



THE NORTH BRANCH

A NEWSLETTER FROM THE AU SABLE NORTH BRANCH AREA FOUNDATION

Summer 2022

Protecting the North Branch for over 78 years



Photo by Janet Remus

From the Chairman's Desk

This is my last report to you from the Chair of the Foundation, as my two years are up at the September annual meeting. The two-year term for the Chair is a Foundation tradition that serves our River community well. It means that no one person carries the responsibilities for too long and we get a valuable fresh perspective regularly. On our Board we have a strong "bench" of dedicated volunteers, each of whom I have described in prior reports. People are our strength and we are a strong team, for which I am grateful.

Our accomplishments are not big flashy projects or programs, but rather incremental steps to improving our understanding and protecting our River. We are in a very real sense a part of a larger team of conservation organizations that coordinate efforts, providing us with leverage to do more.

There are many examples in recent years. We participated with Mason Griffin Founders Trout Unlimited and Anglers of the Au Sable to place a USGS monitor at Kellogg Bridge, to track water temperature, flow and level. We teamed with Anglers to install in the North Branch two more monitors from Lake Superior State University. The five of the six members of the committee coordinating the Anglers' first annual Data Summit were North Branchers and it featured a report by Professor Lutenton on his North Branch study and a presentation by Steve Johnson of his work with Gerry Lake on mapping our River. Anglers will be working with us to expand this effort by mapping all the habitat structures in the Au Sable.

Soon you will see river etiquette signs at selected access points on the North that were created with the Au Sable Property Owners Association. We will be partnering with Anglers in its purchase and use of electro shocking equipment, so trout population studies can be done more regularly giving us better information. Several North Branch folks are "stakeholders", participating in the MSU/DNR Resiliency Study, which aims to create a model for the management of cold-water fisheries in Michigan.

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The River Summit Meeting

by Neil Wallace

Although the Anglers of the Au Sable First Annual Data Summit was obviously an Anglers' project, I am reporting on it here because I think it is significant progress for the North Branch.

At the Summit, Professor Luttenton did his initial presentation on his study of our North Branch and ASNBAF Board member, Steve Johnson did a presentation on the river features mapping project he conducted with help from Gerry Lake. As it happens six of the seven Summit committee members were North Branchers: Steve, Glen Eberly, Tom Wessels, John Porteous, Craig Porter and me. Thanks to each of them for countless hours of effort, even though I know it was a labor of love for each of them.

The idea for a gathering of "River Scientists" to discuss river data grew out of the recent additions of monitors to the River for temperature, flow and level. The USGS one installed at Kellogg Bridge, on the North Branch, was by Mason Griffin Founders Trout Unlimited in partnership with the Anglers and the Au Sable North Branch Area Foundation. Then monitors from Lake Superior State University (LSSU), were installed at two points on the North Branch: one just below Lovells and one just above the confluence with the Main, with more to come.

In an Anglers' Habitat Committee meeting discussing these new monitors, Glen asked: "so what are we going to do with all this data?" That led to: let's get some scientists together to discuss what they see.

As a part of this effort we ended up gathering much more than monitoring data, including studies, data, reports, logs of old habitat structures, everything! Tom Wessels created a Google Drive folder in the "cloud" which now holds all of it for anyone to access and use, so it will now all be in one place - forever. If this first Summit accomplished nothing else, this made it a success. It will also soon hold a video of the entire Summit, including the presentations.

Link: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/15ockqiT248ljM7zM3QKZLhsuBQMP-SHg?usp=sharing>

(This article is also posted on our web site, which makes it easier to use the link.)

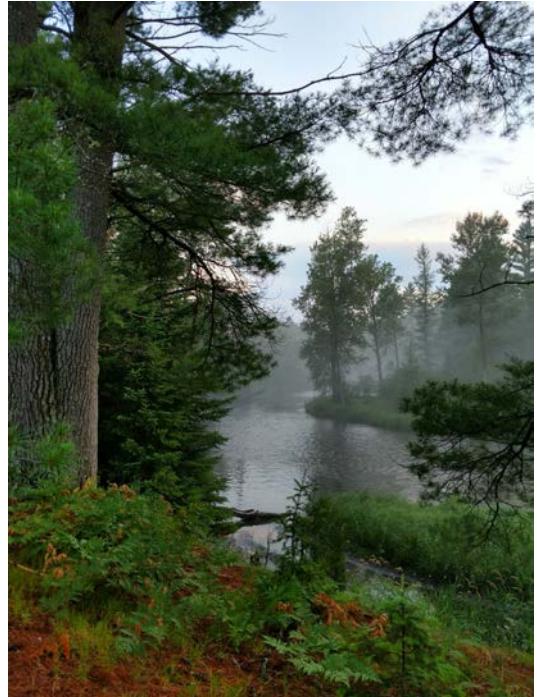
Our panel this year included Professor Luttenton of GVSU, Steve Sendek, former DNR fisheries biologist, and two current DNR fisheries biologists: Neal Godby and Tory Zorn. From their discussion, this layman sees three takeaways.

First, water temperature may had a more significant effect on trout populations than we realized. We should consider a study comparing the temperature of the air to the water to better understand that relationship. It was also suggested that the progression of temperature variations down each branch be studied.

Next, chemicals and their effects on fish needs to be better understood. Some chemicals may not kill the fish but do chase them away. Steve Sendek suggested this is particularly true for the North Branch, because it is the only watershed with the Antrim shale deposits which are tapped for oil and gas and have aromatic compounds, including sulfur.

Finally, nutrients should be a focus, or rather lack of nutrients. Professor Luttenton's preliminary studies found significant insect life on the wood in the river, suggesting it as a source of their nourishment. So could it be as simple as more wood in the river?

Coming soon are increased mapping of the habitat structures in the river for guidance in placing new structures and for maintenance. Anglers, and separately MGFTU, are purchasing their own electro-shocking equipment to do more regular population studies. It seems more and more the conservation groups are stepping in to take on the responsibility of caring for the North Branch and its fish. We are fortunate to have strong partners in MGFTU and Anglers.



How I Arrived at the North Branch by Bill Anderson

It was the Spring of 1990 and a friend asked me and two others to join him on a trip to the Au Sable. I grew up fishing every summer in Northern Minnesota with my family. We would take a two-week trip to Nevis in early June fishing many lakes in the area for bass, bluegill, pike and walleye. I started using a fly rod at age seven for bass and bluegill but had never fly fished for trout until that trip to Grayling in 1990.

There were four of us who traveled to Connors Flat that Spring. The water was high and we brought canoes to float the Au Sable. We camped at Connors and floated several sections of the Main Stream while fishing with Panther Martins on spinning rods. After camping for one night at Connors, we moved on to Lincoln Lodge at the confluence of the North Branch and Au Sable. One of the guys we were fishing with was a member of the Lodge and the accommodations were a great improvement over camping at Connors.

After fishing for two days on the Au Sable, my friend and I decided to fish the North Branch early the next morning.....with fly rods. We entered the river at Kellogg Bridge and floated to Lincoln Lodge. It was a rainy day and we knew nothing about fly fishing for trout but we fell in love with the North Branch. Upon leaving the river and not catching a single fish we decided that we would return the next Spring with fly rods and leave the spinning tackle at home.

For several years four of us made a Spring trip to the North Branch for fishing and a Fall trip to hunt grouse. We were fortunate to be able to rent Jack Garber's North Branch cabin for all of these trips. I also rented his cabin for long Summer weekends with my wife, Debi, and our two children. We floated, swam in the river and explored the area.

In the late 90's Debi and I began searching northern Michigan for lake property that we could purchase and build upon. After exploring almost every lake in northwestern Michigan, we came to the conclusion that either the properties were unaffordable or too close to neighbors. Debi reluctantly agreed that a better option might be looking for river property on the Au Sable.

In the late 90's and early 2000's river properties were selling quickly after listing and we missed out on several opportunities because we could not get up here soon enough to inspect and make an offer. Finally, Rusty Gates contacted two of us about a cabin on the North Branch that was going up for sale. He knew the owners, Cal and Betty Michael, and had spent many days and nights staying with them. Rusty told us that he would give us the time we needed to get up here, inspect the property and either accept or decline the offer. He said "Boys the price is the price and if you don't want the cabin at that price, someone else will." Rusty was not only protecting the owner but also the river in offering the cabin to someone he knew would respect and care for it.

We purchased in 2002, bought our partner's interest in 2015 and put on an addition in 2016. We realized very quickly that we made the correct decision to locate on the North Branch. Even though our cabin is 360 miles from the homes of our children in Chicago, they and their families look forward to making the 6 hour drive up here each summer to spend a week in the outdoors. The opportunities the natural resources offer along with the many friendships we have made Up North have instilled a sense of home to both Debi and me.



New trout structure being installed near Wye Bend, close to Debi and Bill's cabin (photo by Bill Anderson)

From the Chairman's Desk (continued from page 1)

As our prior Chairs have done, I intend to continue to make contributions that are strengthened by my time at the helm. My focus will be on erosion remediation and the planting of more trees, even beyond cedars. And the Camp Grayling proposed expansion - the Electromagnetic Warfare elephant in the room will have my attention and energy.

Just last winter in a Riverwatch article, I wrote about the MSU/DNR Resiliency Project something that applies to all the efforts we are making: "It feels to me that we may just be communing around a long, slow bend in the River to an even better fishery".

It feels like our River community is growing stronger too. So, my thanks to all of you for your support and the opportunity to serve.

Neil Wallace



We appreciate your tax deductible donations that make our work possible. We can also accept credit card donations on the web site. Please use the form below to help us maintain and improve our North Branch

Au Sable North Branch Area Foundation

www.usablenorthbranch.org

Here is my (our) contribution to support the Foundation:

Name: _____

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Au Sable North Branch Area Foundation is recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as a 501(c)3 not for profit.

New River Guardian Award Presented at Social

At the Foundation's Social, on July 9, we announced and presented a new honor we call the: "Bankhead/Schrieber River Guardian Award". We created it to recognize the most extraordinary contributions to our River and River Community. It signifies efforts to guard our River as a precious resource, not just as a fishery, but as a special place to recreate and reinvigorate.

It is named for the first individuals we honor as our River Guardians - Connie Schrieber and Eric Bankhead - for their commitment, hard work, and because they set the standard for conservation guardianship on the North Branch. We will be placing a plaque in the Lovells Historical Museum, with their names and the names of future honorees.

Connie served as the Foundation's treasurer for many years. Her selfless hard work and accounting skills assured the Foundation had a sound fiscal base that enabled us to take on ever more significant conservation projects.

Eric started the North Branch's important River Keeper Program, and was its first leader. He created the program's guidelines and procedures that made it so successful in maintaining our River. Eric recruited, trained and coordinated the volunteers for each reach. He took the calls, referred the violations to the authorities, and got the contractors in for the fix - or did it himself.

Eric's and Connie's outstanding leadership have inspired our River community to take up the conservation efforts, positively affecting our River for years to come.

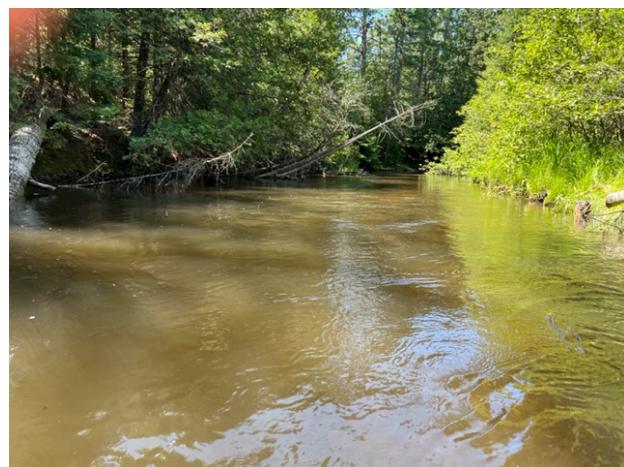
Larry Warner will take Eric's place as head River Keeper when Eric leaves later this summer. Larry said, "I want to thank Eric Bankhead for taking the lead and developing the North Branch River Keeper program quite a few years ago, and I'm delighted to follow in his footsteps as the new lead contact."

Warner also mentioned that there will be two new River Keepers beginning this month. Greg Bierl will be filling in this year for Glen and Martha Eberly on Reach 3 - Twin Bridges to Lovells Bridge and Lyle Kearns will be taking Eric's place on Reach 5 - Dam 4 to Jackson Hole, with partner Bruce Carman. "The North Branch is in wonderful condition with the help from all River Keepers who have a watchful eye on their Reaches, and Ken Reed who is always ready to tackle any river blockages."

An example of the value provided by the River Keepers is shown in the before & after photos below, taken just upstream from Kellogg Bridge. A large tree, blocking the river was discovered by the River Keepers and they contacted Ken Reed to have it removed ensuring safe passage for canoeists and kayakers.



Larry Warner (left) and Eric Bankhead at the Foundation Social event



Meet Our Newest Director - Dave Jankowski

Dave Jankowski is a retired U. S. Air Force fighter pilot and Northwest Airlines captain. He is an ardent fly-fisherman, fly tyer, and bamboo rod maker. With a passion for veterans, he participates in Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing and its affiliate, Bamboo Bend, where he serves as lead instructor.

He lives in Traverse City, Michigan, with his wife, Mary. They enjoy a long marriage, have four grown daughters, and eight grandchildren who all love to go to "Grampy's Cabin" on the North Branch of Michigan's famed Au Sable River.

He is committed to seeing the North Branch improve and reach its potential as a fishery.



Proposed Expansion of Camp Grayling

For more than a month, members of our Foundation have been attending DNR and Michigan National Guard presentations and gathering information on the proposal of the Guard to more than double the size of Camp Grayling to approximately 484 square miles, for electromagnetic warfare testing and training, which they sometimes refer to as cyber warfare. Although we have many remaining questions and concerns about this proposal, our Board's initial focus is opposition because of the lack of information demonstrating that this very significant expansion is truly necessary. From information we have, we believe the Guard may be able to conduct these activities on its existing 231 square miles.

This was the specific initial position we adopted at a special meeting of the Board: The Au Sable North Branch Area Foundation is opposed to the proposed Camp Grayling lease expansion of 253 square miles, more than doubling the size and encroaching on fragile wetlands, as unnecessary and inconsistent with the mission statement of the MDNR which is "to conserve, protect, manage, use, and enjoy our great State's natural and cultural resources for current and future generations". The critical values expressed in this mission statement should be given extraordinarily strong weight considering the enormity of the proposal and its potential impacts.

This expansion should not even be considered, and no further investigation of the appropriateness of it should occur unless and until the following threshold question is answered to the satisfaction of the MDNR and the constituents of Michigan, in a detailed and convincing manner:

Why can't the National Guard use currently available tools such as scheduling, geographic separation, geofencing, and other reasonable measures, to perform its intended electromagnetic warfare testing and training within its existing management agreement footprint of 231 square miles?

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Mission Statement: To preserve, protect and enhance the natural endowments of the watershed of the North Branch of the Au Sable River for the benefit of wild fish and game and public enjoyment and appreciation.

