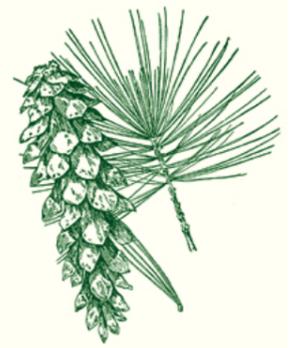


Seasons Greetings



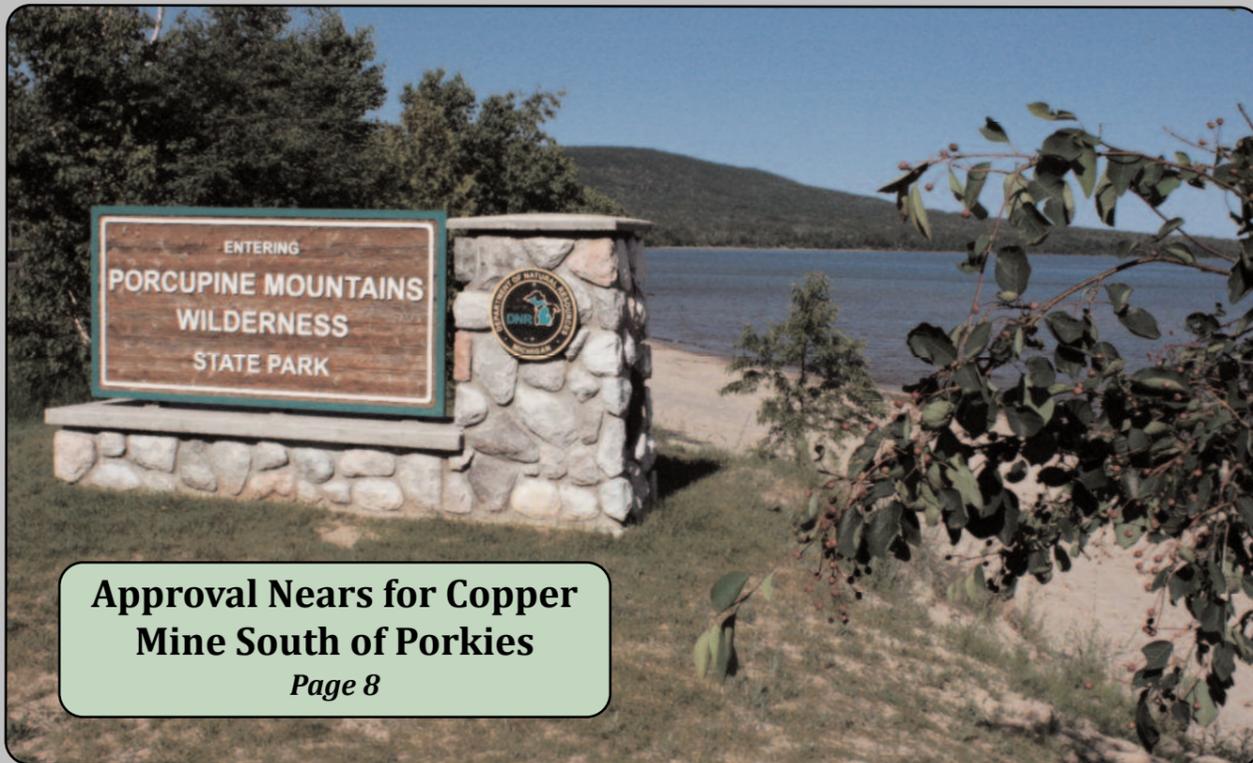
"The newspaper for people who love the north"

Late December 2012
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Digital Delivery



Michigan's Conservation Sentinel Since 1953



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**Looking for a gift idea for the outdoor lover?
Why not give The North Woods Call?**

(See Page 8)

www.mynorthwoodscall.com



**“For unto us
a child is born...”**



**Merry
Christmas
2012!**



North Woods Notes

FOREST PLANS: There is still time to provide feedback on draft Regional State Forest Management Plans. The plans and other information are available at the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) website, www.michigan.gov/regionalforestplans. The plans will provide long-term direction for resource managers that will guide DNR management decisions on state forest lands. Comments may be submitted through January 2, 2013.

HURON PINES ANNUAL MEETING: Help Huron Pines kick off its 40th year of conservation in northeast Michigan by attending the organization’s annual meeting on Saturday, February 2, 2013. The meeting will be held at Treetops Resort in Gaylord, beginning at 10 a.m. Jerry Greenberg, senior vice president for conservation at the Washington, D.C.-based American Forest Foundation, will be the guest speaker. To RSVP, call (989) 448-2293, or visit rsvp@huronpines.org.

GROUSE BOOK: Michigan photographer and friend of *The North Woods Call* Rick Baetsen has begun work on a “grouse photo book.” Baetsen said he has talked about such a book for many years and is pleased to now be pouring over thousands of photos taken since 1976. He plans to select 80 to 100 of the photos for inclusion in the book. That’s the hard part, of course. “The time I spent in the woods getting the images was the fun part,” he said. Look for the book in late 2013.

BURN PERMITS: Residents in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula and northern Lower Peninsula who call the Department of Natural Resources toll-free number to check if burn permits are being issued will now be connected with a new automated and interactive voice-recognition system. The cost-saving system allows users to identify their burning locations through speech, or touch-tone entries. The information will be processed and—if conditions are favorable—burn permit issuance will be confirmed. The system will also inform callers if any burn restrictions are in place for that day.

SURVEY MAPS: Original survey maps of Michigan’s 1,400 individual township parcels are now available to search, browse and print online, according to the Archives of Michigan. The maps—which show bodies of water and land formations throughout the state—document land surveys that were conducted by the federal government to lay out Michigan’s township and range grid system. Some maps documenting later re-surveys are also included. They can be searched by township name or by GPS coordinates. See www.seekingmichigan.org.

FISHERY BOOKS: Still trying to find something for that challenging person on your holiday gift list? How about a book on the Great Lakes? Two selections recommended by Michigan Sea Grant are *The Life of the Lakes: A Guide to the Great Lakes Fishery* and *The Guide to Great Lakes Fishes*. The first book provides up-to-date information on the people, resources and fish that play a part in the Great Lakes story. The latter is a must-have guide for every angler, or fishery and wildlife professional—and it’s waterproof! Check your bookstore or Michigan Sea Grant website for more information.

WILDLIFE FUND: You can honor your friends or loved ones this Christmas by making a donation in their names to the Michigan Nongame Fish and Wildlife Fund. The recipient will be notified of the donor’s gift with a beautiful certificate and Living Resources patch. DNR officials say that a donation of \$20 or more can make a big difference and benefit species that are endangered, threatened, or considered rare, as well as help to restore and protect common species.

HOLIDAY SHOOTING: DNR shooting ranges are open five days per week, Thursday through Monday. For the Christmas holiday, ranges will be closed from December 23-26 and reopen on December 27. For the New Year’s holiday, the ranges will be closed from December 30 to January 2 and will reopen on January 3. Range hours at Sharonville and Rose Lake are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., while the hours at Ortonville and Pontiac Lake are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The boss says it’s time for a winter break

As the cold winds blow and the snow begins to pile up around our back door, it’s time once again for *The North Woods Call’s* traditional winter break.

That means we get to slow the pace slightly and focus on some other chores, such as bookkeeping and tax preparation. Oh yeah, and snow shoveling.

As many longtime readers will recall, former publishers Glen and Mary Lou Sheppard scheduled regular quarterly breaks in the editorial production schedule—usually in January, April, July and Octo-

ber—to catch up on rest and to do some of the things they weren’t able to do within the usual crunch of deadlines.

That’s a tradition worth keeping, it seems, so your next *North Woods Call* will be sent out along about January 15.

In the meantime, have a blessed Christmas and a joyous New Year celebration with your family and friends.

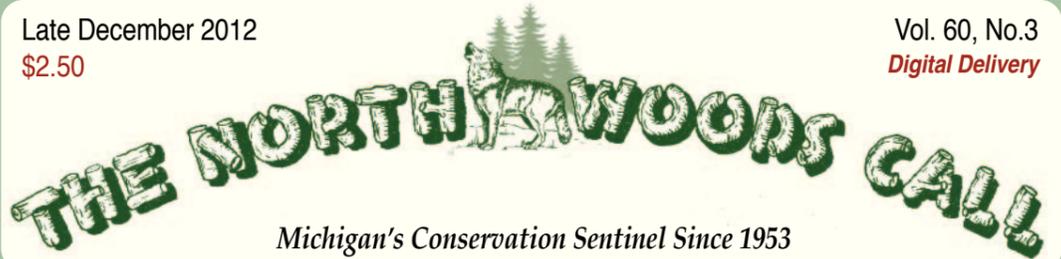
See you next year!

Late December 2012

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Vol. 60, No.3

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New vision for endangered species

Group plans model Kirtland’s warbler program

Gaylord-based Huron Pines is working with the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation on an innovative effort that will ensure a lasting and sustainable Kirtland’s warbler population.

The aim is to create a new model that pairs public and private entities into working partnerships and helps Michigan become a recognized leader in endangered species conservation on the national and international stage, according to Abigail Ertel, Kirtland’s warbler coordinator at Huron Pines.

Ultimately, the goal is to usher the Kirtland’s warbler off the federal Endangered Species List (ESL) and into a future of strong, perpetual management, she said.

“Huron Pines is excited to be joining the legacy of Kirtland’s warbler conservation,” Ertel said. “The Michigan Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Kirtland’s Warbler Recovery team have developed a strong foundation of integrated



Abigail Ertel of Huron Pines.

partnership and habitat management that has seen the warbler return from record low numbers. This success provides the opportunity for us to launch the next chapter in the Kirtland’s warbler story.”

The bird nests primarily in the jack pine forests of Michigan’s Upper and Lower Peninsulas—as well as in limited areas of Wisconsin and Ontario, Canada. It has been on the ESL since the inception of the Endangered Species Act in 1973.

Since then, funding has been

available through state and federal agencies for the intensive habitat management necessary to encourage nesting and successful reproduction of future generations.

Recent surveys have indicated that these efforts have been working. In 2012, 2,090 singing males were counted—up from 1,828 counted the previous year and 167 at the population’s lowest point in 1987.

Along with the growing numbers comes “an increasingly real conversation about moving the warbler off the ESL and away from federal funding support,” Huron Pines officials say.

Ertel said they are just now laying the groundwork for that effort.

Because the warbler is a “conservation-reliant species,” there must be an ongoing program of habitat management and protection, said Brad Jensen, executive director of Huron Pines. That requires a comprehensive community outreach effort to promote awareness and support for jack pine management activities, he said.

Ertel said they have begun to develop a core stakeholders group—“friends of the Kirtland’s warbler,” so to speak—that will involve people of various backgrounds and expertise to advance the economic, cultural and environmental importance of the bird to Michigan and the Great Lakes region.

Members are currently being identified and recruited, and it is hoped that the beginnings of that group will meet as early as January, she said.

They also are planning to create an independent organization to

(Continued on Page 2)



A Kirtland’s warbler in Michigan.

(DNR photo by Dan Kennedy)

Last chance for 2012 survey

We will be compiling the results of *The North Woods Call* 2012 Reader Survey over the holidays and reporting them back to you in January.

There’s still time to register your opinions and provide us with the information we need to better serve you.

If you haven’t yet responded to our request for input, please take time this month to visit the survey tab at our website:

www.mynorthwoodscall.com

Thank you!

Citizen lawsuit advances against DNR

A lawsuit filed by a group of citizens against the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) inched forward Dec. 6 when a scheduling conference was held.

The meeting among major parties and Barry County Circuit Court Judge Amy McDowell helped determine the parameters and timeline for the actual trial.

“Not much happened other than the setting of dates,” said Steve Loshier, president of Michigan Land Air Water Defense (MLAWD)—the citizens’ group that filed suit Oct. 24 in hopes of nullifying the recent auctions of mineral rights within Barry and Allegan State Game Areas, as well as in the Yankee Springs Recreation Area.

The schedule includes a timeline for naming experts, close of discovery and other activities leading up to an Oct. 24, 2013, final settlement conference, Loshier said.

MALWD sued following the DNR’s denial of their request to remove the right to “unconventionally” develop oil and gas on the contested land.

(Continued on Page 2)

Model Kirtland's warbler project being organized

(Continued from Page 1)

direct future conservation efforts, and will design a strong fund-raising program—both public and private-sector—to support the activities and create a permanent endowment.

“There are so many moving parts,” said Jensen. “We have to make sure all the right elements and people are in place.”

John Curry, assistant director of the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation's Central Partnership Office, said Huron Pines is the right organization to manage the project.

Besides being the leading conservation nonprofit in northeastern Michigan, “its innovative and growing staff has successfully implemented numerous high-priority conservation projects in the region,” Curry said. “They are highly effective with state and local governments, partnering with other nonprofit organizations, outreach, fundraising and on-the-ground conservation.”

Ertel is a veteran of Huron Pines with extensive project management experience. She grew up on the shores of the Bay of Fundy, where her interest in birds and bird conservation was sparked while watching thousands of sandpipers arriving to feed and rest during annual migrations south.

She holds a master's degree from Ohio University and spent the past decade working in natural resources—including time conducting bird surveys along the beaches of North Carolina, helping to band migratory songbirds in Amherst Point, Nova Scotia, and providing interpretive programming for visitors to the tidal flats of New Brunswick.

Since joining Huron Pines, she



Huron Pines Executive Director Brad Jensen and Abigail Ertel, the organization's Kirtland's warbler coordinator.

has most recently focused on water quality and wildlife habitat in the Rifle River Watershed.

The Kirtland's Warbler Initiative—as the new program is known—is expected to result in several conservation benefits.

Included are the protection of critical jack pine forests, which are unique to Michigan and essential for Kirtland's warbler survival; maintenance of a stable Kirtland's warbler population; greater investment in the jack pine landscape by landowners, visitors and business leaders to promote local natural resources and quality of life; stronger protection of globally rare cold-water river systems through integrated watershed management strategies; and more effective public/private partnerships to advance conservation in the Great Lakes region.

Jensen said the effort provides a “new vision for the future” and could lead the way for other states with habitat-reliant species to better manage their revival and maintenance with the goal of removing them from the ESL.

In addition to Huron Pines and the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation, partners so far include the U.S. Fish & Wildlife

Service, the U.S. Forest Service, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and the Michigan United Conservation Clubs (MUCC).

Having the MUCC on board is important, Jensen said, because it brings a broader range of people to the table—not just those interested in birds, but also those involved in many other aspects of conservation and resource management.

In local communities, he said, where wildfire suppression and other resource management constraints often encourage little support for the warbler, there will need to be significant educational outreach. They hope to turn the conversation to jack pine forest management and initiate discussions about why that ecosystem exists uniquely in this part of the country.

Outreach to local landowners and school groups will emphasize the idea that jack pine management benefits many plant and wildlife species, as well as rivers, while at the same time helping the Kirtland's warbler (see land management story on Page 3).

Looking Back: December 23, 1953

The tree in the swamp

By Marguerite Gahagan

The tree was tall and straight. It was in a clump of three, deep in the swamp, but it stood out from the many of its kind. There was a dignity and grace about it. Full, even, balanced—it reached its branches high, cradling the dry, sparkling snow on its thick needles.

The saw bit deeper and then it fell—not crashing, but quietly—eased by its smaller brethren, until its top brushed the deep-piled snow. Its lovely top—bluish green, fragrant, snow-damp—came off with another bite of the saw blade and now it was not just another north woods tree.

It was a Christmas tree, a symbol of a season steeped in tradition, beloved by men of all nations throughout the world.

Today it stands in the cabin, green against log walls, stretching its eight feet toward the high-beamed ceiling, filling the air with pine scent of the woods, cradling in its arms ... not snow, but the colored balls and tinsel that for more than a quarter-century have spelled Christmas to one family. Not sunlight, not moonlight, but starlight touches its branches—the stars of green, red, blue and white.

In the swamp, it looked down upon the drifting snow, whose gentle smoothness was broken only by the dainty tracks of a wandering deer.

The swamp changed with the passing clouds. The sun—blinding bright—made the snow a diamond-sparkling blanket. It brought out the green of the needles, and starkly etched the shadows of the trees against the white carpet and the blue sky. It gave the world of the swamp a feeling of tradition; of untouched, virgin beauty; of another era when the north woods was uncharted land and few men wandered into its depths.

It was brave, bright and gay, with an effervescent sparkle that emphasized the season of the year—Christmas.

* * *

Its branches free of snow, its greenish-blue needles uncontested as king of color, the tree was raised in the cabin to be adorned with Christmas bangles—unnecessary additions to its beauty.

Throughout millions of homes, other trees were being trimmed. Each had come from its woods home; each a part of the great, countless miles of American forests; each in itself a part of the richness of a country with wide sweeps of land where free people can still do as their forefathers did—go into the deep woods and come out with a precious gift, a man's own Christmas tree, felled with his own saw, pulled with his own unfettered muscles to his own home.

And there the tree stands, as it stands in the cabin, lighted by fireplace shadows—a symbol of the birthday of the man who was born on Christmas in a wooden manger to die on a tree that man might be saved.

Michigan looks for input on future energy choices

Gov. Rick Snyder has asked that members of the Michigan Legislature and interested citizens share what information they believe is needed to make good energy decisions.

This will help the state set new goals for energy efficiency and re-

newables.

The process will be outlined in January and a series of public participation opportunities will be offered between February and April of 2013. Additional information will be collected and reports outlined from May to June, with draft

reports available for public feedback in October and November.

The final reports—intended for information only—will be available by the end of the year, but will not advocate for any particular policy or outcome.

Governor reveals “fracking” study

In a paper issued in conjunction with a Nov. 28 talk at the Kellogg Biological Station (see story on Page 3), Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder said a formal evaluation of hydraulic fracturing is under way.

The University of Michigan's Graham Sustainability Institute is conducting the study, he said, and state officials are participating in a steering committee for the effort, along with environmental and industry groups. At the end of the study, the governor said, “the public will have a well-reasoned, objective explanation of what this technology is and what it is not,” as well as a Michigan-focused evaluation of the various implications of “fracking.”

Snyder also weighed in on the growing controversy surrounding the practice, which is used in combination with horizontal drilling to reach some natural gas and other resources that otherwise could not be developed.

“This innovation is already benefitting Michigan in the form of unusually low natural gas prices and additional money from state leases that goes to our public lands and parks,” he said, noting that fracking has been done successfully in Michigan for decades.

“None of the fracking that has been done in Michigan has resulted in a single water quality problem,” the governor said. “In fact, fracking's deeper wells likely pose less risk to our groundwater than the shallower wells we are more used to.”

Snyder said the successful use of this technique provides “a great example of how Michigan has made protecting the environment a key part of our energy decisions in the past, and why it must be one of the pillars on which we make our decisions in the future.”

“That said, it's important that our citizens understand what fracking is really about. This (study) is a great example of collaboration and a public university serving the needs of the state, and I am looking forward to seeing the results.”

Snyder gave no indication of when he expected the evaluation to be completed, or a report available for public consumption.

Citizen lawsuit takes step forward

(Continued from Page 1)

They had made three such previous requests—all of which were denied.

DNR officials said they disagree that the sale of leases on the parcels in question is improper or unlawful, and will fight the case in court.

At the heart of the matter is the industrial operation known as hydraulic fracturing—a controversial method that pumps massive amounts of water, sand and chemical additives into a well and down the casing under high pressure.

As the mixture is forced out through perforations in the well and down the casing into the surrounding rock, the pressure causes the rock to fracture. These fractures are then propped open with pumped sand, which enables gas

and/or oil to flow from tight, or low permeability, rock to the well.

Both industry and state officials say that this activity is safe, as long as regulations and proper precautions are followed.

Opponents, meanwhile, insist that there are many examples where these activities have resulted in air and water contamination, as well as other unacceptable side effects.

Members of MLAWD hope the lawsuit sets a statewide precedent, because they believe all state parks, recreation and game areas, and other specially designated areas in the public trust should be off-limits to the technique of “horizontal hydraulic fracturing.”

The group is being represented by the Traverse City law firm of Olson, Bzdok & Howard.

Wanted

Correspondents

We would like to hear from quality writers & reporters interested in contributing conservation-related news from across Michigan—particularly in the northern lower and upper peninsulas, and the capitol city of Lansing.

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Energy & the environment: Gov. Snyder discusses the future

Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder went to the Kellogg Biological Station near Hickory Corners on November 28 to share a message about energy and its relationship to the environment.

Energy, he said, must be reliable and affordable, while at the same time safe for the environment.

"We all depend on having the power stay on, whether at home, work, or on the road," he said. "Second, our energy needs to come at an affordable price to our businesses and homes. Third, we must make sure our energy choices always recognize our responsibility to protect Michigan's environment."

Snyder said many successful companies have safely produced oil and natural gas in the state, while protecting Michigan's waters. That is due, in part, to strict regulations on drilling and wastewater management, he said.

Going forward, the "pillars" of "reliabil-

ity, affordability and protection" will guide Michigan's energy decisions, the governor said. He pointed to energy efficiency as an example of what he calls "no-regrets" policies that the state will use in making these decisions.

"Energy efficiency doesn't mean doing less," he said. "It means doing as much, or more, but using less energy to get it done."

Snyder said that Michigan can become more energy efficient if we "give people the tools they need to take advantage of lower power bills through efficiency." Weatherization programs and legislation that would add energy efficiency information to home inspection reports are needed, he said.

In addition, the state needs to "reinvent" its existing energy efficiency programs to reduce paperwork and costs, while increasing actual improvements, according to Snyder. Already, he said, the Michigan Public Service Commission is allowing collabora-

tion between smaller municipal utilities and cooperatives, which saves even more money.

The state itself has implemented a number of energy efficiency measures in Michigan parks and buildings, Snyder said, and the governor wants to partner with private industry to develop a strategic natural gas reserve for Michigan.

He also talked about upgrading the state's electrical transmission system—even having a major generating source in the Upper Peninsula—"so we aren't entirely dependent on long transmission lines for power."

All these things help get Michigan to where it needs to be today, Snyder said, but they won't get us to where we need to be in the future—a future where he envisions new data centers, new mining operations, new industries, and more and better jobs.

"For that, we need to do something about the high power prices that Michiganders in

the U.P. and northern Lower Peninsula pay," he said. "We need to make sure that new sources of power—whether they are natural gas, wind, or biomass—have a superhighway that can get their power to the places that need it."

Undergirding all this needs to be a comprehensive energy strategy—at both the state and federal levels—around nuclear energy, electrical reliability, natural gas and "energy independence for our most vulnerable," he said.

In addition, an "ecosystem approach" is needed for environmental protection—considering the needs of both nature and people—along with solid land management policies and water protection strategies.

"We will work to set up the kind of environmental protections that allow us to adapt to changing conditions," Snyder said, "and make sure our environment is healthy and resilient."

The North Country National Scenic Trail offers fun for all ages

If you haven't been on the North Country National Scenic Trail, you might want to check it out.

Traversing 4,600 miles through seven states—including the length

and breadth of Michigan—the trail offers excellent opportunities for hiking and backpacking, as well as helping build and maintain the pathway.

North Woods Call subscribers

Stan and Kay Kujawa, who are involved in the Hiawatha Shore-to-Shore portion of the trail in the Upper Peninsula, recently sent us some background information on what has been billed as "the

longest footpath in the United States."

They are understandably proud of a premier trail that was created via the sweat equity of hundreds of hardy volunteers.

Among other topographical features in New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Wisconsin, Minnesota and North Dakota, the trail showcases Michigan's glacier-sculpted north country—the land of Gitche Gumee, Longfellow's Hiawatha, scenic woodlands and the Great Lakes.

Most people don't take on the entire length of the trail in one shot, but each year thousands find their way onto segments near their homes, enjoying quiet and non-motorized movement through the natural world.

Spring, summer, fall, or winter, the vast geographic expanse of the trail offers something for everyone—camping, snowshoeing, long-distance trail running, or just a quiet weekend with the grandchildren.

Forty percent of Americans reportedly live within a day's drive of The North Country National Scenic Trail. They are served by an association that develops, maintains, protects and promotes the trail by creating, encouraging and supporting programs of public education, membership services, recreational opportunities, and resource and corridor protection.

The North Country Trail Association is a nonprofit, membership-based volunteer group.

To learn more about the organization, or to volunteer your help, visit www.northcountrytrail.org, or send an e-mail message to hq@northcountrytrail.org.

You also can write to the North Country Trail Association, 229 East Main Street, Lowell, Michigan 49331.

You'll be glad you did, because this is a great way to enjoy the beauty of Michigan and the six other states that host the trail.



The North Woods Call editor on the North Country Trail in Michigan's Upper Peninsula in 2010. (We know, this isn't about us, but it's the only photo we had to illustrate this story).

Managing for many species: A lesson about jack pine forests

EDITOR'S NOTE: As officials at Huron Pines—a Gaylord-based nonprofit conservation group—work to organize their model Kirtland's Warbler Initiative (see story on Page 1), outreach to local community residents, landowners and business people will be essential.

"Endangered species programs are not always a huge success," said Brad Jensen, executive director at Huron Pines.

Sometimes, he said, suppression of wildfires and other resource management issues dilute what little empathy there might have been for a tiny bird like the Kirtland's warbler.

Huron Pines, therefore, will be actively demonstrating the benefits of managing our jack pine forests, which are needed for the nesting and successful reproduction of the Kirtland's warbler species.

To that end, here are some thoughts from an educational flyer published by the organization:

* * *

Northern Michigan is famous for its blue-ribbon trout streams—those cold, high-quality rivers that steadfastly flow across the landscape after they are filtered through the dry, excessively drained sandy soils.

Left behind 14,000 years ago as the last glaciers receded, the sandy hills and outwash channels work with the harsh northern climate to create conditions that support

only the hardiest of trees—jack pines.

Jack pine forests, just like their beech-maple, aspen, or northern hardwood forest counterparts, offer landowners a variety of resources to enjoy—and just as many opportunities to actively manage.

Looking past the unique physique of the jack pine, (you'll see that) red pine, northern pin oak and aspen are all represented in the landscape, while low, sweet blueberry bushes, collections of fragrant sweet fern, and the rare Allegheny plum fill in the understory. Stands of trees give way to natural openings, where little bluestem glows in the low, golden sunlight of autumn—alongside harebell, Hill's thistle, bird's foot violet, and foraging upland sandpipers, vesper sparrows and common nighthawks.

If a landowner is looking to improve wildlife viewing, or hunting opportunities, managing jack pine stands to encourage early successional stages and incorporate a variety of age classes will offer an ever-changing parade of species.

Young stands (0-5 years) support rabbit populations, while maturing trees provide excellent habitat for spruce grouse and saw-whet owl.

Pockets of jack pine that have reached 50 years of age are used by flocks of wild turkey, bear and busy squirrels, while dead, downed trees provide preferred habitat for snowshoe hare, pileated woodpeckers and

other cavity nesters.

A healthy, diverse stand provides a haven for white-tailed deer, fox, bobcat and ruffed grouse through all ages and places within the landscape, because of the high variation in food sources and cover.

Incorporating areas of varying aged trees builds strength and resiliency into the stand to defend against disease and natural disturbance, and also ensures that—for the lifespan of the forest—there is a high diversity of species present. Research shows that nearly 60 types of songbird can be found using jack pine when the parcel provides a dynamic structure.

Jack pine stands can be cultivated for timber sales—a practice that not only nets the landowner additional income, but provides a perpetual state of early succession so important to habitat and species diversity.

To see examples of active jack pine management that encourages early successional forest and high species diversity, landowners can look to local, federal and state lands. Agencies have been engaged in intensive jack pine management on these parcels for nearly 40 years. Most are familiar with these efforts through the need for Kirtland's warbler conservation.

The management strategies employed as a result have had great success, increasing the endangered warbler's numbers, while also boosting species diversity overall.

These stands have been managed to ensure that a variety of age classes persist on the landscape. Consequently, jack pine, the Kirtland's warbler, and a variety of unique flora and fauna thrive, while the lands are sought-after for rewarding hunting opportunities.

Federal- and state-managed lands allow jack pine forests to persist and thrive so that animals and humans alike reap the benefits. However, many private citizens hold lands within, or around these areas, and could help increase the diversity of our Northeast Michigan forests if they have the desire and guidance to start the process.

If you are a landowner with jack pine forest on your property—or have other resources that you have been thinking about managing—Huron Pines has two new programs dedicated to working with landowners to implement conservation practices.

The Private Lands Program and Kirtland's Warbler Initiative both present new opportunities for area property owners to capitalize on increased land conservation technical guidance, support and resources.

For more information on the jack pine ecosystem, or either of Huron Pines' two new land stewardship programs, call (989) 448-2293, or visit www.huronpines.org.

—Huron Pines



Opinion Page

Conservation Quote

"The trouble with progress is it permits you to do things you needn't do."

— James Russell Wiggins

Special thanks to our readers

With another new year upon us and more than three months under our belts since bringing *The North Woods Call* back to life, we want to pause and say thanks.

We are only as good as our readers and supporters, so we gratefully tip our Stormy Kromer caps to each of you.

Change is never easy, so we appreciate those who have stuck with us through the transition from 40-plus years of Glen Sheppard to whatever it is we have today. Without you, we would just be another defunct newspaper—a casualty of the cultural shifts and advancing technologies that have caused many once-great publications to close their doors.

Of course, the future is still uncertain. So far, we have secured more than 350 print and electronic subscribers—which is a great start, but far below the numbers Shep had when he passed away in early 2011. Some of you are probably just testing us out, but we hope you will find value in our work and continue as part of our community.

After an initial rush of new subscriptions, the orders have recently trailed off some, but are still trickling in most every day. We hope to get a little more savvy about marketing in the coming months, so we can grow the numbers and perhaps attract a few regular advertisers.

We have received many positive comments since we relaunched the publication—and a few critical ones. We appreciate all of them—those that encourage our efforts and those that help improve the work we are doing.

We still believe there is a place for *The North Woods Call* in the 21st Century, but you will be the ultimate arbiters of that. If you like what you see, please encourage friends and family members to come on board. If not, share your concerns and help us grow along the way.

Together we can make this venture work and we're thankful for all you have done so far to keep "the newspaper for people who love the north" moving forward.

The conundrum of oil and gas

"The (urgent demands) of modern life make hypocrites of us all," wrote Capt. Charles Moore in his stunning book *Plastic Ocean*.

He was talking primarily about the growing preponderance of plastic trash in the oceans and other ecosystems, but this observation could just as easily have been made about several other byproducts of human activity.

One thing that comes to mind is the continuing debate over oil and gas exploration, and the deleterious side effects that this activity can potentially have on the environment.

We support those who sound the alarm about this and are encouraged when we see citizen groups form to fight pollution in all its forms. It is absolutely necessary to think deeply about these impacts and to find ways to meet our energy needs with a minimum amount of damage to the earth.

The problem we all face is that—like it or not—oil and gas fuel the world's economy and there is not yet an affordable and efficient alternative that will keep industry and transportation chugging along. There are promising technologies that are emerging and being explored, but none that we know of that will easily replace fossil fuels without disruption to the economy and lifestyles.

Many of the more passionate advocates for alternative energy might say that the economy should take a back seat to clean fuels, or that each of us should expect to sacrifice for the greater good. It is hard to argue with these sentiments, although most people—even the most strident environmental advocates—have largely refused to dial back on their own lifestyles to help usher in an era of green power.

That's where the hypocrisy comes in. When you think about most people you know, how many of them would be anxious to give up their personal automobiles, airplane rides and numerous electronic gadgets—even if it is demonstrated that such actions would result in better stewardship of the earth and its resources?

Such a radical change in habits may not be necessary, of course, if we can bring along better alternative energy sources and implement them without affecting jobs, consumer prices and the desire of individuals to live free, but it's probably not as easy as some would have us believe.

We look forward to the day when new discoveries and improved technologies can lead us out of this mess, but in the meantime we have to be realistic in our stewardship, and do the best we can with the resources and technologies we have.

Christmas morning: A great time for walking

For the past several years, it has been my practice to take a pre-dawn walk on Christmas morning through the rural neighborhood in which I grew up.

It is the best time of the year to be walking. The world's usual frantic pace has temporarily slowed and automobile traffic is light—practically nonexistent if you go early enough. There is a special serenity in the air that is uncommon on other days.

I recall one such morning a few years ago. The sun was just beginning to rise and a nearly full moon hung brightly above, covered by a thin veil of cirrocumulus clouds. The sky appeared red and rippled like the chiseled muscles of an athlete's abdomen.

An eerie vapor floated upward from the chilly waters of tiny Bonnie Brook and I could hear the gentle current gurgling around small stones, fallen logs and beds of still-green watercress.

Some homes remained dark and still, while others were lit by multi-colored Christmas lights that flickered through tightly closed draperies. As usual, I saw no one, but knew there were children smiling and giggling inside the warm structures, as they discovered the toys and gifts that mysteriously appeared overnight.

Passing by the green two-story house where I spent my formative years, I thought about the many happy Christmases spent within those walls—waking early to run down the long wooden staircase with my older sister to see what jolly old Santa left behind.

There was unfettered magic in finding the red-and-white stockings our mother made hanging on the oak-trimmed wall, stuffed with pencils, candy and assorted other goodies.

I have often wondered how many other Christmases were celebrated in the same small rooms during the early 1900s, when others lived in the house and farmed the valley floor. Who were the rosy-cheeked children of those days, giggling with delight at the things they found under their yuletide tree?

I contemplate these questions each year and try to imagine youngsters from another era running down the same stairway in the pre-dawn hours to see what St. Nicholas had left for them. My own father was one of them, having lived in the house himself as a child.

Letter to the editor

A few words of encouragement

EDITOR'S NOTE: We recently heard from a former North Woods Call subscriber whose husband has apparently passed on and she is no longer able to keep up their subscription. We appreciate her comments and thought we would share them.

Editor,
I'm sorry for not to be keeping up. I was delighted with your reincarnation. However, as I find it almost impossible to see and read, I have to cut out the publication.

Thank you for coming along and best of luck. I hope your

paper will continue to cover all aspects of Michigan outdoors, but stick to the truth.

Joan Wolfe
Frankfort, Michigan

P.S. From time-to-time I may send you stuff from old documents (in my files) that you may sometimes consider of interest. You'll note that often they mention *The North Woods Call* as being very helpful.

I'm so glad to think that, besides just news, you'll also be promoting strong protection for our environment. Thank you!

North Woods Journal

By Mike VanBuren



Santa and the editor once upon a time in the olden days.

Each year about this time, my mind generally wanders back to some of the childhood gifts I remember most—toy cars and trucks, BB-guns, assorted games, a 15-pound bow and matching arrow set, miscellaneous clothing, toy rifles and pistols, and lots of Hardy Boy mystery books.

On my walks, I often hum a few bars of "Oh Little Town of Bethlehem," or some other Christmas song, as I continue up the road. When I cross meandering Spring Brook, I usually stop to look into the clear, cold water.

There are greater gifts than the ones we find under our Christmas trees, I remind myself, then offer a small prayer of thanksgiving for the narrow trout stream, the snow, and life itself.

A half-mile further—past the local rod and gun club—I will pause again and gaze up a long driveway toward the tiny house where my grandfather lived until his death more than 45 years ago. I remember sledding with my cousins and neighborhood friends on the steep slopes behind the house.

Across the two-lane road, there was once a jet-black horse that stared at me from behind a dark wooden fence. He always seemed to be curious and I could see his warm breath in the cold morning air, streaming from his wide nostrils like smoke from the fire-breathing dragon in a child's picture book.

"Hello, Mr. Horse," I said each year. "Happy Christmas to you."

The horse, of course, always ignored my greetings and continued to stare at me in silence, as if trying to figure out why anyone would be walking alone on such a

cold winter morning.

Along about this time, the sun usually appears and the moon fades into the daylight, so I start back toward where my walk began.

During the good years, there is plenty of fluffy white snow to muffle sounds and enhance my morning walks. On those days, the landscape glistens in the early morning sunlight like billions of tiny diamonds spread out as far as I can see.

It is on these peaceful mornings that I most keenly sense the presence of God in my life and treasure the incredible gifts I have received during the many Christmas seasons I have enjoyed.

Among them are the sun, the moon, the sky, and the Michigan landscape. Also, the friends and loved ones that have passed through this rural neighborhood and enriched my life. And all the living creatures that share the bountiful land with us.

Topping the list, of course, is a tiny infant born a couple thousand years ago in a crowded Bethlehem stable, which is what Christmas is really all about.

"How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given," the old song goes. *"So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his Heaven."*

One year, as I ended my holiday walk and looked across the valley for the last time, I saw a small herd of white-tailed deer prancing through a stand of tall pine trees. They were quite playful that morning and seemed to be celebrating Christmas in their own special way.

Maybe they sensed the spirit of their creator moving across the land—much as I do each year as the Christmas dawn breaks.

"Oh morning stars together, proclaim the holy birth," I sing from childhood memory, *"And praises sing to God the king and peace to men on earth."*

Merry Christmas, my friends, and a splendid new year full of heavenly hope and love.

The North Woods Call

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A Newshound Publication

*Letter to the editor***Proposed strip mine in the eastern U.P. is a statewide issue that threatens Michigan's conservation legacy**

Editor:

After reading some published reports about Graymont's proposed strip mine in Michigan's eastern Upper Peninsula, I feel an alternative viewpoint is necessary.

There are a number of issues regarding comments made by Graymont representatives that need to be addressed. Graymont claims that this strip mine will create jobs, but offers no details as to how many. I've heard a figure of about 50, but that cannot be verified as of yet. Considering the methods used in modern day mining, I suspect the figure of 50 is greatly exaggerated.

Assuming 50 is accurate, how many of these jobs will be filled by local residents? How many will be filled by individuals already employed by Graymont, or by downstate or out-of-state workers, in order to satisfy any union rule requirements?

There are also job "offsets" that need to be considered. How many long-term jobs will be lost within the logging industry after 5,000 acres of forest are removed and the land beyond the mine has become inaccessible?

I believe that these are all very legitimate questions that need to be considered before any claims of "job creation" are asserted. I am not insensitive to the need for jobs, but there is a cost. This portion of the Lake Superior State Forest is incredibly diverse. So, with respect to that, is the permanent loss of 5,000 acres and loss of access to thousands of additional acres, a fair price to pay for a few short-term jobs?

Graymont has also stated that the land will be restored. How do you restore a 50- to 100-foot deep hole in the ground that encompasses 5,000 acres? We have to keep in mind that everything will be gone—wildlife, forest, vegetation, soil, the very land itself—gone! There is no way to "restore" the old-growth timber, wetlands, ridges, fields, and the varying topography of the land that will lie within the boundaries of this strip mine, no matter how much they claim to the contrary.

What will happen with the many creeks, rivers, streams, and drainage plains? A strip mine is, by its very nature, a permanently destructive entity that irreparably eliminates everything in its path. There is no way to "reclaim" it.

There is nothing that requires this or any other company to do any "restoration" whatsoever. This is just something that they "claim" they will do. Once this land is in the ownership of Graymont, they will be free to do as they please. Furthermore, what will happen if, at some time during the mining operation, they decide to sell the mine to another company? Any and all agreements that may have been made between the state and Graymont will be null and void. The new company will have free reign over the land to do as they please as well.

Graymont's comments continue with the claim that they will only

mine 800 acres at a time, "restore it," then move to the next 800 acres, leaving the remainder of the land "open for use." Considering the fact that this will be an active quarry with heavy equipment, stone crushers, a possible railway, and explosives in use—not to mention the threat of liability lawsuits—it is very unlikely that anything will remain open.

A large portion of this land will have to be fenced off. It is illogical, inefficient, and expensive to tear down and then rebuild 800 acres of fencing at a time. However, there is a greater issue here, which is the enormous quantity of public land that will effectively be "cut-off" behind and across the borders of the mine site—not only by the mine itself, but also by the "buffer zone" fencing. In addition to that, roads and trails that were once navigable by either vehicle or by foot will be gated, further restricting access. Once this mining process has begun, the outdoor recreational activities will come to an end. Make no mistake, if Graymont purchases 5,000 acres, they will mine 5,000 acres!

That being said, I expect they will reduce the acreage that they wish to purchase in order to give the "impression" of a less invasive project. Start at 5,000, then drop it to 1,000 and suddenly it doesn't sound as bad—the size of the mine is not the leading issue.

The possibility of a railway raises yet another issue. Will the state also sell a miles-long strip of land to accommodate a railway?

There has been much talk of conducting local public hearings and town hall meetings once Graymont releases its final decision. However, with all due respect to those that live near this proposed mine, this is NOT a local issue. This is not the sale of county or township land, this is the potential sale of a large portion of the Lake Superior State Forest (state land) and, ultimately, public access to it. This sale will divide, separate, and forever disturb the contiguity of this forest, creating a permanent "hole" that can never be mended.

One final point—what will happen to the many property owners and their cabins that lie within the general area of this mine? Those that fall within the company's desired area will probably be offered a fair price for their land, but what of those who are outside its borders? Their property will be essentially worthless. After all, who would want a hunting cabin next to an active strip mine? Many of these cabins have existed since the 1930s and their owners use them to escape the very thing that this strip mine represents.

Recently I watched an episode of *Michigan-Out-of-Doors* where Russ Mason, chief of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources' Wildlife Division, was grouse hunting with host Jimmy Gretzinger. Jimmy asked Russ a simple question, "What should we as Michiganders be proud of in this State." Russ's response, "I'll tell you what Michiganders should

be most proud of. One hundred twenty years ago this state was a rat hole from one end to the other. You couldn't drink the water, it was overcut, burned down, and polluted—and pretty rotten. In the last 120 years, the people of this state, the Department of Natural Resources, and the legislatures that cared about our resources have put it back. Now, we probably have more abundant, attractive, and world-class natural resources than any other state east of the Mississippi and Michiganders can be very proud of that.

"We have wonderful deer resources and grouse resources. We take more woodcock than anywhere else, manage waterfowl areas that are literally better than any other place in the United States—lots to be proud of in this state!"

One part of Russ's quote that stands out for me is where he says, "...and the legislatures that cared about our resources..."

In addition to Russ's quote, which was well stated by the way, Michigan spends millions on its "Say Yes to Michigan" campaign—much of which boasts of our abundant natural areas which are excellent for hiking, camping, and other outdoor activities. The purpose of this campaign is to promote tourism, which in turn will increase revenue in the Upper Peninsula. So, with these two examples in mind, how will a strip mine fit into this scenario?

In conclusion, I believe we need to seriously consider exactly what it is that we want the U.P. to represent. Do we want the U.P. to be known for its ability to provide open public land, ideal for outdoor activities such as fishing, hunting, hiking, and camping—the place to go to get away from it all? Or do we want it to be famous for a 5,000 acre strip mine?

At some point the limestone will be gone, Graymont will pack up their equipment, money, and paychecks, the state will have spent the money and residents of Michigan will be left with the legacy of a 5,000 acre hole in the ground that serves absolutely no useful purpose for anything or to anyone.

I understand there are some politicians who truly believe that our natural resources hold no intrinsic value until they are "harvested." This is a very dangerous position that seriously jeopardizes the future of not only the access to our public land, but in this particular case, the land itself.

This position also leaves Michigan forest land vulnerable to any company with a pocket full of money and a handful of promises to come into our state and "expect" to purchase any land that they desire. Should this land sale be approved, it will set the precedent that Michigan's state forest lands are "up for grabs".

David Gorenflo
Traverse City, Michigan

The Wild Nearby

By Tom Springer

**The honey locust: A Christmas Tree you likely don't know beans about**

No one likes a know-it-all, but as with the Hebrew prophets of antiquity, I can hold my tongue no longer. It's time to set the record straight on a misunderstood bit of Christmas history that the Western Hemisphere gets entirely wrong.

At issue is a hardwood tree native to Michigan ... and, the dietary habits of one John the Baptist.

If you've not heard, the earthly mission of John the Baptist was to proclaim the messiah's coming. He called for widespread repentance and baptized his followers, including Jesus himself, in the Jordan River. John's travels took him into the rocky hills and badlands of the Judean Desert (now part of Israel). It was ideal terrain for a self-styled preacher and ascetic who often locked horns with civil and religious authorities.

By all accounts, John was a woolly and unvarnished character:

"John wore clothing made of camel's hair and had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey." (Matthew, 3:4)

While most of this sounds plausible, it's the locust reference that's caused the confusion.

When I first heard this verse of scripture as a kid growing up in Florida, I couldn't imagine anything more revolting. We had Spanish grasshoppers down there. They were black, yellow and red; horrid things, some four inches long, that would cling, with monstrous intent, to our window screens. And you're telling me that John the Baptist dipped these things in honey for breakfast?

In truth, the "locusts" that John ate were not of the insect variety. Instead, they were likely seed pods that grow on the locust tree. The pods, about a foot long on a Michigan honey locust, contain leguminous (bean-like) seeds. Around the Mediterranean basin, the tree goes by many names: locust, carob, carob bean, sugar pod and—drumroll please—St. John's bread. Apparently, they've known all along.

In arid lands with scant pasture, the high-protein beans were once an important food source for livestock. People can eat them too, although from what I've read they're an acquired taste. It's no wonder that John drowned them with honey.

On the quiet country road where I walk, there's a nice stand of native honey locusts. In Michigan's rich soil, some of these have reached heights of 60 to 70 feet. In summer, their lacy, fern-like foliage casts a shade that's cool, but pleasantly mottled. Their fine leaves can be easily swept and won't clog storm drains, which makes locusts popular as urban street trees.

There's one trait, though, that these tame, citified honey locusts have had bred out of them: their thorns. And we're not talking here about tolerable little thorns, as you'll find on a rose bush or raspberry cane. No, the three-inch pig stickers on a wild honey locust are about as stout and brutally sharp as a bayonet. There's three by my writing chair and each time I mess with one (like just now!) I manage to poke myself.

Why would such a large, graceful tree need such a hostile defense? What's it afraid of? It's got bark as thick as an elm, maple, oak or ash. Shouldn't that be body armor enough? No resident bird, squirrel, rabbit, raccoon, possum, or even bear could cause a honey locust harm.

Indeed, the honey locust's over-the-top nasty thorns seem more offensive than defensive. They project an aura of gratuitous evil—something you'd expect more from fallen humanity than an innocent tree. Could it be that trees need salvation, too? Some process of rebirth or recreation to take up where their earth-bound evolution has left off?

I'll leave that question to someone above my pay grade. For now, I'm content with the seed pods collected on my walks. They'll overwinter in the barn and I'll see if I can get seedlings to sprout from them in spring.

If they take, I hope they'll stand as an alpha to omega remembrance of the gospel story. The tree recalls a wilderness holy man, the herald of a divine king who was born to serve the poor and oppressed. And that king, in his defining moment, would wear a crown of thorns as painful, ugly—and thereby necessary—as those in my hand.

Is the Call's delivery satisfactory?

With this being the final issue of *The North Woods Call* for 2012—and the end of our third month of publication since we relaunched the publication—we're curious how we're doing with delivery.

There have been a handful of issues related to subscribers not receiving their paper—mostly because we may have had the wrong e-mail address, or made a bookkeeping error—but we're assuming that most deliveries are occurring without a hitch.

If you have any issues related to this, please let us know so we can straighten it out.

We're particularly interested in whether the print editions are arriving intact, given our current method of mailing them folded and tabbed with a first-class stamp.

We will be looking closer at bulk mailing options after January 1, which might allow us to mail without folding and tabbing.

Send your comments to: editor@mynorthwoodscall.com.

More Opinion

Outdoor Rhythms

By Doug Freeman



Outdoor nights: Minding the sky

Not everyone has the desire or opportunity to study the night sky. That's quite understandable. Winter's icy winds and the buggy darkness of summer can be uncomfortable, to say the least.

Residents of cities have to deal with the additional problem of a thick visual smog emanating from street and security lighting. While probably necessary, all that extra light severely restricts the viewing of any but the brighter celestial objects.

I grew up in Lansing, not knowing what a really clear night looked like until a junior high class trip to the Michigan State University planetarium. A literal eye-opener!

Living now in the farm country of northern Muskegon County, a much better view is obtainable. Though some of our neighbors do have dusk-to-dawn floodlighting in their yards, a majority of folks around here have opted for a more natural night environment.

Our little place came with a high-wattage floodlight, controlled by a manual switch. It's used very sparingly, which results in definite electricity savings, not to mention improved astronomical observations.

Despite volumes of fascinating information recently gathered by various scientific disciplines via satellite and radio telescopes, I doubt we—as a species—will ever be able to comprehend the totality of God's vast universe. That doesn't mean we shouldn't try to develop an appreciation of our rather opportune place in the cosmic vault.

My favorite technique is simple. I take a slow stroll out to our horse pasture during the wee hours. If local clouds aren't too thick, I plop down on my back in the chilly—and usually damp or frosty—grass. An old woolen blanket makes a fine cushion. Horizontal and upward-facing, a person can thus develop a sense of the earth's position, its rotation, and our planet's orbital path around the solar system.

The experience is as much about the "feel" of gravity plastering you flat to the ground, as it is the visual panorama of stars, planets and moons (parts of our own Milky Way galaxy), sweeping past on their nightly rounds.

Celestial mechanics, astronomers call it. The characteristics and movements of bodies in space—a discipline that can be intensely mathematical and technical for those so inclined. Telescopes and binoculars are helpful, but not essential to understanding the very core of this reality.

Why would a person want to endure moderate discomfort to take in even a part of such a small revelation? The answer is different for every individual. I've found that the brilliance of far-distant stars impacting a person's brain can be enough to jump-start a tired imagination. And, of course, there's more: meteors, satellites, comets, and the northern lights. At times, these can be spectacular.

Those who observe the night sky on a frequent basis will certainly form a more accurate mental model of the universe. And they're also likely to see anomalies—things not anticipated, nor noted on a calendar—unidentifiable lights and shapes cruising high overhead, sometimes moving erratically.

Yes, I've seen them, too. Natural phenomena, perhaps, or experimental government aircraft. Or maybe something else. Most of us don't know nearly as much as we think we do.

Away from city lights and in a natural setting, we're often better able to contemplate the meaning of things. Amidst the fresh air and night noises, look skyward—there's a lot going on.

Public land management plan

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) wants to develop a public land management plan by the spring of 2013.

The plan is an essential component of the governor's priority to grow the state's resource-based industries.

Goals of the planning process are to educate the public and opinion leaders about public lands and their value; establish collaborations with Michigan Economic Development Corporation regions that use public lands for regional economic prosperity initiatives;

address legal requirements; and establish strategic objectives for land acquisition and disposal.

Background information is now being prepared and performance goals will be drafted with key state-level stakeholders by March 2013. Regional public land goals are expected to be identified by April 2013.

Based on input received through the public engagement process, the DNR will prepare the plan by May 2013 and submit it to the appropriate committees of the Michigan Legislature.

A note to letter writers

All letters must be signed. Please include your name and mailing address (e-mail address, too, if you don't mind).

We won't publish street addresses or phone numbers, but we must have them to verify that letters are authentic. No unsigned letters will be used. It's OK for your signature to be electronic.

Letter from the editor

Hey, what's with the political soapbox?

We received some push back from a couple of *North Woods Call* subscribers about editorials that they felt were more "political" than sensible. We don't necessarily agree, but we respect their opinions and understand why they said what they did.

Because we believe there are probably others out there with similar sentiments, we thought we'd take a few moments to address this issue.

First of all, we didn't mean to annoy anyone—by the opinions, or the way they were stated. We suspect the reactions may have been different if our thoughts were more closely aligned with those of the individuals who called us to task. In fact, one of them graciously acknowledged this inconsistency.

Still, he labeled our comments as "tiresome" and classified us in the category of "Fox-bots," apparently referring to the conservative Fox News Channel, which we cannot get on our television and have seldom watched. We receive our news from a variety of independent sources, and our editorial opinions are based in our personal experience, faith, education, and observation—not what someone else tells us to think.

We fully agree with the reader who said that there is far too much ugliness in the politics of today, yet we see no evidence that this is practiced by one side only. And simply sharing a sincerely held opinion does not make one a "merchant of hate and vitriol," as was implied by this particular individual.

Nevertheless, we wrestle with these interpretive realities when shaping our editorial content and are troubled when someone questions the purity of our intent. The fact is, nobody finds modern political discourse more distasteful than we do. We would rather ignore politicians completely and live our lives unburdened by many of their policies, rules and regulations.

Yet, as government and bureaucracies grow, so do the number of political actions and decisions that directly impact our daily lives. They become increasingly relevant as we consider resource management, taxation, public spending and, yes, *liberty*.

Such issues probably don't concern a lot of our fellow citizens, but to us they are serious matters that should be debated openly.

We also recognize that many people in today's deeply divided world—both liberal and conservative—don't want to hear any ideas that they find objectionable. Apparently, having their own positions parroted back to them is enough.

And sometimes we forget that we live in an era when simple words like "liberty," "freedom," "property rights" and even the "U.S. Constitution" bring visceral reactions from a good share of the American public—in the same way that words like "justice," "fairness," "social welfare" and "choice" seem to set off others.

This is quite amazing to us—given our national heritage—but there doesn't seem to be much common ground. Like Orwell's *1984*, the true meaning of almost everything has been distorted. We blame this largely on political demagogues who regularly divide us against each other for their own gain, but some prefer to blame whoever is on "the other side" of an issue—the so-called "enemy."

We can't do much about any of this, except try to write the truth as we perceive it to be. You may disagree, but then you are welcome to make your own reasoned arguments to the contrary.

It is our belief that the purpose of an opinion page is not to run only those thoughts that are comfortable to any given reader—or to the editor, for that matter. We can learn much—and probably make better collective decisions—if we will at least entertain the sincere ideas of others.

That's all we're trying to do with our editorials—offer what we believe to be legitimate and useful thoughts, so that there can be a more robust civic debate. After all, isn't free expression what our republic is all about?

The important thing to remember is that these are just opinions—freely offered with a pure heart. They are not harmful in and of themselves. You may do with them as you wish.

That said, please keep those cards and letters coming. We love to hear from everyone—even our critics—and we'll keep striving for better ways of stating our opinions that will, hopefully, allow you to more readily absorb what we're actually trying to say.

Upper Peninsula cougar photos verified

Still trying to spot your first Michigan cougar? Maybe you need a trail camera.

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has verified three recent trail camera photos that "captured" wild cougars in the Upper Peninsula.

Two of the photos—both of a cougar with a radio collar—were taken during October in Menominee County. One was near the Cedar River and the other one was near Menominee, just north of the Wisconsin border.

The third photo (see right) was taken during November in northern Marquette County.

DNR officials were trying to determine the origin of the radio-collared cougar, because Michigan does not place such movement-tracking collars on cougars. The closest states that do are North Dakota and South Dakota, they said.

All three photos were taken on private property and the landowners have asked to remain anonymous. DNR Wildlife Division staff visited each location to confirm the authenticity of the photos.

The DNR has now verified the presence of cougars in the Upper Peninsula 20 times since 2008.

Established cougar populations are found as close to Michigan as the Dakotas, and transient cougars dispersing from these areas have



Albeit a bit fuzzy—like those National Enquirer photos of Bigfoot—the DNR says this is the real deal. The image of a cougar making its way through the night woods of northern Marquette County was taken by a trail camera in November 2012. (photo courtesy of the DNR)

been known to travel hundreds of miles in search of new territory.

Also known as mountain lions, cougars were native to Michigan, but disappeared from the state in the early 1900s. The last confirmed wild cougar in Michigan prior to 2008 was an animal killed near Newberry in 1906, according to the DNR.

Although cougar sightings are regularly reported, verification is often difficult, due in part to a lack of physical evidence. Characteristic evidence includes tracks—which are about three inches long by three-and-one-half inches wide

and typically show no claw marks—and suspicious kill sites, such as deer carcasses that are largely intact, and buried with sticks and debris.

Reports of cougar tracks and other evidence should be made to a local DNR office, or by using the DNR's online reporting form at www.michigan.gov/cougars.

Cougars are classified as an endangered species in Michigan. It is unlawful to kill, harass, or otherwise harm them, except in defense of human safety.

—DNR report

Conservation Officer Logs (11/12/12 through 11/25/12)

Snooze and booze: Open bottle brings unexpected ticket for sleepy driver**DISTRICT 1**

While working a late night shining patrol, **CO Jason Wicklund** came across a vehicle stopped in the roadway. CO Wicklund found the driver leaning over the steering wheel with his foot on the brake. CO Wicklund carefully got the vehicle into park and awoke the driver. The driver claimed to be very tired from a lack of sleep. The driver passed field sobriety tests that were administered, but was ticketed for the open intoxicants found in the vehicle.

CO Jason Wicklund and **Sgt. Marc Pomroy** observed a snowmobile operating in a careless manner on a local Iron County roadway. The COs checked the driver and observed that his snowmobile was unregistered and had no trail permit. The subject was warned the previous year by **CO Dave Painter** for the same violations. This time enforcement action was taken.

DISTRICT 2

CO Jerry Fitzgibbon contacted a 15-year-old hunting unsupervised in an illegal blind, without a hunting license, over an early, excessive bait pile. He had operated an ORV from his father's camp with his 15-year-old friend as a passenger, both without helmets, no ORV license, without a gun case, without supervision and without an ORV safety certificate. The supervisor who should have been present was back at camp and his 16-year-old son was also hunting unsupervised, without a license and took an ORV to get to his hunting location, without a helmet or gun case. While CO Fitzgibbon was sorting this out, the first youth's uncle came back on foot, without hunter orange, with a loaded rifle after hunting hours, and had left his hunting license at camp. Enforcement action was taken.

CO Mike Evink and **Sgt. Darryl Shann** contacted a hunter and his wife in a tree fort on state land on opening day. The 7 x 5 foot platform was nailed and lag-screwed into a very large oak tree in a clearing. The hunter also had completely covered his rifle with cedar bark, using a hot glue gun. A ticket was issued for the illegal tree stand and the hunter was directed to remove the blind and all the screws and nails.

CO Mike Evink checked a hunter who at first said he had a license. After making a big show of emptying his wallet and not finding a license, he was asked what color it had been. Being unable to guess the color, he confessed that when his companions had gone into a local store to buy licenses, he must have forgotten to do so. A ticket was issued.

CO Brett Gustafson was on routine patrol when he observed duck hunters in a boat heading to

A NOTE TO READERS:

These are brief excerpts from the CO's bi-monthly field reports. To conserve space, we have excluded the more routine activities in favor of what we think are the most unusual and interesting.

If you want a more complete log than we are able to provide, you can find an archive of them under the Law Enforcement tab on the Michigan Department of Natural Resources website.

shore. Upon contact he determined that the boat owner received money to be a duck guide and take the others out for the day. The CO couldn't see his charter boat license on the side of the boat and began to ask questions. The subject was operating an unlicensed illegal charter operation and was ticketed.

DISTRICT 3

CO Andrea Erratt followed up on a complaint of over-baiting and found several shooting lanes loaded with bait. A total of more than 200 gallons were on the ground. The subject stated he didn't know the limit on the amount of bait allowed. His son, who had just taken hunter safety, advised it was two gallons. Enforcement action was taken.

CO Matt Theunick is investigating a complaint on Bois Blanc Island of a big buck shot from a motor vehicle—on private property without permission. While hanging at a deer camp, someone came in the middle of the night and sawed off one of the trophy buck's antlers. Next, the buck "disappeared," only to be found by the U S Coast Guard hanging on a Lake Huron lighthouse ladder, along with a rifle left at the lighthouse. The investigation continues.

CO Mark DePew was driving behind a vehicle on state land, which apparently made the driver of the vehicle nervous, because he threw a bag of marijuana out of his window, showering the windshield of the patrol truck with marijuana. The vehicle was stopped and it was discovered that the driver had a suspended driver's license. He was arrested for his violations.

DISTRICT 4

CO Brian Brosky and **Sgt. Kevin Hackworth** were patrolling when they heard local dispatch call out a house fire that had just been reported near their current location. The COs responded and found that the upstairs was fully engulfed in flames. The neighbors reported that they believed there were still persons in the residence. The COs then broke out the downstairs windows to vent the smoke and ultimately located and rescued the family dog that had hidden a few feet from one of the downstairs windows. It was determined that the residents had left just prior to the fire breaking out.

CO Mike Wells stopped to check a subject at a vehicle that

had multiple deer attached. CO Wells discovered that the subject was a convicted felon and not allowed to possess a firearm. CO Wells requested the assistance of **CO Carla Soper** to retrieve the firearm used in harvesting the deer. The firearm and deer were seized with enforcement action taken for the felon being in possession of a firearm.

DISTRICT 5

COs Chris Bowen and **William Cherry** also received information on two leg-hold traps with a bobcat in each. The complainant observed the cats in the traps and returned long after the 24 hours and saw that the bobcats were still in the traps, so he called the RAP hotline. The COs contacted the trap owner and enforcement action was taken.

CO Warren MacNeill responded to a complaint of a lost hunter, and was able to locate the subject in a thick jack pine forest and return him to safety using his ORV. Not realizing he was being helped by a CO, the subject began to tell CO MacNeill how much he disliked the DNR. CO MacNeill played along until the subject saw his patrol truck and then quickly changed his tune, thanking CO MacNeill for saving him.

DISTRICT 6

Sgt. Ron Kimmerly received a complaint that a hunter had shot four bucks this year and he does it every year. The complainant went on to say that he and others are sick of it. The Sgt. contacted the subject, who was in his garage with two bucks hanging and two more sets of antlers on the ground. All four were tagged. The subject pointed out the two that he said his father shot. The Sgt. checked on the father's information and found that he was almost 80 years old. The tag was dated in the archery season and the Sgt. advised the subject that his father must be doing pretty well if he is still out bow hunting. The Sgt. then walked over to the subject and asked him to bring his father's phone number up on the cell phone that was in his hand. The subject must have pushed the

wrong button because a slide show started that showed the subject photographed with each of the four bucks. He then gave the Sgt. a written confession of killing the four bucks himself and using his father's tags for two of them. Enforcement action was taken.

While investigating a complaint of a hunter taking an over-limit of bucks, **CO Larn R. Strawn** conducted an inspection at a taxidermist in his area. During the inspection the CO identified over 30 separate violations, including the unlicensed taxidermist, untagged specimens and the illegal possession of game. The CO seized several specimens, including a bull moose, sheep, buck deer, caribou, mink, fox, coyote and a skunk. The incident and inspection results have been forwarded to the local prosecutor for review and action.

On the firearm deer opener, **CO Quincy Gowenlock** responded to a gunshot victim who was hunting along the Clinton-Gratiot county line. Upon arrival, the CO found an older male lying along the wood line with a large wound to his thigh. Upon initial investigation, the subject related that he shot at a deer with his .44 magnum revolver. His gun must have re-cocked itself, the victim said, and then went off again, striking him in the thigh. The round went through his thigh and exited out the back of his leg. Luckily, he missed the main artery and his femur. The subject was transported to Carson City Hospital and the case was turned over to the Clinton County CO for further investigation.

DISTRICT 7

CO Chris Holmes concluded an 11 month investigation into a subject believed to be involved with multiple violations of the hunting and trapping laws of Michigan. **COs Holmes, Steve Mooney, Paul Higashi** and **Sgt. Jeff Rabbers** conducted search warrants on two residences stemming from the investigation. During the search warrant service, the COs seized nearly two dozen illegally killed/possessed game birds and animals including rabbits, squirrels, waterfowl, migratory birds, mink, raccoon and deer. Nearly 50 traps and associated trapping equipment were also seized from the residences, along with firearms used in the crimes. It was also discovered that several other people were involved in the incidents and multiple count arrest warrants will be requested.

CO Mike McGee received a complaint about a woman who was walking her dog when the dog went into a ditch and began smelling around a dead animal. The woman reached into the ditch to get her dog out and set off a body-gripping trap on her hand. Luckily, the retractable dog leash in her hand kept the trap from completely closing; however, the woman was unable to get out of the trap. She was able to call 911 and a deputy responded, and released the woman out of the trap unharmed. CO McGee was contacted and discovered that the trapper, who CO McGee had previously ticketed, was trespassing. Enforcement action was taken.

DISTRICT 8

CO Dan Bigger was contacted at his residence on November 14th and requested by the county to investigate shots fired and spotlights seen in the area. CO Bigger responded to the location and, as he waited for any activity, heard a shot nearby and saw a spotlight behind a residence. CO Bigger contacted the homeowner who was sitting in his residence with a gun rest on his kitchen table and shooting into stumps in his back yard to sight in his shotgun before the opening day. The subject would then use the spotlight to observe where the round was hitting the target. CO Bigger advised of the unsafe manner of sighting in his firearm and advised him he should consider sighting in his firearm before 10:30 p.m. the night before the firearm opener.

DISTRICT 9

CO Al Schwiderson responded to a complaint of subjects hunting deer with a .22 rim fire in Marathon Township. The CO located a subject and his son, who admitted to hunting squirrels that morning but said they were not hunting deer. The subjects and their vehicle matched the description, according to the complainant. As the CO continued to question the subjects, the father stated that they were out hunting squirrels and as they were sitting quietly, a herd of deer came out and startled them. The father stated that he got scared, turned and shot the closest doe to him. Once he shot it, he never tagged it. The CO asked to see their hunting licenses and neither of them had deer hunting or small game licenses. Enforcement action was taken.

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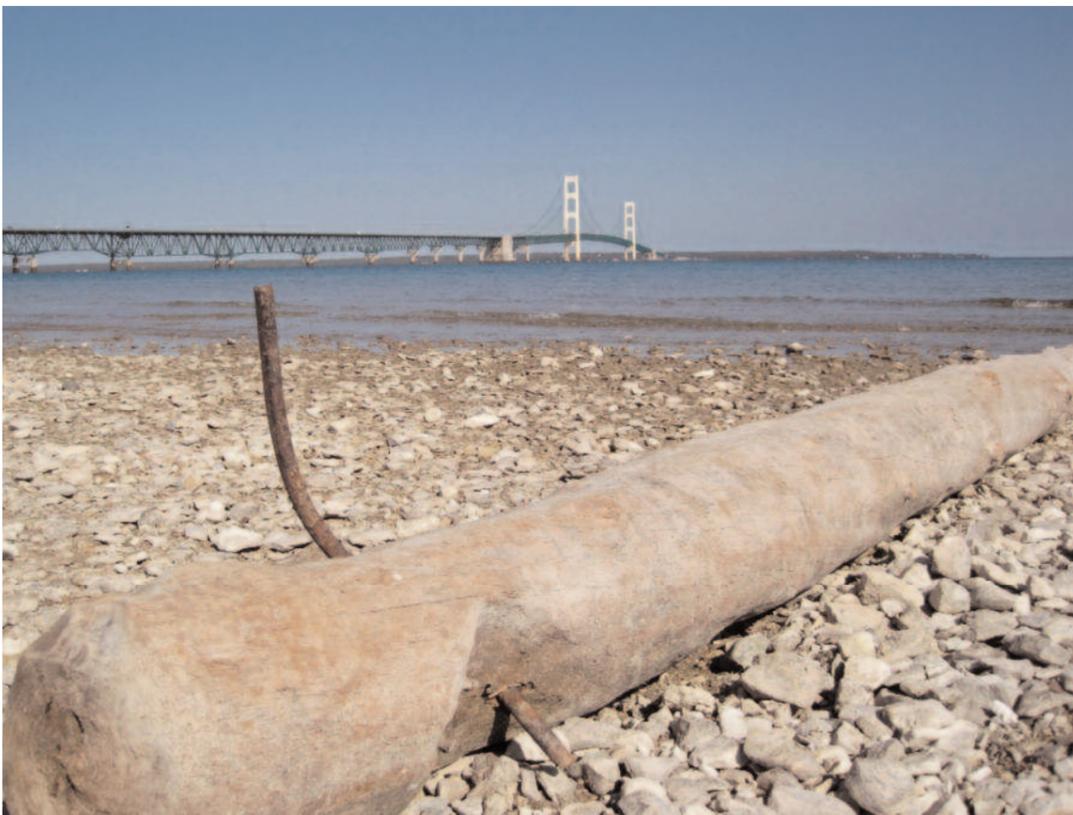
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Final Shot



Shipping Heritage

Remnants of Michigan's Great Lakes shipping industry routinely wash up on the shores of the inland seas. This weathered and well-honed beam was spotted last fall at the Straits of Mackinac—perhaps the legacy of a 19th Century steamer lost during a fierce November gale. Shipwreck enthusiasts can find dedicated underwater preserves in the state, as well as interesting museums dedicated to this subject, such as the one at Whitefish Point in the Upper Peninsula.

\$2.5 million for the Great Lakes

Grand Rapids philanthropist Peter Wege and his namesake foundation have committed another \$2.5 million to the Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition.

The funding will be used to help restore the Great Lakes.

"We are extremely grateful for the generous support from Mr. Wege and The Wege Foundation," said Lynne McClure, midwest director for the National Parks Conservation Association and a co-chair of the coalition. "Their leadership has been instrumental in elevating the profile of the Great Lakes nationally, which has led to a federal commitment to improve the health of the lakes for the millions of people who live along the shores and visit each year."

Wege—a former Steelcase executive—and his foundation helped launch the coalition in 2004 with a five-year, \$5 million grant and have continued to be core supporters.

The coalition and its 120 member organizations have been leaders in securing a robust Great Lakes restoration plan and accompanying federal funding.

"We have a responsibility to be strong stewards of this global resource," said John Jackson of Great Lakes United, who also co-chairs the coalition.

Public comment by Dec. 18

U.P. copper mine nears final OK

A proposed copper mine near the southwest edge of the Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park is getting closer to reality.

The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) said Orvana Resources—a subsidiary of Toronto-based international mining corporation Orvana Minerals—recently withdrew and resubmitted its application for the wetlands, inland lakes and streams permit needed to construct the mine north of Wakefield in Gogebic County.

The deadline for public comment on the new application—the last major environmental permit needed before the project can move forward—is December 18, 2012, they said.

The application was revised in response to previous public comments from local residents, Native American tribes, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the DEQ. To review it, visit www.deq.state.mi.us/ciwpis and enter file number 12-27-0050-P.

Major improvements include a better analysis of alternatives for reducing environmental impact; use of a natural channel design, instead of ditches, to divert existing streams around the tailings basin;

raising the height of the basin to reduce its footprint; and adjusting the plan to better protect streams and wetlands. In addition, Orvana agreed to accept modifications to its mining permit to address concerns expressed, DEQ officials said.

Orvana bought leases in 2008 on 1,759 acres southwest of the inactive White Pine Mine, where more than 1.7 million tons of copper and 4.5 million ounces of silver were mined between 1953 and 1996. Known as the Copperwood Mine, this new project has reportedly been somewhat less controversial than the Kennecott Eagle Mine near Marquette, because many people want the estimated 500 local mining jobs for the economically depressed area. Still, environmental groups and native tribes have voiced concerns over impacts to the landscape and Lake Superior fisheries.

"Our goal is permitting a successful operation that considers the environment," said DEQ Director Dan Wyant. "We are pleased that Orvana's leaders share this goal."

The company hopes to begin production at Copperwood in 2014.



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