

## The Miskwaagamiwiziibi Shelter at the Bates Township Park, Iron County

Maggie Scheffer

*A project of the Iron County Watershed Coalition (ICWC), with funding from the Upper Peninsula Environmental Coalition Community Conservation Grant program*

History plays a part in a rewarding project that unfolded in Iron County along the Paint River in the summer of 2021. Along this scenic stretch of river, once referred to as “Miskwaagamiwiziibi” by the local Ojibway, lies a 40-acre parcel now under the stewardship of Bates Township. Had it not been for the visionary passion of one man in 1923, this river frontage would very likely be divided and developed; inaccessible for public use.

That man was Herb Larson, an influencer who persuaded county officials to purchase land with water frontage so that future generations would be able to enjoy these natural resources as public spaces. Fast forward to 2005: the timber on the parcel was harvested and a disputed proposal to divide and sell the 2,800 feet of river frontage was fought and defeated. The ownership of the parcel was then transferred to Bates Township, which subsequently implemented a recreation plan for the parcel. What began in 2005 with two citizens concerned about the future of the park evolved into a plan to construct a park shelter for public enjoyment, as well as a stopover for paddlers to camp overnight.

Construction of the cordwood park shelter located on the north side of the Paint River in Bates Township began in 2019 with planning and site preparation, involving approximately ten volunteers. On June 12th, 2021, a work bee kicked off the actual shelter construction. Work bees were held June–October, one to two weekends per month. Over this period of time 110 people showed up to help, 45 of them returning multiple times, averaging five hours each day. It is the remarkable dedication of volunteers and the motivation to participate in cordwood construction of the shelter that has made the project so successful!



▶ On July 10th and 11th, 2021, a crew of volunteers helped dig and pour the footing for the octagon-shaped shelter. MAGGIE SCHEFFER





▲ July 24th and 25th: nine large cedar posts were brought in to the site on foot and erected at the corners. This work required the most muscle, and 7-8 strong volunteers rose to the occasion! **MAGGIE SCHEFFER**

▼ Many volunteers over the next two months came to workbees to help rasp cordwood, mix mortar and lay up cordwood. **MAGGIE SCHEFFER**







▲▶ A volunteer attends to detail on an inside wall, while two others install the door. **MAGGIE SCHEFFER**



▼ This photo, taken in September shows the shelter with five completed wall sections. **CARLY EKBERG**

In addition to volunteer support, and to cover expenses beyond the \$6,000 Community Conservation grant received from UPEC, in-kind donations of site materials valued at just under \$3,000 as well as cash donations of \$1300 have been made by local residents and supporters (see accompanying story, “A Place for Everyone”).

At the present time, all but one of the eight shelter walls are completed, the door and windows are in, and the roof has an ice and snow barrier on it. Completing the eighth wall, putting in the floorboards, and finishing the roof covering is anticipated to be done soon.

In addition to the shelter itself, consideration must be given to a suitable fire ring, a pit toilet, as well as a take-out ramp at the river and trail between river and shelter. In partnership with the township trustees, these final touches will complete what can be a valuable asset for the park going forward. This shelter on the Paint River in Iron County can be an enduring recreational site for paddlers as well as those wishing to find solitude for an afternoon near woods and water. It is “by educating and







▲ The lunch ladies kept up the strength and morale of volunteers.  
MARY BAUMGARTNER

engaging our community in projects like this that we work to restore and preserve our watersheds for future generations” (ICWC mission).

Project coordinators are grateful to the Upper Peninsula Environmental Coalition for providing the funds to purchase building materials, and for the pledge of ICWC members to oversee light seasonal clean-up for the first two years of shelter use. Going forward, ICWC can also play a role in bringing awareness to the site so that the public may begin to reap the benefits of the visionary Herb Larson.

## A Place for Everyone

*Richard Sloat*

The vision for Miskwaagamiwiziibi (Misk-wa-ga-me-we-z-b) Park along the banks of the Paint River in Bates Township, Iron County, was for it to be a place where people, after a day or afternoon of canoeing, could rest or camp along the river or in a shelter. Or, a place for people who wanted to drive to the park to spend a day or evening camping with shelters at their disposal at no cost, with the hope that families with limited resources could and would take advantage.

Prior to applying for the Upper Peninsula Environmental Coalition Community Conservation Grant, there were constant concerns. Time, money, volunteers, self-induced pressure to create, and expectations from others. So, to keep the project forging ahead, we focused on planning the pre-construction tasks that were doable without a cut-and-dried plan. When the time came to do these tasks, who would show?

Well, people did show. We cut logs into cordwood; de-barked and hauled cordwood in sleighs; excavated a 21-foot-diameter building site; wheelbarrowed gravel over a rickety boardwalk to the excavation site; loaded lumber, unloaded lumber, loaded and unloaded lumber again. I laugh out loud typing this because these words do not portray the efforts and work actually involved.

In November of 2020 Maggie Scheffer suggested applying for the UPEC grant, so that’s what happened—and just in case the \$10,000 grant was awarded, a closer examination of the shelter plans and materials list needed to be made. Changes were in order; and, when it was official that a \$6,000 grant would be awarded, the pencil needed to be sharpened again.

The first changes of many were apparent. The irregular-shaped octagon now became a simple (HA!) regular-shaped octagon. The wooden timber foundation now became a concrete footing.

Before any kind of construction could begin, measures needed to be taken in order to ensure easier, safer access to the site for ferrying building material over uneven rocky ground. A decision was made to construct a 60-foot-long boardwalk. The boardwalk was out of the scope of the grant requirements, but it had to be done. People would have been injured. The boardwalk was completed in June 2021 by four volunteers. Now water, lime, Portland cement, and sawdust for mixing the mortar could be transported with relative ease, together with timbers, lumber,



and other miscellaneous items that needed to be safely brought to the site. Nine huge cedar logs were the most difficult haul, but was accomplished with three volunteers and a wheelbarrow.

In July, forms were built for the footing and concrete mixed in wheelbarrows. We mixed approximately two yards of concrete for the footings in three hours with ten volunteers.

Later in July, the cedar logs were placed as vertical supports, and rafters and some of the roof boards were put in place. It wasn't until September 18 that the roof, with two layers of treated  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch plywood for additional structural strength, was ready for the layer of ice and water shield to be placed. Meanwhile, the cordwood walls were being built, which began around the beginning of August. By October 17, nearly all of the walls were

complete with a door and two windows. The last wall has half the cordwood in place and a frame prepared for a stained-glass window that is being built and donated by a Bates Township resident. By the end of October, we wrapped up work on the project for the year. We will finish the shelter in the summer of 2022, installing the stained-glass window, installing the cedar board floor, and laying the sod on the roof. Though we joke that we have a primitive shelter, it is much more than that. The shelter is a beautiful piece of art!

There were times myself and others wondered if we could do it. Well, we did—and it was all due to one person, Herb Larson, back in 1923, who had a vision that "recreational centers must be provided for the mass of people, who cannot, and never will be able to, own summer homes of their own."

▼ A happy crew paused on cleanup day for a photo. On the right: Rich Sloat, project director. **MARY BAUMGARTNER**





## New Brew Benefits Grassroots Fight to Save the Menominee River

Dale Burie and Lea Jane Burie, Coalition to SAVE the Menominee River



May 21 was a landmark day for the Coalition to SAVE the Menominee River from sulfide mining. At a party held in Greenleaf, Wisconsin, our volunteers celebrated the release of Tight Lines Beer, a new IPA from Gnarly Cedar Brewery (partnering with Tim Landwehr of Tight Lines Fly Fishing Company). Gnarly Cedar and Tight Lines are now offering this region a delicious beverage with a portion of the proceeds being donated to the Coalition to SAVE the Menominee River to support our fight to protect the river from sulfide mining. (UPEC has supported the river coalition with two Community Conservation grants.)

While this celebration was going on, we spent the day at the river with news reporters from M Live and from media organizations in Traverse City, Kalamazoo, and Marinette, Wisconsin, along with Dr. David Overstreet, archeologist.

M Live is an organization that writes news articles for eight large-circulation newspapers all across the Lower Peninsula of Michigan. We informed them of the entire proposed mine situation, from the original discovery through the current transition to Gold Resource ownership—looking

forward to a public forum when the CEO of Gold Resource, Allen Palmiere, is ready.

Dr. Overstreet guided us through Menominee Tribal burial grounds, gardens, and dance rings, and left us speechless in realizing that this civilization was present on this land over 10,000 years ago. (There is a lone pine tree growing in one of the dance rings estimated to be 250 years old. It made us feel really inadequate as we stood in the midst of such history of the original people of this land.)

M Live was very interested: they took drone footage, getting high above the earth to show the impressions of the dance rings. We all received a very good education on the history of the Menominee Nation thanks to Dr. Overstreet, who is a wealth of information.

Make sure you pick up a six pack of Tight Lines Beer at your favorite store. Or contact Gnarly Cedar Brewery at 920-532-4384. Encourage your local retailers to stock this product. You can find out more about the new beer at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-fEPvpqGBYo>.





## Ruffed Grouse Drumming Season and Population Estimation in Upper Michigan

*Story and photos by Bill Ziegler*

In April and May it is common to hear male ruffed grouse drumming in good grouse habitat all over northern Michigan. Ruffed grouse are a popular game bird that typically lives in mixed-age aspen and conifer habitat. In their mating ritual the male grouse “drums,” typically on an old log. Drumming is actually the beating of their wings back and forth quickly, creating a thumping sound that can be heard for a long distance, reportedly up to one-quarter mile. The males’ drumming attracts the females, and once drawn in, the males will display their dark ruff on their necks and fan their tails to further attract the females.

Ruffed grouse have many potential predators. Male grouse find logs or sites to drum that have good overhead and ground cover. This allows them to avoid avian predation and allows for escape if ground predators approach.

Some state DNR wildlife divisions conduct annual drumming counts to survey ruffed grouse abundance coming out of winter and into another breeding season. One such general population indicator survey is conducted in neighboring Wisconsin. Michigan DNR Wildlife Division uses a different abundance survey method as its primary indicator. Michigan DNR Wildlife personnel compile grouse flush rates from cooperating hunters’ logs throughout Michigan.



**ABOVE** Male ruffed grouse strutting and displaying his fan tail and dark ruff as part of the ritual to attract a female to mate. This mating ritual goes on during April and May in northern Michigan where ruffed grouse are present.



Michigan DNR Wildlife officials do conduct drumming surveys, although not always annually.

The Wisconsin DNR's most recent survey was conducted in 2021. Wisconsin DNR Wildlife information indicates that their state's ruffed grouse population decreased in 2021 by 7% from 2019. This decrease was found in Wisconsin's Northern Forest Zone adjacent to the western portion of the Upper Peninsula's grouse habitat. No data were recorded in 2020 due to Covid concerns. Wisconsin DNR surveys indicate their ruffed grouse population cycle peaked in either 2019 or 2020. Typically, grouse cycles peak in years that end in zero and decrease to lower levels in mid-decade. Deeper-snow winters are thought to aid in grouse survival, as they seek refuge during cold winter nights in deeper snow.

Michigan DNR Wildlife is not currently collecting directly comparable data. Michigan collects flush count data from volunteers. Michigan has not compiled grouse survey data since 2019, and so it is old in terms of projecting the state's current grouse abundance.

As a life-long avid grouse hunter and amateur bird watcher, I have always been interested in documenting their annual

**RIGHT** The male grouse drumming his wings to make a low "thumping" noise that attracts female grouse to his drumming area. Drumming males typically choose an old log, with good overhead and some side cover, to drum from. The more active drumming grouse I photographed normally drummed from about 3 AM until 11 PM with short breaks, presumably to interact with females and eat. The more active male shown here was still drumming on Memorial Day.

**BELOW** The more active grouse rarely rested, although he is shown here on a short rest.





**RIGHT** Coyotes visited both drumming locations I followed. A red fox checked out the drumming log; the grouse left the log before the canines got too close. The drumming males are vulnerable to owls, hawks, foxes, coyotes, and other predators. That is why their drumming location has good overhead and ground cover to allow them to avoid attack, or to escape if predators get too close.

mating (drumming) ritual. Last year I located two different grouse drumming locations among many in Iron County. The first I could hear from my backyard in the still, early mornings as we were wrapping up the maple syrup season. I ran a compass line toward the drumming grouse and found it almost a quarter-mile away from where I originally heard it. Of course, it took several attempts triangulating from closer nearby locations in the morning as the grouse drummed. The first drumming location was not the typical log, but a cut bank of an overgrown sand borrow pit with a shelf below the bank edge on which the grouse drummed. The site had heavy overhead and ground cover.

The second location was the more typical old log location with cover similar to that just described. Better photos were possible at the more typical second site. Both drumming sites were in fairly heavy overall conifer cover, in these cases mixed balsam, spruce, aspen, and red maple.



## "THERE IS NO CREDIBLE SCIENTIFIC BASIS FOR A WOLF HUNT"

*Comments to the Michigan Wolf Management Advisory Council, May 14, 2022*

*Jeff Towner, UPEC Board Member*

Thank you for this opportunity to comment. I am a resident of Negaunee Township and a member of the board of the Upper Peninsula Environmental Coalition. I earned an M.S. degree in Wildlife Biology from Michigan State University. I am a Certified Wildlife Biologist with The Wildlife Society. I was also the field supervisor for the North Dakota Field Office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service from 2002 to 2014, when I oversaw hundreds of consultations on the gray wolf when they were on the endangered species list.

As you know, in February of this year District Court Judge Jeffrey Smith ruled that the Fish and Wildlife Service erred in their decision to remove Endangered Species Act protections from the Western Great Lakes and Pacific Coast populations, and he ordered those populations returned to the list of endangered species. As you also doubtless know, the Department of Justice has filed a notice of intent to appeal that ruling. So, the see-saw nature of the status of gray wolves continues,

and none of us can predict with accuracy how this will turn out. Should our wolves again lose federal protection, I hope that the Michigan Department of Natural Resources will implement a management regime that is based on sound science and not on factors that are not justified by the science. We only have to recall the result of the so-called wolf hunting and trapping season that occurred in Wisconsin just last year to see how a poorly conceived season can quickly turn into disaster. This is especially true when you have wolf "hunters" who seem determined to undermine the agency responsible for the management. The Wisconsin case, similar to policies in Idaho, Wyoming, and Montana, was not so much a hunting and trapping season as a campaign of eradication.

Decades of scientific research and comprehensive reviews of the scientific literature reveal that there is no credible scientific basis for a wolf hunt that is necessary to manage the gray wolf population or their





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prey species in Michigan. The gray wolf is a keystone species in the ecosystem that serves to improve the fitness of prey populations such as whitetail deer. In addition, attacks on humans by gray wolves in North America are exceedingly rare and statistically insignificant. Claims of threatening behavior toward humans are by-and-large unsubstantiated tall tales.

Those calling for a wolf hunt seem to be motivated by one or more of three reasons: increasing the deer population for human harvest, hanging a pelt on the wall, and anthropomorphic hatred for wolves.

The 2015 update of the DNR's wolf management plan states the following: "Personal views of wolves are often based on core beliefs, which are resistant to change.... Moreover, individuals tend to selectively accept and recall information that is consistent with their existing attitudes ... another challenge of a wolf-based education program is to present information that is not biased. The presentation of accurate, unbiased information is especially important when education is used as a tool to help resolve wolf-related conflicts among stakeholders." Also: "Controversy tends to receive attention, and the public may receive inaccurate or exaggerated impressions of the extent

of wolf-related conflicts. Misinformation can spread quickly through a variety of media." The goals and actions for an education program outlined in the DNR's plan are well thought-out, but to date there has been an absence of any discernible education program about wolves. I encourage this Council to make a recommendation to proceed with that part of the Plan.

Section 6.7 of the DNR's updated Management Plan is titled "Achieve Compatibility between Wolf Distribution and Abundance and Social Carrying Capacity." This section gives a good explanation of the differences among various segments of society as to the acceptance of different levels of wolf populations. However, there is a fatal flaw in the approach of this section in that it requires that a compromise on the wolf population must be reached that is acceptable by different factions of the public. Basically, striking a balance. But this ignores the setting of population goals based on the best wildlife science as described elsewhere in the Plan. It makes no sense to set a take of wolves that is even partially based on biased opinions and dismissal of science. In fact, I submit to you that the only legitimate taking of wolves is for the removal by DNR personnel of those individuals or packs that have been documented by the DNR as having depredated on livestock, and then only when



the landowner has taken recommended steps to deter depredation.

Last year the Michigan Senate passed S.R. No. 15, which commends the Michigan DNR for beginning the process of updating the State's wolf management plan, and also states that the Natural Resources Commission should utilize principles of sound scientific management in making decisions, but then went on to call for a wolf hunt before the management plan revision is completed! It also states that there is no "[statutory] requirement for a statewide public attitude survey or study ... prior to a hunting season...." It is absolutely essential to provide the public an opportunity to weigh in on any proposed wolf season as the DNR Director has indicated is necessary. All interested Michiganders and any others should have the opportunity to express their views and have them fully considered, not just an insistent group of U.P. residents.

Some who advocate for a season on wolves cite the applicability of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. In 2012 The Wildlife Society and the Boone and Crockett Club published a comprehensive review of the Model, which identified a number of challenges. One of those stated: "Science is the proper tool to discharge wildlife policy. Wildlife management appears to be increasingly politicized. The rapid turnover rate of state agency directors, the makeup of boards and commissions, the organizational structure of some agencies, and examples of politics meddling in science have challenged the science foundation." One of the report's recommendations states: "Governance models that are not in concert with contemporary societal needs or [that] address only limited special

interests risk having [the] wildlife management lose relevance to society." I couldn't agree more.

When you formulate your recommendations, please also consider the following. I am a hunter who is opposed to a wolf season. My son, to whom I have passed on the hunting tradition, is a Michigan hunter who opposes a wolf season. There are many others like us. For those who are eager to take a wolf and who presumably espouse a belief in fair chase and ethical hunting, where is the outcry about the slaughter in Wisconsin and some other states? I certainly haven't heard any calls from that quarter for a more ethical hunt. Far from it. What I have seen are people on social media urging others to delay reporting their taking of a wolf to the DNR, and crowing about "whacking and stacking 'em".

Americans' federal tax dollars pay for the work of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that, over many years, has led to the remarkable increase in the Western Great Lakes wolf population, along with State and private partners. So in a sense, federal taxpayers are subsidizing every person who takes a wolf. This is another reason that any wolves that are legally taken had darn well better be based on solid science and with a full opportunity for public input.

I think Native Americans have it right that the gray wolf is our relative. We are undoubtedly related, both as intelligent beings with close ties to our family units, but also as species who need and benefit from a healthy, balanced ecosystem. I urge this Council to base your recommendations on science and not on an unscientific disinformation campaigns or on attempts to rig the system by politicians and others. Thank you.

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The Miskwaagamiwiziibi Park Shelter was partially funded by a UPEC Community Conservation grant, but volunteers made it happen.

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