



**Huron
Pines**

Annual Report 2021

*Healthy Water
Protected Places
Vibrant Communities*



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Dear friends,

Imagine your favorite place to find peace, explore nature or share an outdoor adventure. If that place touches the forests, rivers or shores of Northeast Michigan, we are working to protect and improve it at Huron Pines.

We took some big leaps in 2021 – we increased our staff, launched our most critical land acquisition project to date, and came away with a long list of successes – none of which would be possible without the generosity of people like you. Thank you for making our vision for community-driven conservation a reality with your engagement and support.

In supporting Huron Pines, you joined forces with many like-minded individuals, organizations and businesses and helped make a difference that we often count by miles restored and acres protected, but that can also be measured by lives improved. Whether it's the photos you share of a fresh catch on the bank of a stream we helped restore, an email from an AmeriCorps alum about how happy they are in their new conservation career or a message about how your bird watching has improved since our stewardship team last visited, these personal connections are what bring us the most joy.

The benefits that come from our efforts to protect and enhance natural resources don't only include a greater variety of plants and animals, fewer invasive species, a better fishery and reduced pollution. The benefits are also important economically, as we help attract funding to local communities, create good jobs and leverage other support to get important projects completed. The benefits of our work create more recreational opportunities, be it more access to water, creation of trails or opportunities to come together to experience the outdoors. Our work helps connect people, young and old, encourages them to explore the natural world around them, and helps teach us all how to become better stewards of the planet.

In 2021, we built on the momentum of previous years and saw gains in all of these areas that exceeded our expectations. As an important contributor to our efforts, we hope those gains exceeded your expectations as well. Thanks for being a part of what we're working to accomplish for the land, water and people of Northern Michigan. We hope to see you out in the woods, on the water or along the shore very soon.

Brad Jensen

Executive Director

Joe Jarecki

Board Chair

Our Mission

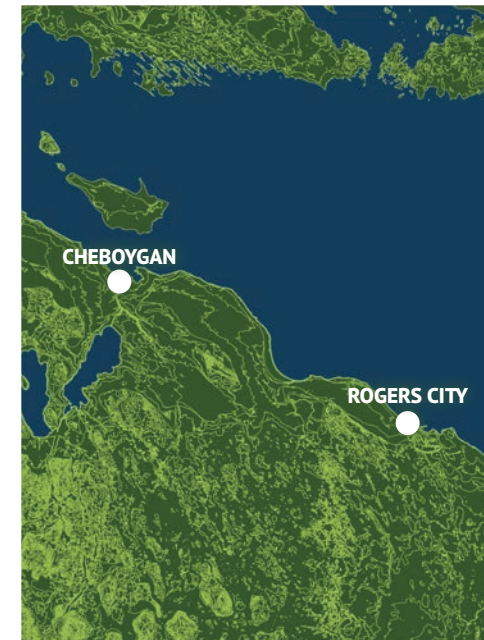
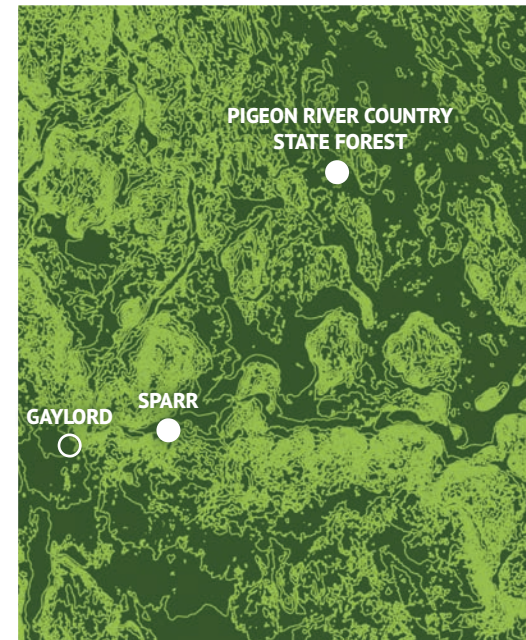
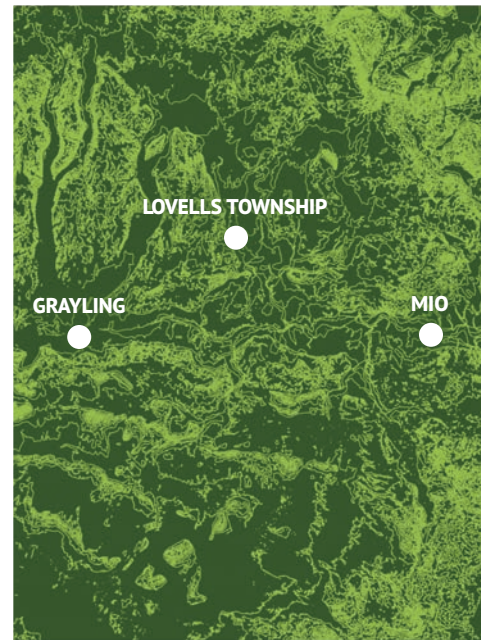
Conserve and enhance Northern Michigan's natural resources to ensure healthy water, protected places and vibrant communities.

Our Vision

Conservation driven by engaged, empowered communities.

Cover: Aerial view of the shoreline at the Lake Huron Coastal Preserve in Alabaster Township. Photo courtesy of Overboard Media. Above: Huron Pines board, staff and AmeriCorps members gather at P.H. Hoefft State Park for an annual meeting.

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Lake Huron Coastal Preserve

In 2021, Huron Pines set out to raise \$2.5 million to permanently protect nearly a mile of Lake Huron shoreline.

This project allowed us to test a new model of land protection that advances our vision of conservation driven by engaged, empowered communities. Instead of creating a new preserve of our own, we helped facilitate the planning, promotion and fundraising of the project in partnership with Alabaster Township, where the property is located.

Thanks to the generous support of foundations, businesses, individuals and the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF), we surpassed our fundraising goal and now the 145-acre property will become a public nature preserve owned in perpetuity by Alabaster Township. The mature hardwoods, forested wetlands and cobble beach provide ideal plant and wildlife habitat and plenty of opportunities for recreation and relaxation.

Huron Pines purchased the property at the end of 2020, as a temporary measure to take it off of the commercial real estate market, with the help of a short-term loan from The Conservation Fund.

Huron Pines worked closely with Alabaster Township over the past year to establish land management guidelines, raise funds for the property, secure public support and submit the grant proposal to the MNRTF.

The MNRTF funds come from royalties on the sale and lease of state-owned minerals (primarily oil and gas). Over the past 45 years, the MNRTF has granted more than \$1.2 billion to state and local units of government to develop and improve recreation opportunities in Michigan.

“We’re so excited for the community of Alabaster and all the people who love to come up north and enjoy Lake Huron,” said Huron Pines Executive Director Brad Jensen. “This project has been a true partnership, with so many individuals and groups helping to make sure the funding was available to protect and enjoy this stretch of shoreline for generations to come.”

Huron Pines was able to raise over \$1 million thanks to foundations, private funders and individual donors. The MNRTF’s requirement for local match contributions will be fulfilled with funds from The Carls Foundation; Elizabeth, Allan and Warren Shelden Fund; Pete and Carol Walters; John Woollam; The Albanese Family Fund; Alabaster Township;

Donette Spiekerman and the many individual supporters who gave during the public fundraising campaign.

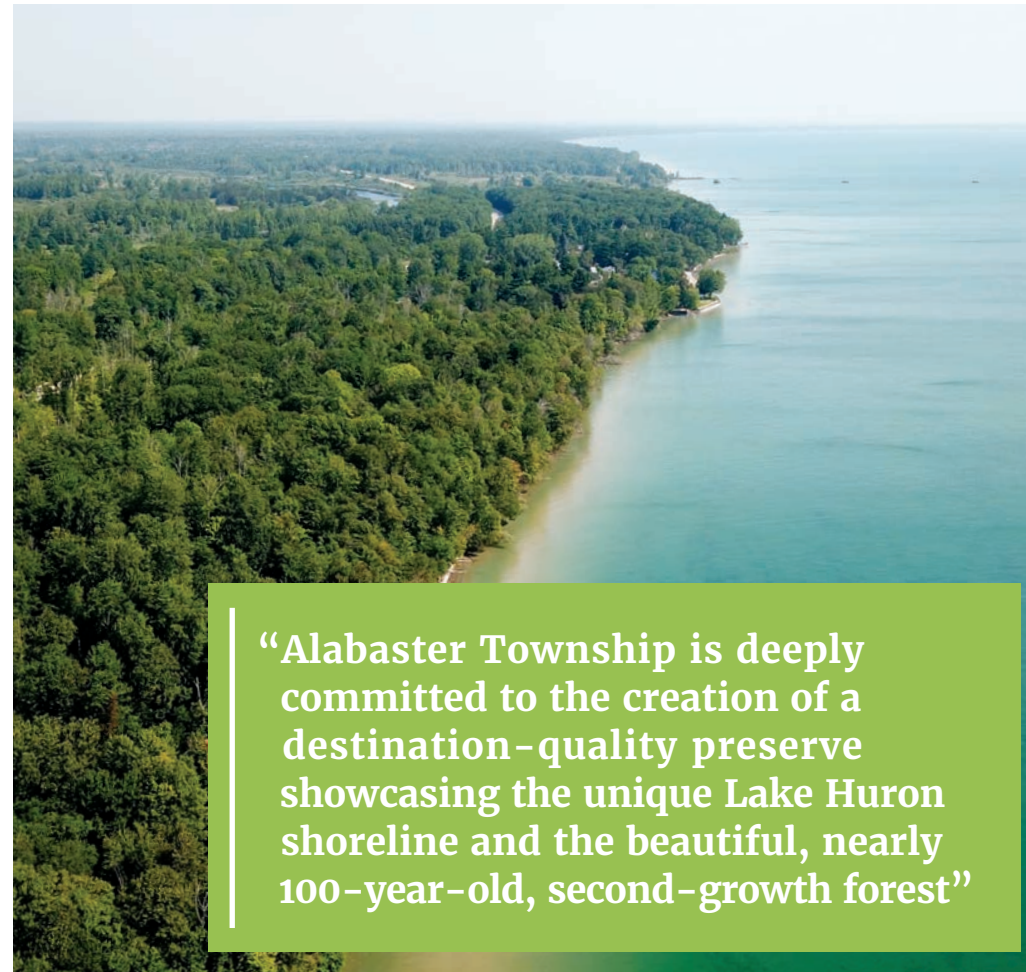
“Alabaster Township is deeply committed to the creation of a destination-quality preserve showcasing the unique Lake Huron shoreline and the beautiful, nearly 100-year-old second-growth forest,” said Alabaster Township Supervisor Stephanie Wentworth. “This is a success only because of our strong partnerships, public support and volunteers. We are excited for all that 2022 has in store to create this public space.”

Now that the grant has been approved, the next step is for funds to be appropriated by the Michigan Legislature this spring. The goal is to transfer ownership of the property from Huron Pines to Alabaster Township by the end of 2022.

The property is currently open to the public for hiking and exploring. Hunting and motorized vehicles are prohibited. Biking is allowed on the Alabaster Township Bike Path that runs alongside the preserve property.

Huron Pines will continue to work closely with Alabaster Township to finalize a management plan for the property which will include longer-term plans to expand trails and improve access to Lake Huron.

Scenes from around Lake Huron Coastal Preserve. Aerial photos courtesy of Overboard Media.



“Alabaster Township is deeply committed to the creation of a destination-quality preserve showcasing the unique Lake Huron shoreline and the beautiful, nearly 100-year-old, second-growth forest”





The Forefront of Forever

Developed in 2019 by Canadian and U.S. community foundation and conservation partners, the Lake Huron Forever initiative aims to support conservation and collaboration to strengthen the health and well-being of residents and natural resources on both sides of Lake Huron.

Huron Pines, and our partners, are taking steps to engage communities and activate local solutions to sustain a healthy Lake Huron forever. Local solutions include land protection, restoration, stewardship, infrastructure improvements, municipal ordinances, city planning and any positive action that contributes to the sustainable protection of the land and water and the vitality of Lake Huron. Here are two examples of Lake Huron Forever in action.

Introducing the First Lake Huron Forever Community

The people of Au Gres have been leaders in the Lake Huron Forever initiative since its inception. Students, teachers, city council members and community partners have come together to learn, share ideas and initiate on-the-ground improvements to protect the health of Lake Huron.

Au Gres reached an incredible milestone when they became the first community to sign the Lake Huron Forever Pledge this January. The pledge is a way for coastal communities to come together to show their public support and commitment to sustaining the health of Lake Huron and its surrounding resources. The goal is to use the pledge as a guide for municipal leaders to gain a sense of clarity and understanding of what they can do to help protect the natural resources on which their communities rely.

In Au Gres, municipal workers will be trained to maintain several rain gardens that have been installed to filter and absorb stormwater that can carry oil, dirt and other pollutants into the nearby river and lake. The city has committed to prioritizing natural resources in their planning efforts, prioritizing invasive species management, using environmentally friendly

products in city-managed spaces and developing more community education programs.

As more communities sign on to the pledge, the full vision of Lake Huron Forever will become reality: Better water quality for Lake Huron and healthier, more sustainable communities all along her coast.

“Au Gres, like many rural lakefront communities, is strongly committed to the health of our natural resources as well as the safety and security of our residents,” said Mayor Michael Hoadley. “This pledge will implement public awareness that we are engaged in preserving our waterways and inform members of the community about what they can do to help.”

Au Gres has a history of taking proactive steps to protect its water quality and surrounding natural areas; the pledge was a culmination of many years of conservation-driven priorities and decision making. The city worked with the Au Gres-Sims School and Huron Pines to install rain garden bioswales at Riverside Park in 2020, reducing the amount of stormwater runoff that enters the Au Gres River and nearby Lake Huron. Students at Au Gres-Sims maintain a rain garden on their school property that was first installed in 2019. They also maintain a campus greenhouse to grow native plants for use in future rain garden and bioswale projects.

“This pledge will implement public awareness that we are engaged in preserving our waterways and inform members of the community about what they can do to help”

“Au Gres follows the philosophy that their community and economic health is dependent on these resources long term,” said Huron Pines Water Program Director Samantha Nellis. “They’ve already proven their commitment and we are excited to see them become the first Lake Huron Forever community.”

Taking the Long View at Tuttle Marsh

Twenty-five miles northeast of Au Gres, Huron Pines is undertaking a different kind of partnership with the similar goal of protecting the broader ecological health of Lake Huron.

Tuttle Marsh Wildlife Area encompasses 5,000 acres of natural and manmade wetlands in eastern Iosco County. Managed by the U.S. Forest Service, the complex is an important stopover site for all kinds of migratory waterfowl and songbirds, particularly in spring and fall. This makes it a popular attraction for birders who drive or walk the earthen dike which bisects the complex and offers elevated views of its many shallow pools teeming with life.

The expanse of this land and its ecological and recreational value make restoration a significant undertaking and a high priority. Huron Pines has teamed up with the U. S. Forest Service to ensure that this property is restored to its ideal native habitat.

“One of Michigan’s iconic rivers passes through that region and its woodland marsh and wetland forests provide important water filtration as it moves toward Lake Huron”

“The Au Sable, one of Michigan’s iconic rivers, passes through that region and its woodland marsh and wetland forests provide important water filtration as it moves toward Lake Huron,” said Huron Pines Conservation Stewardship Director Steve Woods. “The Forest Service is working hard to keep it a place with high value for recreation and wildlife, and it’s a priority for our coastal efforts as well.”

This multi-year project requires a commitment to long-term success in order to get the best results possible. Before native plants can be restored, harmful invasive species encroaching on the wetlands have to be treated and eradicated. This process started in 2020 and continued throughout 2021 with successful treatments of invasive phragmites moving from the dike into the woodland and marsh complex.

Huron Pines will use native grass and wildflower seed to revegetate treated areas. These native plants will serve as high-quality habitat for pollinating insects and as a food source for songbirds, while their deep root systems will help stabilize banks and capture stormwater runoff.

Left page: A stretch of Lake Huron shoreline.

Top right: Huron Pines stewardship technicians treat invasive phragmites at Tuttle Marsh.

Bottom right: Huron Pines staff assist Au Gres-Sims students and staff to put native plants in the soil at the Riverside Park bioswale project.





Stewards of Land and Water

Our focus on healthy water, protected places and vibrant communities is rooted in our belief that the land, water and people of Northern Michigan have an equally important role in protecting our most precious places.

To us, Lake Huron Forever goes beyond the coast. It's the culmination of our commitment to conserving the millions of acres of land and water that make up the Lake Huron Watershed in Northeast Michigan. If you find a healthy river, chances are high that there's a healthy forest nearby.

The Au Sable River is a perfect example of a celebrated resource supported by the land that surrounds it and the people who love it. Here are some snapshots of how Huron Pines and our upstream partners are working together to keep land and water protected from headwaters to open waters.

The Forest Through the Trees

In September, Huron Pines joined 42 Grayling Middle School sixth-graders to explore their school forest property. This public property is the result of the Municipal Forest Act passed in 1931 which allowed schools to take over ownership of tax reverted properties to use them for educational and community benefit. Huron Pines has been partnering with Northern Michigan schools for the past five years to help them integrate school forest management and hands-on education into their classrooms.

On this particular day, students moved between stations to learn about different aspects of the forest and forest health. Huron Pines kicked off the afternoon with an introduction to invasive species and decontamination. Each student took a turn with a boot brush to clean seed-laden soil from their shoes when they stepped off the bus to prevent invasive plants from entering their school forest.

"There aren't many invasive species in our school forest and the students and I had a really good talk about what we can do to keep it that way," teacher Carrie Wilkinson said.

Wilkinson aided her students in collecting jars of soil from the pine-dominant landscape that day for later analysis in the classroom to determine the soil composition of their school forest. She said the classwork and field exploration trip helped lay the foundation for future school activities and stewardship efforts at the 40-acre forest.

"The plan is to have our outdoor recreation class work on designing and building trails there and we'd love to have Huron Pines' help with that," Wilkinson said.

Wading Into Conservation

Huron Pines joined a group of enthusiastic volunteers in August, teaming up with members of the Au Sable North Branch Area Foundation for two days of invasive species treatment. Volunteers, decked out in waders or paddling kayaks, hand-pulled purple loosestrife or clipped and bagged its purple blossoms, effectively keeping this prolific invasive species from going to seed.

This was the third consecutive year we've partnered with the foundation on this stretch of river between Lovells and its confluence with the Main Branch. Starting with an inventory in 2019 followed by two seasons of treatment, the impacts of that work are starting to show.

"There was a noticeable reduction in the presence of purple loosestrife there this year which was really rewarding to see," said Huron Pines



"There aren't many invasive species in our school forest and the students and I had a really good talk about what we can do to keep it that way"

Stewardship Program Coordinator Shelby Bauer, noting 500 acres of river corridor was treated this season. "We had five volunteers over the course of two days and, with their help, we were really able to conduct a selective treatment of that area with minimal impact to the surrounding environment."

Energy to Action

Further downstream, Huron Pines led a day of hands-on stewardship and education at Mio Dam Pond on the Au Sable River with volunteers from Consumers Energy.

The two organizations have collaborated since 2012 on habitat restoration projects near Consumers Energy property along the Au Sable.

"Consumers Energy employees are great volunteers because they live and work near the Au Sable and understand how important it is to our communities," said Huron Pines Community Program Director Abigail Ertel. "We value these days spent in the field with their staff and these opportunities to help reinforce their commitment to protecting the natural resources of the communities we all serve."

Bauer and other Huron Pines staff trained Consumers Energy employees on how to identify invasive plant species on the pond and demonstrated how to properly clean recreational equipment like kayaks and waders to prevent further spread of invasive species. The group spent the afternoon restoring a stretch of shoreline around Camp Ten Bridge, the public fishing docks and boat launch by hand-pulling purple loosestrife plants growing in shallow water, filling five contractor bags with the invasive plants.

"Our volunteers really enjoy learning about habitat conservation and soaking up the expertise from our friends at Huron Pines," said Adam Monroe, Executive Director of Hydro Generation for Consumers Energy and one of the day's volunteers. "We're impressed by Huron Pines' plans to protect Michigan's precious resources. Gaining from their knowledge also helps us in our work to serve our Michigan customers and have a positive impact on the planet."

In May of 2021, the Consumers Energy Foundation presented Huron Pines with a \$200,000 Planet Award. The funding has helped launch the Protect Wild Places program, empowering Michigan communities to support land and water conservation by partnering with Huron Pines to restore 5,000 acres of wildlife habitat and recreational land, and 150 miles of waterways and Great Lakes shoreline. This program supports our vision of conservation driven by engaged, empowered communities as it allows us to work directly with local residents, municipalities and conservation partners to help communities build the infrastructure, best practices and skills needed to support — and eventually drive — the long-term health of the landscape for generations to come.

Participants will not only learn about natural resources, they will also be challenged to get out on the land or in the water to put new skills into practice. Some example topics to be covered through events and volunteer opportunities include invasive species prevention, leave no trace principles, native habitat restoration, forest management and water monitoring.

Now is the time to turn enthusiasm for the outdoors into action to more deeply engage communities in habitat and water quality improvements.

Left page: Grayling Middle School sixth-graders explore their school forest with Huron Pines staff and learn how to prevent the spread of invasive species.

At right: Consumers Energy and Huron Pines staff clear invasive purple loosestrife from the shore of Mio Dam Pond.



"Our volunteers enjoy learning about habitat conservation and soaking up the expertise from our friends at Huron Pines"





From Creek to Coast

The health of Lake Huron is tied directly to the water flowing into it.

Three major restoration projects on tributaries of the Thunder Bay River in 2021 reconnected 39 miles of coldwater habitat and significantly reduced the amount of sediment and other pollutants entering Lake Huron from one corner of the watershed in Montmorency County.

A timber bridge now stands where Carter Road crosses Gilchrist Creek southeast of Atlanta. Twenty miles upstream at Greasy Creek Road, a new bottomless arch culvert allows brook and brown trout access to vital spawning, nursery and refuge habitat. Both structures, installed during the summer of 2021, address long standing issues with erosion and virtually eliminate the risk of road washouts on one of the highest quality tributaries of the Thunder Bay River.

Huron Pines also installed a timber bridge where nearby Schmellers Road crosses Hunt Creek, reconnecting another 10 miles of upstream habitat by replacing three undersized culverts which were a bottleneck in the river and a velocity barrier for fish. Hunt Creek flows through a large tract of state forest and has deep ties to Michigan's fishing history as the former site of Hunt Creek Fisheries Research Station. For 70 years, researchers at the remote facility experimented with fish stocking and

population survey techniques on Hunt Creek itself, shaping strategies still in use today across Michigan and parts of the Midwest.

“Everything we do in the upper watershed has a direct impact on Lake Huron itself”

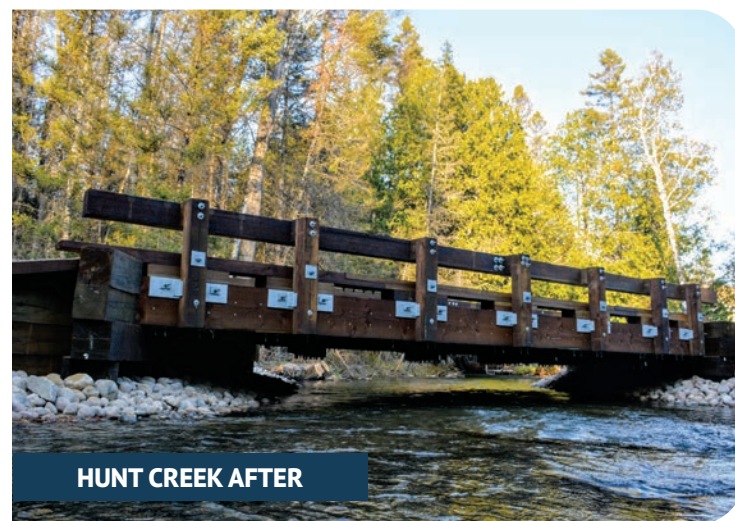
All three projects have reconnected vital spawning and refuge habitat for fish and other river life, a crucial countermeasure to a changing climate bringing more extreme temperatures, drought and storm events. These restorations also greatly reduce the amount of sediment, gravel, road salt and motor vehicle oils washing into the Thunder Bay River.

“Everything we do in the upper watershed has a direct impact on Lake Huron itself,” said Senior Project Manager Josh Leisen. “These were three high-stakes projects and it’s awesome to see their ecological benefits realized.”

Restoration of this part of the Thunder Bay River Watershed began in 2020 with the installation of a timber bridge over Gilchrist Creek at Harwood Road. A fifth project is planned at Hall Road on the Main Branch Thunder Bay River in 2023.



HUNT CREEK BEFORE



HUNT CREEK AFTER

Funding for these projects come from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's National Fish Passage Program, Great Lakes Fishery Trust and Walters Family Foundation. Montmorency County Road Commission provided in-kind labor and equipment.

Assessing Alpena's Stormwater

Where the Thunder Bay River meets Lake Huron in Alpena, Huron Pines has completed a stormwater assessment to help community leaders improve the ways in which the port city manages its stormwater runoff, a move which will benefit Alpena and Lake Huron well into the future.

Stormwater is rainfall and snowmelt that runs over land and drains into nearby bodies of water, picking up and transporting pollutants such as fertilizer, salt, oils, sediment and litter which can result in beach closures, harm fish and wildlife, and trigger algae blooms.

Throughout 2021, Huron Pines digitized and mapped Alpena's stormwater system, including drains to the river and Lake Huron, then estimated how much runoff and potential contaminants are entering those systems

annually. This information will be used to identify problem areas where man-made or nature-based infrastructure solutions could make the most impact in capturing stormwater and contaminants before it enters Lake Huron, the source of drinking water for 10,000 people in Northeast Michigan's largest city.

Solutions could include green stormwater infrastructure like rain gardens, bioswales, tree trenches and urban tree canopy improvements, all of which can improve aesthetics, support local tourism and recreation and build community vibrancy.

“The stormwater assessment will guide us through some brainstorming sessions with city staff and other community partners this year,” said Huron Pines Water Program Director Samantha Nellis. “By the end of 2022, we hope to have a plan with some engineering designs ready to implement. Stormwater assessments like this one are a powerful tool for leveraging grant dollars for on-the-ground work.”

The stormwater assessment is supported by the Community Foundation of Northeast Michigan, Northeast Michigan Youth Advisory Council and Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy.



GILCHRIST CREEK BEFORE



GILCHRIST CREEK AFTER



Welcome to Peggy's Place

In 1923, after a 20-year career mining iron ore in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, Michael Borkowski and Pelagia Litwin Borkowski paid \$1,700 for 80 acres in the heart of Northern Lower Michigan.

With the help of family, they worked the land and it became their lifeline through subsistence farming. It continued to be passed down through the generations as a summer refuge, a retirement home and, for some, a final resting place.

Peggy Kusnerz is the great-granddaughter of Michael and Pelagia and the last living relative in the Borkowski lineage to own the land. Passed down through four generations, Peggy is determined to keep the family legacy alive by ensuring the land will be cared for long after she is gone.

"I owe a lot to this land," she said. "I've been visiting it since I was 6 months old, so the land is just really in me. It's my home. I know where I come from in this place."

But Peggy knows the property is not the same as it was before. Its fields, once worked and productive, had become a purple sea of spotted knapweed; its woods, a harbor for other invasive species that disrupt the native habitat and food source for the songbirds which drew her in as a child. For now, Peggy's land does not fit her family's legacy but she is not one to sit idly by.

"I owe a lot to this land. I've been visiting since I was 6 months old, so the land is just really in me. It's my home and I know where I come from in this place."

Peggy came to Huron Pines wanting to permanently protect her property from division and development, and also wanting to see that it is restored to its fullest potential.

"Seeing that commitment to the work of land conservation just makes

me feel great, especially the young women that are on staff," Peggy said. "You have to remember that I lived in a time when women couldn't get a mortgage, and women had a tough road. Observing the women in the field here working at a thing they have passion for just tells me that things are going to be okay."

Sustainability Through Diversity

One approach to restoring Peggy's property is through our budding native seed program.

Starting in the summer of 2021, members of our Restoration Team visited remote sites around Northern Michigan — remnants of once-dominant prairie landscapes teeming with native wildflowers and grasses — and collected seed to propagate and rebuild natural plant communities in places which lack a similar biodiversity.

Peggy's field was cleared of invasive species by our staff to make way for plantings of this native seed in October 2021. This will allow the area to be restored more quickly and with more plant diversity, boosting its resilience to change. More planting will come this spring once we see what blooms successfully in the early stages of this multi-year effort to transform the landscape.

The long-term commitment to the land requires Peggy and Huron Pines to think about the future of the landscape and changing climate conditions. She recalls stories her mother told of seeing frost on the ground every month of the year when she was growing up and, though the winters in Otsego County are still harsh, summers are hotter without much relief or rain for weeks or months at a time.

"Diversity is the most important part of climate resilience," Huron Pines Conservation Stewardship Director Steve Woods said. "We're taking a field that had a small number of almost entirely nonnative species and are transforming it into a place with 50 species of native plants. This means that, under any condition, there will still be food and shelter for wildlife. If we can convert degraded sites into habitats with high diversity, it will make a positive impact on the landscape as a whole."

"If my property can be a healthier place to live for all species or a place of refuge, let's make that happen," she said.



"If my property can be a healthier place to live for all species or a place of refuge, let's make that happen"

Show and Tell

As our restoration efforts continue on her property, Peggy has offered to let it be used as a teaching tool to demonstrate to other landowners how a similar partnership with Huron Pines can breathe new life into their property and the surrounding landscape.

"We hope other landowners will adopt her stewardship ethic of not just 'living' on the land but taking an active role in its sustainable management," Woods said. "This work is consistent with the vision for Huron Pines — conservation driven by engaged, empowered communities — and this is exactly what that looks like."

"It's so easy to talk about some of these concepts and subjects but if you can show someone a beautiful field and healthy forests, and that there are people who can help them get there, then you are halfway to action," Peggy said.

Peggy's eagerness to teach and share is the glue of this valuable project. With permanent land protection in the future as the driver, Huron Pines staff will build community and landowner education into our work here very easily.

"Peggy has become a friend, donor and champion for the organization's vision. This is what brings my everyday work to life," said Huron Pines Land Protection Director Heather Huffstutler. Working with Peggy to reach her goals for her family legacy, Heather will help determine the right path to permanent protection of this land for future generations.

As those plans are finalized, we'll continue to enjoy the peace here, the renewed diversity being built and a quick walk through the labyrinth Peggy and her late husband, Michael Sanders, built. The sense of place created by Peggy and her vision for healthy soil, undeveloped land and supporting a vibrant community are undeniable.

Left page: Native poverty grass seed drying in paper bags.

Top: Collecting seeds in the field.

At right: Peggy's great-uncle Adolf (at the reins) bringing in the hay from the field while Peggy is held by her father. Brad Jensen and Peggy Kusnerz during a visit to Peggy's property. The freshly cleared field, ready for native seed to be spread.





Pigeon River Reconnected

A new bridge and a free-flowing Pigeon River represent both a major improvement in road infrastructure and another big step forward in our longstanding mission to restore one of Northern Michigan's most beloved trout streams.

The Ford Lake Road crossing lies within a mile of Pigeon River Country State Forest Headquarters. It is well known by visitors and locals as a figurative jumping-off point for fishing or paddling the river and hiking the Shingle Mill Pathway, and as a literal one for escaping the heat of summer with a plunge into the Pigeon River.

As popular as the crossing is for people, Ford Lake Road has also long been the end of the line for fish and other river life because of high-velocity water exiting the old crossing structure. Today, a 44-foot timber bridge ushers trout to a staggering 50 miles of upstream spawning habitat and coldwater refuge. When the old structure was in place, this habitat was inaccessible during heavy rains or high water, as the stream was flowing too fast for the fish to swim upstream through the culverts.

Known to many as "The Tubes," the three corrugated pipe culverts of the former structure at Ford Lake Road were the root of many problems for the river and the roadway. Not just a barrier for fish, fast-moving water also carved a deep hole into the riverbed and washed harmful sediment downstream where it covered important gravel habitats. Erosion of the structure itself forced frequent repairs by the Otsego County Road Commission.

When 3 ½ inches of rain fell on the Vanderbilt area on an October night in 2020, another symptom of the undersized crossing became all too apparent. Swelled with floodwater, the Pigeon River surged over its banks and topped Ford Lake Road, washing away a large part of the roadway and a campsite, sending an estimated 400 tons of sediment into the river. Past washouts like this one had been a recurring source of sediment entering the trout stream and an ongoing, expensive maintenance issue for the road commission.

Construction of the new bridge began in April with site preparation and staging of machines and materials. Timber and sheet pilings were driven with two of the culverts still in place, diverting the stream around the project site to minimize sediment input into the river. With the west abutment done, work shifted in midsummer to the removal of the remaining two culverts and construction of the bridge's east end. The timber deck was laid in late summer and guardrails were installed by November.

Visitors returning to the Ford Lake Road site this spring to camp, hike, fish or paddle will be welcomed with a proper and aesthetically pleasing timber bridge heralding a bright future for the Pigeon River.

"I hope people see how beautiful it is now and appreciate that the Pigeon River looks and sounds the way it's supposed to," said Huron Pines Associate Director Lisha Ramsdell. "I truly believe people will still create memories there that stay with them forever, while knowing the stream is far better off with this new bridge."

While this restoration is significant in its own right, the cumulative impact it has on the Pigeon River was made possible because of the 2015 removal of the dam at Song of the Morning Ranch five miles upstream of Ford Lake Road. That project, also led by Huron Pines, replaced a century-old dam with a timber bridge, transformed a 45-acre impoundment back into a natural stream and reconnected a total of 45 miles of Pigeon River headwaters. Another four road/stream crossing restorations are planned for 2022 and 2023 to mend the last few broken links in the Pigeon River system.

This project was managed by Huron Pines and supported by Otsego County Road Commission. Funding support came from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Sustain Our Great Lakes Program, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's National Fish Passage and Great Lakes Basin Fish Habitat Partnership programs, Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Walters Family Foundation.

Above: The Ford Lake Road timber bridge over the Pigeon River in December.

Right page, top to bottom: The former crossing at Ford Lake Road contributed to a washout after heavy rain in October 2020. Our Water Program staff visited the construction site in the summer of 2021. At bottom, the completed timber bridge.





Shoring Up Support

Our focus on protecting the water health of Lake Huron makes the harbor town of Rogers City and its conservation-minded community a natural partner for our organization.

Our relationship with Rogers City spans two decades and four mayors. In 2021, we finalized plans to work with an urban forester to expand the city's tree canopy to support water quality and enhance aesthetics with natural elements as Rogers City begins a downtown revitalization project starting in 2022.

Mayor Scott McLennan is deeply involved in our partnership efforts in his community and is an active volunteer with Huron Pines.

"Rogers City is known for its vast beach fronts and visitors are drawn to the area to take a swim, search for stones, launch a kayak or soak in the beauty that open access to the lake provides," McLennan said. "Keeping our water resources clean is critical to the city and Huron Pines is a great ally in efforts to protect all the natural resources that we so enjoy."

A May volunteer workday in 2021, marked a return to hosting public events and engaging community members in natural resource protection.

"That day was a great way for people to get back out in the field with us and was a radical success from that standpoint," said Brittany VanderWall, District Forester for Presque Isle Conservation District.

Two dozen volunteers joined Huron Pines and Presque Isle Conservation District to plant 55 trees at Roger City's Herman Vogler Conservation Area. That event was one of many planned projects supported by the conservation district, the city and local volunteers to help keep the Trout River and Lake Huron healthy and protected. The trees were planted to absorb and filter excess stormwater that flows into the nearby bodies of water. The project was supported by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Sustain Our Great Lakes Program.

"Natural resource conservation is part of the community's identity in Rogers City," said Huron Pines Water Program Director Samantha Nellis. "They are eager to take action, and planting trees is just one step in our restoration goals for the area."

In addition to supporting water quality, the trees were part of a plan to incorporate climate resilient species into the 270-acre recreation area. A mix of species were chosen, including bur oak and red cedar, specifically to see how they fare beyond the northern extent of their typical range.

"Trees adapt to changes in water and temperature over long periods of time. As conditions change, they can survive and change along with them. The rapid rate of climate change means that trees have a limited timeframe to adapt," Nellis said. "We're planting species that increase genetic diversity to give the trees a head start and improve their chances of sustaining themselves. We are trying to build resilience in Rogers City forests to retain clean air, clean water, flood control, recreation and tourism appeal."

"Huron Pines has the ability to fund projects and has experts in facilitating them. Partnering with Huron Pines is the perfect marriage."

Huron Pines partnered with the conservation district again in the fall to remove invasive honeysuckle at the conservation area and are planning a volunteer tree planting event near a shoreline park in Rogers City in May 2022 with 500 trees.

"As a conservation district we serve the public," VanderWall said. "Huron Pines has the ability to fund projects and has experts in facilitating them. Partnering with Huron Pines is the perfect marriage."

When Michigan Lieutenant Governor Garlin Gilchrist toured Rogers City in August, Mayor McLennan welcomed him as a guest to our Huron Pines retreat. From the steps of a historic pavilion at P.H. Hoeft State Park overlooking the shore of Lake Huron, Gilchrist gestured with open palms as he thanked Huron Pines for our work.

"The mayor was telling me about the work you do on invasive species and stewardship more broadly," Gilchrist said. "You share how important it is for everyone to be good stewards in a way that is accessible to them, in a way so that everybody knows they have a role to play today so we can protect what we need for tomorrow. This is the front line of how we respond to climate change as a people."



Left page: Michigan Lt. Gov. Garlin Gilchrist and Rogers City Mayor Scott McLennan address our board and staff during a gathering at P.H. Hoeft State Park in August.

Above: Scenes from a tree-planting day at Herman Vogler Conservation Area where we were joined by board member Greg Bator and his wife, Cecilia (top). Brittany VanderWall (bottom) is District Forester at Presque Isle Conservation District.



Cheers

Our business partners help us reach new audiences, present us with new fundraising opportunities and often have a personal passion for the outdoors. Cheboygan Brewing Company is no exception.

They recently released a special Pigeon River Pilsner that celebrates Pigeon River Country and bears our logo in tribute to our work to protect and restore the waterways of Northern Michigan.

"This easy drinking pilsner is pure and refreshing like the Pigeon River in Northern Michigan," reads the label. "To continue our stewardship of the outdoors, we pledge our support as a Sustaining Member to Huron Pines, whose mission is to conserve and enhance Northern Michigan's natural resources to ensure healthy water, protected places and vibrant communities."

Brewery owner Tony Pitts said his staff and patrons enjoy fishing, hiking and playing outdoors in the Pigeon River Country State Forest south of town.

"It has a special place in our hearts," Pitts said. "Huron Pines plays a very important role in protecting the places our staff and customers spend much of our time so it felt like a fitting partnership. The Pigeon River symbolizes what is great about this area, and honoring the river seemed natural to us."

Brewmaster Brian Lindsay is one staff member with a tie to both the Pigeon River and Huron Pines. Before brewing beer for Cheboygan Brewing Company, Lindsay served as a Huron Pines AmeriCorps member in 2013. He served with the Headwaters Chapter of Trout Unlimited where he focused on river improvement projects that took him to the Pigeon, Sturgeon and Black rivers.

Thanks to businesses like Cheboygan Brewing Company, Evil Queen Candles, M&M Excavating and Michigan Overboard, Huron Pines is building connections to new supporters across industries and across the state.

If you are a business interested in exploring a partnership opportunity with Huron Pines, contact Marketing and Development Director Colby Chilcote at colby@huronpines.org.



Heading North

It's barely sunup over the northern shore of Lake Huron but Larissa Schmock and Nick Theisen have already broken camp.

Nick hastily stows tents in the hatchback between waders, sleeping bags and provisions of coffee. Up in the driver's seat, Larissa pores over a map of the day's route with the heat on high, waiting for the sun to break and the April frost to thaw from the windshield. With so much to do, starting early is essential.

Over the course of six months, Huron Pines AmeriCorps members Larissa and Nick trekked to 800 road/stream crossing sites across nine watersheds, verifying existing data and gathering key information to guide future stream restoration efforts in the Eastern Upper Peninsula.

Larissa and Nick would visit two dozen sites on an average day, assessing each one and determining if further data should be collected. Farm drainages, dry ditches and wetland culverts constituted about half of the 800 sites. For the other half, they took detailed measurements of the stream, photographed and documented the condition of the structure, and logged each detail into a database. Just as it has guided Huron Pines' extensive river restoration work in Northern Lower Michigan, the Great Lakes Stream Crossing Inventory Protocol is helping us identify problem structures in the Eastern UP and prioritize them for future replacement.

Addressing erosion and fish passage issues on these northern streams is an extension of our Lake Huron Forever initiative and its mission to protect and restore the water quality of Lake Huron. A watershed-wide inventory is the first step in finding where our priorities overlap with those of county road commissions, state and federal natural resource agencies, tribal communities and conservation districts across the Eastern UP.

"This has been an opportunity to meet new partners outside our traditional service area," said Huron Pines Coastal Project Manager Amy Nowakowski. "Our colleagues in the Eastern UP have been really supportive and we share common goals around improving road infrastructure and protecting waterways."

One early outcome of these new partnerships is the potential restoration of Beavertail Creek in Chippewa County. Three undersized crossings of

the coastal tributary to Lake Huron have been identified for replacement in collaboration with the Chippewa County Road Commission and the Michigan DNR. Beavertail Creek is designated as a high-quality trout stream and replacing these road/stream crossings would reconnect 17 miles of aquatic habitat while rectifying maintenance issues for the road commission.

In Service of Huron Pines AmeriCorps

Another outcome of this project has been the fulfillment of the goal of Huron Pines AmeriCorps, a program which aims to develop leaders in conservation through valuable field experience and community service.

"Interacting with landowners and partners as a representative of Huron Pines really helped me develop professionally," said Larissa, who took a job with Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy following the completion of her Huron Pines AmeriCorps service. "Being the lead on the project taught me how to handle logistics and planning, to make decisions and keep organized."

Nick joined the full time staff of Huron Pines in January. As Water Program Technician, he'll support many components of our water-related work including road/stream crossing and invasive-plant inventories, community stormwater assessments, GIS mapping, and the development of a water quality monitoring program using both biological and chemical indicators.

"My service definitely helped me pave this path, to find what I like to do and have a passion for," he said.

"Their high level of motivation and service ethic is what made this project a success," said Amy, who supervised Larissa and Nick for the duration of their terms. "For a potential host site, Huron Pines AmeriCorps members can add a lot of value to your programs. Our members are motivated individuals seeking careers in natural resources and it's a valuable experience for everyone."

The Eastern UP road/stream crossing inventory was supported by the Great Lakes Fishery Trust and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Sustain Our Great Lakes Program.



Scenes from our Eastern UP road/stream crossing inventory in which Huron Pines AmeriCorps members documented hundreds of sites and Water Program staff visited with potential project partners.

Financial Overview

It's our goal to scale our efforts and increase the impact of our work to restore, enhance and conserve more land and water across Northern Michigan. We're grateful to our many individual donors, critical foundation funders and all our agency and business partners. With so many threats and demands on our natural resources, we anticipate the need for our work to continue to grow.

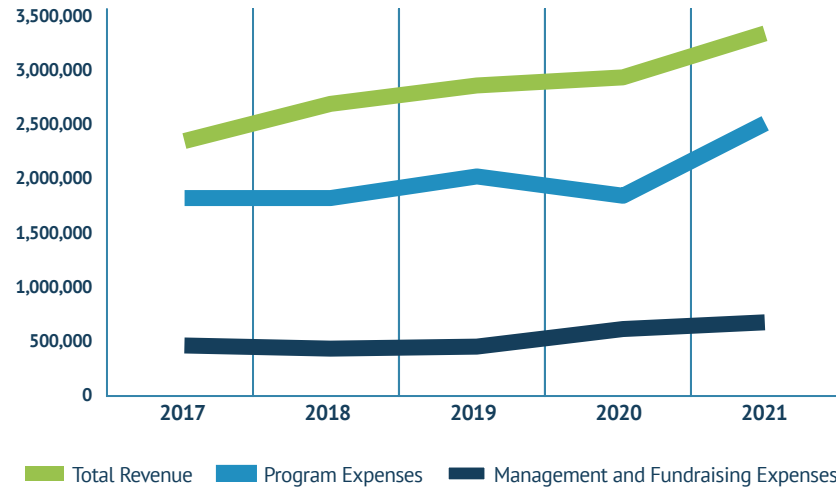
The top graph illustrates steady revenue and program growth over the past five years. Huron Pines manages a large number of contracts and coordinates multi-year, multi-partner projects, providing management and administrative support for most of those partnerships which is reflected in the line at the bottom of the graph which combines management and fundraising expenses.

The middle graph illustrates the breakdown of expenses in the past year by Huron Pines program area. Major project expenses, like building a bridge or acquiring a preserve, can vary widely from year to year but this provides a quick snapshot of how expenses were dispersed across programs in 2021.

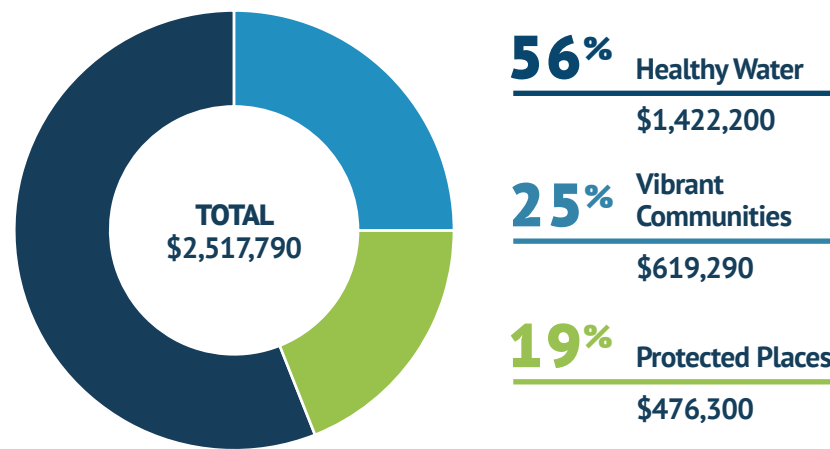
The bottom graph illustrates net assets over the past five years. Since 2017, Huron Pines has acquired three preserves – Hubbard Lake Nature Preserve, Emily Min Hunt Preserve and Lake Huron Coastal Preserve (which will be transferred to Alabaster Township later this year). The asset growth also reflects an increase in our endowed funds for long-term protection and success.

Huron Pines is independently audited each year and more detailed financial reports are available by contacting our office.

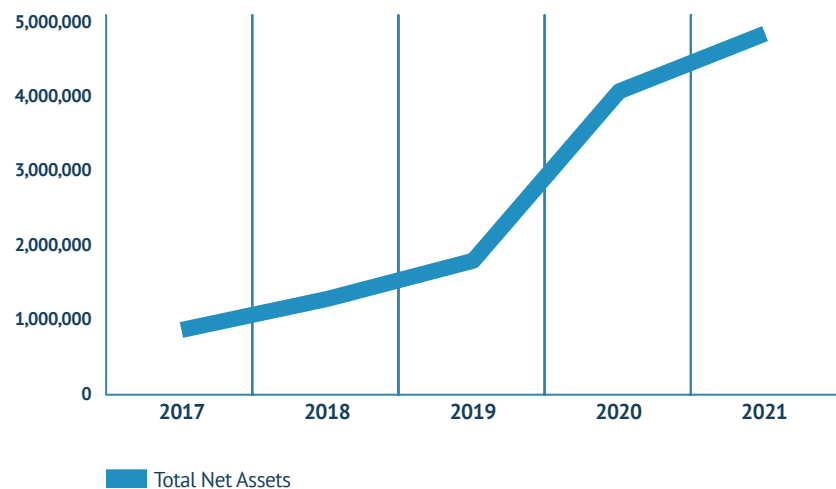
Five-Year Trend



2021 Program Expenses



2021 Net Assets



2021 Donor List

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In Honor Of

Eliana and Everett, our grandchildren
 From Gary and Ruth Barnes
Caleb and Eloise, our grandchildren
 From Sharon and Joe Czaika
Caleb
 From Sarah Czaika-Miller
Eloise
 From Ellen Czaika
**Dave Dempsey, Lake Huron's (and Michigan's)
 tireless environmental advocate**
 From Michiganographer

In Memory Of

Shelly Rouse
 From David Walicki



A Lasting Legacy for the Greatest Good

For over two decades, Joe and Judi Jarecki have watched Huron Pines evolve as an organization, its impact on the communities and ecosystems of Northern Michigan growing by the year.

Joe was first introduced to our work as a conservation partner during his career with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and he and Judi became loyal volunteers with our organization, with Joe now chairing the Huron Pines Board of Directors.

Their shared desire to promote the resilience, adaptability and restoration of Northern Michigan's natural resources has led the Jareckis to commit a future gift to Huron Pines through a family trust, one which will solidify their legacy and strengthen our work for years to come.

Joe and Judi Jarecki arrived in the Gaylord area in 1990 when Joe took a job working in the Pigeon River Country State Forest (PRC). Judi, a former nurse and school librarian, brought with her an appreciation for the natural world which was instilled in her as a child and materialized in adulthood as a particular fondness for Northeast Michigan.

"For me, it's the PRC," she mused about the sense of place she's found here. "I can be out in the quiet, see the stars and have an elk in my front yard."

Through Joe's career caring for the wild forests of the PRC, he and Judi got to know Huron Pines and the collaborative approach we take to accomplish our work. In his words, our "big tent" philosophy calls on the input of many individuals and organizations to find and implement solutions to the environmental issues we collectively face. In that way, we all share in the successes.

"Huron Pines works with everyone for the greatest good," he said.

As Unit Manager and an avid fisherman, Joe worked with Huron Pines on river restoration projects across the many streams of the PRC. Judi is also known to don a pair of chest waders and immerse herself in our volunteer efforts to remove invasive phragmites and install woody debris along the riverbanks for erosion control and fish habitat.

Living in the historic log home at the Pigeon River Country State Forest headquarters with over 100,000 acres of the Big Wild beckoning at their back door, the Jareckis have had some amazing experiences during their time in Northeast Michigan. They've been startled by the sudden bugle of an unseen elk, enjoyed fireflies displaying in a wet meadow during frog and toad surveys and have paddled the Black River with a 6-foot lake sturgeon swimming lazily past their canoe. These experiences have built on their already strong connection to the environment and have motivated them to do something which will ensure their grandchildren have the chance to witness the same wonders.

As one way to ensure the sustainability of their favorite wild places, the Jareckis have committed a future gift to Huron Pines through their family trust, working with an attorney on terms which will keep their gift as flexible as possible so that it will make an impact when and where it is needed most.

"Huron Pines works with everyone for the greatest good"

"We've watched Huron Pines be the catalyst for large-scale projects involving many partners with great success," Joe said. "Things change quickly and we know Huron Pines is the organization that will know how to address change. We want our gift to be something that can help the organization adapt, investigate new solutions or be an investment in a brand-new project."

Thank you, Joe and Judi. Thank you for your support of our shared vision, the trust you have in us and the leadership you model for us.

If you are interested in learning more about how to leave a lasting legacy to support the protection, restoration and sustainability of natural resources in Northeast Michigan, please contact Colby Chilcote, Marketing and Development Director, at colby@huronpines.org.

Above: Joe and Judi Jarecki.

Protect Wild Places

Thank you to everyone who supported the Huron Pines Land Protection Fund by purchasing a poster in 2021. Posters are still available to purchase on [QuerkusCreative.com/Products](https://www.QuerkusCreative.com/Products). 100% of proceeds are donated to Huron Pines.

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4241 Old US 27 South, Suite 2
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Protect Wild Places

Huron Pines has launched the Protect Wild Places program with support from the Consumers Energy Foundation. Protect Wild Places will engage communities in conservation efforts through volunteer, education and training opportunities.

In addition to hosting monthly events, Huron Pines will restore **5,000 acres** of wildlife habitat and recreational land and **150 miles** of waterways and Great Lakes shoreline with the help of partners and volunteers like you.

Find event information at
huronpines.org/events

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