

# U. P. Environment

Quarterly Newsletter for  
the  
Upper Peninsula  
Environmental Coalition  
The oldest grassroots  
environmental organization  
in the U.P.

## From the President's Desk: A Media Breakthrough

Winter 2008/2009



It was a surprise to me that a patch of Lake Superior shoreline in Michigan got mentioned in a New York Times editorial (October 27). It was a shock that it was mentioned in the same breath with Oregon's Mount Hood and California's Sierra Nevada mountains.

The editorial was about proposals for federal wilderness that had been bundled together in an omnibus lands bill about to be taken up, or not taken up, by Congress in a lame duck session. For me, the very mention of the Beaver Basin wilderness proposal in Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore

was a sign that the Upper Peninsula and its natural wonders are beginning to be noticed more nationally.

The omnibus public lands legislation contained two Michigan bills, both of them featuring U.P. sites: the Keweenaw National Historical Park in Calumet, joined by the Beaver Basin in Alger County. It occurred to several of us working on outreach that this was also an opportunity to promote the U.P. downstate, where our issues have not always been front and center.

This was the genesis of the op-ed

(cont. on page 3)



Above—Unmistakable signs of pileated woodpeckers hard at work amid the winter snow

Photo by Jeannine McKenzie

Left— Beaver Basin Bridge in winter

Picture courtesy of Pictured Rock National Lakeshore Park Service

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## **Don't forget those Econo Foods Slips!**

Thanks to you and Econo Foods, UPEC has earned several hundred dollars over the past few years by submitting grocery receipts from the store collected by UPEC members. That amount represents 1% of total gross receipts from all the slips.

That may not seem like a lot, but when you're a non-profit organization every little bit helps. Of course, that amount could be even higher this year if more of you were to save your slips and send them to us!

Either save them throughout the year and mail them off to us before the end of May, or simply hand them to a UPEC board member when you attend a meeting—whichever is most convenient. It's one of the easier ways you can offer your support.

### **About UPEC...**

The Upper Peninsula Environmental Coalition has a 30-year track record of protecting and seeking to maintain the unique environmental qualities of the U.P. through public education and watchful monitoring of industry and government.

UPEC seeks common ground with diverse individuals and organizations in order to promote sound planning and management decisions for all the region's natural resources.

Our newsletter, the *U.P. Environment*, is published four times a year.

You can send your comments or contributions to UPEC by standard mail at P.O. Box 673, Houghton, MI 49931, or e-mail us from our website at [upenvironment.org](http://upenvironment.org).



UPEC is a proud member Of Earth Share of Michigan, an organization that allows working people to donate to environmental organizations through workplace giving campaigns.

Each year Earth Share provides UPEC with critically-needed funding for environmental education and program operation.

If you would like to help us earn more funding for UPEC, consider letting your employer know you want the Earth Share of Michigan giving option at your workplace and give to the annual payroll deduction plan.

**For more information**, please call 1 (800) 386-3326 or view the website at [www.earthsharemichigan.org](http://www.earthsharemichigan.org)

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that is printed below which appeared in the Detroit News web edition on Friday, November 14. The Michigan Environmental Council's Hugh McDiarmid shopped the op-ed around for us, and got us placed into the Detroit metro area with its hundreds of thousands of potential readers. The op-ed also "bounced" through the web over the following weekend. That's a message with some power!

The message was carried by the beauty of river otters, by hopes for our grandchildren, and by the serenity of the woods. While warnings, forebodings, exposes and critiques have their place in environmental writing, they create an entirely different emotional energy than the positive appeals of animals, children, and trees. But despite the media breakthrough for us – enhanced by being in a conservative newspaper – the message itself failed in the short run to achieve its goal. The lame duck Congress, overwhelmed by controversial stimulus and rescue packages, did not even look at the omnibus public lands bill. That will be left to the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress which convenes in January, 2009. Then our message may fall on less burdened ears. Politics, however, is always full of surprises and contingencies, and nothing seems certain.

- Jon Saari, President UPEC

### Michigan Benefits if Congress Passes Public Lands Bill

*(This is the op-ed piece Jon Saari is referring to in the above article—Ed.)*

Beaver Basin, a remote corner of Michigan's Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore, is a place of timeless serenity.

Bald eagles and river otters like the fishing at 765-acre Beaver Lake; loon calls echo over the water at twilight. Ten thousand acres of quiet woodlands nestle Beaver Lake and the nearby Lake Superior shoreline. The adjacent and aptly-named 12 Mile Beach is a credible nominee for the best beach walk in the state.

Our grandchildren will have the same opportunities for memorable visits to this place that we have -- if Congress acts decisively next week.

Local citizens, stakeholders and park officials have reached consensus on a nimble plan that would provide ongoing protection for Beaver Basin -- and preserve the guiding principles that have been in place there since 1981 and worked so well.

This plan would designate the wild core of Beaver Basin, some 11,700 acres, as federal wilderness. Nothing would change from the way it's been for the last twenty some years -- and that is the point of this agreement.

Visitors would still prize a campsite at the end-of-the-road Little Beaver Lake Campground (on the edge of the wilderness) and anglers could still use quiet electric motors on Beaver Lake. Meanwhile, the bedrock peace and quiet would be guaranteed.

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Otter Drawing

By Mike Keranen



The Beaver Basin Wilderness Designation is one agreement among 15 wilderness proposals from 8 different states -- and a total of 140 pieces of public land proposals -- bundled together in an Omnibus Public Lands Bill. Besides the Beaver Basin proposal this bill also contains provisions to enhance funding for another significant piece of Michigan's heritage -- the Keweenaw National Historical Park -- which tells the story of copper in the state.

This needs doing now. The whole package reflects years of successful local discussions and negotiations across the nation -- and there is a real possibility that many of those deliberations would have to start again from scratch if Congress fails to act and the legislation does not pass this fall.

That would be a huge lost opportunity. The bill has broad bipartisan support in Congress and quick passage is likely if it reaches the House and Senate floor. President Bush has signaled his willingness to sign this bill. Odds are Congress will reconvene on Monday to address the economy and a new stimulus bill. We urge them to pass the public lands bill then.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid has committed to giving the Omnibus Public Lands Bill a quick hearing. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi should do the same.

Congressman Bart Stupak, whose district includes all of northern Michigan, has signed a letter urging Pelosi to bring that bill to the floor -- and we urge all Michigan representatives to join him in that effort.

The Michigan provisions within the Omnibus Public Lands Bill are good ones and reflect patient dialogue and negotiations among our citizens and stakeholders.

They've got it right -- now it's Congress' turn to recognize the common sense goodness of this bill and get it passed -- now.

- Eric Hansen and Jon Saari

*Eric is the author of "Hiking Michigan's Upper Peninsula" (2005) among other hiking books*



Drawing by Mike Keranen



## New Section of the North Country Trail in Baraga County

This fall, a North Country Trail Association Volunteer Adventure crew built about 3½ more miles of the North Country National Scenic Trail on the Baraga Plains, west of Alberta. The trail, built mostly to the North Country Trail Association's "Gold Star" standards, extends existing trail eastward in the direction of Canyon Falls Roadside Rest, and, finally, to existing trail near Craig Lake State Park. The trail, built by hikers, is open to all types of foot traffic, including hikers, backpackers, skiers and snowshoe-ers.

This new trail segment, built on Michigan Tech and private lands, features dry open areas, wetlands, jack pine stands, moist woods with spruce and pine, and a scenic view into the valley of Plumbago Creek. Please make sure to stay on the trail when crossing private land at the eastern end of this segment; a sign clearly indicates when you are entering private land.

In summer, or even when there's a few inches of snow on the ground, one may drive to the western trailhead and to within 1500 feet of the eastern trailhead. In full winter, though, it requires an easy ½ mile ski or snowshoe to the western trailhead. While little of the new trail will likely have formal blazing until next spring, detailed directions and an aerial photo-based map are available at <http://www.northcountrytrail.org/pwf/va2008trail.doc>, which should make the trail followable by experienced outdoor folks with directions, map, and compass before final blazing is installed.

If you want to be informed of organized winter trips on this segment, please contact Doug Welker at 906-338-2680 or [dwelker@up.net](mailto:dwelker@up.net).

- Doug Welker, UPEC Officer

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## Autumn just North of Nestoria

Southward across the peninsula, a vista of forest stretches forth,  
stunning maples with red-orange leaves, oaks in orange-yellow hues,  
yellow-green shreds of birches, swamp alders stubborn and green,  
all interspersed with black-green pine, hemlock, and spruce.

There's a swamp and a meadow, and a small inland lake,  
its water black and deep, filled with inverted multicolored trees.  
Across the granite hills stand black hemlocks, pines and spruce  
stippled with yellow tamaracks that will drop away their leaves.

- A new poem by Beth Virtanen

(Printed with the author's permission)

*Beth Virtanen is a U.P. native and has published a number of poems and pieces of short fiction.. She is currently Paloheimo Scholar in Residence at Finlandia University in Hancock, where she is working on an anthology of Finnish-American literature.*



## UPEC Helps Sault Area Enviro Team Compete

(The following report was submitted by one of this year's Environmental Education grant-winners)

This year the Sault Area High School and Career Center participated in Canon Envirothon. This is a North American environmental competition in which students study selected subject areas, complete a community outreach project and compete at various competitions. [To participate] students must study aquatic ecology, energy, soils/geology, forestry, sustainable agriculture, wildlife and a current environmental concern. Then they compete at regional and state competitions. If successful at the state level, they can move on to a national competition held in Arizona.



Students establishing a baseline sample

Photo by Sault Area Schools

Although Sault High has had teams in the past and done well at state competitions, this was the first year for the current team and

their advisors. This Enviro Team, made up of five members and one

alternate from freshman through senior classes, along with three adult advisors, formed in January, 2008 and competed through this past May. They met weekly to discuss and hear presentations on the above subjects and/or participated in outdoor hands-on educational experiences.

This year the theme project was Recreational Impacts on Natural Resources. Chippewa County, where Sault High is located, has many snowmobile trails and relies heavily on winter snowmobile tourism. The students completed a research project on the impact of snowmobile trails on the pH, conductivity, turbidity and oil and



Taking winter samples for testing

Photo by Sault Area Schools

grease in snow core samples. Along a high-traffic snowmobile trail fifteen miles west of Sault Ste. Marie, samples were collected along four transects: at 0, 5, 15 and 30 meters from the trail. By collecting samples at multiple distances and testing for the above parameters, the students tried to determine if pollution from snowmobiles could be having an effect on our environment. Samples were processed with the help of Lake Superior State University.

Students found that conductivity was higher closer to the trail, while oil and grease was higher at transect one. With these results, students concluded that snowmobile exhaust may have an effect on conductivity, and that when snowmobiles travel slower (transect one was close to a stop sign) they may emit more oil and grease.

(Continued page 9)



## Torch Lake Remediation Progress Report

The Great Lakes Legacy Act (GLLA) of 2002 provided funding to clean up toxic hot spots or areas of concerns (AoCs) across the Great Lakes region. The Act requires partnerships with citizen advisory groups, state agencies, and local governments to be sure all stakeholders are represented.

One of these organizations, The *Lake Superior Binational Forum*, comprised of representatives from states, provinces, and municipalities around Lake Superior, met in Houghton, MI in September, 2008. An encouraging update on Torch Lake, one of the AoCs, was presented.

Torch Lake near Lake Linden is the site of 100 years of mining and smelting which deposited 200 million tons of mining stamp sands into the lake and surrounding shore lands.

These deposits have resulted in fish deformities, groundwater contamination and airborne toxins caused by dry sands blowing around.



Torch Lake photos courtesy of  
US EPA, Great Lakes  
National Program Office

Disturbing sediments already in a lake has usually resulted in spreading the toxins around, so the procedure has generally been to allow the sediments to naturally stabilize so they cannot mix with the cleaner water above. However, preventing new contaminants from blowing into the lake from the surrounding area had to be addressed. The remedy used was to distribute 6" of uncon-taminated soil over the surrounding shore lands and planting vegetative cover (grasses and legumes) to stop the blowing of contaminants into the atmosphere and lake. This has, for the most part, been completed.



Small mammal surveys have indicated abundant wildlife on newly re-vegetated sands compared to none before remediation.

Water contamination is being monitored annually to determine whether more action is required to reduce aqueous toxins. It appears the toxin level has declined; results of 2008 sampling should show how effective the treatment has been. In addition, the area has become an appealing recreation area. Several area schools are monitoring adjacent streams and low-impact boating campsites have been placed along the waterway.

To learn more about the Torch Lake AoC, you can visit this website: <http://www.epa.gov/glnpo/aoc/trchlke.html>

- Sherry Zoars, Board Member



## The Air Breathes Me

The air breathes me in and out  
in white puffs, moisture condensed  
into visibility with energy, and  
I am caricatured like a stick  
figure in the dry December wind.

- A new poem by Beth Virtanen  
(Printed with the author's permission)



**Ice at Brunet Park along the eastern Keweenaw County shoreline**

The photographer, Eric Munch, writes: "[I] was worried that the very thin ice in the photo would melt or break off before I managed to shoot it. I used my 4 X 5 view camera, which requires a relatively long time to set up: usually at least several minutes."

Photo courtesy of Eric Munch (copyright Eric Munch)



*(UPEC Helps Team cont. from page 6)*

As part of the team's community outreach, we printed educational pamphlets and a poster that resided in the high school. [Plus] we invited Lake Superior State University chemistry faculty and students to the state competition.

With [UPEC's Environmental Education Grant] and some additional grant money, we were able to provide the students with the necessary funding to complete their outreach project and cover costs associated with the competitions.

The team placed fourth out of twenty-five teams with a score of 519. The first place team won with a score of 549.

(In addition), the team placed third in two subject areas: aquatic ecology and energy. The students seem to have enjoyed this experience, and all the underclassmen planned to return this fall to start the next year's team.

- Amanda Bosak and Johanna Nugent, Envirothon Team Advisors



Team members learning at state competition

Photo by Sault Area Schools

## Celebrate the U.P.!

UPEC will be hosting a gathering in Marquette on  
**Saturday, March 28, 2009,**  
which will  
highlight speakers and conversations about ideas and things  
that make the U.P. special.

Mark your calendars and keep your eyes open  
for details to come soon!

- Karen Bacula, UPEC Board Member  
and Celebration Coordinator





## Ceremony Celebrates Sturgeon River Gorge Wilderness Land Purchase

On August 15<sup>th</sup> dignitaries, past and present members of the U.S. Forest Service staff, tribal members, representatives from non-profit groups and others gathered at Bear's Den overlook on the edge of Sturgeon River Gorge Wilderness to celebrate the purchase of a key addition to that Wilderness. The land in that addition, which had been purchased by the Trust for Public Land (TPL) a few years before and held by them until Federal funds were available, had been bought from TPL by the Forest Service in July.

Of the 2000 acres of new Ottawa National Forest land, 1800 acres are within the wilderness boundary, and 200 adjacent acres, including the current Sturgeon Falls Trail trailhead, are along Forest Road 2200 on the east side of the wilderness.

This success is the result of the hard work of Forest Service staff, prioritization by TPL, the support of our members of the U.S. Congress and other groups like UPEC, and the fortuitous availability of money from the Forest Service at just the right time.

UPEC member Catherine Andrews and I attended the dedication. I had worked there as a wilderness ranger for a number of years. I thanked all the groups and individuals there for their hard work and told a few stories about the Bear's Den Overlook area and the Wilderness in general. At the end of the ceremony, we were all asked to help color the new addition green on the map that was set up. Shown in the photo below are Catherine and I doing just that.

- Doug Welker, UPEC Officer





## Meet our UPEC Board Member

(From time to time, we like to introduce members of the board to our readers. We hope you're as impressed as we are with the passion and professionalism of these individuals who volunteer so much of their time to this and other environmental organizations. -Ed.)

### Sherry Zoars

Zoars came to us in 2007 with an M.S. in Resource Management from the University of Michigan's School of Natural Resources, which she earned in 1990. During her time at U of M, she studied aquatic plants under Ed Voss.



Following graduation, she worked for several years with the Nature Conservancy in Chicago, right about the time, she says, when the stewardship program and natural area restoration movement were taking off. During that time, she also taught winter ecology at an Illinois community college. In addition, Zoars worked as a naturalist-guide for the Morton Arboretum in Lisle, IL, leading school tours in various native ecosystems.

While she isn't a native Yooper, Zoars writes, "We had been coming up here since I was a child and we brought our own kids up here to camp and explore every summer."

Since relocating to the U.P., the resource management specialist has worked on a contract basis for the U.S. Forest Service doing bird and aquatic plant surveys. In 2003, Zoars decided to share her interest in the preservation of native species by starting the North Woods Native Plant Society. Since then she has been arranging guided field trips in the western U.P. and north central Wisconsin to educate others about and to promote native plants and ecosystems. Zoars and her husband live lightly on the land in Watersmeet.

- Ed.

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### Yes! I Want to Help UPEC Make a Difference!

(Please complete and mail to UPEC, Box 673, Houghton, MI 49931)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
City/City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

I'm already a member, but I'd like to make an additional contribution to the following fund(s):

\_\_\_\_\_ UPEC Land Acquisition/Protection  
\_\_\_\_\_ UPEC Environmental Education  
\_\_\_\_\_ UPEC Outreach Fund  
\_\_\_\_\_ UPEC Endowment Fund\*

**I'd like to support the goals of UPEC by enclosing a contribution for (please check one):**

\_\_\_\_\_ Regular Membership (\$20)  
\_\_\_\_\_ Supporting Membership (\$50)  
\_\_\_\_\_ Student/Low Income (\$15)  
\_\_\_\_\_ Other (\$      )

\*If you make out your check to the Marquette Community Foundation and put **UPEC Fund** on the memo line, you can take a 50% tax credit on your Michigan return (up to \$200 for individuals, \$400 for couples). OR you can make your contribution directly to UPEC. We are a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization and your contributions are tax deductible.

**Thank You!**



**Upper Peninsula  
Environmental Coalition**

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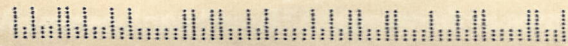
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*Protecting and maintaining the unique  
environmental qualities of the Upper Peninsula  
of Michigan by educating the public and  
acting as a watchdog to industry and government*



Beaver Basin Pond photo by Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore Park Service