



THE NORTH BRANCH

ANewsletter from the AU SABLE NORTH BRANCH AREA FOUNDATION

Spring/Summer 2019

Protecting the North Branch for over 75 years

From the President's Desk

As I write this it appears that winter has released its grip. Spring's snows, frosts and rains are giving way to teasing sunny summer warmth. The North Branch river is flowing high and fast. The critters have reappeared and are multiplying. It's time to enjoy another summer on the North Branch.

Your board has already begun this year's work with our first meeting in April. Your River Keepers are floating their river reaches, making sure that all is well on the river.

a The board has formed committees to address issues such as invasive species, riverbank erosion and monitoring fishing conditions. We will keep you updated on all that is happening on the river and surrounding watershed through postings on our website.

We'd like to hear from you. Let us know if we can be of any help. If you are interested in board participation let us know that.

We look forward to seeing you all at our **annual dinner** which will be held on **Saturday July 13, 2019** at the Lovells Township Hall starting at 6 p.m. Please RSVP by June 30.

To make your reservation, contact Sue Inman by email, text or phone:

inmansue2@gmail.com

312-446-7225 (cell)

989-348-2922 (land line)

Enjoy your summer!

Mike Inman



So Where Are the Trout?

by Glen Eberly

We have provided information in our past newsletters regarding the serious decline of the wild trout population in the Au Sable North Branch, which became evident last spring. DNR shocking studies were done and confirmed early findings by fishing guides and anglers that trout had become scarce from Dam 4 to above the Otsego County Line. Meetings have been held with the DNR, DEQ and many conservation organization stakeholders: Anglers of the Au Sable, our Au Sable North Branch Area Foundation, Michigan State TU Council, Mason-Griffith TU Chapter, Au Sable Property Owners Association, The Michigan Natural Resource Commission, and Grand Valley State University.

While no definitive cause has been identified, it was determined that a continuous, thorough scientific monitoring of the Au Sable Watershed health factors is necessary. And, that process, being led by Anglers, will be initiated this year.

Now for some very positive news. Dr. Mark Luttenton, Professor of Biology at Grand Valley State University has been involved in our meetings. He has considerable experience on our river and has proposed a project to address two factors that many of us feel might be the cause of the trout population decline: **Sand Load** and **Inadequate Macroinvertebrate Biomass** (trout food). Here, in his words, are his proposed projects:



General Considerations

Historically, the North Branch of the Au Sable River has supported vibrant brown trout and brook trout populations. However, in recent years, trout populations have declined to levels that are below the historical average. In addition, recent surveys have found that fish biomass has also declined.

Several factors conspire to support healthy trout populations including habitat, access to spawning sites, suitable environmental conditions (e.g. temperature), and adequate food resources. Trout populations will decline if one or more of these factors has been impaired, although population response is not always linear. Accumulating research suggests that in some cases the response of trout populations to change in environmental conditions may only occur when conditions reach a threshold beyond which populations decline sharply.

Recent conversations regarding the decline in trout populations in the North Branch Au Sable River have resulted in some hypothesis and several questions. In general, there seems to be no clear understanding of why trout populations in the North Branch Au Sable River have declined during the past several years.

Although there may be several factors involved in the decline, two elements seem to stand out including: 1) reduced suitable substrate due to sand bedload, and 2) adequate macroinvertebrate biomass. These two factors emerge in the absence of: 1) identified fish disease, 2) obvious catastrophic event (e.g. flood), 3) obvious mass mortality, and 4) high levels of toxins.

Recent DEQ P-51 results have suggested that there is a diverse macroinvertebrate community that indicates good water quality. In addition, annual spring monitoring of macroinvertebrates suggest that there are good numbers of invertebrates, but the sampling protocol limits those conclusions to areas with adequate gravel substrate. This data leads to the hypothesis that the North Branch Au Sable can support diverse macroinvertebrate communities, but total invertebrate biomass is limited by excess sand bedload.

*I propose to conduct **two coordinated projects** on the North Branch Au Sable River. **The first**, quantify macroinvertebrate abundance within a significant section of the North Branch Au Sable River, by taking quantitative samples from all available substrates (e.g., gravel, sand, silt, woody debris). **Second**, assess substrate suitability across a significant area of the North Branch. Combining these two data sets will allow us to determine if there is sufficient macroinvertebrate biomass to support trout populations.*

(Continued at bottom of page 3)

Au Sable North Branch Watershed Committee Report

by Bill Adams

In 2017 the North Branch Foundation Board of Directors established the Watershed Committee to study and develop a plan, to enhance the North Branch watershed. The members of this committee are Steve Johnson, Tom Wessels, Neil Wallace, and Bill Anderson. It was determined that the first order of business was to meet with Huron Pines and review the North Branch Action Plan that they developed in 2009. This plan was the result of an extensive study of our watershed. Many of the recommendations from that plan had been completed over the years. After meeting with Huron Pines and asking them to review the action plan for priorities in improving our watershed, they concluded that our river is in good shape for the most part but sediment, particularly sand, continues to be one of the greatest threats to the health of North Branch.

As a result of this meeting and Huron Pines' conclusion, the Committee along with Terry Lyons and Mike Inman attended an erosion study workshop along the banks of the North Branch. This workshop was led by John Bailey of Huron Pines. We learned how to identify and assess each erosion site. The assessment included GPS coordinates, measuring height and width of the site, determining the direct cause of the erosion as well as assigning a severity grade. Last fall Neil, Tom, Bill and Greg Bier floated from Kellogg Bridge to the confluence of the North Branch and Main Stream. There were a total of 12 sites along this reach that were identified as ongoing or potential erosion sites and thereby allowing for increased amounts of sand to enter the river.

The reason Huron Pines identified sand as one of the greatest threats to the North Branch watershed is due to its effect upon invertebrate development and trout spawning. Both of these need gravel to develop successfully. If the gravel is covered by sand, insect growth and trout spawning success are greatly diminished. To decrease the amount of sand that is entering the North Branch, the Watershed Committee has begun selecting and prioritizing sites to begin mitigating erosion. The first site has been selected and work will begin as soon as river water levels allow that to happen.



Erosion site selected for remediation

A Watershed Committee policy statement has been developed and approved by the Au Sable North Branch Foundation Board of Directors and can be found on our website. This policy is not intended as a restoration of landowner property but rather for the improvement of the River consistent with our mission statement. Site selection will be made by the Committee based upon: access feasibility, landowner's cooperation, funding availability-including the landowner's willingness to make a significant contribution, site severity effect upon the River and our ability to handle the scope of the work. Foundation money may be spent on these projects but only after attempting to secure grant money and landowner's willingness to participate financially.

Much has been done over the past decades to improve the North Branch Watershed and we hope that the results of the erosion mitigation work performed over the next several years will further enhance our watershed and river.

So Where Are the Trout? (continued from page 2)

Dr. Luttenton continues to detail the plan regarding timing, (a two year program), man power, (requiring two students from his Masters of Biology degree program), and cost, (total cost of \$36,000).

The DNR has scheduled a meeting for June 17th to discuss the North Branch Trout Mystery, other watershed issues, such as collecting and monitoring stream health factors, the USGS Toxin Testing, beaver management, habitat projects and, very importantly, the sand load issue. Your ASNBAF Board will be well represented and we will keep you advised of progress made to solve the, "Where are the Trout?" mystery.

River Keepers Report

by Eric Bankhead

What’s new to tell you this season? Well if you’re a long time member of the ANBAF not much, but if you are new to the river and/or ANBAF here goes.

It The 11th season of River Keeping has begun. Nineteen of your neighbors volunteer their time to keep the river enjoyable for all of us. They observe and report issues that may be detrimental to the River. From Large Woody Debris movement, wind or beaver tree falls blocking safe passage, invasive plants, septic or sewage leaks, unpermitted construction, zoning issues, excessive trash, to access site issues.

Ken Reed will be doing River maintenance again this season. He’s already been on the River clearing beaver falls near Jackson Hole Access and trimming up sweepers that have dropped over the winter in the Wye Bend area. All this river maintenance is paid for by your donations.

Thanks to the River Keepers for their Time and Concern for the River and yours too. See our website ‘AuSableNorthBranch.org’, ‘River Keeper Program’ page for contact information on your Reach.

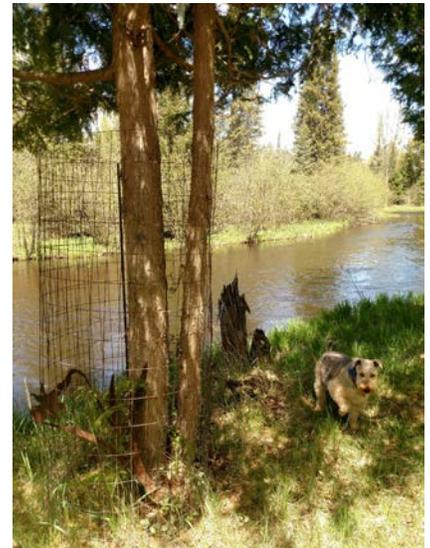
Beaver on the North Branch ... STILL

Yes, we still and probably will always have Beaver on the NB. They’re sort of like the Purple Loosestrife, we can try and control them but never totally rid the river of them. Anyway the Beaver were certainly here before we were, so be it.

Beaver activity was reported this fall in the areas around Big Creek confluence, Jackson Hole, Morley Access, Wye Bend, and below Black Hole Access. A total of 17 beaver where trapped.

They’ve been seen to take down Cedar, White Pine saplings, and a 6’ diameter oak this winter. Normally they take Poplar and Birch but they must have acquired a different taste last year. Most likely just wearing down their teeth as they continue to grow year after year, unlike us humans.

So, if you cherish those trees on your property PROTECT THEM! Wrap chicken wire or metal fencing around the bottom 3 feet of the trees if you what to keep them.



We appreciate the donations that make our work possible. We can now accept donations by credit cards on the web site. Please use our web site, or the form below to help us maintain and improve our North Branch

Au Sable North Branch Area Foundation

www.ausablenorthbranch.org

Here is my (our) contribution to support the Foundation:

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Au Sable North Branch Area Foundation is recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as a 501(c)3 not for profit.

Permitting Within Crawford County & Lovells Township

by Gary Neumann
Lovells Township Supervisor

A question that I frequently get asked at the Township Hall is *“What kind of permit do I need to build a ?”* Unfortunately, there is often no simple or singular answer to this question. However, the following should take some of the mystery out of this topic while providing you with a basic understanding of the permitting process.

Lovells Township exercises zoning authority within the township. This function is the responsibility of our Zoning Administrator, Dale Gauthier Jr. (989-348-7301 or lovellszoning@gmail.com). In accomplishing his duties Dale Jr. follows the Lovells Township Zoning Ordinance (LTZO). Generally speaking, Dale Jr. is the place to start, regardless of the project you have in mind or the location of that project. At times it gets complicated because regulations differ based upon the zoning (Greenbelt, Residential, Commercial, etc.) of the parcel where the project is to be accomplished. Dale Jr. often meets with the parcel owner at the parcel, and once he is satisfied that the project meets the requirements of the LTZO he will issue the parcel owner a zoning permit. The current fee for a zoning permit is \$20. It is an important permit because the county will not issue a building permit for work in Lovells Township unless Dale Jr. has issued a zoning permit for the construction.

Crawford County exercises control of general construction throughout the county. Paul Olmstead (989-344-3233 or palmstead@crawfordco.org) is the county official responsible for this function and his office is in the basement of the county building in Grayling (202 W. Michigan Ave.). Paul is the individual who issues building permits, soil and erosion control permits, and demolition permits. Crawford County permit fees are generally determined by the size of the project, and they will be significantly higher than a Lovells Township zoning permit.

District Health Department 10 (DHD10) exercises control over wells and septic systems within Crawford County. DHD10 is located (501 Norway St.) in Grayling and their phone is 989-348-7800. Arriving at DHD10 with a building permit from Paul Olmstead will, after paying the required fee, get you a permit for a well, a septic system, or both. Again, expect the permit fee to be significantly higher than a Lovells zoning permit. Their main concern with wells is the isolation distance of the well from things like a septic tank or drain field, a dry well, or a sewer line.

Regarding docks on rivers and streams in Lovells Township. No more than one dock per parcel is allowed, and it can be no more than 12 feet in length and 4 feet in width, and it can't extend more than four feet over the water. If there is any placement of a dock in a designated “natural river” (such as the North Branch of the Au Sable) a permit will be required from the MI Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE), Water Resources Division. The point of contact at EGLE is Matt Kleitch (989-619-2443 or kleitchm@michigan.gov) and it would be wise to contact him when ANY kind of construction is planned in, over or within the floodplain of a “natural river”.

In closing, feel free to call or email Lovells Township if you have questions that are not answered above. We are also always happy to provide sections of the LTZO should you desire, for example, to become more familiar with the restrictions in a specific zoning category, such as the Greenbelt Zone.

We hope this newsletter is both interesting and informative for you, and have made a number of changes in an effort to improve it. We are also working hard to improve our web site and encourage you to visit it for additional information, articles and photos. However, we are always happy to hear from you. If you have any articles, ideas, comments or suggestions, please send them to Bob Weed: robertweed70@yahoo.com

A BIG Thank You to Our 2019 Supporters!

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Darlene Brantley, in memory of Otto Brantley
 Jim and Linda Ross, in memory of Bill Ross
 Jim and Ida Wine, in memory of Bill Ross

UPCOMING EVENTS

Annual Foundation Dinner

July 13 Lovells Twp. Hall
 Social hour: 6:00 pm; Dinner 7:00 pm

Lovells Historical Society - Beaver, Beer and Banjo

July 20 Lovells Riverside Tavern
 6:00-9:00 pm

28th Annual Lovells Bridge Walk

August 17 Lovells
 8:00 am - 2:00 pm

ASNBAF Annual Meeting

August 31 Lovells Twp. Hall
 10:00 am - noon

Anglers' of the Au Sable Annual River Clean-up

September 7 Gates Au Sable Lodge
 10:00 am - 2:00 pm

Officers

Mike Inman, Chairman
 989-348-2922
 Neil Wallace, Vice Chairman
 248-891-5446
 Marjie Warner, Treasurer
 313-663-1331
 Bob Weed, Secretary
 248-310-6884

Directors

Bill Anderson 219-771-9178
 Eric Bankhead 989-348-6704
 Glen Eberly 989-348-3084
 Steve Johnson 989-344-1053
 Gary Neumann 989-348-9848
 Jerry Rucker 989-348-8738
 Tom Wessels 231-271-6151

Mission Statement: To preserve, protect and enhance the natural endowments of the watershed of the North Branch of the Au Sable River for the benefit of wild fish and game and public enjoyment and appreciation.

