School, Mount Desert Island High School and the Vinalhaven School made presentations to a group of judges that included educators as well as fisheries scientists and managers. They graded the students' efforts on not just content but on how the students fared with the opportunity to practice public speaking and to successfully deliver information.

This year, Eastern Maine Skippers program coordinator Christina Fifeld said, three projects received scores of 95 points, "which is amazing."

Two of the winning groups came from Jonesport-Beals High School. One group explored how locally caught seafood might be marketed in the community with the idea of keeping more of the money generated in the Downeast town's fishery at home and providing better shopping opportunities for local consumers.

The other Jonesport-Beals group discussed problems arising from the shortage and high price of bait, especially as it affects younger fishermen.

Students representing Jonesport-Beals included: Kendrik Alley; Kiley Alley; Patrick Alley; J-Lynn Beal; Judson Carver; Tyler Childers; Kacey Crowley; Marc Crowley; Jasmine Floyd; Kirsten Hood; Eddaejia Keene; Chad Libby; Skyla Libby; Evan Merchant; Krista Robinson; Nathaniel Robinson; Zach Vincent; Mitch White; and Reed Willette.

The third winning group came from George Stevens Academy and spent the school year studying efforts to restore the alewife runs and waterways on the Blue Hill Peninsula. That subject was particularly appropriate in light of the Penobscot's successful fishway construction and stream restoration projects at Pierce's Pond and Wight's Pond during the school year.

GSA students who participated in the Eastern Maine Skippers program included: Lauren Brown, Paige Casey, Bryce Dannenberg, Ellie Gellerson, Marshal Lebel and Connor Maxcy.

This past school year, the Eastern Maine Skippers Program, which provides aspiring commercial fishermen and fisheries-focused students with the skills to be successful in a time of rapid environmental and regulatory change, reached a milestone — 100 students enrolled in this year's group, a 150 percent increase since the program's inception in 2012.

The program is now in eight Maine high schools and serves more than 37 coastal communities.