



Kicking off the New Year on the Big Sable River

Shortly after putting 2011 behind us, Kanouse Outdoor Restoration was back in the river working on instream habitat improvements. Whole tree revetments were placed along 150 feet of eroding bank and 9 woody debris fish cover structures were strategically installed near the banks to add an important habitat component for aquatic species. Over the past 3 years more than 35 large woody debris structures have been placed on nearly 1 mile of river. Thank you to the Big Sable Watershed Restoration Committee for their fundraising efforts and the USFWS Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, USDA-NRCS Conservation Innovation Grant, OxyChem, Mershon, Challenge, and Kalamazoo Valley Chapters of Trout Unlimited for your funding support!

Improving the Betsie River, Platte River and Otter Creek Watersheds

In 2008, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) awarded the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians (GTB) a grant for \$823,500 through the Targeted Watershed Grant program. GTB partnered with the Conservation Resource Alliance (CRA), Benzie County Road Commission (BCRC) and others to raise \$274,500 in match and complete 7 restoration projects over the last 3 years. The focus was on Betsie and Platte Rivers, and Otter Creek in Benzie County. Globally, these types of rivers are rare with their extremely stable groundwater flows and close proximity to the Sleeping Bear National Lakeshore, a matrix of glacial moraines, sand dunes, forests, lakes, and islands off the shores of Lake Michigan, named from the Native American “Legend of the Sleeping Bear.”



The 7 restoration sites include the following: Betsie River and King Road, Platte River and Burnt Mill Timber Bridge, Platte River and Burnt Mill Woody Debris, Dair Creek Recovery, Otter Creek Timber Bridge, Otter Creek Study, and Platte River and South Street Stabilization. *See map and project details on page 2.*

CRA Biologist Presents on Early Successional Forest Habitat

Eric Ellis, CRA Wild Link biologist and program manager, presented an hour long workshop at the Stewardship Network Conference in East Lansing in January. The presentation focused on the benefits of and need to improve early successional habitat in Michigan, especially young aspen and alder habitat. Early successional forest habitat supports many species of wildlife including declining bird species such as the American woodcock, golden-winged warbler, Kirtland’s warbler, and alder flycatcher. The primary method for enhancing this habitat is clearcutting, a much maligned silviculture practice that, when implemented correctly, can have significant benefits to wildlife. Examples from the numerous CRA early successional forest improvement projects were highlighted.

American woodcock require early successional habitat to survive.



Photo by Ricky Layson

Watershed Improvements *continued*

1 Betsie River and King Road – Steep sandy approaches washed into the stream during rain and snowmelt. 1,700 feet of paving and 6 spillways were installed.

2 Platte River and Burnt Mill Timber Bridge – A culvert less than 8’ wide was replaced with a 54’ long timber bridge. The undersized culvert caused scouring of the stream bottom and recreational access put further pressure on the banks. Now fish passage is restored and the Platte River flows under the road unimpeded.

3 Platte River and Burnt Mill Woody Debris – The previous undersized culvert caused widening of the channel, bank erosion and trees toppling into the stream. Over 1,200 lineal feet of woody debris work was completed, restoring stream sinuosity and shape, and providing instream cover for fish and other aquatic species.

4 Dair Creek Recovery – A failed dam, channelized stream and nearby road crossings created a medley of problems for Dair Creek, the coldest and second largest tributary on the Betsie River. Dam removal, routing Dair Creek into one stream channel, and 3 road crossing projects later, fish passage and reconnection of 8 miles of Dair Creek to the Betsie River have been restored.



5 Otter Creek Timber Bridge – Undersized culverts, beaver activity and a road that repeatedly washed into the stream were problems on Otter Creek, a stream totally contained within the Sleeping Bear Lakeshore. A new timber bridge restored fish passage, and provides a safe crossing for vehicle and recreational access.

6 Otter Creek Study – GTB Biologists evaluated the characteristics of Otter Creek’s naturally reproducing brook trout population, and explored habitat conditions in the creek and its tributaries. Findings show that Otter Creek is rare in that salmon and steelhead don’t outcompete brook trout due to their intolerance of marl soils,

and brook trout would benefit from increased large woody debris habitat for hiding and resting cover, and to scour out spawning areas.

7 Platte River and South Street Stabilization – Platte River flows through the Village of Honor where it attracts more use from recreationists. At the South Street crossing, folks had trampled the banks to get to the river. Large, heavy rock and rock steps were placed to prevent erosion while still providing access.

This endeavor was a success thanks to the help of more than 32 partners and \$1,098,000 in funding and local match. **Thank you for restoring our rivers!**



Newly installed woody debris will benefit native brook trout.

Maple River Sand Trap Site Restored

In partnership with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and the Trout Unlimited Miller Van Winkle Chapter, CRA recently completed an instream fish habitat improvement project on the Maple River in Emmet County. The old sand trap site off of Brutus Road was wide, slow, full of sediment and providing little fish habitat. In addition, the adjacent banks were covered in invasive spotted knapweed and loose highly erodible soils. The TU Miller Van Winkle Chapter helped remove the knapweed and planted native trees and shrubs provided by the MDNR. CRA used US Fish and Wildlife Service Coastal Program funding to pay for the installation of 25 instream structures last October by contractor Ken Reed. The structures have already sped up river flows and are providing quality habitat for native brook trout and other aquatic life.

Volunteers Reach Out to Supporters

CRA's annual supporting members are the most important element for creating a sustaining funding base for our organization into the future. Growing the number of individuals, businesses, and organizations that invest in CRA is a top priority in our development planning. Perhaps the most rewarding activity associated with our annual fundraising efforts is letting our members know how much we appreciate their support and interest in our work. Recently, a group of volunteers, all long-time supporters of CRA themselves, shared an evening together to make thank you calls to our donors. The resulting stories from these brief interactions reveal just how much folks care about our northern rivers, forests, and wildlife.

We really can't say it enough – Thank You! Together, we are making a difference.



Boardman River landowner Jim McIntyre saying thank you!





CRA Biologist, Eric Ellis, loves aspen regeneration!



The last three years, over 15,000 native trees and shrubs have been planted to improve wildlife habitat.



Thank You Ruffed Grouse Society!

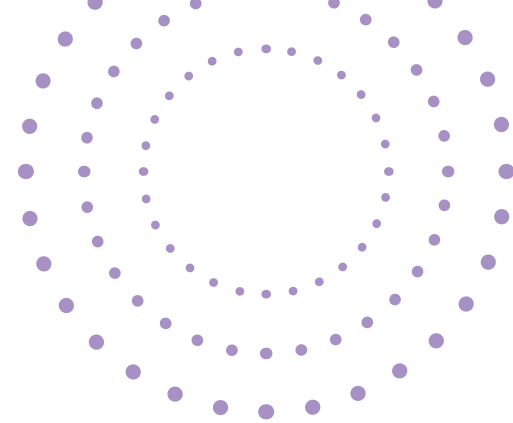
CRA was recently awarded nearly \$4,500 from the Ruffed Grouse Society Michigan Drummer Fund. Funds will be used to regenerate 10+ acres of aging aspen habitat on state land at two sites that are unsuitable for commercial sale. If not regenerated soon these aspen stands will lose vigor and will be gradually lost as they are replaced by other northern hardwood species (primarily red maple). These sites will be clearcut by hand resulting in thick, dense young forest habitat. Native mast producing shrubs will be planted at both sites in the spring. This project will benefit a variety of species that require early successional forest, especially ruffed grouse and American woodcock. White-tailed deer, snowshoe hares, and numerous migratory songbirds will also benefit. Since these project sites are located on state land, hunters and other outdoor recreationists will also be able to access them and enjoy the plants and wildlife that depend on young forest habitat.

Free Trees!

For the fourth year in a row CRA is partnering with Leelanau County based Saving Birds Thru Habitat and Fairmount Minerals to purchase and distribute over 4,500 native trees and shrubs. These shrubs are available free of charge to landowners who will plant and protect them for future wildlife habitat. Species available this year include red-osier dogwood, silky dogwood, sugar maple, American bittersweet, Washington hawthorn, American hazelnut, red oak, white oak, jack pine, and white pine. All trees are bare root and under 2' in height. People are limited to 100 trees. Trees must be picked up in person at CRA's office between 9:00 am and 4:00 pm Friday April 20th. If you have any questions or would like to reserve trees please call or email Eric Ellis at 231-946-6817 or eric@rivercare.org.

The Boardman: A River Reborn project

Photo Left: Recently, CRA biologist Nate Winkler assisted Andy Selle of InterFluve, Steve Largent from the Grand Traverse Conservation District, and Brett Fessell and Frank Dituri of the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa & Chippewa Indians in investigating the location of the original Boardman River channel at Brown Bridge pond. The work involved establishing "depth of refusal" at various points in the river delta and mapping the depths to illustrate the contour of the likely channel buried beneath over 90 years of accumulated sediment. Visit www.theboardman.org to learn more and follow The Boardman: A River Reborn project.



Christmas on the North Branch Manistee River

While many of us were preparing for the holidays, J.E. Kloote Contracting was preparing to move some dirt and release the North Branch Manistee River at Mecum Road to allow it to flow freely. Five 72” culverts were removed and a 60 foot timber bridge was constructed over the river allowing for unrestricted aquatic species passage. The structure was completed just before Christmas and was quite the gift for project partners and for this tremendous trout stream. This coming spring the approach work will be completed to manage road runoff preventing harmful sediments from entering the stream. The project was funded through multiple grants including National Fish and Wildlife Foundation – Sustain Our Great Lakes, USFWS Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and Fish Passage Programs, and MDNR Fisheries Division – Habitat Improvement Account.

CRA Partners Invest in River Care

Recent grants from a number of CRA’s very dedicated partners will help support our efforts throughout the region. The Consumers Energy Foundation approved a grant of \$1,500, the Trout & Salmon Foundation - \$1,500, Charlevoix County Community Foundation - \$3,500, Serra Family Foundation - \$4,000, The George Fund - \$10,000, and the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa & Chippewa Indians - \$20,000. Thank you to all of these organizations for their continued support and conservation leadership.

Carl Mezeske Remembered

Carl Peter Mezeske, of Brethren, died December 21, 2011. Carl had served for many years on CRA’s Board of Directors, retiring from those duties in 2004. Carl was a proud Air Force Veteran of the Korean War. He was employed as a maintenance supervisor at PCA in Manistee, served for 14 years on the Kaleva Norman Dickson School Board, for 10 years as the Dickson Township Assessor and Supervisor, and for 16 years as a Manistee County Commissioner where he was active in multiple committees.

Carl was a lifelong farmer, who loved working on his farm, hunting, fishing, reading and just enjoying the wildlife and its natural beauty. In honor of Carl’s passion for the outdoors, his family directed memorial contributions to CRA to continue his legacy of conservation in northern Michigan.

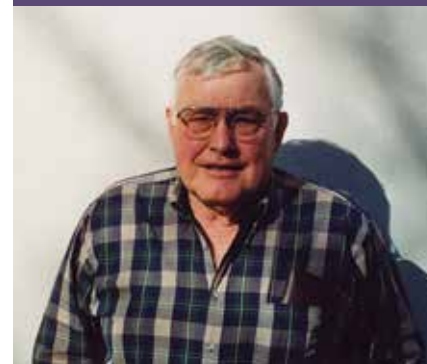


The new channel spanning timber structure allows for unrestricted aquatic species passage and sediment and nutrient movement.



Above: Bob Gluszewski, Consumers Energy Area Manager, presents a grant award to Matt Thomas.

Below: Carl Mezeske



THANK YOU for your recent support of CRA, River Care™ and Wild Link™

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We are very excited to announce a strategic expansion in our fundraising area, and ask your help to refer top notch candidates.

This newly created full-time position is designed to expand the involvement of individuals, families and businesses who share a love of “Up North Michigan.”

Please visit www.rivercare.org for the announcement and job description.

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Stewardship Spotlight

Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa & Chippewa Indians

Relationships change over time. Good ones grow and mature, fueled by trust, shared passions, and the ability to work together toward common goals. It's that kind of cooperation that defines CRA's long-term working relationship with the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa & Chippewa Indians.

The vision for a better natural world is built into the Band's culture as well as an important part of their business practices. From tribal leadership to the natural resource staff, the highest regard for the region's resources is evident. CRA has worked closely with the Band for many years on priority projects throughout our overlapping service areas. With an ability to leverage public investment and a highly qualified staff, the Band has become an important partner on most of CRA's major projects. CRA has been able to mobilize 2% Revenue Sharing Grants from the Band for nearly a dozen years to strengthen our River Care Program's impact for local watershed improvement.

Thank you! Megwetch! to the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa & Chippewa Indians for all of your support and leadership in our northern communities.

