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Teacher to embark on Arctic expedition

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Editor



Stan Skotnicki, an eighth-grade teacher at Cheektowaga Central Middle School, hikes the Brooks Range in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge during a research trip to Alaska last summer. He will spend several weeks in Cherskiy, Russia, this summer to study global warming.

Specifically, Skotnicki will be stationed in Cherskiy, Russia, about 60 miles from the Arctic Ocean. He and research scientist

Mike Loranty from Colgate University will be set up along the Kolyma River, one of the most remote rivers in the world, for about four to six weeks, according to Skotnicki.

He is scheduled to depart around June 18 and return in late July.

“The research time is in the summer because it’s when it’s most hospitable,” Skotnicki said. “It’s still going to be pretty chilly.”

Skotnicki will be studying how different types of vegetation affect the thawing of permafrost in the Arctic. Permafrost is a subsurface layer of soil that remains frozen for years.

“There are all kinds of organic layers that are locked up in the permafrost, and as it’s thawing out, the carbon is being re-released into the atmosphere, and that amount of carbon is turning into greenhouse gases, which is really bad for our planet and global

Come summertime, Stan Skotnicki will be leaving the warm weather to do research in Siberia.

Skotnicki, an eighth-grade science teacher at Cheektowaga Central Middle School, is one of 15 teachers across the country chosen by PolarTREC to study global warming in various parts of the world.

PolarTREC, or Teachers and Researchers Exploring and Collaborating, is a program that allows kindergarten through 12th-grade teachers to spend three to six weeks participating in hands-on field research in polar regions.

Skotnicki said teachers are paired with scientists and sent to places near the North and South poles.

“I’m the only one going to Siberia, but then a fair amount are going to Alaska and then one group is going to Greenland,” he said.

Other groups will depart for the Antarctic in October.

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The program is funded by the National Science Foundation. Skotnicki applied in August and found out he would be going in November.

Last year, he spent five weeks in Alaska studying with some of the same scientists involved in PolarTREC. Skotnicki said he always enjoyed doing research projects and hands-on science in the field during college.

“I found this as an opportunity to get back into the field and then take real science back into the classroom, so the kids can see their teacher doing real science,” he said.

About two weeks ago, he went to Alaska for orientation. PolarTREC representatives discussed how the teachers would use information gathered in the field in the classroom, how to reach out to the community and how to journal their experiences. Teachers were also versed in Arctic field training.

Teachers discussed how to use data from the field in classroom lessons and labs as well. Participants are required to create two labs and two assignments.

From the field, Skotnicki said he will be journaling online about two to three times a week, and the team plans to host a webinar so students and residents can interact with scientists while they are in the field.

Skotnicki said he is looking forward to traveling and bringing the information he gathers to his students.

“I’m looking forward to seeing a part of the world that maybe not many people actually get to ever see,” he said.

Students and residents can follow Skotnicki’s travels by subscribing to www.polartrec.com/expeditions/vegetation-impacts on-permafrost. Subscribers will receive an email every time a new journal entry is posted.

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