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Partners News

Special December 2017

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FOCUS ON UPPER PENINSULA CONSERVATION

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Have you checked out PIF's website? www.partnersinforesy.com

The website is for members to expose your business, service or tree farm, share thoughts, ideas, articles, photos, and links. This is your COOP, we need your input as much or more than your dues.

PILGRIM RIVER



Pilgrim River
Photo: Rachel Hovel



Pilgrim River tributary stream falls,
Fall 2015
Photo: Rachel Hovel



Extensive Canada Yew on Pilgrim River Property
Photo: Rod Sharka



KUUF Hikers June 2011 Pilgrim River Group
Photo: Bill Leder

The Pilgrim River Watershed Project Nears Completion

1,569 acres of prime forestland and four miles of river corridor protected A story of collaboration, patience, and perseverance

By Bill Leder, President, Copper Country Chapter of Trout Unlimited

HOUGHTON -- After a 12 year highly coordinated effort, the dream of protecting a high quality forest and one of the Upper Peninsula's best trout streams has just taken a big step toward final completion. Significant environmental and community benefits have been ensured forever.

Background

The Pilgrim River is, by all accounts, an excellent trout stream. Stories among local residents and Michigan Tech alums of fishing its waters are well known. The main channel and tributaries include about 16 miles from the headwaters in Adams Township, coursing through Portage Township to the mouth at Portage Lake. The river combines a high gradient that minimizes sediment deposits, good summer ground water flows, and extensive gravel beds that promote spawning. The watershed area is comprised of 15,000 acres. Much of this land encompasses high quality northern forests. The river and the forests combine to form a diverse ecosystem.

Initial Work

In May 2005, Bill Deephouse, Shawn Hagan, and Rich Bowman walked the stretch of the river where the Copper Country Chapter had completed habitat improvement projects dating to 1999. They realized that the river could be negatively impacted by reduction of public access and degradation of the ecological system. There was concern among Chapter leaders about the potential for eventual urbanization of this high value natural area, just four miles from Houghton, close to an urban zone with a population of 20,000. Much of the Pilgrim River Valley had been a popular, non-motorized outdoor resource enjoyed by the community for many decades, but it was understood this land use status could radically change. Shawn Hagan, Senior Director of Forest Operations with The Forestland Group, LLC observed, "As timberlands go, this ground had tremendous potential for both conservation and/or higher and better use. The pressures to develop this piece were mounting."

Thus began the Pilgrim River Watershed Project. Continuing with Chapter leaders including Steve Albee and Jim Baker, opportunities to conserve and protect the Pilgrim River as a healthy cold water fishery, open to the public, were identified and investigated. This initiative was consistent with the Chapter's Mission Statement: *Conservation, Protection, and Restoration of Cold Water Fisheries and their Watersheds in the Western Upper Peninsula*. There were meetings with Evan McDonald, Executive Director of the Keweenaw Land Trust (KLT), to explore grant programs. Subsequently, as an expansion from our original 1,000 acre goal, two tracts totaling 1,378 acres along the river were acquired by the Hovel Family, with the goals of continuing a high quality working forest, applying best sustainable practices, protecting natural and scenic resources, and assuring non-motorized public access for defined recreation including fishing. With the Hovels' enthusiastic support, signs were placed at entrances and trails were developed to promote public involvement and support. Bob Page developed a project website and led an effort, with assistance from Boy Scouts, to mark and map the trails. (<http://www.pilgrimriverwatershed.org>)

The Pilgrim River Watershed Project (PRWP) was identified as a resource in the Houghton County and Portage Township Recreation Plans. The Houghton Keweenaw Conservation District, under the leadership of Gina Nicholas, prepared the Pilgrim River Watershed Management Plan. Both these steps

served as a means to gain attention, and to support grant applications. Again the County Commissioners and Township Trustees voted to support the PRWP during meetings in July 2017. Speaking about the Management Plan Nicolas said, "HKCD's mission is to promote the wise use of natural resources in Houghton and Keweenaw Counties. The Pilgrim River Watershed Management Plan identified the high quality of the Pilgrim River and the community's desire to maintain this special place close to the population center of Houghton for outdoor recreation in all seasons. HKCD is pleased to have been a partner in conserving this part of the Pilgrim River for water quality, wildlife habitat preservation and public recreation and enjoyment."

The Chapter began local fundraising in December 2009 when a special savings account was opened with two, \$50 deposits. A cadre of conservation partners was formed: The Copper Country Chapter of TU, Keweenaw Land Trust, Copper Country Audubon, Partners in Forestry, Keweenaw Trails Alliance, Houghton Keweenaw Conservation District, and Northwood Alliance. In addition to the Project website, a You-Tube Video was produced that can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xT0u1JSaV8Q>.

Fundraising over the past eight years has continued on a systematic basis. To date over 550 separate donations have been received totaling over \$553,000. Many persons have donated faithfully year after year. Every donation has been acknowledged with a hand-signed letter.

Pilgrim Community Forest -- The Completed First Phase

KLT applied for, and in 2014 received, a \$286,000 grant from the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to establish the 276 acre Pilgrim Community Forest on the tract north of the Pilgrim River, with a trailhead at the intersection of Pilgrim and Paradise Roads. A single donation by the John A. Woollam Foundation, part of the \$553,000 total, provided the 50% match for the grant. The USFS Community Forest Program provides for fee simple ownership; KLT acquired the land from the Hovel Family and will continue to own the property. The land remains enrolled under the Commercial Forest Act, and there is an established and marked trail that leads to the river.

Pilgrim Forest -- The Second Phase, Now Almost Complete

FLP Application

In 2014, KLT prepared a nomination to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) under the nation-wide, competitive USFS Forest Legacy Program (FLP) for a \$550,000 grant to acquire conservation easements on the 731 acre Heritage Tract accessed off Boundary Road and the 371 acre Headwaters Tract accessed off Baltic/Onkalos Corner Road. The FLP provides 75% grants to states through their natural resources departments, and the states ultimately hold the conservation easements. Federal funding for this program stems from the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which in turn is funded by royalties on off-shore oil and natural gas drilling and production. The source of the 25% grant match is the locally raised funds. Evan McDonald reflecting on the funding strategy, said, "We considered several approaches to fund this project during its development. With demonstrated community partner commitment, the well documented conservation value of the proposed project area, and building on the success establishing the Pilgrim Community Forest, this larger project had all the makings to be competitive for more funding at the national level. Fortunately for us, not only is the Hovel family conservation minded, but Joe particularly endorses the philosophy that is the foundation of the Forest Legacy Program and supported the project nomination. Kerry Wieber at the MDNR did a fantastic job to help flesh out and polish the FLP application for the Pilgrim River Forest."

The Bridge Tract

The 190 acre Bridge Tract owned by Chapter board member John Ollila, included in the application, links the Heritage and Headwaters Tracts and is therefore viewed by the USFS and MDNR as a strategic Project component. This feature, combined with strong local fundraising, significantly enhanced the rating of the FLP application. John is donating a conservation easement to KLT, and the transaction will be complete before the end of 2017.

FLP Grant Award

2015 began with discouraging news. After a fifty year history of funding conservation and recreation projects in virtually every county in the United States, Congress allowed the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) to expire, and there was concern that its renewal would remain stalled in the House Natural Resources Committee and die. The Chapter led a successful effort that resulted in then Congressman Dan Benishek, a member of the Committee, visiting the Project and meeting with a wide array of conservation minded community members, local officials, and Joe Hovel, representing his family ownership. As a result, Congressman Benishek went on record pledging his support. As well, the Chapter sent board members Bill Deephouse and Travis White to Washington, D.C. to advocate for LWCF renewal just before the expiration.

Deephouse recalled the trip by saying, “The last place I expected to be last week was hustling through the halls of the US Capitol, but that’s where Travis White and I were, jostling with be-suited men and elegantly dressed women. We all had something in common: a driving desire to be heard by our senators and representatives. It had all started with a phone call from Evan McDonald, who asked me, ‘Would you like to go to Washington, DC?’ Of course I would! Monuments, museums, history, fresh oysters..... but why would he ask? Why would he care? The small answer was ‘to support the Pilgrim River Watershed Project.’ The big answer turned out to be more complicated.”

Finally in late December 2015, Congress enacted an extension of LWCF and appropriated \$100 million. Because of a very strong application, coupled with the already-raised matching funds, the application for the Pilgrim River Watershed Project was ranked 1st in Michigan and 19th nationally out of 41 projects that were funded. This was an occasion to celebrate!

Patience and perseverance have a magical effect before which difficulties disappear and obstacles vanish. - John Quincy Adams

Buoyed by the grant award at last, in early 2016 work began and recently was concluded by MDNR and KLT on an extensive set of highly detailed technical and administrative requirements to satisfy the USFS grant terms and conditions. Pat Toczydlowski, Project Specialist with KLT, worked diligently to create highly detailed baseline documentation reports. MDNR staff members Kerry Wieber and Meghan Stevens played an essential role in navigating the complex process. The Hovel Family has been an outstanding, patient partner every step of the way.

The conservation easement agreement between the Hovel Family and the MDNR that covers the Heritage and Headwater Tracts, recorded with the Houghton County Register of Deeds and running in perpetuity with the land, includes key restrictions and permitted uses summarized below:

- There will be no residential, commercial, or industrial (including mining) development.
- The Hovel Family’s working forest rights, with periodic timber harvests, will continue. Forestry activities will be accordance with sustainable best practices documented and periodically updated in a written Forest Stewardship Plan. The riparian corridor will be protected.

- There will be non-motorized public access rights that include hunting, fishing, hiking, mountain biking on designated trails, cross country skiing, snowshoeing, bird watching, wildlife viewing, education, and mushroom and berry gathering for non-commercial use.

The grant and local matching funds will be used to compensate the Hovel Family for allowing the defined public uses and for the value of the development rights extinguished under the conservation easement, and also to fund perpetual stewardship endowments. John Ollila's easement donation also will be recorded and will allow specified public access to a portion of his land in the Pilgrim River Valley.

Research Opportunities

The Pilgrim is more than just a mecca for trout anglers. The Copper Country Chapter has provided \$2,700 in financial assistance to Chris Adams, a PhD student in Biological Sciences at nearby Michigan Technological University. Under the supervision of Dr. Casey Huckins, Adams is conducting a multi-year fish tagging and tracking study on the river in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Michigan DNR. He said, "The Pilgrim River is a very productive trout stream, and our preliminary data has shown that it is currently supporting a population of coaster brook trout (brook trout that migrate between streams and Lake Superior waters). This may be one of very few remaining viable populations of coasters in Michigan, and protecting this watershed is of great importance to ensure these fish can persist." His work was reported in the winter 2017 issue of [Michigan Trout](#). The Pilgrim River is one of eight Lake Superior tributaries in Michigan under special harvest regulations in an effort by the MDNR aimed at restoring coaster brook trout populations.

"I am thrilled to see the long-term protection of this valuable watershed. Maintaining intact habitat and life history diversity, such as the "coaster" form of brook trout, is increasingly important as we are faced with impacts of climate change."

Rachel Hovel, Assistant Professor of Biology (University of Maine-Farmington)

Beautiful piece of land strategic not only because of the Pilgrim watershed but also because of its proximity to Houghton, Hancock and Chassell. Much appreciate what you do! G.W.

Conclusion

The local conservation partnership that was forged early in the process, a well-conceived and diligently executed fundraising effort, community support, KLT's expertise, active participation by the property owners including early trail construction, and professional assistance from the U.S. Forest Service and Michigan DNR staffs were instrumental in a successful outcome. Everyone stayed focused on shared values and goals. Kerry Wieber said, "The purpose of the FLP is to protect environmentally important forests and to ensure that they are managed sustainably in perpetuity. The Pilgrim River Forest is an ideal project to assist in achieving these goals. Not only will the important forest be protected and appropriately managed, but the importance of protecting and providing public access to the Pilgrim River and the other unique resources on these Tracts cannot be overstated. The success of this project is entirely due to the collaboration and passion of the many people involved in protecting such an important area and I'm very pleased to have had the privilege of working on this outstanding project!"

Danielle Shannon, a Research Scientist with the Michigan Tech School of Forest Resources and Environmental Science and USDA Northern Forests Climate Hub Coordinator commented, "Protecting the forests of the Pilgrim River watershed will have long-lasting impacts in preserving and enhancing habitat, in addition to providing a buffer for future disturbances and risks associated with climate change. Keeping cover along the riparian area will provide shade to keep cold water habitats cold, and keeping uplands forested will ensure groundwater recharge, benefiting the watershed for years to come."

Joe Hovel summarized the successful outcome by saying, "It is truly

gratifying to be part of a community effort, protecting this significant tract of land so close to population centers and a university. And to accomplish these goals with the Community Forest Program and the Forest Legacy Program brings the benefits of these essential federal programs directly to the UP for us all.”

The Pilgrim River Watershed Project has been a long, 12 year journey of collaboration, patience, and perseverance, punctuated with twists and turns, setbacks, and leaps forward. The Chapter is proud to have been part of a project assuring that over 1,500 acres of prime forestland and four miles of the Pilgrim River will remain a thriving natural area to be enjoyed now and forever.

Introductory comment by Rod Sharka:

To our readers; As long as I have known Joe, I've always been amazed at how he has been able to accomplish all of the land conservation projects that he has. Having known Joe and Mary for over 10 years now, and knowing how frugal and humble of a life they live, I have always wondered how they had the means and where with all to do so. I am guessing that many of you have wondered the same thing. As such, I asked Joe to share with us all a brief summary of how he was able to accomplish all that he has. The following is his answer, which should be instructive to all of us. Needless to say, his humility would not allow him to describe the dedication in time and effort that has also been expended on his part, but his story does show how important and essential programs such as the Forest Legacy program has been in making such land conservation work possible.

Doing good across state lines...again and again!

By Joe Hovel

By 1990 the effects of forest fragmentation had negatively impacted our part of Wisconsin and were very apparent to me. The loss of productive forest land and the fragmented habitat was changing the character of the landscape. A nice size parcel of former industry timberland, incredibly diverse and well-stocked, had come on the market in northern Vilas County. The seller was the Trust for Public Lands who had offered the parcel to the State of Wisconsin to expand the Northern Highland State Forest. The north forest boundary was then the south property line of this tract, so the State could not pursue this opportunity.

To save this parcel from a speculators frenzy of creating over 2 dozen ‘hunting forties’ or the like, I put aside my conservative nature and borrowed funds to make the purchase. My wife Mary and I appreciated this incredible opportunity and pledged to do only good with this investment, barring financial emergency. We managed the property carefully with sustainable forestry practices for the next 19 years, complimenting our investment.

In 2002 Wisconsin had adopted the Forest Legacy program, and we made an application hoping to protect this property. Narrowly avoiding federal funding

If you have questions that you would like to see addressed in the newsletter, suggestions for, or have articles for, future newsletters, please contact us at partnersinfo@forestry.com or by mail:

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FUTURE ARTICLES

for three consecutive cycles, the WDNR interest remained solid. In 2005 Wisconsin expanded the forest boundary northward. By 2006 the WDNR was prepared to proceed in helping us protect this parcel, however asking us to consider selling our land to add to the State Forest. My answer was positive, if we could find a similar property to carry on our sustainable forestry and conservation mission. About that time, a charming young loon biologist, Keren Tischler, and I had become acquainted, together focusing on protecting a property just east of Sylvania Wilderness. Keren resided in Houghton County, was active in local conservation efforts and was familiar with a desire to protect a 1000 acre parcel featuring the Pilgrim River. By late 2007 we visited the Pilgrim valley together and sensed the excitement in the air over the possibility of a Pilgrim River Watershed conservation project. My strategy hinged on the section 1031 Like Kind Exchange (LKE) process in the IRS code. After months of logistics and Stewardship Fund timing with WDNR, as well as my negotiations to purchase 1,360 acres in the Pilgrim valley, in late summer 2009 it all came together. With the LKE process, a 1990 forest land investment just below the UP border, with some additional family investment, was now relocated in Houghton County, MI.

With our 2014 sale of a part of our holding to the Keweenaw Land Trust, that created the Pilgrim Community Forest (see Partners News, October 2014), we conducted a second LKE with those proceeds to purchase part of a larger property just below the UP border and near the headwaters of the Wisconsin River. That seller wanted the whole parcel to be protected, even though he needed to sell. So I worked with WDNR again and by the end of 2015 the 1,042 acre Upper Wisconsin River Legacy Forest was created on both ownerships under the Forest Legacy Program. With yet another LKE, we used our proceeds to buy the other portion and make the property whole once again.

The gratification of completing this recent Pilgrim River Forest Legacy transaction with MDNR gives us the opportunity for yet more LKE investments in conservation forest land, and those are in the works. Hopefully part of this will expand the Pilgrim Forest, and also to create yet another important conservation project in the UP! In protecting these parcels I truly believe we are protecting the quality of human life. We must collectively and continually be grateful for the Land and Water Conservation Fund, the Forest Legacy and Community Forest Programs, as well as Wisconsin's Stewardship Program. Without these we would not have all of this incredible success to celebrate!

WHAT THE FOREST LEGACY PROGRAM IS AND DOES

- Is a federal program from USFS, State, and Private Forestry, and is administered by participating states.
- Federal funding source from the Land and Water Conservation Fund can fund up to 75% of the appraised value. State or local sources of revenue are used to match.
- The Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program has matched, (or fully funded), Wisconsin's Forest Legacy projects.
- Most commonly purchases perpetual conservation easements on working forest lands. However grants have been made to states for fee simple purchase.
- Under a Forest Legacy easement, the landowner retains the timber rights subject to sustainable management under a Stewardship Plan. Most other property rights are transferred to the administering state for conservation of the unique forest resources.
- Prohibited uses because of the transfer of these rights include development, parcelization and mining. The easement will lay out the parameters of future road building and gravel extraction for the benefit of the property.
- Public access is not mandated by the federal program; however it is required under the Stewardship Program and is necessary to accomplish most projects. Access for the public may be simply the traditional forest uses of non motorized recreation, but may be expanded on to include bike trails (as with the Pilgrim) and a snowmobile trail (as in the Upper Wisconsin River Legacy Forest).

How to Respond to Naysayers

By Bill Leder, President, Copper Country Chapter of Trout Unlimited

While many readers of this issue of Partners News may find it difficult to believe, we did encounter a few folks, including some public officials, over the 12 year history of the Pilgrim River Watershed Project who either outright opposed it or had serious reservations. We approached this issue by trying to understand the beliefs at the roots of their views. The following talking points proved very helpful in “making our case” in both public and private meetings and conversations. We wanted to demonstrate a compelling win-win situation. The talking points are specific to our Forest Legacy Program Project but could be tailored to other situations.

- The Pilgrim River Watershed Project is currently listed as important recreation resource in both the Portage Township and Houghton County Recreation Plans. *(It took a lot of patient work to achieve this very important step.)*
- The Pilgrim is one of best trout streams in the western UP. *(Outdoor sportsmen and women are voters and have a strong lobby.)*
- The Project was publicly supported by then Congressman Dan Benishek. *(He was known as a conservative, but he supported our efforts. This took a lot of work.)*
- A \$550,000 grant was awarded by the USFS to MDNR in December 2015. Our project ranked 19 out of 41 funded projects -- one of only two in Michigan. *(The implied message is that because the project competed and won, it must have value.)*
- Under FLP, money comes from the federal LWCF and passes through the DNR. The source is royalties charged by the federal government on off-shore oil and gas leases, not taxpayer money. *(This message resonates positively, or at least is neutral, with conservatives who want to reduce government expenditures.)*
- Local private fundraising began in December 2009. We have raised \$275,000 in grant matching funds through over 550 separate donations, mostly from Houghton and Keweenaw County residents. There is very strong local community support. *(The implied message here for elected local officials is that opposing the Project will be opposing the wishes of many voters.)*
- The land historically has been and will continue to be enrolled under Michigan CFA. *(Thus, non-motorized use by the public is not a change. For those who use ATVs and snowmobiles, this is not a loss of access.)*
- The easements are legal documents that run in perpetuity and are recorded with the Houghton County Register of Deeds. *(This ensures that current conservation-based uses will continue, forever. This is reassuring to Project supporters.)*
- Personal decisions on where to live and work often include a consideration of high quality, close-by outdoor recreation opportunities. *(This is a major factor helping stimulate population growth and good-paying job creation. Most everyone in the community supports this form of economic development regardless of political views.)*
- The 1,500 acre project comprises just 2.1% of the land in Portage Township. *(There is very little if any negative impact on developable land.)*
- The land will remain in private ownership on the ad valorem property tax rolls. *(This also helps counter pro-development advocates.)*
- Periodic timber harvests, based on best forestry practices, will contribute to the local economy. Saw logs from a timber harvest three years ago were processed at a local mill. *(The Project contributes to the local economy and will always do so. The Project is distinguished from a preserve – although preserves can be a valid component of a larger conservation and recreation strategy.)*

FORESTED LEGACY

As I walk through a patchwork of cedar and hemlock, working my way upstream on a branch of the Pilgrim River, clumps of yesterday's wet snow slide from tree limbs and land on my back. I am alive! A flock of finches chattering swiftly overhead confirms this truth.

I regularly walk or ski from my home, a handful of miles south of Houghton, Michigan, into the surrounding forest. I am fortunate that I can head out in nearly any direction. This is a place where I pick berries, marvel at mushrooms, observe birds flitting through impossibly thick Canada Yew and feel kinship with something larger than myself. I bring big questions to the river and return home with the wisdom that has condensed on my brow.

These woods and waters are available to my forays because of the Commercial Forest Program (though my activities are technically not hunting, fishing or trapping). But even if CF garners access, it does not guarantee management toward optimum ecosystem health, or even that this place will remain forested in perpetuity or even a long time, only as long as it remains enrolled in the program.

For the Pilgrim River Watershed, that started to change in 2009 when the Hovel Family purchased nearly 1400 acres of the surrounding forest. This catalyzed numerous partnerships that utilized key government programs, first culminating in the transfer of one tract to the Keweenaw Land Trust as a Community Forest, and now with the remaining acreage and additional private land under Forest Legacy Conservation Easement through the DNR.

I came to know the Hovel's commitment to land conservation long before we each knew the Pilgrim River Forest as we do now. I was looking for a way to protect a lake and surrounding forest near the Sylvania Wilderness from development. Mutual friends, Bob Evans and Tom Church, connected me to Joe. After hearing me on the phone, Joe declared, "Keren, if it means that much to you, we ought to protect it" to me, a perfect stranger. Soon enough Joe had pulled together a small group to purchase the property.

I've since learned that no one is a stranger to the Hovel family for long, and that relationships are key to this kind of work. Soon after they purchased the Pilgrim River Forest, Joe was busy bringing together neighbors in the watershed. And he continues to introduce me to people in my community. Many of these folks have likely shared large meals at their large kitchen table, meals grown in their large gardens and prepared by Mary over a wood stove.

I am relieved and awed by what this partnership has accomplished toward maintaining the integrity of this watershed, the health of its inhabitants and the opportunity for all of us to go get lost in wonder, for a long time. Who knows, maybe we'll all come home enlivened and inspired to share our few drops of wisdom in the world. For this legacy I have tremendous gratitude.

Keren Tischler



Part of the crew that installed Pilgrim River Watershed Project signage, December 2009

What bird sings those sweet flute-like notes in the rich dark green maple forest in spring? Or the bird that sounds like wind-chimes on a day with a gentle breeze that barely rustles the rich new leaves? This is the experience of the Pilgrim River Watershed forest in spring, now protected for all generations to come. Those birds are thrushes and the veerys -- along with warblers and vireos their home is now protected forever for all to marvel at and enjoy.

The Pilgrim River Watershed Project has been a wonderful collaborative project that could not have been accomplished without the deep love of nature by the owners of the property and the vision of all those who took part in its protection. Saving habitat is the single most important thing that can be done to ensure the long-term survival of birds and other wildlife that have lived and depended on these forests forever. Protecting these forests will provide to our grandchildren the opportunities we have enjoyed while fishing in clean water or hiking among these trees and hills listening to the birds and marveling at the wonders of nature.

The reason that local, state and federal governmental bodies generously supported the Pilgrim River Watershed Project is that a range of diverse private groups came together with the goals of conservation, protection and conscientious use of our natural resources that would allow this land to be protected in perpetuity. These partners and all those to come will enjoy the birds as much as any dedicated birdwatcher. Those sweet bird songs of spring is a sort of 'thank you' to all.

*Dana Richter
Research Scientist, School of Forestry, Michigan Tech.
and President, Copper Country Audubon
Houghton, Michigan*



JOE'S COMMENTS

With all the challenges to us who care about land conservation and sustainable forestry, it is especially gratifying to tout the Pilgrim River accomplishment in this issue. As you can see from our features in the last issue on wild parsnip, climate change and glyphosate, there are lots of challenges in just the forest management component. And as I also said last month, when we get into the specifics, or shall I say lack of respect, of some of our conservation programs it becomes almost insurmountable. We will continue to discuss all these things, these pages are an open forum awaiting your comments as well.

With all that said, a cadre of partners came together with a common goal some years ago, to protect an important part of the Pilgrim River watershed in Houghton County. Now it is our time to

As a service to PIF members, contact Joe for special pricing in your needs for:

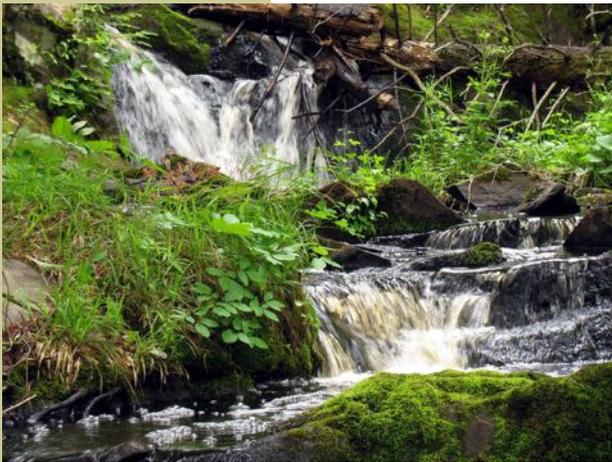
- Napoleon wood stoves
- wood finishes and preservatives
- garden and tree amendments
- grass seed for trails
- Tool handles, replacement handles

celebrate a big achievement in Upper Peninsula land conservation. From the day I was first alerted to this conservation need by Keren, (at a time when we were able to reinvest other conservation sale proceeds), through all the negotiations, all the networking, meetings and hikes in the woods to discuss strategy, forming solid relationships with folks also intent on being part of a conservation success story, this has been a very real life experience I shall forever be grateful for.

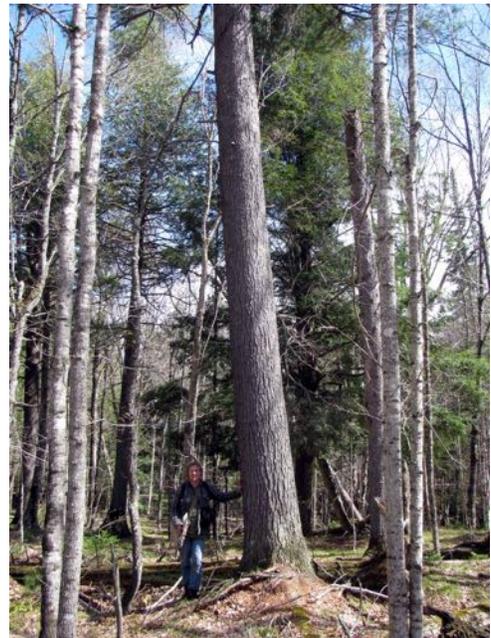
For example, I recall the phone call from Hannah representing the LWCF coalition in 2013, because she had seen a support letter I wrote for a Wisconsin Forest Legacy project. In the conversation she asked if I was aware of or if perhaps I had any contacts for folks in the UP who were involved in the Pilgrim River project. In the coming months we were working with the coalition on sending Bill and Travis from the UP and Dick from Wisconsin to DC to lobby for LWCF. We arranged a meeting and a site visit with a very conservative congressman and convinced him how important the LWCF and Pilgrim project are. Bill Leder has done a great job telling the long story, beginning before I was even involved.

We have known about the Pilgrim success for months now, even though it is now just wrapping up. But I am sure the story on Wildcat Falls will likely be a big surprise to most of you. It will be up to us in coming months to make this a permanent landmark in conservation. Please help with the effort in any way you can. This place is way too special to not act on, especially noted now that we are given another chance!

WILDCAT FALLS



Wildcat Falls May 30, 2012
Photo: Susan Sommer



Wildcat White Pine
Photo: Rod Sharka



Photo: Susan Sommer



Photo: Susan Sommer



Photo: Susan Sommer

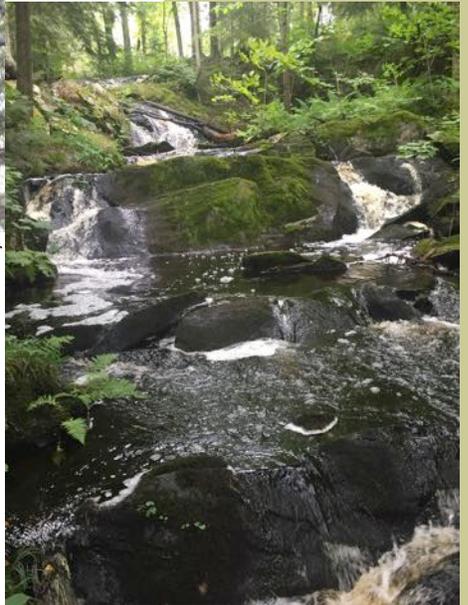


Photo: Rachel Hovel



Photo: Rod Sharka



Photo: Rod Sharka

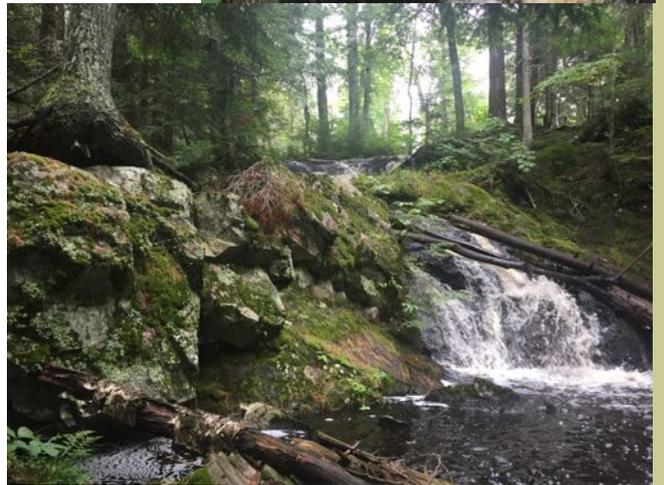


Photo: Rachel Hovel

**Sometimes we achieve another opportunity for success
and we need to seize the moment!**

A story of why to never give up on important issues.

Anyone who has followed Partners News for any length of time is well aware of our efforts to protect the Wildcat Falls land parcels located 9 miles northwest of Watersmeet Michigan. The Wildcat Falls land parcels are a public lands gem, but in 2009 the Ottawa National Forest announced that they were to be traded for a privately held parcel. PIF, Northwood Alliance (NWA), and many individual plaintiffs filed suit in an attempt to block the trade, but in late 2016 the land trade was completed. However, there is something to the slogan, 'it isn't over yet'! A conservation minded buyer in the NWA network has successfully negotiated with Mr. Delich and has reached agreement to purchase the former public Wildcat Falls parcels.

Partners in Forestry's involvement in this issue has now spanned about eight years. Our attempts to prevent the loss of public enjoyment of these lands included two Forest Service Administrative appeals (which followed unfavorable Decision Notices), a lower court case, and an appellate court case. Over 100 people participated in a hike protesting the trade on April 1, 2012. In the Ottawa's own environmental assessments, they talked of the importance of the falls to the community, as it gave folks "a sense of place." A Northwood Alliance board member made a video comparing the trade parcels and obtained 1200 signatures on a petition opposing the land swap. ([Watch the video on YouTube](#)) The value in this former National Forest parcel includes Wildcat Falls, rock out crops (geologist Jack Parker says it is as if the glaciers missed this spot), Scott and Howe Creek, and magnificent old growth features in cedar and hemlock groves. We prevailed in a 2011 administrative appeal over the old-growth issue, the appeal deciding officer agreeing these features were significant and were not properly disclosed.

At no point was there opposition to the Ottawa National Forest obtaining the Delich lands (the other half of the trade exchange), but we consistently felt that the loss of these priceless public lands was too great.

Recently this story has taken a positive turn. After extensive and lengthy negotiations, a conservation buyer in the PIF and NWA network is poised to purchase the Wildcat Falls and County Line Lake parcels from Mr. Delich after he acquired these 240 acres of National Forest land. The closing is set for the very beginning of January 2018. Of the 240 acres, 80 acres is good, manageable timberland but is quite distant and of less conservation importance. Thus, our efforts will concentrate on 160 acres, with the falls, the rock outcrops and old-growth features in cedar-hemlock forests, and an excellent 40 acre parcel with large sugar maple overlooking County Line Lake.

The new owners wish to give the conservation community a real, positive and sound opportunity to achieve permanent conservation status on this very special parcel. The controversy over the loss of Wildcat Falls divided the community and created dissatisfaction with the managers of the Ottawa National Forest, and Northwood Alliance has always been uncomfortable with this divide. Developing a conservation project, with the goal of achieving a Community Forest, will go a long way to respectfully bringing closure to the past and, more importantly, protecting these valuable parcels for future generations to enjoy.

The past fundraising efforts we touted 'to save Wildcat Falls' are behind us, and while those funds did support our lawsuit they left us nothing tangible and no guarantee of long-term protection. Our new fundraising opportunity will achieve a publicly accessible, community style forested tract, open for your enjoyment as well as the enjoyment of future generations. The success of this effort does not depend on a judge from a distant place, but certainly will depend on us all. Here, we collectively have a real opportunity to achieve a very special parcel, to be managed by the community for us all. We hope you share our excitement over this exceptional project. We will need to begin fundraising and plan timing and strategy to apply for available grants. We will need your help.

Please feel free to ask questions, give input and visit this special place.

www.partnersinforestry.com

www.northwoodalliance.org

Please contact PIF for more information.

The Board of Directors of Northwood Alliance is behind this letter and requests your assistance!

PINING FOR A BETTER MEMORY

Paul Hetzler, Cornell University Extension

Speaking as a guy who can hide his own Easter eggs and still not find them all, I marvel how Father Christmas, who is a few years older than I am, manages to keep track of all those kids and their presents. Lucky for us that the most enduring memories are those with an associated smell. If it was not for fragrant evergreen trees, wreaths and garlands, Santa might have long ago forgotten his holiday duties.

Of all the memorable aromas of the holiday season, nothing evokes its spirit quite like the smell of a fresh-cut pine, spruce or fir tree. Although most American households which observe Christmas have switched to artificial trees, about eleven million families still bring home a real tree.

Every type of conifer has its own blend of sweet-smelling terpenols and esters that account for their “piney woods” perfume. Some people prefer the fragrance of a particular tree, possibly one they had as a child. A natural Christmas tree is, among other things, a giant holiday potpourri. No chemistry lab can make a plastic tree smell like fresh pine, fir or spruce.

The origins of the Christmas tree are unclear, but evergreen trees, wreaths, and boughs were used by a number of ancient peoples, including the Egyptians, to symbolize eternal life. In sixteenth-century Germany, Martin Luther apparently helped kindle (so to speak) the custom of the indoor home Christmas tree by bringing an evergreen into his house and decorating it with candles. For centuries after that, Christmas trees were always brought into homes on December 24th and were not removed until after the Christian feast of Epiphany on January 6th.

In terms of crowd-pleasers, the firs—Douglas, balsam, and Fraser—are very popular, aromatic evergreens. Grand and concolor fir smell great

too. When kept in water, firs all have excellent needle retention.

Pines also keep their needles well.

While our native white pine is more fragrant than Scots (not Scotch; that’s for Santa) pine, the latter far outsells the former, possibly because the sturdy Scots can bear quite a load of decorations without its branches drooping.

Not only do spruces have stout branches, they tend to have a strongly pyramidal shape. Spruces may not be quite as fragrant as firs or pines, though, but they’re great options for those who like short-needle trees.

The annual pilgrimage to choose a real tree together is for many families, mine included, a cherished holiday tradition, a time to bond. You know, the customary thermos of hot chocolate; the ritual of the kids losing at least one mitten; the time-honored squabble—I mean discussion—regarding which tree is best—good smells and good memories.

Not only are Christmas trees a renewable resource, they boost the local economy. Even if you don’t have the time to cut your own from a Christmas tree grower, do yourself a favor this year and purchase a natural tree from a local vendor, who can help you select the best kind for your preferences and also let you know how fresh they are. Some trees at large retail outlets were cut weeks, if not months, before they show up at stores.

For the best fragrance and needle retention, cut a one- to two-inch “cookie” from the base before placing your tree in the stand, and fill the reservoir every two days. Research indicates products claiming to extend needle life don’t work, so save your money. Tree lights with LED bulbs don’t dry out the needles like the old style did, and are easier on your electric bill too.

Whatever your traditions, may your family, friends, and evergreens all be well-hydrated, sweet-scented and a source of long-lasting memories this holiday season.

YULE LOGS

Paul Hetzler, Cornell University Extension

The tradition of burning a Yule or Christmas log has largely fizzled out in most parts of the world. Although often depicted as a modest-size birch log, the monster Yule logs back in 6th and 7th century Germany were tree trunks that were intended to burn all day, in some cultures for twelve days, without being entirely consumed. It was important that an unburned portion of the log remained after the marathon Yule-burn, because this insured good luck in the upcoming year. The Yule remnant was tucked away in a safe place inside the home (presumably after it was extinguished) and was used to light the following year's Yule log.

While a birch log is picturesque, it doesn't compare with many other hardwoods in terms of heat value and how long it will burn. All people are created with equal value; with logs, not so much.

Heat value, whether from coal, oil or wood, is measured in BTUs, or British thermal units. One BTU represents the energy required to heat a pound of water one degree Fahrenheit. As most people in this part of the country know that fuel wood is usually some type of hardwood, that is a misnomer. Certain hardwoods are actually softer than softwoods, or conifers. Basswood and eastern cottonwood, for example, have a BTU rating per dry cord of around 12 million, lower than that of white pine (16 million) and balsam (20 million).

As those who heat with wood know, hickory, hard maple, and black locust are tops for firewood, producing almost 30 million BTUs (mBTU) per cord. You'd have to burn twice as much butternut or aspen to get the same amount of heat! Sources fuel vary in their evaluation of fuel woods, but beech, white oak and ironwood (hop hornbeam) rate quite high, around 25 mBTU/ cord. The iconic paper birch has about 20, respectable but not a premium fuel.

Of course there are other considerations aside from BTU value in choosing firewood. Even though balsam heats better than butternut, it throws a lot of sparks as it burns, creating a potential hazard in an open-hearth fireplace. Moisture is also critical. Well, critical not to have it. When wet wood is burned, much of the wood's heat value goes into boiling off the water. Fresh-cut elm is 70 percent water by weight—you'd get very little heat from that, assuming you could even keep it lit.

Outdoor furnaces, because they have a blower, are capable of burning green wood. This might be seen as a convenience, but if you burn unseasoned wood in an outdoor furnace you're spending twice as much time, lifting twice the amount of wood compared to burning dry fuel. (How's your back these days, anyway?)

In the Balkans and parts of southern Europe the genuine Yule-log tradition still lives on, while in other regions, including Quebec, a "Yule log" cake or *bûche de Noël* is a popular dessert at Christmas time. If you're one of the few Americans who will burn an actual Yule log in an open hearth this year, you probably have a good chunk of dry hard maple or hickory set aside, plus a remnant of last year's log with which to light it.

But if that's not your tradition, you can join millions of Americans who tune into televised Yule Log Programs this holiday season. While there are many from which to choose these days, the original made its first appearance way back in 1967. Not only does that log appear to burn indefinitely, it was lit fifty years ago. I'd like to know what species of tree it's from, because with just a few of those we could solve the energy problem once and for all.

