



LITTLE RIVER NEWS

SPRING/SUMMER 2015

**THIS YEAR'S ANNUAL MEETING WILL BE HELD JULY 11,
2015 AT 10 A.M. IN SKINNER PARK, IRONS, MICHIGAN.
PLEASE SEE PAGE 2 FOR DETAILS**

STRONACH DECISION MAY ADVERSELY AFFECT THE RIVER CORRIDOR

On March 2nd the Stronach Township Planning Commission presented proposed changes to their zoning ordinances that will alter the previously existing protections for the corridor of The Little Manistee River. Specifically the changes would **eliminate**: 1) The need for a MDEQ permit to build on a parcel contiguous to the Wetland Conservation District. 2) The requirement of a 100' set-back from the river for the construction of any building. 3) The need to maintain a 50' "natural buffer" from the edge of flowing waters. 4) The prohibition of building within the river's 100 year historic flood plain.

Your trustees were rightfully alarmed by these proposals, but at a public meeting of the Commission, many members of the LMWCC were rudely discouraged from speaking in opposition to the changes. A hasty letter was emailed to LMWCC membership detailing the

Commission's actions and encouraging members to express their concerns in writing to the Stronach Planning Commission as well as the Manistee County Planning Commission. At that Commission's meeting on the 26th of March, by a vote of 4-2, the Stronach Township proposals were opposed. However, the county does not hold jurisdiction over the township's decisions.

A letter to the editor of the *Manistee News Advocate* from the Trustees of the LMWCC was published on April 9, and that letter was subsequently sent to the *Traverse City Record Eagle*, The MDNR, the Michigan chapter of Trout Unlimited, Conservation Resource Alliance, a major partner of the LMWCC, and our friends at the Pere Marquette Watershed Council.

A copy of the original letter can be found on page 3.

ANNUAL MEETING, JULY 11TH

This year's annual meeting, the Council's 19th, will be held **at 10 AM at Skinner Park in Irons**. Registration for members will begin at 9:30. As always the trustees will present a "State-of the Council" with each trustee discussing his or her area of responsibility, and many topics covered in this newsletter will be discussed. In addition, Greg Goudy of MDEQ will talk about the Council's developing a Watershed Management Plan. This is a project that the Trustees, under the leadership of Armas Souras have undertaken. The main speaker will be Jeremy Geise of Michigan Trout Unlimited who will present findings of the habitat survey and fish population study conducted in 2014 by aquatic biologist Kristen Thomas and her interns. There will be a silent auction and bucket raffle, and we are looking for items to be donated for these events. The big raffle prizes will be: 1) A kevlar canoe, 2) A kayak package, 3) a hand-crafted 5 weight graphite fly fishing outfit.

COUNCIL CALENDAR

May 9 — Annual Macro invertebrate survey

May 25 — Work project - prepare materials – trees, stakes, etc. for June 27 project

June 27 — Work project to re-inforce and refurbish the fish habitat structures at Driftwood Campground

July 7 — Annual Water Quality Study

July 11 — Annual LMWCC membership meeting

We are always in need of volunteers for our projects. Contact Joyce Durdel (231-590-0046) or use the "contact" link on the website.



President Tim Phillips addresses last year's annual meeting.

Here is the original draft of the LMWCC letter to the editor of the Manistee News Advocate published on April, 9, 2015 in response to Stronach Township Planning Commission's changes to their zoning ordinances:

The Little Manistee Watershed Conservation Council (LMWCC) is an organization established in 1996 by people concerned with “the resource conservation and restoration of the Little Manistee River and its watershed.” According to its mission statement: “Our goals are to restore, protect, and preserve the natural character of the watershed.” Many of its members own property along the river, but many who do not view the Council’s work as essential stewardship of this valuable and beautiful river. It is not necessary to elaborate the benefits of maintaining the river in as pristine a condition as possible, nor do the economic benefits provided by the river’s recreational opportunities, shared by the entire three county area — Lake, Manistee, and Mason — need to be enumerated. That the Little River is the major source of eggs used to maintain the Great Lakes’ salmon and steelhead fishery speaks not only to the economic value of the resource but also the need to maintain the highest quality of its waters and the watershed.

Recently the Stronach Township Planning Commission announced a “Public Hearing” to propose changes to its zoning regulations concerning riparian property. Among the proposed changes:

- 1) Eliminating the need for a DEQ issued permit for “Any structure, use or activity located on a parcel of land which is contiguous to the boundary of the Wetland Conservation District.”
- 2) The elimination of the following protections of the immediate riparian zones abutting the river:
 - a) a 100 foot set-back requirement from the “edge of bodies of water.”
 - b) a 50 foot “natural growth” “buffer zone from the edge of flowing bodies of water.”
 - c) “No building or structure shall be built, located or constructed within a 100 year floodplain of any flowing bodies of water.”
 - d) “Waterfront Yards: the minimum setback shall not be less than 100’ from the normal high water line.”

Several members of the Council’s Board of Trustees attended the “Public Hearing” on March 2nd “to consider adoption of new and changes in the following ordinances,” yet when the Council members attempted to articulate their collective objections to the proposals, those objections were summarily dismissed by Township Commissioner, Robert Rishel. Attending the Manistee County Planning Commission Meeting on March 26th, LMWCC trustees learned the county commission, and Rob Carson, the county’s Planning Director, are opposed to Stronach Township’s zoning changes concerning the Little Manistee corridor.

At immediate risk is a degradation of the quality of the water that makes The Little Manistee a world-renowned Blue Ribbon trout and salmon fishery and a resource that provides myriad recreational opportunities for both local residents and non-resident outdoor enthusiasts. More insidious is the possibility of uncontrolled development along the river corridor that may include unlawful discharges into the river as well as mineral extraction from its previously protected banks. While much of the river corridor in Stronach Township flows through the

(Please see “letter” on page #5)

AN INTERVIEW (OF SORTS) WITH MARK TONELLO

In January of this year, your editor exchanged a series of emails with Mark Tonello, Fisheries Management Biologist for the MDNR. Our topic was the health of the Little Manistee from the DNR's perspective.

LMWCC: Are there reasons for the decline in numbers of salmon and steelhead over the years. I am assuming that the ecosystem of the lake has begun to stabilize, and a balance of forage fish and predators is sustaining itself. Are there other factors?

Tonello: You hit the nail on the head- it is conditions in Lake Michigan that dictate the number of salmon and steelhead returning to the Little Manistee River. Due to exotic species (mostly quagga mussels), Lake Michigan is much less productive than it was 10-20 years ago. There simply isn't enough forage (alewives in particular) in Lake Michigan right now to support the numbers of salmon and steelhead that were out there years ago.

LMWCC: Does the DNR have purposes other than harvesting a minimum number of salmon and steelhead eggs at the weir each season?

Tonello: For the DNR, the purpose of the Little Manistee Weir is to capture steelhead and Chinook salmon for broodstock purposes, and to harvest Chinook salmon. As you probably know, all Chinook salmon reaching the weir between August 15th and mid-October are harvested by our Contractor, American Canadian Fisheries. Coho salmon are no longer harvested at the weir. They are passed upstream, as are any fall steelhead or brown trout that come into the weir. There is one other purpose that the

weir serves - it is maintained as a sea lamprey barrier by the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

LMWCC: Are there reasons for the noticeable lack of either steelhead or salmon smolts in the river. Again I assume that the above factors affect what people are seeing or not seeing.

Tonello: The electrofishing data shows that the river continues to produce huge numbers of salmon and steelhead smolts each year. In fact, 2014 was a record high for coho salmon.

LMWCC: If the LMWCC continues with efforts to improve habitat and reduce sedimentation is the river capable of sustaining a greater population of resident, i.e. brown trout?

Tonello: I do believe that the Little Manistee River ecosystem is producing very good numbers of wild trout, steelhead, and salmon. The #1 key to all that is it's cold water. That gives it nearly ideal year-round temperatures for salmonids, and also stable flows that are friendly for salmonid production. The other key is gradient - the Little M falls hard enough to expose gravel bars and keep them free of sand. Combine ideal water temperatures, stable flows, and abundant gravel in the streambed, and that creates an awesome environment for wild trout and salmon.

That said, yes there is still work we can do. As you may know, the steelhead life cycle is such that they typically stay in the river for two years (two summers) before smolting out to Lake Michigan. So those older steelhead parr, which are typically 5-8", need places to live. Competition is intense, particularly when you add in coho parr and resident

(Please see Tonello page #5)

Tonello continued from page #4:

brown trout. So that's why our focus for the past 10 years or so has been to provide overhead cover (usually with wood), channel diversity, and depth. All of those are habitat parameters that will help more steelhead parr, coho parr, and resident brown trout survive. Our work is far from done - we all know that there are long reaches of the Little M that have very little of the above. So hopefully we'll continue to work on it, one area at a time. Your organization, CRA, and the USFS have all been outstanding partners to work with, and we've gotten a lot done over the past ten years or so. Successful projects that come to mind include work done on the Indian Club, at Fox Bridge, Bear Track Campground, Syers Creek, etc.

Reducing sedimentation is another valid goal. While the Little Manistee River is a "sandy" river and will always be so to some degree, we should be doing our part to keep sand out of the river. We've learned through hard experience that sand-trapping is not cost beneficial, so we've moved on from that technique, but we should continue to fix eroding streambanks and poor road stream crossings to keep as much sand out of the river as possible.

Hope that helps. Let's keep up the good work!

LAKE MICHIGAN WARMER AND HIGHER THIS SPRING

In late March the National Weather Service and NOAA Great Lakes Environmental Laboratory found the lake levels to be 18" higher than last year, and temperatures to be 21% warmer than a year ago. The shoreline temperature in Chicago was 51° as opposed to 47° last

spring. The full lake Michigan surface temperature was 36.3°. A year ago it was 34.1°. This is the result of only 5% of the lake being ice covered at the time of the sampling. Last year 21% of the lake was ice covered at the same time of the sampling.

NEW WEB SITE FEATURES

It is now possible for members to renew their memberships and make donations on-line via *Pay Pal*. Also by using the "contact" link on the web site volunteers can sign-up for many of the Council's work projects, annual surveys and making contributions to the annual meeting's silent auction and bucket raffle. There are links to some of our partners: Conservation Resource Alliance, American Rivers, and Michigan Trout Unlimited. You can also keep up-to-date with the latest work of **your** council.

letter continued from page #3

National Forest, the LMWCC feels strongly that any weakening of environmental regulations protecting the river and its watershed not only damages the river but also expedites processes for future elimination of such protections.

Trustees of the Little Manistee Watershed Conservation Council

NATURAL RIVERS ACT

As a result of the actions of the Stronach Township Planning Commission, the trustees of LMWCC are once again examining the advantages of applying to the state of Michigan under the Natural River Act of 1970 for a "**Natural River**" designation for the Little Manistee.

For more on the program see page #8

SALMON-IN-THE-CLASSROOM

Congratulations to the 5th and 6th students and teacher Mrs. Jennifer Wojciechowski at Norman, Kaleva, Dickson School. They are recipients of the Manistee Area Retired School Personnel stipend. These students were introduced to "Salmon in the Classroom"; their program is designed to learn and investigate the "Life Cycle of Salmon".

The request consisted of purchasing equipment in order to participate in field studies at the site of release in early May.

Currently their studies reading, making observations, recording and feeding their charges.

With the help of the Little Manistee Watershed eggs were obtained from the Weir in October and the fry to be released at some selected site so they can begin their perilous journey down to Lake Michigan only to return to their birth site in about 3 to 5 years.

Using the new equipment the students along with a legion of chaperons will begin investigating the sub-strate of the stream seeking insect and plant life gaining information of what is a necessary part of a healthy stream.



By Evelyn Furman

**Results of DNR Shocking Program and Fish Population Estimates at
Johnson's Bridge 1979 — 2014**

| Year | Brown trout | | Rainbow trout | | Chinook salmon | | Coho salmon | | Brook trout | |
|-------------|--------------------|-----------------|----------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|-----------------|--------------------|-----------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| | #acre | lbs/acre | #acre | lbs/acre | #acre | lbs/acre | #acre | lbs/acre | #acre | lbs/acre |
| 1979 | 348 | 51.26 | 211 | 5.46 | | | | | | |
| 1981 | 364 | 83.10 | 390 | 18.26 | | | | | | |
| 1995* | 392 | 106.58 | 439 | 35.66 | | | | | | |
| 2002 | 689 | 135.58 | 1354 | 18.36 | 1271 | 4.93 | | | | |
| 2003 | 556 | 98.61 | 1965 | 18.18 | 328 | 1.83 | 10 | 0.23 | | |
| 2004 | 628 | 88.16 | 768 | 16.59 | 13 | 0.09 | | | | |
| 2008 | 508 | 92.56 | 1126 | 11.78 | 1866 | 6.52 | | | 1 | 0.07 |
| 2009 | 826 | 83.28 | 2382 | 16.82 | 625 | 3.79 | 28 | 0.67 | | |
| 2010 | 988 | 95.79 | 1879 | 23.23 | 409 | 3.01 | 13 | 0.18 | | |
| 2014 | 682 | 71.98 | 2690 | 18.33 | 2217 | 7.31 | 31 | 0.39 | | |

*Estimates include only fish 4" and larger.

Station length = 984 feet

1979-2004= .90 acres

2008-2010= .82 acres

2014=.87 acres

THE NATURAL RIVERS PROGRAM

The Natural River Act was passed into law by the Michigan Legislature in 1970. It authorized the MDNR to develop a program to preserve and enhance a river's value for its aesthetics, unimpeded flow, recreational opportunities, water conservation, and floodplain and fish and wildlife habitat. The designation process begins by developing a comprehensive river management plan that contains background and baseline data about the river system being studied, as well as the proposed river segments to be designated and the recommended public and private land development standards.

At the annual meeting in July of 1995, members voted unanimously, 74 – 0, to allow the LMWCC Board of Trustees to begin an investigation into the process of protecting The Little Manistee River and its corridor under the Natural River designation. Such a process takes a considerable amount of time and effort. It requires a series of open meetings with the general public, riparian owners, interested organizations, as well as townships and counties.

Local governments have very few and in most cases no protective zoning restrictions for the entire length of The Little Manistee. Many of the problems facing the Little River stem from the absence of such restrictions. Failure to maintain a natural riparian buffer results in sedimentation due to unfiltered run-off. Lack of tree cover leads to warming of the river, which adversely affects the fish populations. A natural buffer provides habitat for birds and animals, part of any recreational user's ultimate enjoyment of paddling or wading the river. Some building

decisions can also be detrimental to the health of the river: Homes built too close to the edge of the water, ill-advised placement of septic systems and drainage, filling small wetlands and floodplain areas. Any of these practices, anywhere along the river's corridor create problems affecting the entire system of the watershed, and these are problems that LMWCC, since its inception in 1996, has been working vigorously to remediate and eliminate.

Basic biology of river protection is at the heart of Michigan's Natural River Act. It creates a process for communities and organizations along a river to develop common zoning rules to keep the ecosystem healthy and doing so without jeopardizing riverfront property owners' land values. Indeed a comprehensive 1996 Michigan State University study found that property on designated Natural Rivers sells at higher prices and sells more readily than land on non-designated rivers. The Natural River Program sets out simple zoning criteria that local communities use to design a plan for protecting their river comprehensively across township and county boundaries. The criteria revolve around the river's "riparian area," that streamside zone that buffers pollution, supports wildlife, and keeps rivers natural and healthy for everyone.

In light of the recent changes in Stronach Township's zoning requirements (**see article on page #2**), your Board of Directors, at its April meeting, thought that this is a propitious time to again consider the advantages of a "Natural River" designation for The Little Manistee.

ANNUAL GOALS FOR 2015

ANNUAL EVENTS

Bug Survey

Water Quality Survey

Private projects: Continue monitoring and assisting owners with the permitting process.

Membership: Pursue the mass mailings to riparian owners

Annual Meeting

Salmon-in-the-Classroom

Newsletter: To be published and distributed twice a year: June – December

SWAT: Joe Rogers heads the SWAT group

Fundraising: Continue to explore fundraising options

Web Site: Make sure that all significant and current information is available on the Council's web site.

Complete the CRA channel restoration project located above 9 Mile Bridge.

Volunteer tree gathering - May 23rd.

Volunteer project to refurbish the structures at Driftwood Valley Campground and Fox Bridge – June 27th.

Work with the various state and local agencies to study the installation of access steps at Johnson Bridge utilizing the Jorgensen family gift.

Study the erosion survey of the river completed by CRA as well as the habitat survey and fish population study completed by Michigan Trout Unlimited with the goal of completing a comprehensive watershed management plan.

Continue the development of a strategy for recruiting river-front property owners to join the organization.

Continue work to develop marketing plan including initiating corporate memberships.

2015 EVENTS

Complete the "Little Manistee Land Owners Association" project using matching funds (\$1750 – up to \$5000 approved) for completion of the project.

In 2014 LMWCC completed two major surveys on The Little Manistee River. The first, conducted by Nate Winkler of Conservation Resource Alliance (CRA) assessed stream bank erosion from King’s Highway down to Old Stronach Rd. Bridge. The other was a study of fish habitat and populations completed by Kristen Thomas, an aquatic biologist with Michigan Trout Unlimited. The CRA study documented with photographs and GPS co-ordinates all bank erosion sites and rated them according to the severity of the threat they pose to the river. The TU study assessed the existence of suitable habitat structure, primarily large woody debris, for the maintenance of The Little Manistee as a high quality, “Blue Ribbon” trout stream. **(See the interview with Mark Tonello of the MDNR on page #4).** The TU team also sampled fish populations at two locations: Old Grade Campground and the site of the CRA channel restoration project upstream from 9 Mile Bridge. These studies are extremely important for several reasons: They will enable LMWCC to make informed decisions about where and how best to focus our energies and resources in doing our restoration and remediation work. They provide the Council with baseline data to measure the effectiveness of our past as well as future efforts. Thirdly, they will prove invaluable as we undertake the process of developing a “Watershed Management Plan” as they document the on-going problems faced in fulfilling our mission to “restore, protect, and preserve the natural character of the watershed.” The completion of a Watershed Management Plan will facilitate LMWCC receiving grant monies for future projects, in particular state and federal



Dr. Bryan Burroughs, Executive Director of Michigan Trout Unlimited addresses the February 7th Trustees meeting to discuss the results of the habitat and fish population study conducted by TU last summer.



Brown trout released after electro-shocking population count at the CRA channel restoration site.

grants as well as private funds. Your trustees are committed to fulfilling conscientiously their responsibilities incumbent upon the faith expressed when the members of the LMWCC elected them. These two surveys, as well as the annual macro-invertebrate and water quality studies, provide LMWCC with current scientific data to assist us in our determination to serve and protect this resource we all love.

YOUR TRUSTEES

| | |
|----------------|---------------------|
| Tim Phillips | President |
| Jim Squier | Vice president |
| Evelyn Furman | Recording secretary |
| Dan Sernick | Treasurer |
| Dale Downes | Membership |
| Joyce Durdel | Water Quality |
| Armas Soorus | Marketing |
| David Spruance | Newsletter |
| Joe Rogers | SWAT Team |
| John Miller | |
| John Gorys | Emeritus |
| Kaye McDonald | Emeritus |
| Gordon Lewis | Emeritus |

LMWCCMISSION STATEMENT

Is to bring together persons and organizations who have an interest in the resource conservation and restoration of the Little Manistee River and its watershed. Our goals are to restore, protect, and preserve the natural character of the watershed by communicating resource problems and then offering and implementing problem resolution. We are a state chartered non-profit, tax-exempt organization. All contributions are tax deductible under §501{3} of the IRS code. Our business is conducted by a council of trustees elected by the membership. All positions are voluntary, non-compensated.

OTHER COMMITTEE

CHAIRS

| | |
|----------------|------------|
| Gene Means | Grants |
| Anna Jo Rogers | Web Master |

Check out our new-look, up-dated, and informative web site: www.lmwcc.org. Many thanks to our wonderful web master, Anna Jo Rogers for her efforts on our behalf.

Hope to see everyone at Skinner Park in Irons on July 11 at 10 AM for what should be an informative members' meeting with speakers Greg Goudy of MDEQ and Jeremy Geise of Michigan TU. The meeting will be followed by a raffle drawing, silent auction, and bucket raffle. Lunch will be provided courtesy of members of the Indian Club.