



Huron Pines

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Prioritized Restoration Projects in the AuSable River Watershed Summer 2015 Update from Huron Pines

The following update encompasses the work completed for the AuSable River Watershed Project through the end of June 2015. Huron Pines has continued to meet with project partners to begin implementation on the selected project sites for the work to be completed within the watershed.

The following update shows the progress made on each of the project focus areas including:

1. Remove 11 barriers to aquatic organism passage to reconnect 35 upstream miles.
2. Install 75 instream habitat structures comprised of large woody material through 1 ¼ miles of river to increase instream habitat diversity.
3. Treat invasive species through chemical and mechanical methods on 150 acres including 5,000 feet in the riparian zone within the watershed to restore native plant communities.
4. Stabilize 9 eroding streambank sites to reduce annual sediment loading by at least 300 tons.
5. Coordinate 20 volunteer events, trainings and workshops to engage community members in hands-on restoration projects to express the importance of watershed-scale conservation projects.
6. Conduct 100 private landowner site visits to help individuals reach their conservation goals throughout the watershed.

Aquatic Organism Barriers and Monitoring

East Branch AuSable under West Karen Lake Road (CR021) – This project is one of our highest priorities and we are very excited about its construction this summer! Construction is scheduled to begin in August, at which time, the Crawford County Road Commission will begin prepping the site for bridge installation. In early spring, Huron Pines and the Crawford County Road Commission selected Krenn Timber Bridge Company to fabricate the structure and John Henry Excavating to install the pilings and bridge caps. Huron Pines recently received our engineer's stamp of approval and, a timber structure is currently being fabricated for the West Karen Lake Road/Stream Crossing!

Additional Aquatic Organism Barrier Projects and Monitoring – The Alcona County Road Commission has been a wonderful partner and remains very active with Huron Pines. They have been feverishly working to install several different road/stream crossings within the watershed and have recently completed restoration at project site PR051: Tributary of East Branch Pine River and Trask Lake Road (see pictures below). Additional sites scheduled for restoration this summer include PR049: East Branch Pine River and McConnell Road, PR100: Grey Creek and Alvin Road, AL016: Smith Creek and Brodie Road and PR101: Duval Creek and Goddard Road.

Typically each road commission can donate equipment and labor that provides a non-federal source of matching dollars. Not only does this investment provide a powerful leveraging tool, but also allows more

River Restoration • Land Stewardship • Huron Pines AmeriCorps • Kirtland's Warbler Initiative

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of the federal funding to be used for barrier removal projects. All of Huron Pines' road commission partners have been instrumental in making these road/stream crossing improvements possible.



Project Site PR051 during construction in June

Huron Pines met with the Oscoda County Road Commission manager in early March to discuss the improvement of two priority crossings (OS001 and OS027) in the North Branch Watershed for 2016. Even more recently brought to our attention is a critical site where a culvert has failed and is currently acting as a major source of sediment pollution. Bills Road over Honeywell Creek is a road/stream crossing located in Oscoda County. This culvert is substantially undersized and has given way at its middle; with approximately eight feet or more of fill above it, the culvert is acting as a delivery system for sediment into the river (see photos below).



Bills Road over Honeywell Creek Culvert

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Other road/stream crossing improvement work includes the crossing of the South Branch River under Rollways Road (IS026). The design approach to this project will be to add structure at the outlet of the existing culvert in order to give aquatic organisms the ability to access the culvert outlet and prevent further perching of the structure. The design and construction of this project is planned for this summer/fall of 2016 and will be funded by resources provided by the U.S. Forest Service (\$47,448). After construction, monitoring work will be conducted at this site to identify the passage rates of fish through the improved structure.

Buhl Dam – Huron Pines and the U.S. Forest Service have a significant amount of time and resources invested into the Pine River Watershed (tributary to the AuSable River Watershed) and we are seeking to extend that effort into 2016. A perfect example of this is investigating the feasibility of removing Buhl Dam, which was brought to our attention by the local DNR Fisheries Biologist. Buhl Dam is an old structure located on the South Branch of the Pine River in Alcona County. The structure no longer serves a purpose for water management, is a barrier to fish passage and is located on Forest Service property. Huron Pines recently submitted a grant to the DNR Habitat Improvement Account to provide funding for the removal project. The U.S. Forest Service has deemed this a top priority within the watershed and we are working together to secure funding, but are still in the very preliminary stages of project development. While this project was not on our initial priority list, it has worked its way to the top as we have systematically addressed the restoration of high priority sites to restore them back to their healthy and natural function. In June, Huron Pines completed an agreement with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service for \$20,000 for engineering design and feasibility studies.



Buhl Dam

Instream Habitat and Monitoring

Concern for overall habitat degradation and sand loads in the West Branch of Big Creek near Lovells was brought to the attention of the Steering Committee by the North Branch Area Foundation during the planning meetings in 2013. Targeted areas for instream habitat placement in at least 1 ¼ miles through the placement of whole trees in predetermined stretches of the creek occurred in 2014 and Huron Pines' Restoration Crew recently completed the remainder of the project.

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The targeted area for instream habitat implementation was through a five-mile stretch of river from County Road 612 down to Townline Road in Crawford County.

After approval by the DEQ to complete the proposed work on the West Branch in March, the Huron Pines crew immediately went to work. The final structure was installed in late June and the installation of 300 whole trees into the West Branch of Big Creek was final. The DNR has also remained invested in these efforts and still plans to conduct pre- and post-monitoring surveys. Their services and knowledge in the coming months and years will be beneficial and we look forward to working with them on future projects.



Huron Pines' Restoration Crew installing instream habitat structures in the West Branch of Big Creek

As mentioned in the spring 2015 update, Huron Pines contracted Streamside Ecological Services' Aaron Snell to collect fish samples at 2 monitoring locations and monitor the change in geomorphology at 4 locations from the origin of the West Branch of Big Creek to below West North Down River Road (approximately 12 stream miles). Aaron completed his assessment of the watershed and the full report can be found on our website at:

http://www.huronpines.org/media/projects/media/ses_west_branch_big_creek_watershed_final_report_web.pdf

In late May, Huron Pines worked with local volunteers and Aaron Snell to host a training event that focused on BMP techniques used to identify and assess geomorphic processes of the river. During this event we taught volunteers how to monitor and install scour chains, perform a pebble count and conduct cross-sectional and longitudinal profiles. This training was very successful and the feedback we received was very positive. The long term benefit to this training event ensured that continuous data will be available during ongoing efforts to restore the water quality within the AuSable Watershed.

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Aaron Snell of Streamside Ecological Services teaching volunteers how to install and monitor scour chains and perform cross-sections

In addition to the instream habitat work being completed on the West Branch of Big Creek, our relationship sparked a series of other projects in the area that were completed earlier this summer. Huron Pines worked with local landowners at Big Creek Lodge and its adjacent neighbors to plant more than 160 acres of native plants, perform maintenance of existing instream structures, and provide for future installation of more than four monitoring sites to the data from this work for years to come. It is our goal to see projects evolve like this to benefit the area and region even more. We started out our relationship with local landowners to complete one project and have seen that relationship grow into a comprehensive management effort for their area. Huron Pines is constantly looking for projects such as these and can help provide assistance to landowners to develop conservation easements, do greenbelt plantings, manage their upland forest and implement many other conservation techniques.

Invasive Species Treatment and Monitoring

We are building on an exceptional year for invasive species treatment in the AuSable River Watershed from 2014 and 2015 will continue to focus on high-priority sites. In 2014, approximately 130 acres were treated through extensive coordination between local volunteer groups, resource agencies and Huron Pines. As the lead organization for the northeast Michigan Cooperative Weed Management Area (CWMA), Huron Pines established a program that gave us the ability to work across many different partners through the region on early detection/rapid response and invasive species education.

Huron Pines is currently working with local landowners and project partners to develop a systematic approach to treating the various species that have been observed on Hull Island in Oscoda, Michigan. These species include phragmites, Japanese barberry and reed canary grass. The area of treatment is approximately 18 acres and through the funding recently received by the DNR Invasive Species Grant Program, Huron Pines has the necessary funding to treat the areas we deem as priority; this funding also allows us to allocate much needed non-federal dollars to match our NFWF-SOGL funding.

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Hull Island: Oscoda, Michigan

Erosion Control and Monitoring

Huron Pines will once again be addressing excessive erosion on the South Branch of the Pine River in 2015. This is a great opportunity to continue to build our relationship with the U.S. Forest Service while we work to treat priority sites for sediment reduction. The U.S. Forest Service granted additional funds to Huron Pines that will be allocated toward erosion control in the Pine River Watershed. This project is a continuation of work that Huron Pines completed on the South Branch of the Pine River in 2013 and 2014 near the Buhl Dam area.

Huron Pines conducted a site visit to select streambank erosion control sites again in March and we have received all of the approved permits. Once these projects are completed, the annual sediment loads will be reduced by approximately 205 tons. Efforts through this project are also capitalizing on our relationship with the Pine River-Van Etten Lake (PRVEL) Watershed Committee. We are looking forward to completing more on-the-ground work with PRVEL this fall and work is scheduled to begin in September.



Priority erosion sites along the Pine River scheduled for restoration in September 2015

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Landowner Involvement

Significant landowner involvement is a major contributor in the effort to increase the resiliency and protect the existing high quality resources within the AuSable River Watershed which, also adds to the protection of tributary systems to Lake Huron. These protection efforts occur through on-the-ground projects and the investment put forth by private landowners. Landowner involvement and investment is an invaluable resource that helps Huron Pines to identify high quality restoration projects as well as build future partnerships.

To schedule a site visit or speak with Huron Pines, please visit our website at:
<http://www.huronpines.org/sitevisit.asp>

Funders

Our NFWF-SOGL grant is \$560,000 in federal funding and requires a dollar for dollar non-federal match. We receive a generous amount of financial commitment from our County Road Commissions when partnering to complete road/stream crossing improvements. This commitment of non-federal match to our projects is the most crucial part of our fundraising strategy. Local investment by interest groups, foundations and individuals fuels our restoration efforts.

Without committed funding by local project partners, the ability to have a profound impact in an area is significantly decreased. In some cases, the lack of match will be the most heavily weighed factor when considering the feasibility of a project. When faced with a lack of investment by non-federal sources, Huron Pines is charged with the decision to move forward or pull back from certain watershed projects. The table below is a comprehensive list detailing the funders that have been committed for this watershed initiative through June 2015:

Funding Organization	Funding Source	Amount	Percentage of Overall \$1.22M Cost
National Fish and Wildlife Foundation-SOGL	Federal	\$ 560,000.00	45%
County Road Commissions	Non-Federal	\$ 255,600.00	20%
U.S. Forest Service	Federal	\$ 170,000.00	14%
Camp Grayling	Non-Federal	\$ 70,000.00	6%
DNR-Habitat Improvement Account	Non-Federal	\$ 50,000.00	4%
AuSable North Branch Area Foundation	Non-Federal	\$ 30,000.00	1.50%
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service	Federal	\$ 20,000.00	1.50%
AuSable Property Owners Association	Non-Federal	\$ 7,000.00	<1%
ITC Transmission Corporation	Non-Federal	\$ 5,000.00	<1%
AuSable Watershed Committee	Non-Federal	\$ 2,000.00	<1%
Pine River Van-Etten Lake Watershed Coalition	Non-Federal	\$ 1,000.00	<1%
Sub-total of Funding		\$ 1,170,600.00	95%
Remaining Balance for Project Completion		\$ 49,400.00	5%

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