The Huron Pines staff has been getting their feet wet in the waterways of Northern Michigan for over 45 years. That’s over four decades of patching up waders, pulling trucks out of the mud and fighting off black flies to restore the highest priority stretches of stream in the region.

Prioritizing each site meant collecting data from thousands of road/stream crossings and hundreds of dams across the best coldwater streams in Northern Michigan. Over the past 12 years, Huron Pines collected this field data and compiled the results to compare possible project sites on rivers like the Au Sable, Rifle, Thunder Bay and Pigeon. Those initial findings grew into a plan to fix 100 of the worst sites—areas where old dams or roads were changing the flow of rivers, contributing excess sediment and blocking the movement of fish. It was an ambitious plan but not an impossible one.

Since that initial list was created, Huron Pines has raised over $10 million dollars for river restoration and infrastructure improvement in the region. We completed our 100th project earlier this year and are on track to hit our goal of reconnecting 500 miles of coldwater habitat by the end of the field season. Thank you for helping us make history.

Here are a few success stories from a decade of Huron Pines river restoration.

**Healthy Water 2019**

**Restoration Milestones**

Brook trout caught on Silver Creek in 2018 (Photo by Nick Johnson).

Below: Volunteers, led by Huron Pines, measure a culvert on Silver Creek to collect data for a major Silver Creek restoration project that wrapped up in 2012.

**500 Stream Miles Reconnected**

**100 Stream Barriers Removed**

**$10 Million Invested in Stream Health**
Historical Highlights

Rifle River

Project Year: 2015
Location: Houghton Creek, a high-quality tributary to the Rifle River in Ogemaw County
Miles Reconnected: 5.2

Overview: In 2015, the undersized culvert was replaced with a new timber bridge at Flynn Road. This summer, Huron Pines is working with the Ogemaw County Road Commission to replace the culvert at Heath Road which will give fish full access to the headwaters of Houghton Creek.

Saunders Dam

Project Year: 2013
Location: Black River in Otsego County
Miles Reconnected: 8

Overview: Located in the Pigeon River Country State Forest, Saunders Dam prevented fish passage and degraded water quality in the headwaters of the Black River. The removal of Saunders Dam helped to restore the wild, scenic nature of the Pigeon River Country Concept of Management and had an immediate impact on the watershed.

The Rifle River Watershed is extremely important for the environment and the community.

From the field: Josh Leisen Senior Project Manager at Huron Pines, oversaw the 2015 project and is actively working on the 2019 construction as well. Josh explained, “The Rifle River Watershed is extremely important for the environment and the community. Fish and wildlife need high-quality streams to thrive while residents and visitors want clean, navigable waters for recreation and enjoyment. Protecting the health of Houghton Creek by returning the creek to a more natural flow provides trout with the habitat they need to survive. It keeps the water cleaner and colder and ultimately improves the fish population and water quality in the Rifle River as well.”
Huron Pines returned to the site in 2018 to survey the stream channel and monitor water flow. Those monitoring results confirmed that the dam removal created more natural stream conditions suitable for fish passage.

From the field: Scott Whitcomb has been the Pigeon River Country State Forest Manager with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources for over a decade. As an integral partner during the Saunders Dam project, Scott said, “The removal of Saunders Dam and restoration of the ecological function of the former dam site represents a fantastic outcome for the conservation partners involved, the fisheries resource and the public that enjoy the Pigeon River Country. Any time that a group of partners come together for a common cause, develop a synergy working together and then see a project through to a successful conclusion, it’s a win for everyone.”

Silver Creek

Project Year: 2012
Location: Silver Creek, part of the Ocqueoc River Watershed in Presque Isle County
Miles Reconnected: 9
Overview: The Silver Creek project included 10 road/stream crossing improvements in the upper three miles of Silver Creek. The project opened up fish passage, reduced excess sediment in the creek and removed invasive species in the area. It was an early example of a holistic approach to conservation which involved looking at the entire watershed—land, water and people. By working together with the road commission and natural resource agencies, we ensured that the project not only restored fish habitat but also improved transportation infrastructure and protected habitat for other plant and animal species to advance long-term solutions for natural resource restoration and protection in the area.

From the field: Nicholas Johnson owns property on Silver Creek (that’s Nick’s son holding a fresh catch on the cover). Nick and his family are avid conservationists and manage their farm, forests, and wetlands according to practices promoted by NRCS, USDA, MAEAP and certified foresters. They see the Huron Pines Silver Creek restoration project as “one piece of the puzzle” for protecting fish habitat. “It’s great to know that Huron Pines can help address the big problems, while we do our part on the piece of dirt we have been blessed with. With some luck, time and well-managed habitat, I hope that my son will land one of those elusive 12-inch brookies in the near future.”

I hope that my son will land one of those elusive 12-inch brookies in the near future.
Looking Ahead

In 2019

In addition to a dozen road/stream crossing improvements, Huron Pines is also managing two dam removals in 2019. The dams are located on the Middle Branch Cedar River in Clare County (pictured above) and the East Branch Pine River in Alcona County.

The dam removals will reconnect over 9 miles on the Cedar River system and 1.2 miles on the Pine River system.

The dam removals are funded in part by the Bay Area Community Foundation, Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, Leon P Martuch Chapter of Trout Unlimited, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation-Sustain Our Great Lakes Program, Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network (WIN) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

A Cleaner Coast

With over 100 stream restoration projects completed, Huron Pines is looking to the coast for more clean water solutions—holding meetings with officials in Au Gres, East Tawas, Rogers City and Alpena.

“Huron Pines is working with coastal communities to ensure the long-term health of Lake Huron by reducing pollution and flooding caused by stormwater runoff,” said Samantha Nellis, Watershed Project Manager at Huron Pines. “We are helping to implement solutions that use natural processes. Solutions like rain gardens, tree planting and buffer strips that absorb and filter stormwater and improve aesthetics in our communities.”

An Au Gres-Sims Middle School student installs native plants in a rain garden designed as part of a year-long school project to understand stormwater management and reduce stormwater runoff in Au Gres.