

PINE RIVER/VAN ETTEN LAKE WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PLAN
2008 ANNUAL STATUS REPORT



The goals and objectives for the Pine River/Van Etten Lake Watershed were developed by the Steering Committee to protect the designated and desired uses of the watershed. Tasks were identified for each objective indicating steps needed to reach the objective.

The current goals and objectives were reevaluated under a DEQ 319 grant awarded to Huron Pines on behalf of the watershed in 2008. The updated plan will be released in 2009 following approval by DEQ. As one step in the accomplishment of the tasks as set forth in the original plan, the Coalition Steering Committee has compiled the following summary of plan activities.

Goal 1: Improve & Protect the coldwater fishery of Pine River and its tributaries

Based on the surveys conducted in 2007 and 2008, Huron Pines is compiling the list of priority road/stream crossing sites throughout the watershed including the nine (9) priority sites ranked as severe in the 2003 plan. Huron Pines also completed a re-inventory of stream bank erosion sites and is creating site plans to be included in the MDEQ watershed management plan update. In addition, Huron Pines is assembling a list of the priority project sites throughout our project area, including the 4 sites ranked as most severe. Once the reprioritizing of these lists is complete, the lists will be shared with the watershed partners and engineering work on the highest priority sites will begin so the construction work can begin as soon as funding is available.

The US Forest Service and the Alcona County Road Commission have four road/stream crossing improvement projects planned for 2009 subject to the availability of funding. Materials are on hand for replacement of the culvert on Bean Hill Road at Gimlet Creek when conditions permit. Improvements at the outlet of Sprinkler Lake at Adams Road on the West Branch of the Pine River at Fowler Road will proceed if the final estimated costs remain within budget. The design of the final project on Stout Road at Loud Creek is being extensively revised which will result in a substantial change in scope as originally intended and may result in a delay in implementation.

Huron Pines, in conjunction with the PRVEL Coalition, held two watershed workshops in the summer of 2008, one on green belting and shoreline stewardship on Van Etten Lake, and the other on river stewardship in agricultural areas in the Pine River/Van Etten Creek area.

The US Forest Service and DNR are working with the Barton City Improvement Association, a local conservation group, on the reestablishment of the northern pike spawning marsh operation at Jewell Lake. Its use was discontinued after issues associated with flooding of private land adjacent to the marsh arose. The fish population of Jewell Lake was sampled in April, 2008 using fyke nets. While adult northern pike were captured, it is the consensus of USFS and DNR biologists that the population is not large enough to support the spawning marsh operation at this time. Thus, the DNR has placed Jewell Lake on its stocking schedule for northern pike for the next three to five years to build up the population to sustainable levels. In the interim, maintenance work (brushing) will be done on the marsh itself as well as re-construction of the water control structure and outlet channel to Jewell Lake.

The engineering study for a fish passage over the dam at Van Etten Creek was completed in 2008 and the report will be released in early 2009. Following release of the report, DNR will meet with interested parties to present the findings and to receive comments.

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Huron Pines has created toolkits with information with information on the importance of vegetative buffer strips along streams, including a model ordinance for use by the public and governmental units to be distributed in 2009. A stormwater ordinance to be used for the adoption of stormwater management practices and policies is also included on the toolkit CDs. Huron Pines will continue to encourage local communities to adopt stormwater ordinances and will focus their future efforts on the Oscoda/Greenbush area.

Goal 2: Ensure that the total/partial body contact designated use for Van Etten Lake is met

Huron Pines Ecologist Jennifer Muladore (along with an NRCS engineer and several DEQ staff) visited the Lingo property in April to make recommendations for erosion control on the Pine River. While the erosion is not severe enough to warrant a large project, trees could be added or repositioned on the river bank to help reduce the force of the river. This property isn't a lakefront property, but reducing erosion anywhere on the river helps to reduce sediments and pollution that end up in Van Etten Lake.

Huron Pines has also added extensive information about vegetative buffers to the informational toolkits, including sample greenbelt ordinances for officials, along with further resources available with information in support of this objective.

In addition to continuing to monitor lake water quality under the Cooperative Lakes Monitoring Program, Van Etten Lake Association volunteers completed the review of District Health Department #2 records of on-site wastewater system permits issued for properties near the lake to determine to ages of the systems in use. This review indicates that over 60% of the estimated 659 homes and cottages near the lake have waste treatment and disposal systems more than 28 years old.

Goal 3: Restore Van Etten Creek of Alcona County to levels that will ensure it is removed from the State's non-attainment list

NRCS activities for 2008 included the completion of a Comprehensive Nutrient management Plan (CNMP) for a dairy farm on Van Etten Creek. The construction of a waste storage facility in the watershed is planned for 2009.

In addition, it has been proposed that NRCS and the Steering Committee renew the efforts to encourage and assist one or more agricultural producers with the utilization of fencing buffer strips along the riparian corridor in 2009.

Fecal Coliform Sampling was conducted monthly at six sites on Van Etten Creek and at several other sites on the Pine River and its tributaries in 2008. The intent of this sampling is to inexpensively screen sites to help identify potential sources of contamination by animals and humans. This activity will continue in 2009.

Goal 4: Improve and protect the aquatic habitat within the watershed.

Huron Pines, with the help of volunteers at the August workshop on river stewardship, completed a demonstration site on Walt Joslin's property that included adding large woody debris (LWD) to the stream bank to prevent erosion. Restoration Project Manager Patrick Ertel led a demonstration of installing LWD with duckbills to help hold the trees to the bank. LWD also provides habitat for trout and other aquatic wildlife. The trees were donated by the Lingo Family.

The Coalition is working to establish a long term stream monitoring program. We completed work on the MICORPS start-up grant in 2008 which covered the cost of training and the purchase of sampling tools and supplies to initially sample two locations twice each year. In addition, Huron Pines was awarded a follow-up grant to enhance and expand this program

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including the development of quality assurance procedures to ensure the data is acceptable to DEQ. The grant will also be used by Huron Pines to assist with the development of programs on other watersheds. The types of macro-invertebrates present are used to assess the water quality of a particular stream based on their relative tolerance to environmental conditions. While the macro-invertebrate sampling gives an indication of stream quality, habitat assessment conducted concurrently provides clues to the causes of stream degradation if it has occurred.

Goal 5: Protect critical wildlife habitat areas within the watershed.

As reported above, Huron Pines presented a workshop on green belting for local residents (including a landscaper) in June and developed informational toolkits that include information on conservation for residents. These toolkits will also be available to the real estate sales and developer communities.

Goal 6: Sustain the Pine River/Van Etten Lake Watershed Management Process.

Many of the activities included in this report were completed or are planned for completion as a part of the action plan for the DEQ 319 grant awarded to Huron Pines in 2007 to revise the watershed management plan. A completed draft of the watershed management plan revision has been submitted to the DEQ for approval or notification of changes needed.

Huron Pines is also developing a homeowner's guide to promote the Coalition's work and the watershed management process and has applied for funding to print and mail the guide (including a request for donations). Huron Pines has also applied for multiple federal and state grants that, if awarded, will enable more projects to be completed in the watershed.

Huron Pines and the Steering Committee arranged for news articles, posted press releases on the web and sent out a newsletter to interested riparian owners relating Coalition activities in 2008. A semiannual newsletter will be published in 2009. In addition, Watershed Coalition activities will be highlighted on the Huron Pines Web site and press coverage will continue to be sought.

The partnership agreement for the Watershed Coalition Steering Committee will be updated in 2009 as another step towards strengthening the Coalition infrastructure.