



CATALYST

FALL 2023



Staff Biologist and Project Manager Nate Winkler surveys a Boardman River tributary with the help of members from the Elliott Donnelley Chapter of Trout Unlimited.

The Gift of Capacity: Electrofishing Equipment is a Gift that Keeps Giving

Our supporters generous gifts never fail to amaze us and grow our capabilities at CRA. This year's support from the Elliott Donnelley Chapter of Trout Unlimited (EDTU) is no exception. EDTU's contribution covered the purchase of a Smith Root backpack electrofishing unit.

This new tool has allowed us to make exceptional strides in data collection. We can now perform fisheries surveys in support of our grant proposals and reports. Many of these focus on how our projects are benefitting brook trout and other regionally important native fish. We also use the equipment to build upon existing datasets established by our partners, including tribal nations of the 1836 Treaty Ceded Territory and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

Prior to this gift, we relied solely on our agency partners for fisheries surveys, many of whom are stretched thin by shrinking budgets and resources. Now we can collect data at sites independently – a huge step forward in growing our research base.

We are so grateful that EDTU is dedicated to helping CRA build knowledge of our clear and clean cold-water streams. Without this support, we wouldn't be able to tell authentic, scientifically informed stories of stream restoration.

Recently, other tremendous organizations have also invested in CRA's electrofishing capabilities and are recognized explicitly in our gift listing- Thank you!

Want to see our electrofishing equipment in action?

Scan the QR code to watch the behind-the-scenes video from this summer, produced by EDTU's very own Mae Kelke (Mayfly Films). For more fly fishing and outdoor content, follow Mae on Instagram (@mayflyfilms) or visit her website at mayflyfilms.com.



About CRA

In 1968, Conservation Resource Alliance was established with one goal – to preserve and protect Northern Michigan’s waterways, wildlife, and forests for future generations. CRA is a private, not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization. Through our River Care™, Wild Roots, and Wild Link™ programs, we restore and protect over 700 miles of rivers, 5,000 miles of tributaries, and 4 million acres of diverse forests throughout Northern Michigan.

We’ve been able to care for this region’s natural resources because our partners and supporters continue to be the backbone of our organization. Thank you to all of our donors for supporting hands-on feet-wet conservation. If you haven’t donated, please join us. Your commitment is critical to keep this important work moving forward.

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www.rivercare.org

A CRA Summer Review:

Touring the First-Ever Free Span of a Major U.S. River

How long does it take to restore the connectivity of an entire river? In the case of the Maple River watershed, 20 full years. CRA invested a tremendous amount of time, energy, and resources into this Northern Michigan gem. We can even remember back to the very beginning when CRA Project Manager Chris Pierce coined the name of the venture: “The Free Span the Maple River Initiative.”

Now, nearly two decades later, we proudly marked the final crossing – a timber bridge at Douglas Lake Road – which stands as a remarkable capstone to the entire project. To celebrate the achievement, CRA staffers met with project funders and partners in Emmet County to tour several of the completed sites - likely the first-ever entire free span of a major river in the United States.

We want to thank every partner, funder, and individual that allowed this vital project to succeed. The initiative has and will continue to produce profound economic and ecological benefits.



The new Douglas Lake Rd. crossing serves as a finish line for the now freed Maple River.



CRA’s Chris Pierce shares the history of the Maple River Initiative with project funders and partners.

Visit to Jordan River Marks Turning Point of Project

It’s always exciting to get a sneak peek at what’s next on our conservation docket. This summer, CRA enjoyed touring Jordan River restoration sites with staffers from the Charlevoix County Community Foundation (C3). The trip included visits to three upcoming construction sites, including crossings at Jordan River Road East and West over the Jordan River and Fuller Road over Deer Creek.

Along the tour, the CRA crew pointed out several issues: rusted-out stream crossings, evidence of road flooding, and dilapidated culverts that prevent fish passage. We’re excited to dig in and remedy these issues.

Before the construction crews are deployed, CRA and partners are currently processing contracts for the final two grants – one from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (awarded to CRA) and one from EGLE 319 Nonpoint Source Pollution Program (awarded to fellow non-profit, Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council). The plan is to bid out construction in the fourth quarter 2023 for a 2024/25 timeline.

Thanks to community support from foundations like C3, CRA is able to expand its impact and launch the restoration of entire ecosystems. We look forward to tackling the work – one crossing at a time.



Program Director Kim Balke shows C3 team members an undersized and ecologically damaging culvert on Jordan River Road.

Groundbreaking this Fall: CRA Prepares for Construction in Multiple Watersheds Before the Years End

Safeguarding one of Michigan's Finest Blue Ribbon Trout Streams

With a signed construction engineering agreement in hand and the contractor selected, CRA has solidified plans for a dramatic restoration project on the Pere Marquette River.

The project aims to stabilize the streambank, minimize sediment loading in the river, and restore the floodplain bench. Erosion along the bank is coming closer to a railroad right-of-way, accelerating the need for swift restoration.

The intervention will ensure the preservation of this pristine ecosystem. The Flint Rainbow Club (landowner) and AECOM (engineering firm) are pivotal partners in ensuring this project gets off the ground – slated for construction starting in the late fall of 2023.

For a full list of project partners and funders, visit the River Care projects tab online at rivercare.org!



A drone captures the railway atop the embankment as CRA staff investigate the eroding bank on the ground.

Drastic Improvements for the Glen Lake & Crystal River Watershed

The first of four stream-crossing replacements along Leelanau County Road 675 is currently under construction. In recent years, The Tucker Lake Outlet crossing has been completely plugged, forcing stormwater over the road and eroding the shoulder into the waterway. A much larger aluminum box culvert will replace the existing one, a big step in opening critical habitat and rectifying the long-problematic site. The newly spanned crossing will allow aquatic organism passage from Fisher Lake to Tucker Lake while simultaneously eliminating erosion concerns at this site.

The beautiful ocean-like blue color of the Crystal River, angelic wilderness surrounding it, and the long winding meanders already make the stream a premier paddling experience. When the three remaining crossings are replaced, the need to portage along County Road 675 will be eliminated.

All in all, the initiative is scheduled to be completed by 2025. When finished, it will enable safer and more enjoyable recreation. A huge thank you to the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians for their partnership, and for providing nearly all of the funding for this project. Other partners include the Leelanau County Road Commission and Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. We thank you for your generous support.



At the Tucker Lake Outlet, a blocked and severely undersized culvert results in water pooling on both sides of Leelanau County Road 675, increasing the risk of road flooding.



Wild Roots seedlings and tree tubes flood the Sherrill Family Forest.

Forests & Families are Forever: A Story with Wild Roots

When CRA team members toured the Sherrill Family Forest early this September, we immediately sensed something special happening on the 35-acre stretch of land. Landowners Jim and Jason Sherrill, a father-son duo, bought the parcel in 2016 to plant and maintain a diverse native forest of 20-plus species of trees and shrubs, nurture a plethora of native wildflowers and grasses, and add to wildlife food habitat. Their vision is coming to fruition.



Jim shows CRA's Kat Hanson around the forest in his retrofitted watering golf cart.

"We want to make it world-class," said Jim, as he gestured to a field with tree tubes as far as the eye can see. Jim led our tour from his golf cart, which was rigged with a 55-gallon water drum that he uses to hose down the seedlings throughout the property. His son Jason, granddaughter Hannah, and two dogs trailed behind him as we journeyed from one planting site to the next.

From the beginning, the family knew it would take a significant collaborative effort to achieve their aspirations for the land. In 2019, Jim contacted Josh Shields, a Forester and Wildlife Biologist for Manistee (MCD) and Mason-Lake Conservation Districts (MLCD). Shields swiftly connected them to several programs that could assist with the family's goals.

In 2020, the Sherrill's enrolled in the Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Through EQIP, they hired Manistee-based Forester Stephen Begin to develop a Forest Management Plan. Soon after, using that plan as a guide, they began work under the NRCS's Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) with the help of MCD's Scott Hughey and Tyler Dula. CSP enabled the family to remove all the invasive species from the forest in the spring of 2022 and plant 125 trees and shrubs to support the abundant wildlife in the area.

In the spring of 2023, the Sherrills planted nearly 3 acres of native grasses, pollinator-friendly plants, and monarch butterfly habitat, ecologically enhancing the property yet again. Through CRA's Wild Roots program, they were able to surpass their native tree and shrub planting requirements dramatically. Jim enthusiastically shared his love for Wild Roots: "We were only required to plant 140 trees, but we planted 420 this spring because of CRA's Wild Roots Landowner Program. I could not believe the opportunity Wild Roots gave us."

Every year, CRA's Wild Roots Program allows landowners to participate in a cost-share program that provides them tree tubes and a voucher for native seedlings. The vouchers can be used at any participating Conservation District's spring seedling sale.

The Sherrill Family Forest is truly an intergenerational endeavor. Jim enlisted the help of his grandchildren to plant across the property. By ensuring the youngest members of the Sherrill clan are involved with the forest, both Jim and Jason hope to instill an environmental ethic in the next generation of the family.

For Jim, the land provides a genuine connection to his family that can be easily lost in today's modern world. "You can't plant trees with a phone in your hand!" said Jim, looking out over a family forest in the making.



The family's Forest Management Plan guides them to plant in shaded areas or direct sunlight, depending on the seedling type.

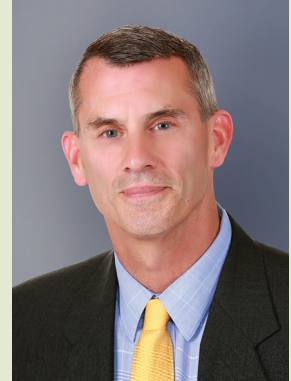


The proud caretakers of the Sherrill Family Forest.

CRA Welcomes Three New Board Members!

Pete Stalker is the Community Bank President for Mercantile Bank in Cadillac, Michigan.

Why Team CRA? "I chose to serve because I'm impressed with the work CRA is doing to protect our natural resources on a variety of fronts: including developing partnerships with key organizations, raising funds to implement projects, and identifying and recruiting quality staff and committed board members to ensure continued success."



Nora Balgoyen is the Sr. Area Manager for Local Government & Community Affairs with ITC.

Why Team CRA? "ITC has been a long-time supporter of CRA, and its dedication to the northern Michigan watersheds. Through this ongoing support, I have come to personally know the simply outstanding CRA staff. My 'why' for joining the CRA Board, is to support the people in an organization that believes in what they do and takes action to make a difference."



Dick Redmond recently retired from DT Midstream as Chief Administrative Officer.

Why Team CRA? "I chose to serve because of the importance of CRA's mission, the competency of its management and staff, the organization's resourcefulness in collaboration and leveraging donor contributions, and CRA's ability to execute projects in a high-quality, efficient, timely, and cost-effective manner."



Pete, Nora, and Dick – CRA is honored to have you on our team!

Thank You for Your Support!

The following individuals and organizations made a contribution to CRA since the release of our last Newsletter.

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 from William & Mary Jo Zaeske

Thank you for your investment in CRA's electrofishing capacity

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– Seasonal Technician Summer Reflection –

Fieldwork is rough. It involves navigating through tall grass prairies while the sun beats down on you. You'll likely sweat through your shirt before the shift is over. Still, you focus on the bright side: anything beats that mosquito infested marsh from the other day.

Fieldwork is rewarding. One day you may stumble upon a meadow of wild raspberries and discreetly shove a handful into your mouth. You'll then learn that raspberries foraged from the wild taste better than any raspberry foraged from the grocer. Another day, you might observe kingfishers dueling above a particularly fruitful pool. That same day may also bring the feeling of cold water rushing between your legs while you wade downstream.

These are the memories that colored my summer with Conservation Resource Alliance. Each memory, good or bad, slathered our fieldwork pallets in a different shade. And each shade went on to paint a larger picture of what life as a seasonal field technician was like.

In ecology, even highbush cranberries are tasked with

weathering storms of rain and herbivory if they so wish to grow. Like the tiny cranberry, we faced our fair share of challenges. For me, these challenges came in the form of battling the elements. I learned to be comfortable while facing exposure to all sorts of nature's wonders, including impossibly large spiders.

It was challenges like these that helped me to see conservation from beyond the perspective of a scientist or policy-writer. To see conservation from the ground level, as a steward directly serving the needs of a local plant and stream constituency, is a rare perspective to hold.

My time here was short, but I appreciate CRA for everything it has taught me. This is an appreciation that ranges from learning to enjoy the solitude of a raspberry meadow, all the way to picking apart the best pools for brook trout. The wilderness of the Grand Traverse region is lucky to have a team of stewards as dedicated to conservation as Conservation Resource Alliance.

-By Eddie Yago



Eddie poses with a perch he caught on Boardman Lake.

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