

### Developing leaders in conservation.

It's a tagline we came up with back when we started the Huron Pines AmeriCorps Program nearly 12 years ago. Our number one concern, then, was where we would find that next generation of leaders to help protect Northern Michigan and the Great Lakes. We were at a much different place as an organization back then. Thanks to some ambitious ideas, support from people like you, deep community partneships and the efforts of our board and staff, we've been able to try new things, learn from mistakes and create meaningful and positive programs.

One thing we learned is that you don't "find" the next generation of leaders—you help create them. And not only have we made that a priority through Huron Pines AmeriCorps, where we bring on 30 full-time college graduates each year, but also through school programs, volunteer projects, outreach to elected officials and work with community leaders. Leadership comes from all levels and we've started to work with everyone, from age 5 to 95. Involving new people from all walks of life into our conservation programs has helped us reach more people than ever before and build more support for protecting our forests, lakes and streams. It's inspired us to take a more optimistic view of the future than perhaps we would have just a few years ago.

Thank you for making our work — and our optimism — possible. We hope you continue to join our efforts in building current and future generations of conservation leaders.

Sincerely, **Jerry Rucker**, *Board Chair* **Brad Jensen**, *Executive Director* 





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We are investing more than ever in the people and places that are vital to the economic and environmental well-being of Northeast Michigan, that make it a place that more and more people want to call home — and more and more people want to protect.

That investment in the communities, landscapes and waterways of Northeast Michigan begins by understanding the work that needs to be done, then executing a strategy to make it happen. To date, we have identified over \$30 million worth of habitat projects to be completed. Over the next 25 years, we plan to protect and restore 100,000 acres of prioritized lands and reconnect 500 high-quality trout stream miles.

The completion of that work depends on sustainable funding, and informed, active communities. In addition to donations and grants, we are building a framework to establish a conservation fund that will ensure the long-term protection of our region's valuable natural resources. More than funding, a healthy future for conservation will require a commitment from impassioned people, and a sustainable vision for programming, training and oversight, so that local communities can have a hand — and a leadership role — in managing and maintaining the places they love.

Cultivating partnerships is essential to reaching our goals and ensuring the long-term health of our region. Nearly every one of our on-the-ground projects is made possible through collaborative efforts. We understand that each project ties back to the broader community and the people who live there. That's why we have been listening to and learning from local organizations, civic leaders, residents, schools and business owners in our region for over four decades — to give everyone a voice at the table. We have witnessed first-hand the positive impact that comes from communities investing in natural resources, whether that's financial, educational or recreational. We strive to help build a conservation ethic into every conversation to help more people make decisions with the long-term interest of the environment in mind.

One goal in 2018 is to engage more people in conservation, because the more people who understand and are involved in conservation, the better protected our favorite places will be. We continue to focus on projects that are not only good for natural resources but for the people and communities that depend on them. As our traditional habitat restoration work continues to grow, we are also doing more to increase our efforts in the areas of land protection, access and community education.

To solidify our commitment to advancing recreational access and land protection efforts, we amended our bylaws in 2017 to allow Huron Pines to own or manage land for the purpose of protecting it in perpetuity. Keeping in mind our commitment to the idea that natural resources build stronger, more vibrant communities, we built our land protection criteria around the idea that beyond having a high conservation value, any projects under consideration should also present a benefit to the community through recreation, education or research opportunities.

At the end of 2017 we hired our first ever full-time Environmental Education Coordinator. This new position helps increase our capacity to advance conservation education across communities in our region to develop active stewards of the Great Lakes ecosystem with fresh perspectives for protecting our natural resources. We've also evolved our system for evaluating restoration projects to include criteria for objectively evaluating community engagement and stewardship initiatives as well.

We are in the center of the Great Lakes ecosystem, with over 4.5 million acres of intact forestlands and an abundance of high-quality rivers, many of which are state-designated Blue-Ribbon trout streams. These resources are increasingly threatened as we see invasive species continue to spread, wetlands continue to diminish and beaches continue to close due to water safety concerns. It is with the support of donors and partners like you that we are able to address these threats head-on and to have a positive impact on our natural resources and the quality of life that comes with having access to wild places that are well protected and cared for.

# **Building a Conservation Community**

#### The Kirtland's Warbler was the first bird species to be placed on the endangered species list when the Endangered Species Act was passed in 1973.

Since that time, the Kirtland's Warbler has gone from near extinction, with scarcely 200 birds in the world, to a population of more than 2,000 pairs today. The Kirtland's Warbler population has exceeded recovery goals for the past 16 years and due to successful recovery efforts, it has been proposed that the Kirtland's Warbler be delisted from the endangered species list in 2018. Delisting is recognition of over 50 years of commitment to Kirtland's Warbler conservation among many agencies, organizations and individuals. It also signifies that conservation efforts for the Kirtland's Warbler are now rooted in, and focused on, long-term sustainability rather than recovery. This important shift in thinking and conservation planning means agencies are afforded new flexibility in how they manage the jack pine landscape and opportunity for stronger private sector commitment to develop, lead and support new programs across the full-life cycle of the species.

In recent decades, the Kirtland's Warbler recovery has been due, in large part, to agencies like the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Forest Service. Their commitment to species protection and recovery through land management has had an undeniably positive impact on the Kirtland's Warbler. From the beginning, the story of the decline and rise of the species has been a lesson in the power of adaptive management, rooted in collaboration between committed agencies and dedicated individuals. Citizen scientists were credited with early observations and discoveries that helped identify threats to the Kirtland's Warbler.

"There's an underlying code of conduct within the Kirtland's Warbler community that people share information, even the tiniest details because you never know who's going to knit together the answer that saves the species," explained Huron Pines Community Program Lead, Abigail Ertel, who was the original coordinator of the Kirtland's Warbler Alliance.

When it began, in 2013, the Kirtland's Warbler Alliance was formed as a way to lay the groundwork for continued protection of the Kirtland's Warbler knowing that it would one day be downlisted or delisted from the endangered species list. Huron Pines saw the need to establish a group that could raise private funds, interface with the public and actively campaign for species protection. Over the years, the Kirtland's Warbler

Alliance has brought a unique voice to the table alongside traditional conservation and natural resource management partners. Huron Pines' role with the Kirtland's Warbler Alliance has changed over the years from one of leadership and coordination to one of member and advisor. The Kirtland's Warbler Alliance will file articles of incorporation to become their own independent nonprofit association in 2018.

The efforts of the Kirtland's Warbler Alliance have led to increased public involvement and interest in the species through educational outreach and increased access to Kirtland's Warbler habitat. Involving the broader public does more than help a single species. As Ertel explained, "The more that people can see how land managers, researchers, educators, birders and social scientists are working to tackle big issues that help the Kirtland's Warbler — and also impact our economies, our jobs, our quality of life and our recreational hobbies — then I think it's a big step forward to support conservation as a whole."



Former Huron Pines AmeriCorps member, Deanna Staton, volunteers at Jack Pine Planting Day to support Kirtland's Warbler habitat.

The culture of cooperation and timely information sharing embedded in the Kirtland's Warbler community will keep conservation programs moving forward and the population healthy. The commitment of many individuals and the collective efforts of organizations like the Kirtland's Warbler Alliance will continue to raise awareness and understanding for the Kirtland's Warbler and advance the connections between conservation and community that is imperative for ensuring a sustainable future for the species.

# Protecting the Places We Love... Forever

Our vision for the future of conservation in Northeast Michigan is based on the idea that protecting and promoting large contiguous areas of land allows natural systems to flourish, a challenge that becomes greater as development and land use increase. We have worked toward our goal of preserving intact land and restoring natural ecosystems by meeting with landowners, initiating projects that improve the health of our forests and wildlife and working with partners to minimize problems like invasive species, polluted stormwater runoff and soil erosion. But we felt we could do more to have a greater impact. After carefully considering our own vision, mission and goals, and meeting with many conservation leaders, our board voted to amend our bylaws and articles of incorporation so that, where appropriate, Huron Pines can protect land through permanent management or ownership.

This change is not just about land protection, but also about creating new opportunities to connect people with nature. As Huron Pines Executive Director, Brad Jensen, explained, "This addition to our traditional programming is a big step, and as we seek to build capacity in this area, we're looking at potential projects that have a benefit to both nature and the local communities where they're found. Wherever possible we want to make a better link between recreation, education, research and protecting wild places. This makes for better communities and it also broadens support for conservation."

One of our first successful land protection projects came in the spring of 2017 as we partnered with Little Traverse Conservancy to permanently protect over 300 acres of critical coastal wetland habitat on Lake Huron's Duncan Bay. The land, between the city of Cheboygan and Cheboygan State Park, was under threat from invasive species, overuse, wetland alteration and development pressure. Through our efforts, Huron Pines and Little Traverse Conservancy, received \$430,000 in grants

from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, to acquire 5 separate parcels of land, including 3,500 feet of lake frontage along Duncan Bay.

The properties are now part of the Little Traverse Conservancy preserve system, and will be guided by management plans that Huron Pines will help develop to offer recreational and educational opportunities while protecting these rare places. Potential projects for the preserve include an outdoor learning space and a trail system that will connect bike and pedestrian traffic from Cheboygan State Park to downtown Cheboygan.

# "Land is our most precious and irreplaceable resource."

We take inspiration from conserving land and water, and will build a long-term fund to do more land protection work in the years to come. As Huron Pines board member, and retired DNR forester, Ned Caveney explained, "Land is our most precious and irreplaceable resource. Our well-being depends upon the health and productivity of this land. Unless we do our part, future generations will not know what a wonderful place Northeast Michigan is."



#### **2017 BY THE NUMBERS**

### PROPERTIES TREATED FOR INVASIVE PLANT SPECIES

280
TOTAL ACRES
TREATED

SEPARATE SPECIES TREATED





#### **2017 BY THE NUMBERS**

44,260
Hours of AmeriCorps service completed

New leaders developed through Huron Pines AmeriCorps

**†** 

15,546
Students reached

3,768
Acres of public land improved

Presentations to over 2,000 adults in communities across Michigan

330
Miles of trails/river restored

STUDENTS SPENT

910
HOURS
OUTSIDE
ON RESTORATION
PROJECTS

900 LBS INVASIVE GARLIC MUSTARD PULLED IN OSCODA



1,600 LBS INVASIVE EUROPEAN FROG-BIT REMOVED IN ALPENA





68
Miles of upstream river miles reconnected

Streams improved across 5 Northeast Michigan counties

Road/stream crossings improved

Dam removed

# **Reconnecting River Miles**

Huron Pines has come to be recognized as a regional leader in the science and implementation of freshwater restoration work. For over four decades, we have gained experience and forged partnerships that have allowed us to take on larger-scale, higher-impact projects. In the past decade alone, we've reconnected over 450 miles of upstream habitat by improving or removing 91 separate stream barriers. Our success is made possible through the commitment of community partners in our region. In 2017, road commissions in Cheboygan, losco, Montmorency and Presque Isle counties matched our funding to contribute a combined investment of over \$188,000 to improve the infrastructure of their communities.

# We've reconnected over 450 miles of upstream habitat

This past year, we also hit a milestone in our ability to analyze and prioritize future projects by completing 350 site inventories of potential fish passage barriers in our region. We have now successfully collected inventory data on all of the road/stream crossings and dams we can reasonably access across Northeast Michigan. This data will allow Huron Pines and our partners to more effectively invest resources to restore, manage and conserve aquatic resources throughout the Lake Huron Basin.

Here are two examples of large-scale, high-impact restoration projects completed in 2017.



Crump Road culvert on Mullett Creek - Before

# Mullett Creek Road/Stream Crossing Improvements

Mullett Creek is a coldwater trout stream within the Cheboygan River Watershed, long recognized for its water quality, wildlife and brook trout fishery. In fact, Mullett Creek is home to one of the only lake-run populations of brook trout in Michigan, meaning brook trout spend various stages of their life-cycles transitioning between Mullett Creek and Mullett Lake. However, several undersized road/stream crossings were impeding brook trout passage through the Mullett Creek system.

Roy Tassava, a local resident who has owned property near the Crump Road crossing on Mullett Creek for the past 30 years, experienced the problems caused by undersized infrastructure first-hand. "The culvert was too small and the road was designed such that stormwater would run down the edges and cut in trenches. Most of that muddy water containing road silt would run right into the creek," Tassava said. For years he took matters into his own hands. "I made trenches with a hoe or shovel so that the runoff would go into the ditches before it reached the creek." Despite his efforts, much of the road wash still ran into the creek, which led to natural resource and safety concerns.

"Because brook trout had breeding habitat just below Crump Road (i.e. gravel), I was concerned that the road silt would adversely affect breeding, the eggs, the larval fish, the fingerlings and then the trout themselves all year long. I was also worried that the water flow would be so high some year that the culvert could not handle it all and thus it would flow over the road."



Crump Road culvert on Mullett Creek- After

Huron Pines was able to lead a restoration project in 2017 that will have a lasting impact on the health of Mullett Creek and the safety of the roads. Over the course of 2017, Huron Pines, the Department of Natural Resources-Aquatic Habitat Program, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation-Sustain Our Great Lakes Program, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service -Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and the Cheboygan County Road Commission invested \$300,000 into the restoration of four separate road/stream crossings on Mullett Creek, including the crossing at Crump Road.

"The larger culvert alleviated that flow-over concern and the road also was redesigned so that rain runoff would not flow directly into the creek but instead into the roadside ditches. The passage of trout and other aquatic life will be much easier with the larger culvert. Last September I noted that some trout

## Mullett Creek is home to one of the only lake-run populations of brook trout in Michigan

already took up residence inside of that culvert," said Tassava. Restoration of the four road/stream crossings successfully reconnected 13 miles of stream, which not only improved fish passage but also restored natural river processes, reduced sediment and associated pollutants, enhanced the overall aquatic habitat and helped protect other native aquatic organisms. One final road/stream crossing will be improved in 2018, and upon completion, the entire 19-mile watershed will be reconnected, helping to ensure the long-term population persistence of native species throughout the greater Cheboygan River Watershed.

#### Buhl Dam Removal and South Branch Pine River Restoration

Buhl Dam was a high priority resource issue on the South Branch Pine River in Alcona County. Located off a heavily trafficked public access site, visitors had to cross over the failed dam to access recreational opportunities in the Huron-Manistee National Forest, which meant, in addition to being a barrier to natural river processes, it was also an infrastructure concern.

In May of 2017, Huron Pines led the removal and replacement of Buhl Dam, reconnecting over 20 miles of upstream habitat. For the first time in decades, native brook trout and steelhead can access upstream sections of the South Branch Pine River

and its tributaries, improving the resilience of fish populations by allowing fish to spawn and migrate more freely. After the original structure was removed, a new 65-foot steel bridge was installed to provide safer access for visitors crossing over the river.

This project was made possible through support and funding from federal, state and local partners, including the U.S. Forest Service, Michigan Department of Natural Resources-Habitat Improvement Account, National Fish and Wildlife-Sustain Our Great Lakes Program and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service-Fish Passage Program. One of the most involved local champions was the Pine River-Van Etten Lake Watershed Coalition. "Because our watershed covers such a large area and our organization is all volunteers, it would be impossible to plan and implement such large projects as this dam removal without the funding and leadership of our partner, Huron Pines," said Carole Plunkey of the Pine River-Van Etten Lake Watershed Coalition. "The finished product complete with the new footbridge fits right in to the natural landscape and we're proud to be a small part of this huge endeavor."



Buhl Dam - Before



Former site of Buhl Dam - After

# Restoring Coastal Resources

Rich with natural resources and recreational opportunities, Alpena is home to the Lake Huron coastline, the Thunder Bay River, vast wetlands, forests and trails that provide the perfect ecosystem for unique and rare plants and wildlife. It's a great place for people to connect with nature and we want to ensure that connection is protected for years to come.

We take a proactive approach to land stewardship. Diverse natural communities of native plants and animals are more resilient to threats like invasive species, erosion and extreme weather, and by acting quickly, we can control invasive plants before they are well-established and difficult to remove. We do this through extensive monitoring, community education, invasive plant treatment and habitat restoration. Below are some of our current projects focused on the Alpena area.

#### Monitoring

In 2017, we completed an invasive plant inventory of Alpena's major roads and parks, the results of which will be assembled into a report with strategic actions the city, county and partners can take to stop the spread of invasive species.

We also worked with our partners at the Michigan Natural Features Inventory to survey native plants and reptiles to understand the animals' use of the coastal wetlands surrounding Alpena, which will help inform future habitat restoration work.

#### **Education**

We reach out to local nurseries and landowners about the benefits of selling and using native plants for landscaping, erosion control and water filtration. We also help people understand how to identify invasive plants and what steps to take for proper removal. In 2017, we met with over 50 Alpena landowners to talk about invasive species and protecting their shoreline from erosion and water quality problems, which resulted in 700 feet of native greenbelt planting and over 20 acres of invasive phragmites treatment. These plantings will help prevent polluted runoff from entering Lake Huron while also providing habitat for pollinators and other wildlife, reducing open space for invasive species to grow. We'll be looking for landowners to help us plant another 300 feet in 2018.

We also coordinate closely with the Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative program and Alpena schools to reach children and their families through hands-on learning about water, forests, dunes and native plants. Huron Pines has received funding from the Besser Foundation, Eagle Creek Renewable Energy and the Michigan Invasive Species Grant Program, allowing us to initiate a volunteer effort to remove European frog-bit, an aquatic invasive species, from the Thunder Bay River Watershed. This plant is spreading in areas where the water moves slowly, making its way along the river and out into Lake Huron. Volunteers have been working hard and making a difference at the Alpena Wildlife Sanctuary, with help from local elementary students at special workdays. Our annual Frog-Bit Challenge is a great opportunity to learn about the effects of invasive species on wildlife habitat, water quality and recreation.

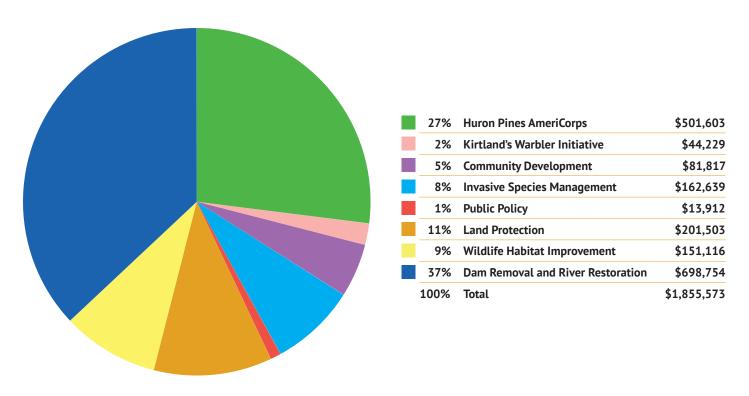
#### **Habitat Restoration**

In 2017 the Huron Pines summer field crew, with the help of The Nature Conservancy's stewardship crew treated invasive species in and around Squaw Bay. They also placed basking logs and cover boards to enhance habitat for rare species of turtles and snakes in the coastal marsh area of Squaw Bay.

Additionally, through our annual invasive species cost-share program our summer field crew treated over 72 acres of invasive phragmites along the Lake Huron shoreline and spent 30 hours removing Japanese knotweed within the city of Alpena, to protect native habitat as well as homes and roads threatened by these plants' strong roots. This work was funded through the Michigan Invasive Species Grant Program, Environmental Protection Agency-Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Services-Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program.



# **Huron Pines Program Expenses 2017**



## **Financial Overview**

Revenue	2016	2017
Annual Giving	\$49,712	\$41,500
Contributions	\$238,081	\$288,074
Contractual Services	\$250,315	\$284,902
Federal Grants	\$846,854	\$1,360,673
State Grants	\$327,701	\$320,400
Total Revenue	\$1,712,663	\$2,295,549

Expenses	2016	2017
Fundraising	\$17,628	\$16,668
Management	\$359,811	\$416,253
Program	\$1,334,045	\$1,855,575
Total Expenses	\$1,711,484	\$2,288,496
Net Income	\$1,179	\$7,053



# Grants \$10,000+

The Americana Foundation
Bay Area Community Foundation-Saginaw Bay
Watershed Restoration Fund
Besser Foundation
The Carls Foundation
Corporation for National and Community Service
The Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow Foundation
Eagle Creek Renewable Energy
Rollin M. Gerstacker Foundation
Great Lakes Commission
Great Lakes Fishery Trust
Great Lakes Restoration Initiative
ITC Holdings Corp.
Michigan Department of Military & Veterans
Affairs - Camp Grayling

Aquatic Habitat Grant Program
Habitat Improvement Account
Wildlife Habitat Grant Program
Michigan Community Service Commission
Michigan Invasive Species Grant Program
National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Sustain Our Great Lakes Program
Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network (WIN)
The Elizabeth, Allan & Warren Shelden Fund
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
U.S. Fish & Wildlife ServicePartners for Fish and Wildlife Program

Michigan Department of Natural Resources-

#### \$1,000-2,499

Au Sable River Property Owners Association Au Sable North Branch Area Foundation Heart of the Lakes Otsego County Community Foundation Otsego County United Way William B. Mershon Chapter of Trout Unlimited

#### \$500-999

Dr. Patrick J. McNamara Fund of the Otsego County Community Foundation

#### \$100-499

Community Fund of the Otsego County
Community Foundation
Youth Fund of the Otsego County Community
Foundation

# Business Gifts Business Gifts \$1.000-2.499

Consumers Energy DTE Energy

#### **Business Gifts \$500-999**

Fischer Insurance Agency Huntington Bank Jay's Sporting Goods M&M Excavating Inc. Paddle Hard Brewing LLC Snowbelt Brewing Company

#### **Business Gifts \$100-499**

Core Energy, LLC Huron Engineering and Surveying, Inc. Latitudes Tavern Line 45 Straley Lamp & Kraenzlein PC

#### **Business Gifts \$1-99**

The Brook of Grayling
Dunn's Business Solutions suggested by M&M
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The Chip and Betsy Erwin Family

#### \$1,000-2,499

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recommended by Michael Lewis

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