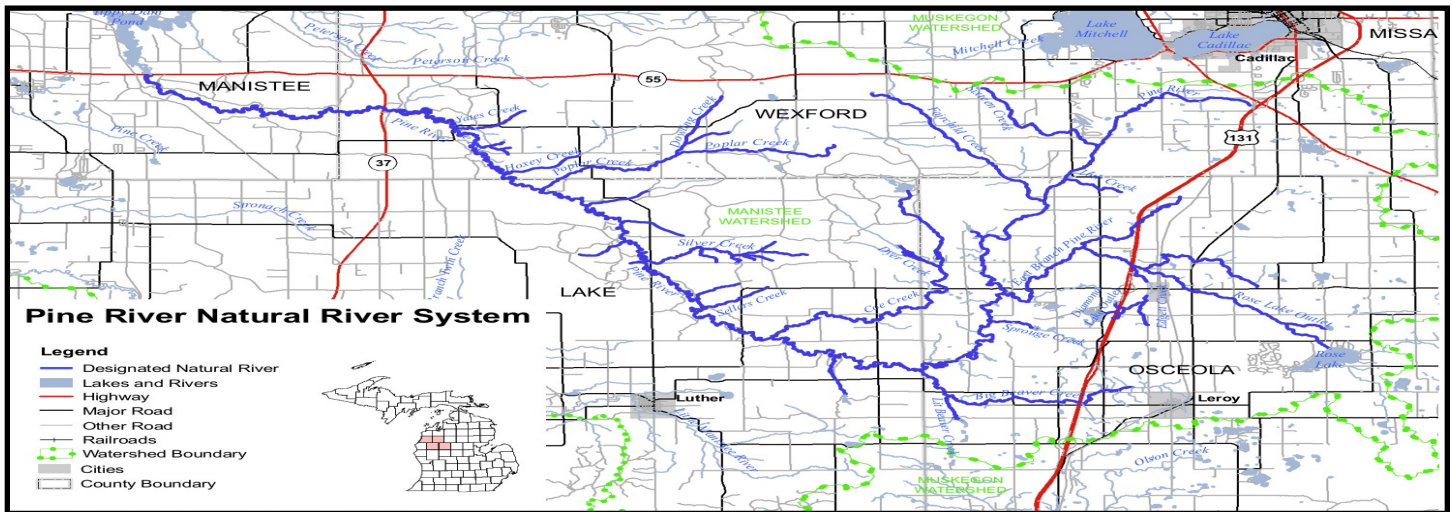


Nature News

Newsletter of the Cadillac Area Land Conservancy



Summer 2025



Natural Rivers helps provide watershed protection in the Cadillac Area

By Dana Castle, MDNR

Here in Northern Michigan, we are fortunate to be home to some of the state's best resources and public land via both state-owned property and the U.S. Forest Service's (USFS) Huron-Manistee National Forest. Many people enjoy recreating, especially in the summer via the numerous ORV trails, paddling on the rivers, fishing, birdwatching, hiking, etc. The rivers near the Cadillac area feel largely uninhabited and wild, even though many people have property along these rivers. One of the reasons that our rivers feel so wild could be attributed to the Natural Rivers Program. The Natural Rivers Program, administered within the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), is a zoning based program that establishes an overlay zoning district on sixteen rivers throughout the state, in addition to other local and state regulations. The goal of the program is preserving and enhancing these river system's free flowing condition, and their fish, wildlife, boating, scenic, aesthetic, floodplain, ecologic, historic, and recreational values and uses. The district extends 400-feet from the river's edge and applies to both public or private lands. However, most people are still able to build homes, additions, accessory buildings, docks, stairs, and other structures on their property by securing a Natural Rivers permit and following the development standards outlined in the rules and permit. The overall goal is to conserve rivers in their current state for many generations to come.

If you've ever built something on your property, you likely know it's already a bit complicated by having to obtain the proper permits from the county, township, health department, or other local agencies. So, adding an additional layer can be a point of contention for some. However, the Natural Rivers Program uniquely provides watershed level protection. The program also protects the things that brought most folks to own river property to begin with, the excellent water quality, the fishing, and the scenery. In addition, in many areas, Natural Rivers zoning may be the only zoning and therefore the only land use program protecting the river. While your new construction generally will not be at the river's edge, you may find comfort that you also won't have to see your neighbor across the river through their windows!

The setbacks for new construction helps reduce run-off from homes and other impervious surfaces going into the river which could reduce fish and wildlife habitat, *(continued on next page)*



❖ Protecting Land in Wexford, Missaukee, Osceola and northern Lake and Mason Counties ❖



increase sediment loading, and stream temperature. Property owners are also required to maintain a protected vegetated buffer where live vegetation and trees must be maintained. Healthy stream vegetation helps reduce run-off, keeps streams cool with shading and reducing nutrient loading, and can contribute to stream bank stability and fish habitat. Protecting vegetation also helps protect the aesthetics of the area by “hiding” some of the homes or buildings on the nearby properties. Natural River designation are forward-looking, meaning that structures and related uses are grandfathered in, and while modifications to those homes have to meet standards, owners can expect to maintain what they originally had.

How does a river become a state-designated Natural River? In the early 1970s, the DNR developed a list that they thought would be good candidates for enhanced protection because they were seen having exceptional values that were also potentially threatened by development. However, most designations have started (and sustained) from a local effort with an entity like a watershed group.

During a designation process, the DNR, along with a citizen advisory committee, will develop a management plan for the river, shared publicly, and hold public hearings prior to making any final decision on river designation.

The DNR is currently exploring designation of the Little Manistee River and has formed the Little Manistee Advisory Committee to help guide the development of the management plan. The management plan will give watershed property owners a better understanding of what the designation could mean for the development of their property. After a management plan is developed, the DNR would distribute that plan and hold public hearings across all affected counties. This designation process does not have a guaranteed outcome of a new Natural River. There are many things that can occur during or between these activities, and the timeline is hard to estimate and many of the rivers contemplated in the 1970s have not been designated. The Little Manistee is an incredible river that has many of the values the Natural Rivers Program is designed to protect, and even holds the entire state’s stock in Steelhead fish.



Information related to the Natural Rivers Program, including the full set of rules, can be found on the DNR website: www.michigan.gov/DNRNaturalRivers. For information related to the current efforts on the Little Manistee River please contact Dana Castle at castled1@michigan.gov or 231-285-1042

Successful CALC Birding and Botany Walk

As part of the Cadillac Area Land Conservancy's (CALC) 30th year anniversary there was birding and botany walk on May 30th. About twenty people gathered on a cool Saturday morning at one of CALC's easement properties a few miles south of the village of Marion. Bob Weir and Matt Johnstone led the walk. Bob and Matt are serious birders and would be our guides on the walk through the property. Their expertise on all things avian was pretty amazing. When asked about their favorite places for birding in the



Cadillac Area, Bob told me he personally liked to go to the Waldeck Island Preserve on Stone Ledge Lake that's owned by CALC. About a mile north of Tustin the White Pine Trail crosses

Cleveland Road. Walking north from this intersection is another location offering a variety of habitat and bird species. Bob also pointed out that the Heritage Trails adjacent to the Carl T. Johnson Fishing and Hunting Center have a good combination of wetland and forest lands that are favored habitat for a variety of species. Another local hot spot is known informally as the “Prairie chicken lands” located off M66 between McBain and Marion, Bob and Matt both indicated that this was popular birding spot. It's just a bit south of the Wayside Chapel outside of McBain. Look for a small gravel parking lot off 66.” said Bob.

DNR Adds 78 Acres to Mitchell State Park

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources added 78 acres of land to the state park, bringing the park's total size to 770 acres. The property is valuable for its abundant wetlands and having this land within the park is beneficial to the area's wildlife. The DNR's current plans are to leave this new acquisition in its natural state.





CALC Art Auction complete and THANK YOU!

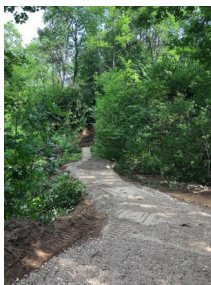


For the first time, CALC had a booth at the Annual Cadillac Art Festival this July and it went great. Thanks to the generous donations from **Shari Spoelman, Steve Cunningham, Joyce Petrakovitz, Matt Long and Tom Havard** there were five beautiful art pieces that CALC was able to sell in a two day in-person silent auction. All five pieces sold. The money raised goes to CALC's operating

budget. In addition, there were a many people who stopped by the CALC booth to learn more about the organization.

Improvements coming to Oliver Preserve and Waldeck Island!

Thanks to the generous donation from the Oliver family, changes are coming to the Oliver Nature Preserve. The first phase is complete with the removal of the steps and flattening of the approach path to make the creek crossing more accessible. Crushed concrete surface has been placed on the approaches to the creek and the bridge has been widened. The next phase will be to add a viewing platform overlooking Slagle Creek.



Trees are being removed from the parking lot at Waldeck Island to improve safety and parking ability.

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Director's Corner

Chris Gentry, Executive Director

Conservation District vs Land Conservancy...What is the difference?

Often times the Cadillac Area Land Conservancy gets confused with the local conservation district and people ask, "what is the difference"? The conservation districts were formed with the intent of working with local land owners to conserve soil and water resources and prevent and control erosion. Michigan's Conservation Districts are special purpose local units of state government that utilize state, federal and private sector resources to solve today's conservation issues. Conservation Districts provide linkages between land managers and a host of conservation service providers. Conservation Districts support citizens managing their private lands for a cleaner, healthier Michigan. They provide the public a point of access in their communities when questions arise on how to manage natural resources. Conservation Districts are funded through annual plant, plat book and tree sales; State Operations grants; and sometimes local millages.

The Cadillac Area Land Conservancy is a private 501c3 non-profit organization with the mission to protect natural, scenic and farm lands for current and future generations. We protect land in several ways:

- By working with landowners to permanently protect private land through voluntary conservation easements.
- By acquiring natural lands by donation to create Conservancy owned nature preserves which are open to the public
- By assisting state and local units of government in creating or expanding public parks and natural areas that result in enhanced public access to nature and improved recreational opportunities.

The Cadillac Area Land Conservancy is funded by private donations, grants, and our endowment fund investment proceeds. The local conservation districts and the land conservancy are to distinctly different groups in our area that area both doing great things to manage our nature resources for future generations.

Cadillac Area Land Conservancy

30th Anniversary Celebration



OCTOBER 19TH
ANNUAL MEETING 2-3 PM
MUSIC, FOOD, FELLOWSHIP 3-6 PM

OLDE MILL VENUE
314 N. MILL STREET
MARION, MICHIGAN

Music by David Gill

Appetizers

Fellowship, reflections on
CALC history and looking
forward

Desserts

Free event. Please RSVP to
calc@calc-landtrust.org