



Little Manistee Watershed Conservation Council
LITTLE RIVER NEWS

FALL/WINTER 2024

**May the joyful and peaceful spirit of the season
flow through you and your loved ones like the
crystal-clear waters of the Little Manistee River
we all cherish.**

Happy holidays to all.



INSIDE

President's Message	page 2
Natural River Update	page 3
Council News	page 5
Invasive Species Survey	page 6
Enbridge Line 5	page 7
Riparian Buffer Narrative	page 8

PRESIDENT'S ANNUAL STATE OF THE COUNCIL

Over the 14 years I have spent on the board of LMWCC the organization has evolved considerably. When I was first involved it was a hands-on group of people getting in the water and manually installing fish cover and bank remediation projects. Members did macro invertebrate and water quality studies, salmon in the classroom and river steward programs. Over time we found it more difficult to gather volunteers for these hands-on projects, and the board also aged. Bank remediation and fish cover projects are still an important part of our work. Now we find it more practical to contract the work, especially for large projects that require heavy equipment and specialized knowledge. We work with Conservation Resource Alliance (CRA) on projects. They help us prioritize based on the Eroding Streambank Survey, do the permitting, design and coordinate the contractor. Each of the last two years we have completed about six bank remediation projects on both public and private land. Many of those private projects have been done at the request of a projects completed this year. The number of sites we can do is primarily limited by the availability of staff at CRA to do the work. CRA is working to expand their staff and capacity for these projects so we can move faster. We are also limited by our ability to fund the projects, so we are working to expand our partnerships with both the state and national chapters of Trout Unlimited, Conservation Districts, The Little River Band of Ottawa Indians, West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission and others to build our capacity to do more and larger projects on the Little Manistee. The intent is to team with them to get grant money from state, federal and other sources.

Our watershed management plan is a key item in being able to apply for these grants and we would like to leverage it to speed up and expand our work. LMWCC does not have the technical knowledge or administrative capabilities to get and implement these grants; now we are working with these partners who do. Currently we are working with CRA for funding to remediate 15 road crossings on the river. These projects are extremely expensive and require expertise we do not have. We have an inventory of road 60 crossings identified as needing work. Without outside financial resources and technical expertise we have been unable to address them on our own. We are also in very early stages partnering with Michigan Trout Unlimited as the grant applicant and the other partners I mentioned above for addressing doing some road crossing problems. In the past, LMWCC applying for grants has yielded mixed results. We have had many disappointments, so we can't guarantee these will bear fruit. Partnering appears to be the only viable way forward for the road crossings, and I believe we can make this work over time. We are also in the early stages of applying with CRA for a grant to remediate numerous eroding stream banks to facilitate more quickly working our way through the inventory of high and medium priority eroding banks.

Over the past several years some great people have joined the LMWCC board. They have increased our capabilities by bringing varied and unique skills. We are working on a strategic plan to fulfill our goals as defined in the Watershed Management Plan and our Mission Statement. We are working to update the web site and our social media profile to attract younger members. We are also developing education and marketing tools to help people be good stewards of the river and expand our influence. This year we cooperated with the Vogue Theater and Iron Fish Distillery to sponsor the International Fly-Fishing Film Festival, and we received a portion of the proceeds from the event. **(continued on page 9)**

NATURAL RIVER UPDATE

As most members know, for the past two years the LMWCC board has been active in assessing the attitudes of residents and property owners within the Little Manistee watershed towards a state Natural River designation for the Little Manistee River. In 2020 a Watershed Management Plan for the river was completed and approved by the EPA and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. The plan detailed major threats to the pristine character of the river and recommended strategies for implementing long lasting protections against unchecked development and potential sources of pollution. One of the major recommendations was that the state be encouraged to designate the Little Manistee a Natural River.

The majority of trustees were in favor of the LMWCC undertaking a process of gathering pertinent information to present to the DNR. This included commissioning the sociology Department at Grand Valley State University to develop a scientifically constructed survey, distribute that and solicit responses from all LMWCC members, all riparian property owners, as well as a large sampling of residents within the watershed, and analyze the data. The process was transparent. The LMWCC trustees held a series of public meetings to make known the results, and attendees were free to express their personal responses. The survey results were forwarded to the DNR and can be seen on the LMWCC and GVSU websites.

It is important to remember certain facts: The board undertook the process in accordance with the Watershed Management Plan. The board at no time had, nor does it have, the ability or the authority to arbitrarily designate the Little Manistee a Natural River. The board submitted the survey results to the DNR as compiled by the team at GVSU without commentary or alteration.

A document written by the Michigan House Committee on Conservation and Outdoor Recreation in 2003 states:

Under Part 305 of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act (formerly the Natural Rivers Act, Public Act 231 of 1970), the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) can designate a river (or a portion of a river) as a “natural river area” with the stated purpose of “preserving and enhancing its values for water conservation, its free flowing condition, and its wildlife, boating, scenic, aesthetic, floodplain, ecologic, historic, and recreational values and uses.”

Currently, before the Department of Natural Resources designates a river as a natural river area, it must hold a public hearing in the county seat of any county in which a portion of the designated natural river area is located. Upon designating the natural river area, the DNR develops a long-range plan for the natural area setting forth the purposes of the designation, proposed uses of lands and waters, and management measures designed to accomplish the purposes. The DNR is also required to inform landowners and agencies as to the plan and its purposes in order to encourage their cooperation in the management and use of their land in a manner consistent with the plan and the purposes of the designation.

The long-range plan is developed by a committee consisting of local residents and businesses, DNR staff and other stakeholders to develop the Little Manistee River specific portions of the management plan BEFORE any designation takes place.

Please see the letter on the following page for the DNR’s response:



GRETCHEN WHITMER
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
LANSING



M. SCOTT BOWEN
DIRECTOR

October 22, 2024

SUBJECT: MICHIGAN DNR TO FORM ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR EXPLORATION OF
LITTLE MANISTEE RIVER NATURAL RIVER DESIGNATION

Dear Little Manistee River Interested Party:

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is reaching out to determine public interest for serving on the Little Manistee Natural River Advisory Committee (Committee). In addition to the scoping meeting with interested members of the public held at the **Westshore Community College Downtown Manistee Education Center, located at 400 River Street in Manistee, on October 24, 2024, at 6:00pm**, MDNR is also holding a **virtual meeting via Microsoft Teams on December 11, 2024 at 10:30am**.

For background, DNR has the authority to designate new Natural Rivers through Part 305 of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act. The DNR is considering designation of the Little Manistee River as a Natural River because of its high natural resource values. While we understand that there are currently different levels of public support for this designation, we do know that the public has requested more information on what Natural River designation for the Little Manistee River could mean. This initial step of Committee formation is part of a multi-step designation process to provide the public with additional information needed to help understand how Natural River zoning could be applied. The Committee is expected to help draft a Natural River management plan for the Little Manistee River that considers the needs of river protection, local governments, and watershed residents.

The main goals of the meeting are to generate a list of interested individuals willing to serve on the Committee and introduce the planned process for the following year. We hope to gain participation from a broad spectrum of individuals, groups, and local governments that bring diverse viewpoints and perspectives to the planning process. To be clear, formation of this Committee does not indicate that the DNR will elect to formally designate the Little Manistee as a Natural River; rather, it will result in a Little Manistee Natural River management plan to allow for more informed discussion and decision making on the proposed Natural River designation.

The DNR encourages you to attend one of these meetings if you would like to learn more about the Little Manistee River Natural River planning process and what serving on the Committee entails. Committee members will not be selected at this meeting, and there is no obligation to participate in future meetings or the planning process simply by attending. If you are unable to attend but are interested in learning more or being part of this process, please contact Dana Castle, Fisheries Biologist at MDNR, at 231-285-1042 or castled1@michigan.gov. We look forward to seeing many of you at this meeting. Please also send an e-mail to castled1@michigan.gov to obtain the link to attend the virtual meeting.

Thank you,

Dana Castle
Cadillac Customer Service Center
8015 Mackinaw Trail
Cadillac, MI

COUNCIL NEWS

ANNUAL MEETING

The LMWCC annual members meeting was held this past July 6th at Skinner Park in Irons. Attendance at the meeting was a meager 51 despite the trustees' annual review, informative speakers, and an array of prizes in the bucket raffle and the major raffle for which all members had an opportunity to buy tickets. Nate Winkler, of Conservation Resource Alliance, a long-time partner of LMWCC, detailed the work CRA has been doing in northwest Michigan from spearheading efforts to remove several dams to overseeing habitat restoration and bank erosion remediation projects throughout the region. Dana Castle of the DNR discussed the status of the Natural River designation process and answered members' questions on that topic. The event raised \$2,629.20, a few hundred dollars below the average for the last ten years, but as the event is the Council's sole fund raiser each year, the board of trustees is looking into how it can be made more profitable.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

By trustee Dale Downes

The LMWCC is currently working on a strategic action plan to help guide the organization toward implementation of the watershed management plan and other activities it intends to undertake during the next three years.

The vision of the LMWCC is to leave an enduring legacy of the wild nature, natural beauty, and sustainable environment of the Little Manistee Watershed for future generations to experience. The mission of the LMWCC 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; and preserve the natural character of the watershed by communicating resource issues to appropriate organizations/individuals and then offering to assist with issue resolution.

The LMWCC will realize its vision and mission

through promotion of river stewardship, implementation of the watershed management plan, education, monitoring of water quality; and partnership with the MDNR, USFS, CRA, Mason-Lake and Manistee Conservation Districts, Little River Band of Ottawa Indians, the Advisory Committee for Exploration of the Little Manistee River Natural River Designation committee, and the West Michigan Shoreline Resource Development Council.

IN-STREAM PROJECTS

By Nate Winkler of CRA

Project Summary: In 2013 and 2021 CRA identified erosion along the Little Manistee River through reconnaissance funded by the Little Manistee Watershed Conservation Council (LMWCC). Photos, location, and dimensional data of eroding banks and bluffs were recorded in the field and presented in report form. The reports are used annually by the LMWCC and CRA to prioritize sediment reduction and fish habitat improvement projects on both private and State-owned lands.

For 2023/2024, CRA and the LMWCC selected three sites on State-owned land in the vicinity of the Little Manistee River ORV trailhead and campground at Carrieville as well as two separate privately-owned sites in the vicinity of the 9 Mile Bridge. Due to the proximity of the state-owned sites to one another, they were combined as one project. The goals of work were sedimentation reduction to the river, infrastructure protection bank protection, and improvement of fish habitat. The CRA contractor sourced wood material on site for both projects including tall white pine and oak from overstocked stands outside the riparian corridor. This material was laid in a jackstraw configuration in the river along 400' of bank. Oak piles with a crotch were driven through the material into the channel bed to secure it against movement during high flow events.

Before and after photos can be seen at LMWCC.com

Invasive Species Surveys Results

By Zach Peklo, North Country Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area
North Country Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area

NCCISMA has partnered with LMWCC to conduct invasive species surveys along the Little Manistee River. Grant funded surveys in 2021 and 2022 covered the areas from Old Grade Campground to Skocelas Rd. (Manistee County). This year's survey focused on the stretch of river from Old Grade Campground up to the headwaters east of Luther, near 1 Mile bridge.

Upstream of Old Grade Campground surveys were conducted on foot, wading through the river below the high-water line. Staff recorded all occurrences of invasive species on GPS enabled iPads, noting the species, location, area and density that the invaders covered. In total, the 2024 surveys upstream of Old Grade identified 164 occurrences of invasive species, which include many ornamental invasive species like myrtle, snow on the mountain and Japanese barberry. Only 16 of these occurrences were species that are considered regional high priority species, which are those species that are considered a threat to northern Michigan, but can still be controlled because they are not widespread on the landscape. Regional high priority species found include: Garlic mustard, Japanese knotweed, Oriental bittersweet and Phragmites.

Letters will be mailed out to the property owners with the 16 occurrences of regional high priority species and the impacts that they pose. NCCISMA can assist with treatment training if property owners wish to tackle the invaders themselves, but also offer an at-cost treatment program where NCCISMA staff can conduct the treatments. Quotes are provided for the program at zero-charge. More information on these programs will be included in the letters. With the surveys completed and invasive species infestations identified, NCCISMA and LMWCC will be able to pursue grant funding to continue the next steps in addressing invasive species within the watershed.

Species like garlic mustard can easily hitch a ride in the mud on your boots, so it is important to ensure that before you start your adventure, gear is clean and free of hitch-hiking seeds. For paddlers, kayaks and canoes should be cleaned, drained and dried in between uses to prevent the spread of invaders like New Zealand Mudsnail and Rock-snot. CLEAN, DRAIN, DRY is the most effective way to prevent the introduction of invasive species into the Little Manistee watershed.

Because the Little Manistee River meanders through a patchwork of Federal, State and private land, it is important to be aware of the impacts that ornamental species may have outside of the garden bed. Property owners are encouraged to utilize native species in ornamental plantings, which benefit native pollinator species and eliminate the risk of invasive species spread. Both the Mason-Lake Conservation District and Osceola-Lake Conservation District host spring and fall native plant sales, offering property owners the chance to purchase a wide variety of plants native to this region.

Zach Peklo is the Program Coordinator for North Country Cisma. For more information about NCCISMA, visit our website at www.northcountryinvasives.org or contact us by phone at (231) 429-5072, or email at NCCISMA@macd.org.

ENBRIDGE LINE 5

From the *Chicago Tribune* November 6, 2024

Line 5, owned and operated by Calgary based Enbridge, runs from Wisconsin to Ontario via the Straits of Mackinac and carries over 20 million gallons of crude oil and natural gas liquids a day. It has been a source of controversy and dispute for decades having spilled more than one million gallons of oil from thirty spills over the last fifty years, more than a dozen of them since 2004. The pipeline traverses twelve miles of the Bad River Band of the Lake Superior Tribe of Chippewa Indians' reservation before running across the lakebed at the bottom of the Mackinac Straits, and experts and conservationists claim the pipeline is vulnerable to future leaks and poses serious risks to the livelihoods of the regions' Indigenous communities, the wildlife in the area, and the drinking water of millions of Great Lakes residents. The battle to remove the pipeline from the reservation and the lakebed has been ongoing for years.

Michigan Attorney General, Dana Nessel has been spearheading legal action to decommission Line 5. She has called it a "ticking time bomb." In 2020, Governor Gretchen Whitmer revoked the operating easement for the dual pipelines in the straits where the 30-inch diameter pipe splits into two 20-inch pipes citing the company's violation of the terms of the easement by ignoring structural problems at the junction of the division.

Enbridge has countered by proposing to build a tunnel to house the section of pipeline in the straits and to move it from the Bad River Band reservation to a new site farther from the shores of Lake Superior. A federal judge on Wisconsin has ordered the company to close the portion of the pipeline which 'trespasses' across the reservation.

However, Enbridge needs federal permitting to begin construction pending an environmental review by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Enbridge declares the tunnel



Coated pipes used for Line 5 under the Straits

would make the pipeline safer. But opponents have expressed concerns about the current pipeline operating unprotected during construction. They say the complex currents in the Straits could make a spill catastrophic, possibly polluting miles of Lakes Michigan and Huron shoreline, harming wildlife and their habitats. Cost of cleanup, which would be extremely difficult, could run into the billions of dollars.

Line 5 supplies almost 40% of the crude oil refined in Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Canada. Between 1999 and 2010 Enbridge's North American operations experienced more than 800 spills dumping more than 6.8 million gallons of oil, according to a report by the National Wildlife Federation. In 2010 more than one million gallons of oil spilled into the Kalamazoo River after corrosion caused protective tape to detach from pipeline 6B.



Clean-up on the Kalamazoo River 2010

Riparian Buffer Narrative, Part I

By Jack Epstein, Trustee, LMWCC

We know that about 90% of the water that falls on the watershed enters the ecosystem from non-riparian land. This water enters the groundwater system and follows the pull of gravity. Along the way, depressions in the Earth permit the ground water to form streams, lakes, and rivers; which in our human centered perception is what we think of in terms of water. The vast majority (95%) of the water in sandy soils is underground, where it gains and loses minerals, bacteria, fungi as it flows downhill on its journey to the ocean. The abundant cool clean water nourishes vast underground networks of roots and mycorrhizae, bacteria, viruses, insects, and burrowing animals and, indirectly, all who dwell above the ground.

We see and think mostly of the surface dwellers, those who inhabit the field and forest, streams, and wetlands, and the built environment — homes, farms, roads, and bridges. Forest that was clear cut a century ago has been cut again at least once since then. Fields that once produced mostly hay now warm enough long enough to sustain row crops. They bring with them their accompanying needs for fertilizer, insecticide, fungicide. Roads that once were loose dirt are now brined to keep down the dust. Some roads are paved and cross the network of streams over culverts placed years ago. Most of our historical stewardship focused on extraction. Ecosystem products like wood, wheat, soy, corn, hay, and sometimes oil or gas. We fished the grayling to extinction. We trapped the beaver. We encouraged large herds of deer, stocked the rivers with non-native trout. We brought in invasive plants, insects, and water dwellers.

So why do we focus on the river corridor as our priority for stewardship? It's because small efforts at conservation there yield large effects on the quality of the ecosystem processes, services, and products. Conservation is resource constrained. We spend \$4 trillion a year on human health care in our country. We spend less than \$40 billion a year on conservation, public and private. For the entire country. So, it is important to be stringent in setting priorities to achieve the most benefit

from our investment. Locally, we have adopted a watershed management plan to guide our efforts in a direction that a steering committee, representing diverse interests, has determined to be of high priority. Many of these actions address issues of best management practice in the river corridor.



A century ago, we clear cut the ancient forest down to the water. The land burned for a while after, charring most of the accumulated organic material in the soil. We ploughed from hilltop to river which ended up impoverishing the soil even more. Abandoned farms became home sites. Often within a few feet of the river, or a bluff overlooking it. We created lawns to tame the successional meadows that tried to reclaim the land, and spread fertilizer and insecticide to keep our lawns green and bug free. Creating an expectation of what the riparian experience should be. Meanwhile savaging the natural riparian ecosystem.

Think of the forest as a sun and wind sieve above ground and a broad and deep beaver dam under the ground. Interlocking roots and mycorrhizae stretch for miles and alter the flow of ground water. Slowing pulses that come with spring thaw and heavy rain, drawing deep water toward the surface in times of drought, providing a levee that ties the sandy soil together to resist erosive forces tearing it apart. That's why it's important that the forest be treated the same way along the entire river. A beaver dam/levee that has holes punched in it doesn't work very well.

President's Message continued from page 2

These efforts have allowed us to broaden our perspective to include the wider watershed. We are primarily a river group, but the condition of the river is dependent on issues throughout the watershed. These include invasive species, unchecked development, pollution and many other problems. We all know water flows downhill. As riparian owners we are not at the top of the hill, and what is upstream of us in the watershed is important. That is a major step in the evolution of our organization, and we must remain open to future growth.

We are doing water studies in cooperation with the Mason/Lake and Manistee Conservation Districts to state standards. The CD's bring volunteers, technical knowledge and credibility to the results. This year the results are very good; we have a great environment in the river. One group did find an empty shell from a New Zealand Mud Snail at Johnson's Bridge. This is an invasive species. Once introduced into a new area, New Zealand mud snails can reach densities exceeding 500,000 per square meter. It is thought that high snail populations will have a negative effect on populations of other aquatic organisms, especially native snails and the insects and fish that feed on them. Staff from the CD are planning to return to the site and look for additional live samples to determine the extent of the problem. Over the past two years we have initiated surveys of terrestrial invasive species along the river. The article in this newsletter by Zach Peklo details the findings and helps landowners understand and address what has been found.

We are also planning our annual watershed summit meeting for late February. With our partners and stakeholders, we will review our status and make plans for the future. Please watch for the announcement if you would like to attend.

Thank you for your membership and continuing support in protecting the Little Manistee.

A reminder: The second part of trustee Jack Epstein's Riparian Buffer Narrative will appear in the spring/summer issue of *The Little River News*. Be sure to look for it.

LMWCC TRUSTEES

Armas Soorus	President
Jim Squier	Vice-president
Dan Sernick	Treasurer
Wayne Anderson	Conservation
Dale Downs	Membership
Joyce Durdell	Macroinvertebrates/ Water Quality Surveys
Anna Jo Rogers	Web Management
Joseph Neumann	Social Media
Joe Rogers	SWAT Team
David Spruance	Newsletter
Melissa Jacobs	
Tyler Bengry	
Dennis Depp	
Jack Epstein	
Chastity Gouker	
Greg Johnson	
Blake Krueger	
Amanda Lick	
Glen Myers	
Tod Nyson	