



GRAND TRAVERSE CONSERVATION DISTRICT

2022 ANNUAL REPORT

October 2021 – September 2022

A LETTER FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Dear Conservation District Friends,

I am grateful for all that has occurred over the past year. Our team has been working diligently on various initiatives throughout the region, often in collaboration with our partners and always with strong community support. We have achieved much as a result. At GTCD, we are continuously innovating and redefining what it means to be a conservation district. We are making a positive impact on conservation and our community by providing educational opportunities and responsibly managing our natural resources.

I am also excited to announce that we are officially launching the Great Lakes Incubator Farm program (GLIF) this year and have recruited our first cohort of beginning farmers for the upcoming growing season. This project will have a significant impact on the Grand Traverse region and beyond by providing farmer training and supporting farmland succession, ultimately protecting our local food system and preserving the agricultural landscapes that define the area.

Another key aspect that ties together our land stewardship and the Incubator Farm program is our plan to build the Ottaway Crossing footbridge where the old Sabin Dam once served as an east-west crossing. This will provide access to miles of trails at the Natural Education Reserve, including a connection to the GLIF property at the historic Meyer Farm on Keystone Road.

We look forward to sharing further developments on these projects and appreciate your continued support.

With gratitude,

Koffi Kpachavi
Executive Director





THE GREAT LAKES INCUBATOR FARM

Last year, in preparation for the launch of the Great Lakes Incubator Farm (GLIF) program, regional partners and GTCD staff installed a pollinator plot in collaboration with Northwest Education Services Career Tech Agriscience students, who grew and planted ~2800 native plant plugs at the farm. With a few drip irrigation lines to help give it a boost, the pollinator plot took off throughout the summer and is on its way to being well-established. Later in the season, the GTCD staff planted three acres of cover crop on the remaining fields.

This fall, Layla Khorsheed joined the team as the Great Lakes Incubator Farm Manager to lead the GLIF program. She is eager to serve the community by helping lower barriers to entry for new and beginning farmers, facilitating training and workshops with our partners, and helping participants transition to their own land upon graduation from the three-year program. She has been building relationships with supporting organizations, collaborating with local growers, and has attended the Michigan CSA Network Conference in Mt. Pleasant in addition to the Great Lakes Fruit, Vegetable, and Farm Market Expo in Grand Rapids. She looks forward to working with the first cohort of participants.

GLIF wouldn't be complete without our University of Michigan School for Environment and Sustainability (SEAS) graduate students who diligently researched other incubator farm programs to design a framework for our program here in northwest Michigan. We were fortunate to host them as on-site interns last summer, where we began on-farm preparations for the program and visited partners around northern Michigan. From orchards and pastures to a large distribution center, our SEAS/GTCD staff enjoyed learning directly from those in the industry and will incorporate these lessons into the framework for GLIF.



EDUCATION



In 2022, our staff focused on enhancing our current programming, identifying new opportunities for collaboration, and overall, better serving our community.

Nature Day Camp 2022 wrapped up its most successful season to date. Serving more than 300 families, Nature Day Camp welcomed young conservationists to the Grand Traverse Natural Education Reserve to discover the natural beauty that surrounds us here in Northern Michigan.

Our new Nature Playscape opened to the community with an official ribbon cutting ceremony in July. Seeing over 3,000 visitors in its first three months, this natural, free-play area encourages and welcomes all ages to interact with nature through sensory learning experiences by engaging with and manipulating diverse natural elements and materials.



1,000

1,000 students from 28 different schools, groups, and programs participated in our NEST field trip program



3,000

Since opening in July, our Nature Playscape welcomed over 3,000 visitors in the first three months



300

Our Nature Day Camp program served over 300 families where young conservationists explored all that the Natural Education Reserve has to offer

EDUCATION

GTCD also hosted our first Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES) exhibit titled "Habitat." "Habitat" explores one big idea: Protecting Habitats Protects Life. This exhibit includes indoor and outdoor signage, hands-on experiences, and more. We are excited to host this exhibit until 2024.

Our Nature Education for Students and Teachers (NEST) field trip program also celebrated its most successful year to date. Led by Education Specialist Paige MacKinnon, NEST programs served over 1,000 students from 28 different schools, groups, and programs.

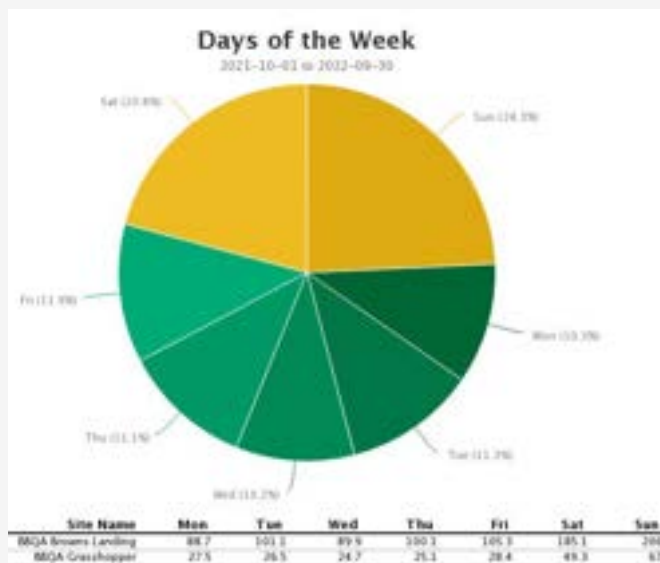
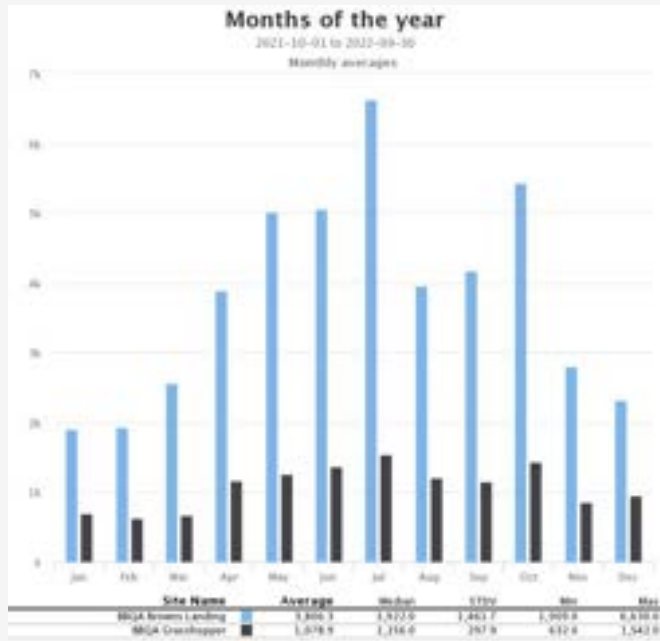
We also welcomed Rachel Blevins as our new Environmental Educator in 2022. Rachel joins the GTCD Education team with nine years of experience working with Virginia State Parks. Her experience includes developing and leading education programming, working as a crew member on prescribed burns, and assisting with invasive species management. In her role as Environmental Educator, she is looking forward to expanding and enriching our range of program offerings as well as forging new partnerships to best serve our community.

Thank you to our community, our program families, and to those who choose to support our work. 2023 brings a great opportunity to collaborate and thrive. We hope to see you at an upcoming GTCD program.



Brown Bridge Quiet Area Usage By Trailhead

PARKLANDS



In 2022, we experienced another fantastic year of achievements as we oversaw the management of over 2,500 acres of public parklands in the Grand Traverse region. Cameron Evans was added as a fourth full-time Parklands Steward which expanded our expertise and workmanship to provide new trails and restore river banks for the public to enjoy.

Earth Day weekend was well-spent at Brown Bridge Quiet Area with over 90 volunteers helping to revegetate the banks of an in-stream restoration project geared towards stabilizing streambanks and providing critical river habitat. These seedlings, potted shrubs, and large trees will aid the ongoing restoration of what used to be the 190-acre impoundment formed by Brown Bridge Dam. To date, there have been over 28,000 trees and shrubs and over 3,000 herbaceous plugs planted in the Brown Bridge bottomlands alone, complementing the 7,560 linear feet of river habitat that has been created through the placement of large in-stream wood which is important for fish, aquatic insects, and other wildlife.



PARKLANDS

Over 60 children from local elementary schools joined us on Arbor Day to learn about restoration and stewardship by helping plant various species of native seedlings within the Sabin bottomlands of the Natural Education Reserve. In June, members of the public helped plant approximately 1,400 native milkweed plugs in the Sabin bottomlands, thanks to an award from Monarch Watch. Since the removal of the three dams, over 60,000 native trees, shrubs, and plants have been planted, in what would otherwise be barren landscapes resulting from 100 years of impoundment.

At the Recreational Authority's Hickory Meadows property, nearly a quarter mile of trail was constructed in the spring of 2022, connecting the main meadow north towards the M-72 trailhead which traverses diverse forest types and vital marshland. A 24ft. footbridge and a 40ft. boardwalk were constructed over sensitive wetland areas, thanks to funding from the Traverse City Track Club. Future trail plans include connecting Hickory Meadows to the City's Hickory Hills property, as well as the future Hickory Forest.

We were also able to expand our assistance beyond the traditional boundaries of our managed parklands to nearby municipalities. Staff spent much of August at Whitewater Township's Battle Creek Natural Area and Lossie Road Nature Trail clearing downed trees and reopening trails that connect the surrounding areas and offer glimpses of a densely-wooded watershed, including Battle Creek and a tributary pond full of wildlife. In addition, GTCD provided services to the City of Traverse City with the installation of a new wood staircase at Indian Woods Park, as well as maintenance help within East Bay Township. We are grateful for the partnerships across the county and look forward to new ways to serve the community.



MICHIGAN AGRICULTURE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSURANCE PROGRAM



Our Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) technician, Samantha Wolfe, hit the ground running in 2022 with a number of verifications already completed and more farm visits in the pipeline. Sam attended training sessions, both virtually and in-person, from Grand Traverse to Kent, Ottawa, and Clinton Counties to further her knowledge of soil quality and health, specialty crop production with a focus on vineyards and orchards, wells and hydrogeology, and best practices to mitigate environmental risks on farms. Training highlights took place directly in orchards and vineyards, which offered hands-on demonstrations of high-tech pruning techniques for both high density systems and low-tech solutions for maintaining older backyard trees. Sam also managed to conduct 25 site visits, 12 new verifications, and seven reverifications throughout the year.



Connecting with the community, she contributed to the spring issue of Northern Michigan Woman Magazine with an article about the Great Lakes Incubator Farm and wrote for the Traverse City Record-Eagle's Agriculture Forum column. Sam helped coordinate four educational events to help qualify growers for MAEAP, including a Farmer's Resource Fair in Antrim County, which will be held again in 2023, and both a Soil Expo and Winter Solstice campfire and hike at the GLIF property. She also worked alongside her Leelanau counterpart to continue our annual tire recycling event where we collected nearly 1,000 PTE (passenger tire equivalent), filling a 53ft. trailer, from 21 different producers. Sam hosted two agricultural chemical container recycling events and our annual spring seed swap at GTCD. All of this earned her the honor of being named the 2022 MAEAP Technician of the Year, which was announced at the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts Fall Convention at Shanty Creek in Bellaire.

PRODUCE SAFETY

In 2022, GTCD became the home base for the Produce Safety Program grant, serving 21 counties in northern Michigan. Breanna Hannula joined the district in May as the Produce Safety Technician. During her first growing season as a technician, she focused on learning and networking within the community and beyond by participating in local events, particularly those hosted in the abundant orchards throughout the area. She also wrote informative articles for the Traverse City Record-Eagle's Agriculture Forum and MDARD Produce Safety Bulletins.

Breanna attended a multitude of produce-focused trainings and conferences in and out of state, including the Produce Safety Alliance Grower Training and Train the Trainer courses, Michigan On-Farm Produce Safety Team Professional Development, North Central Region Food Safety Modernization Act Fall Professional Development in Vincennes, Indiana, and the Great Lakes Fruit, Vegetable, and Farm Market Expo in Grand Rapids. She also shadowed the Marquette Produce Safety Technician and locally-based Produce Safety Inspectors. Throughout the year, Breanna connected with over 300 growers both in-person and virtually to help spread the word about the Produce Safety Program and made 20 farm visits throughout her multi-county coverage area.



INVASIVE SPECIES NETWORK



2022 was a year of learning for the Northwest Michigan Invasive Species Network (ISN). While Shelly Stusick remained in her position as Go Beyond Beauty (GBB) Specialist, Audrey Menninga became the new ISN Coordinator in December 2021, and ISN welcomed new staff later in the year. In April, Murielle Garbarino joined ISN as the new Habitat Management Specialist. She jumped immediately into ISN, helping hire seasonal staff, contacting landowners, and arranging for treatments.

As a new team, in 2022...

- ISN placed garlic mustard dumpsters in six locations and welcomed the Village of Empire to their host sites. With hard work from volunteers, ISN was able to collect 93 bags of garlic mustard.
- Japanese barberry trade-up days included another milestone for the GBB program as ISN was able to offer three trade-up locations. GBB helped safely dispose of 374 barberry plants.
- ISN treatment crews were able to complete all of their priority invasive species treatments.
- ISN conducted two popular autumn olive workshops for people wanting to learn how to manage and control autumn olive in each county.
- GBB began state-wide expansion with its first state-wide hub opening through the Friends of the St. Clair River.



ISN's work is funded in part through grants from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (administered by the US Forest Service and the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians), the Michigan Invasive Species Grant Program (www.Michigan.gov/invasives), and the Good Neighbor Authority (a partnership of the US Forest Service and Michigan DNR), as well as cost-share from landowners and generous donations from supporters.

FORESTRY



Ellie Johnson's first full year as District Forester for Leelanau, Grand Traverse, and Benzie counties was full of collaboration and personal growth. She made connections with many landowners, natural resource professionals, academics, and volunteers who are motivated and curious about becoming better stewards for our region's forests. This year, Ellie conducted 219 site visits for private forest owners, visiting 5,691 acres of woodlands to discuss silvicultural practices, forest health management, native plant landscaping, climate change resiliency, construction damage mitigation, invasive pest control, wildlife habitat, and numerous other topics. 71 of those site visits were to Grand Traverse residents, where she walked with them through their 3,081 acres and assisted with management projects, providing 52 referrals to both private and public sector professionals. Many of these site visits were to landowners in the Forest Lakes Overlay District with concerns about oak wilt and shoreline erosion, in addition to general tree health inquiries.

Ellie also reached over 600 interested patrons at 25 educational events throughout the year in association with numerous local organizations. This past winter and spring, she connected with almost 200 people through a Winter Webinar series and seedling workshops held in partnership with all three conservation districts. Throughout the year, a few young professionals shadowed her on site visits to learn what district foresters do. Ellie also hosted guided hikes with entities like American Bird Conservancy and Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy and gave talks to public groups on limiting disease spread and damage when conducting tree work. Ellie was the guest speaker at Spider Lake Association's Annual Meeting in July, where she connected with more than 70 residents on the importance of wetland vegetative communities and how to manage the ecotone between wooded uplands and our inland lakes.

Recently, Ellie was asked to serve on the board for both the Michigan chapter of Society of American Foresters and Salix Community Forestry Collective. She looks forward to continuing to expand her network and supporting private landowners to access the information and services they need to execute their forest management goals.

VOLUNTEERS - WE THANK YOU!



- To celebrate Earth Day, over 50 volunteers planted native trees and shrubs along the Boardman River at Brown Bridge Quiet Area to help restore a recent in-stream wood habitat placement project.
- In partnership with the Au Sable Institute of Environmental Studies, over 60 students planted native grasses, sedges, and wildflowers in the Brown Bridge bottomlands to help diversify plant communities within recent restoration sites. Through this partnership, at a later date, 32 college students and 6 professors helped plant several large white pine trees.
- A handful of members from Trout Unlimited spent 5 hours assisting in planting trees and shrubs at an abandoned sand trap site along the North Branch of the Boardman River. In-stream wood habitat was added the year prior so planting these trees and shrubs near the buffer of the river will help stabilize the new embankment.
- Hagerty Insurance Agency generously provided 6 volunteers to help remove invasive autumn olive, honeysuckle, and buckthorn along the lakeshore of Boardman Lake as the first step of improving the riparian buffer within Medalie Park.
- Several Rotarians gathered at East Creek Reserve to help nurture tree plantings that were installed years ago through a DNR Wildlife Habitat Improvement Grant award. These hardworking volunteers also helped clear and clean up several sections of trail.
- 5 volunteers from Applied Innovation and 10 volunteers from Trout Unlimited joined us at the abandoned sand trap site on the North Branch of the Boardman River to plant native trees and shrubs to help stabilize the bank restoration work that was previously done by MODAL LLC. These plantings will not only help stabilize the river bank but will also provide a natural buffer along the river and habitat for wildlife.
- Friends & family of the late Jim VanEenaam, along with Rotarians from Rotary Club of Traverse City, helped spruce up trails and infrastructure at Rotary's East Creek Reserve in October 2021. New fence railings were installed, trees were cleared, and signage was cleaned off for better ease of access.
- 9 volunteers joined us in early June to aid in the availability of pollinator species and support monarch butterflies by planting ~1,400 native milkweed plugs in the bottomlands of former Sabin Pond. These milkweed plugs were awarded to the District by a grant through Monarch Watch.
- Dr. Norm Fred (from Boardman River Clean Sweep), Frank Wall (a member of Bethlehem Lutheran Church), Scott Talcott (a member of the Traverse Area Paddle Club and retired tractor mechanic), and Paul Ton (a member of Bethlehem Church, Traverse Area Paddle Club, and Trout Unlimited) dedicated roughly 40 hours to repair Grand Traverse County's John Deere 301A tractor. This tractor had not been running for many years, but with a little TLC, it has already been put back to work on the Natural Education Reserve.

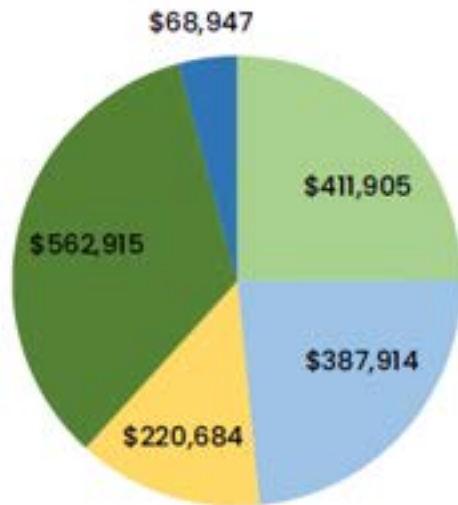
VOLUNTEERS - WE THANK YOU!

- Over 20 volunteers assisted in the removal of garlic mustard, planting of native seedlings, and the closing of rerouted trails at Hickory Meadows on May 7th for a Mother's Day Weekend workbee event.
- Angela Repke dedicated time in the spring leading a rejuvenating Nature, Mindfulness, and Writing course on our managed parklands over the span of 5 weeks.
- Over 90 volunteers attended 4 planting events on the Natural Education Reserve throughout 2022 to plant native seedlings and potted stock along the Boardman River in restoration efforts since the removal of Sabin dam in 2018.
- Nordic grooming volunteers from the VASA Ski Club, with City of Traverse City equipment, spent multiple hours in tireless efforts to maintain quality groomed trails at Hickory Meadows throughout the winter season.
- 15 students with Instructor Phil Girard from Greenspire High School assisted in stewardship activities at Medalie Park in October and November. Habitat improvements consisted of invasive species control and planting native shrubs along the shoreline buffer.
- 70 volunteers led by Dr. Norm Fred spent an estimated 80 hours cleaning trash from 30 miles of the Boardman River as part of the 17th Annual Boardman River Clean Sweep.
- Our Environmental Education volunteers dedicated their time throughout the year to assist with our Environmental Education programming which included NEST field trips, the Peepers program, and our summer Nature Day Camp - thank you Kerry Winkler, Emmy Lou Cholek, Katie Spengler, Bill Strong, Laura Solomon, and Alena Fritch.
- 7 volunteers, including MSU Extension Master Gardeners, collectively spent 34 hours helping spruce up the native plant gardens around the Boardman River Nature Center.
- Over 30 volunteers put in over 160 hours packing native bare-root tree and shrub seedlings during our Annual Native Seedling Sale.
- Volunteer extraordinaire Tracie MacPherson dedicated her time over the last year leading GTCD's Nature Center improvements which included bringing the new Nature Playscape and the new Smithsonian Traveling Exhibit to the Boardman River Nature Center.
- 27 volunteers assisted with the 2022 Annual Native Plant Sale where over 1,500 plants found new homes.
- Trail Stewards spent dozens of hours helping monitor and maintain trails on District-managed parklands to keep trails safe and accessible for our community.
- Our dedicated docents volunteered hundreds of hours staffing the Boardman River Nature Center. A very special thank you to Don Flegel, Phil Jarvi, Marcella Massa, Mary Beth Sellers, and Kathie Wiley.



YOUR INVESTMENT

Income



| | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|-------------|
| Federal & State Grants | \$411,905 | 25% |
| Conservation & Education Services | \$387,914 | 23% |
| Contributions and Donations | \$220,684 | 13% |
| Millage | \$562,915 | 34% |
| Native Seedling/Plant Sales/Other | \$68,947 | 5% |
| Total | \$1,652,365 | 100% |

Expenses



| | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------|-------------|
| District Operations | \$549,684 | 33% |
| Invasive Species (Federal Grant) | \$234,814 | 14% |
| MAEAP/Food Safety (State Grant) | \$104,539 | 6% |
| Conservation & Education & GLIF | \$548,653 | 33% |
| Seedling/Plant Sales | \$45,936 | 4% |
| Investments in Fund Balance | \$168,739 | 10% |
| Total | \$1,652,365 | 100% |

THANK YOU, DONORS AND CONTRIBUTING FOUNDATIONS & PARTNERS

October 2021 – September 2022

Gifts of \$20,000 – \$29,999

The Carl A. Lemcool Memorial Foundation
Grand Traverse Regional Community Foundation
Jim & Diana Huckle Family Foundation
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Rotary Charities of Traverse City

Gifts of \$10,000 – \$19,999

Hagerty Insurance
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Harvey's Foundation

Gifts of \$5,000 – \$9,999

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Gifts of \$2,500 – \$4,999

Mack & Lorraine Beers
Beers Family Foundation
August A. Busch III Charitable Trust
Grand Traverse Resort & Casino
Michigan State University – Volunteer River
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Gifts of \$1,000 – \$2,499

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Gifts of \$1 – \$999

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October 2021 – September 2022

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Allen Foundation, Inc.
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Sandra Bromley in Memory of Traverse City Police Captain Edward Rokos
Anthony & Chris DiGiacobbe in Memory of Kathy Bilowus
Dr. Duke & Gayla Elsner in Memory of Cindy Retherford
Michael Gillman in Memory of Steve Gillman
Audrey Goense in Memory of Mark Goense
Kelli Hixson in Memory of Sylvia Jones & Dana Ball
Kathleen Howard in Memory of Tom & Jetta Swiat
Catherine Kearns in Memory of Mark J. Kearns
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Ann Rogers in Memory of Bob Rudd
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Trinity Lutheran Church in Memory of Roger Bloom
Marti VanEenenaam-Iwanicki and Tom Iwanicki in Memory of Jim & Sandy VanEenenaam

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October 2021 – September 2022

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Judy Hicks
Maurie & Mary Pelto
Elmer & Ruth Peterman
Mary Van Valin

In Memory of Max Bromley

Sandra Bromley
Doug & Joy Ensor
Randi Friedman
Mary Kafer
Lee & Georgia Marnett
Terry McLeod
Jean Rokos
Darren Lori Tweedy

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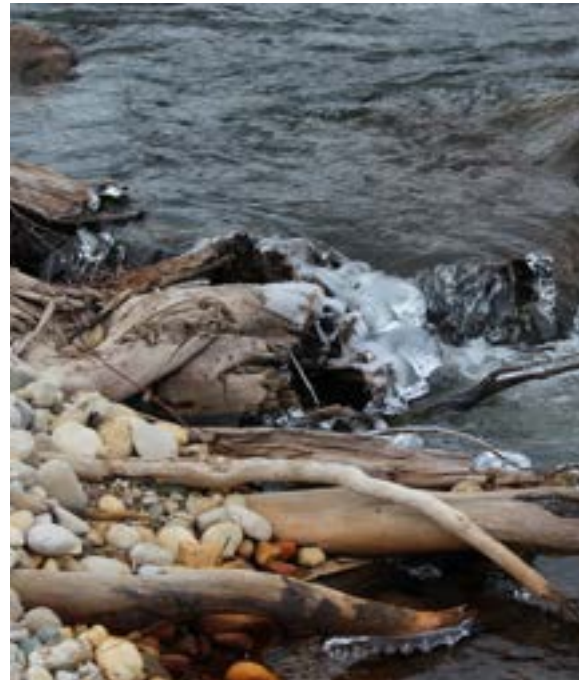
John Baylor in Honor of John, Pama, and the Dogs
Julie Clynes & Sarah Hoxie in Honor of Jennifer Jay
Amy Darrow in Honor of Conrad Pels
Britt Feldhake in Honor of Dave & Tressa Ford
Andrew Schopieray in Honor of Ken & Linda Schopieray
Mary Beth Sellers in Honor of Layla Kingston
Victor Senn in Honor of Alex & Danielle Solis
Barbara Winckler in Honor of Arianna Reich
Kayla Wojda in Honor of Matthew Wojda

In-Kind Gifts

Birdsfoot Native Nursery
Monarch Watch
Marge Forgoine & Family
Bob White
National Park Service – Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program

A Special Thanks To Our Board Members

Andy Blodgett
Jan Engle
Doug Leonhardt
Dario Primo
Dr. Thomas Wertz



YOUR SUPPORT ALLOWS US TO CONTINUE THIS VITAL WORK

For over 80 years, the Grand Traverse Conservation District has been your community-serving organization that cares for the people and places that make Northwest Michigan so special. Your support allows us to continue the vital work of keeping our local farms sustainable, the Boardman River healthy, our parklands safely accessible, native habitats intact, and ensuring that the next generation is connected to the outdoors.

**Donate online at www.natureiscalling.org/donate
or by calling 231.941.0960**



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