



THE NORTH BRANCH

A NEWSLETTER FROM THE AU SABLE NORTH BRANCH AREA FOUNDATION

Fall/Winter 2020

Protecting the North Branch for over 75 years

Photo by: John Pacella

From the Chairman's Desk

By tradition, every two years the ASNBAF elects a new Chair and Vice Chair, which leads to another tradition—the new Chair writes an article as an introduction and an outline of the goals for the organization over the coming term. This is that article. I am Neil Wallace, that new Chair, and Bill Anderson is our new Vice Chair.

Although I have had my cabin on the lower North not quite a dozen years, I first fished it a few decades ago and have been returning regularly to the North Branch ever since. So I suppose it was inevitable I would put my river roots down along its banks. Along came the opportunity to contribute by volunteering and then by being on the Foundation's board of directors.

You should also know I am now on the Board of Directors of the Anglers of the Au Sable, which has a strong confluence of interests with us—a relationship I believe has and will help with what we try to do for our River.

For now I summarize my goals as: Expand, Engage and Enjoy

“Expand” for me means not only building on our recent outreach to all property owners on the North and on Big Creek, but expanding what we do for the River, enhancing the monitoring of the River's vital signs, expanding our erosion remediation efforts and much more that I will detail in the coming months. It also means expanding our Board for a diversity of views and injecting a bit of youth to offset my dotage. Already at my first meeting as Chair, we added two new board members, recruited by Bill and me: Andy Grant and Greg Bierl. You will be hearing much more about them soon and likely for a long time, too!

“Engage” will be an effort to educate everyone about our River and to bring more of you into our volunteer efforts. For me volunteering on river projects is personally rewarding and we have many efforts that can actually be fun. We will be looking more to Big Creek and what we can do for it, with input from the folks who live with it. One of our key, but quiet, efforts is the Riverkeeper program. Headed by Board member Eric Bankhead, this program regularly monitors our River for problems like obstructions, excessive beaver activity, and the invasion of purple loose strife.

Continued on page 5

Improving Habitat on the North Branch by Terry Lyons - Anglers of the Au Sable Habitat Chairman

Recently at the Au Sable North Branch Area Foundation (ASNBAF) annual meeting I reported on the Anglers of the Au Sable work on the North Branch - where I have my cabin and have enjoyed fishing for decades.

In the early years after the Anglers founding in 1987, it relied on other organizations to manage and carry out its habitat restoration projects. Prior to Rusty's passing we implemented a new system of managing all of our activities. As part of this reorganization we created several committees with different areas of responsibility, including a Habitat Committee that was charged with coordinating all of Anglers stream work and developing new projects.

Around 2010 the committee decided that it would implement methods for using volunteers to do the mapping, design work, and permitting for our Habitat projects. By doing this the cost of these projects would be reduced and we could use the savings to do more projects. Three long time North Branch conservationists helped us create the techniques that we are still using today. Glen Eberly, Steve Johnson and Gerry Lake were all instrumental in developing methods for mapping and designing North Branch restoration projects.

About this same time Steve Sendek retired as the DNR's fisheries biologist for the AuSable River, who in that role had been involved in all of our previous work and was interested in continuing these efforts. So he formed his own fisheries management company, hiring students during the summer to construct our projects.

With this final piece of the puzzle, we were able to accelerate the development and constructing our own habitat projects. In 2012 we began to organize our North Branch Habitat Restoration project.



New Trout Structure installed on the North Branch

We have made significant progress as you can see by this list of the North Branch projects that Anglers have accomplished and the cost involved.

- 2013 Sheep Ranch to below Twin Bridge; \$31,600, 77 structures, DNR grant funding
- 2014 Above the Powerline to above the Tavern; \$41,200, 55 structures, DNR grant funding
- 2015-16 Ford to County Line; \$100,400, 200 structures, DNR grant funding
- 2017 CR 612 to Burchi's; \$40,400, 44 structures, DNR leftover funds
- 2018 Burchi's to Meades; \$51,000, 110 structures, Anglers' funds and donations
- 2019 North Branch maintenance; \$5,200, repair 40 structures damaged by ice, Patagonia grant monies
- 2020 Ochs's above Dam 4; In progress-\$61,000 (total to be determined), 100 structures, Anglers' funds
- 2021 Ochs's below Dam 4; \$61,000 (Estimated, grant to be applied for) 100 structures, Anglers has agreed to pay for this project if no grant is obtained.

If we meet our 2020 and 2021 goals, from 2013 we will have installed 686 structures at a cost of \$438,600.

During this time Anglers, with volunteers from the ASNBAF, have also conducted annual North Branch studies to collect important data that helps guide both our habitat work and fisheries management. In the spring we conduct a quantitative insect survey at six different locations on the North Branch. This gives us an annual snapshot of the health of the insect populations in the North Branch. In the fall we do spawning redd surveys at sites from the Ford to Kellogg Bridge. The data from this survey gives us an estimate of the health of the brown trout population.

Both of these surveys are conducted entirely by volunteers. We also monitor the water temperature throughout the watershed. This project is in partnership with Mason Griffiths Founders Chapter of Trout Unlimited (MGFCTU).

Partnerships with organizations like ASNBAF and MGFCTU are critical to the success of both our habitat projects and our advocacy efforts. We are fortunate to have three local organizations striving for the same objectives and coordinating their efforts for the common good.

Editor's Note: This is a condensed version of Terry's article. The complete article can be found on our web site: www.ausablenorthbranch.org

Update on Dr. Luttenton's North Branch Projects for 2020

by Glen Eberly

The projects started earlier this year by Dr. Mark Luttenton, of Grand Valley State University (GVSU), have concluded the data gathering phase and even increased from two to three total projects. (For additional information on the projects, please see the article in our Summer 2020 newsletter which is available on-line.)

Insect Study - This project has been completed and graduate student Paul Dingman is compiling the data back at GVSU. He expects to have results before the end of the year and once we receive the results, we will be sharing them with you.

Mapping Project - This project is complete from the Ford to the Confluence with the Main Stream. Graduate student Bert Carey was the lead on this project. It involved eighteen volunteers and took over a month to complete. We now await the report from Dr. Luttenton and his comparison of areas previously mapped for stream bed habitat. The mapping of the water below Morley resulted in a potential structure review of that area by Neil Wallace, Steve Sendek, Terry Lyons and Glen Eberly. Results were that Anglers of the Au Sable (Lyons) and Sendek believe there is good potential for structure placement in this lower water. Structures installed in 1981 were still in place and functioning! The tentative plan is to do structure work on the lower water in 2022.



Juvenile Trout Study - This study was added to the original projects when additional funding became available. The goal is to better understand the growth and survival of trout fry, known as recruitment. Trout (brook and brown) were shocked in three 500 foot reaches where Dingman collected aquatic insects -the Ford, Twin Bridges and the Copper Fisherman. We provided 4 volunteers for this project (Inman, Sendek, Lyons and Eberly) to assist 4 representatives from Grand Valley State Univ. (Luttenton, Josh, Bill and Dingman) and Jim Wilkenson from USGS.

The process was to move upstream using 2 shocking teams to shock and capture all trout. The trout were counted and 20 to 22 trout age 0 - 1 yr. were weighed, measured, had their stomachs emptied (gastric Lavage process) for analysis and returned safely to the stream. The temperature at each site was also recorded.

Results:

The Ford - sadly, very few fish were collected in this reach but 20 small fish were evaluated.

Twin Bridges - the total fish count was 74 brown and 20 brook trout in a 500 ft. reach just below the bridge. This was considered very poor count by Sendek and compared to the count in 1974 of over 3,740 trout in a 1,000 foot test area (500 above and below the bridge) we see the proof of a serious decline in this area of the North Branch.

Copper Fisherman- We don't have the final count for this reach but it was considerably better than Twin Bridge and the Ford. It seems fishing improves as we move down stream. Why? That is what we want to find out and FIX!

As additional reports are received from Dr. Luttenton and his students, we will provide them to you in our newsletters and on our web site. These projects could not have been completed without the financial assistance from this Foundation, Anglers of the Au Sable, Mason Griffith Founders Chapter and the hard work of almost two dozen volunteers. Thank you to everyone who contributed!



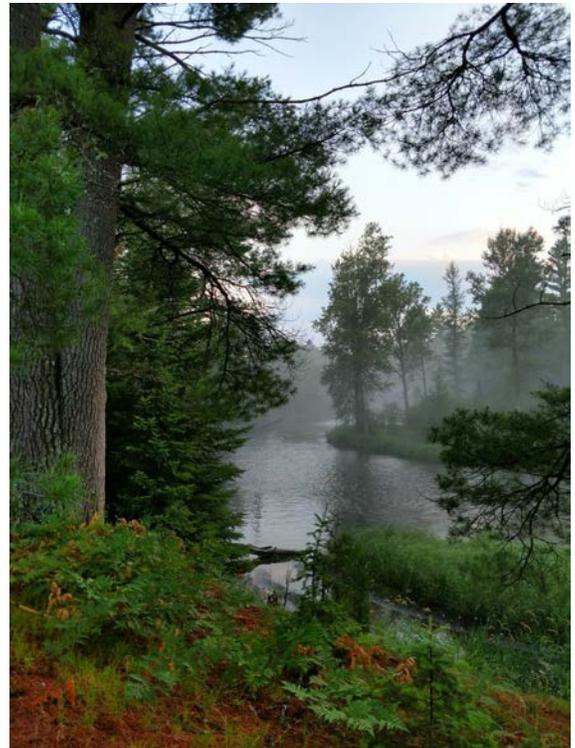
2020 Photo Contest Winners

Thank you to everyone who participated in our photo contest. We received a huge number of outstanding photographs. Our two winners were:

George Safranek, Wildlife Category
Just Below the Surface



Julia Hulka, Scenery Category
North Branch



Both winners received \$100 gift certificates to Gates Au Sable Lodge. Although they were not awarded prizes, some beautiful photos were submitted by: Audrey Blough, Joe Breakey, Mike Buikema, Rose Dugdale, Sara Haveman, Cynthia Infante-Inman, Scot Jacot, Kathey Lareau, Heather Lovell, Rosemary Malbin, Daniel Navarre, Douglas Neal, Marcy Ng, John Pacella, Martha Pregler, Janet Remus, Rick Reyhl, Dan Smith, Jen Van Dam and John Walters. We hope to continue the Photo Contest next year and will announce plans in our Spring Newsletter.

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.ausablenorthbranch.org

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

Name: _____

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

“Enjoy” of course is why we are all here. Our organization is stronger and we can do more for the River when we enjoy it together and have interaction of all those who love it. The annual meeting, now with important speakers on timely river topics, and our annual dinner are two examples. Our expanding, successful photo contest is another. We can and will do more. Recently Jerry Rucker, longtime board member and twice our Chair, decided to step off leaving us with this key part of his message:

“I am pleased to have seen the organization evolve from a homeowner's watchdog group to a natural resource conservation organization.”

My hope, my goal is to take us further down this path that Jerry and others have blazed for us and for our River

Thanks,
Neil Wallace



Photo by Mike Hayden

Invasive Species

Volunteer projects in 2020 faced a number of new difficulties. In spite of these issues, Foundation volunteers (Bill Anderson, Glen Eberly, George Shaw and Marjie & Larry Warner) joined a team from Huron Pines to float the North Branch and eradicate Purple Loosestrife (PLS), a very problematic invasive species. The combined team removed about a dozen large trash bags of flowers and plants, ensuring that PLS does not eliminate some of the desirable and necessary native plants. Hopefully we can hold a larger and even more successful effort in 2021.



Legacy Chemicals Pollution

The USGS published a report this year evaluating legacy and emerging organic chemicals in the North Branch. All the conservation groups in the Au Sable watershed looked forward to seeing this paper to help them understand possible reasons for the dramatic decline in trout population that has been noticed over the past 2-3 years. Board member Tom Wessels reviewed the data and conclusions in the paper and wrote an excellent article explaining the findings. Tom's article is too long to publish in our newsletter, so we have placed it on our web site with links to the original report (32 pages). We hope you find Tom's article and the other stories on our web site interesting and useful. If you have any questions or suggestions for new articles, please feel free to contact one of our officers or board members to share your ideas.

A BIG Thank You to Our 2020 Supporters!

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Regular Firearm Deer Season

Nov. 15 - 30, 2020, Statewide

Trout Season Opener (tentative)

April 24, 2021, Lovells Twp. Grounds
 Check our web site or Lovells Twp.
 web site for updates on activities!

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 Bill Anderson, Vice Chairman
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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.

