



Huron Pines

Conserving the Forests, Lakes and Streams of Northeast Michigan

Upper Black River—Cheboygan County

August 2009



Photo courtesy of Sturgeon For Tomorrow

Huron Pines is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and an equal opportunity provider working to conserve the forests, lakes and streams of Northeast Michigan. We bring partners together to take a hands-on approach to conservation problems. Our vision is that through active leadership and coordination of conservation projects, Huron Pines makes the region a better place to live, work and enjoy.



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Reducing Erosion and Protecting Lake Sturgeon

In many northern Michigan rivers, an excessive amount of sediment, or sand, is the number one pollutant that ruins a healthy coldwater river system. On the Upper Black River in Cheboygan County, sedimentation is not only threatening the ecological integrity of the river but also the spawning habitat of an ancient state-threatened fish.

Lake sturgeon (*Acipenser fulvescens*), a relic from the age of dinosaurs, is both the oldest and largest fish found in the Great Lakes system. Lake sturgeon can grow to a length of nine feet and weigh upwards of 300 pounds. While male sturgeon can live for 50–60 years, the females can live for up to 150 years.

Once plentiful across the Great Lakes states, lake sturgeon populations were drastically reduced by a combination of overfishing, dam construction, habitat destruction, and more recently, poaching. On the Black River, campers from an adjacent campground have been traveling the steep bank to catch a glimpse of the ancient fish for years. In the process however, their frequent trips have killed the native vegetation and created severe erosion. Without plants to absorb and slow rainwater runoff, sand and other pollutants run straight into the river.

Watershed Approach to Restoration

Three major erosion sites affecting the sturgeon spawning habitat were identified in the Black Lake Watershed Stewardship Management Plan, approved by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality in 2001. The management plan listed each of these sites as “severe” and on the high priority list. Along with the support of several community partners, Huron Pines began work in 2007. Currently, a combination of bioengineering techniques and education are being used to control erosion. Streambank stabilization methods include the placement of Large Woody Debris (LWD), installation of coconut fiber logs, terracing and native plantings. In addition, the sources of erosion, namely human traffic, are being managed through educational signage and interpretive materials.

Left (2007): before work began, sand-laden runoff went directly into the river.

Right (2009): the sand is being stabilized after terracing, seeding, and native plantings.



BEFORE



AFTER

Huron Pines AmeriCorps Spring Service Project

Huron Pines AmeriCorps members and nearly 60 volunteers, including Boy Scout Troop #645 of Harrison and the Cheboygan Archers, came out on May 9, 2009, to help conserve the Upper Black River. Cosponsored by Sturgeon For Tomorrow, the day focused on installing erosion control techniques on two of the three major erosion sites. The volunteers installed mulch fabric, seeded and planted over 3,000 native plants.

The project was part of national AmeriCorps Week: a weeklong, nationwide event designed to bring more Americans into service, salute AmeriCorps members and alums for their powerful impact and thank the community partners who make AmeriCorps possible.

Since the service project, the landscape of the site has drastically changed. Over 90% of the plants grew, filling out the steep slope. The plants slow and absorb runoff, keeping the Upper Black River clean and clear. Additionally, Huron Pines added terracing, mulch fabric and native plants to complete two sites in July. The third site will be completed in September.

In addition to the erosion work, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Michigan State University annually monitor the sturgeon run. They tag and weigh each fish to monitor population numbers, evaluate reproductive success and rear juvenile sturgeon for reintroduction.



Upper Black River Restoration Project Partners

- Great Lakes Basin Program for Soil & Sediment Control
- Huron Pines AmeriCorps
- Michigan Department of Natural Resources - Fisheries
- Sturgeon For Tomorrow
- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
- Michigan Department of Natural Resources – Forest, Mineral & Fire Management
- Natural Resource Conservation Service