



# Huron Pines

## Five Year Strategic Plan: 2008-2012

*Approved 3-10-08*



### Mission, Vision and Role

Huron Pines conserves the forests, lakes and streams of Northeast Michigan. Huron Pines helps others to identify problems, brings together the necessary resources to resolve the issue, and takes a project idea all the way from conception to completion.

Our vision is that through active leadership and coordination of hands-on conservation projects, Huron Pines makes the region a better place to live, work and enjoy.

Huron Pines coordinates projects that cross political boundaries and that require the technical support, funding and input from many different stakeholders. The organization is well positioned to utilize the talents, funding, and other resources from both the private and public sector. Its mandate is to work closely with local organizations and citizens. Through its connection to the US Department of Agriculture, as well as numerous other federal and state agencies, it is able to serve in a neutral, project coordination role.

The niche of the organization is to take a “hands-on” approach to conservation. To that end, Huron Pines avoids engaging in the type of political issues and litigation that many others seem to take on. The neutrality of Huron Pines, particularly the ability of its Board and staff to bring together a diverse group of partners, is the organization’s greatest strength.

*Huron Pines is a not-for-profit, 501(c)(3) organization that serves 11 counties. The organization is an equal opportunity provider and was founded in 1973.*

This five year strategic plan is designed for use by the Board and staff to help provide general guidance as to where the organization is going based on the issues and trends that we recognize. Specific plans of work for Huron Pines are completed on a yearly basis. The annual workplans are the documents that include specific project goals, deliverables, and costs.

### Core Programs

Huron Pines offers three primary programs that enable it to best serve the interests of Northeast Michigan. These Core program areas meet the local needs of the region while also helping Huron Pines to develop and support ongoing efforts targeted at conservation. Each program area is designed to positively impact the things most important to the region – people, water and land.

**People** --- Our focus is on both groups and individuals through our **Leadership Program**. Huron Pines provides assistance to local grassroots groups and individuals in order to increase the conservation impact we have. Huron Pines has provided services to many smaller groups consistent with our mission, including developing educational materials, establishing committees, strategic planning, financial management, acquiring 501(c)(3) status, and providing project management and coordination. Huron Pines provides individual help, hosts workshops, and shares its resources whenever possible.

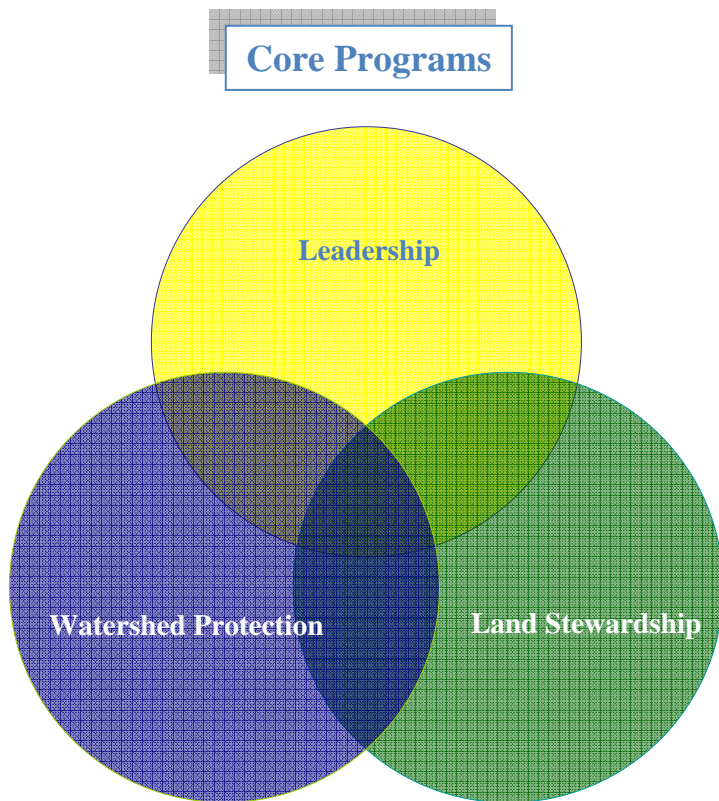
Our largest initiative is the new Huron Pines AmeriCorps Program. Through this program, Huron Pines is undertaking a multi-year effort to assist other nonprofit groups by providing them with technical assistance that they would otherwise be unable to obtain. This assistance is provided in the form of full-time AmeriCorps Members who serves one year with an individual organization. Huron Pines is able to provide 10 Members to various groups and projects impacting northern Michigan. Our belief is that stronger organizations will result in better stewardship of natural resources.

Water --- The **Watershed Protection Program** is a comprehensive effort to help local stakeholders manage and improve their watersheds in order to meet goals consistent with the Clean Water Act and State Fisheries Management Plans. Whenever possible, Huron Pines attempts to implement large-scale projects that incorporate a broad range of approaches to address root causes of water resource problems. Key project areas include watershed planning, stormwater management, in-stream habitat enhancement, control of aquatic invasive species and erosion control.

Land --- The **Land Stewardship Program** helps landowners manage and protect ecologically important properties in our northeast Michigan. Huron Pines is currently focusing this effort in the areas surrounding the Pigeon River Country State Forest and is developing a program to promote private lands stewardship in the coastal sections of our service area. Additionally, Huron Pines concentrates its efforts on working with landowners to install and preserve aquatic plant buffers (greenbelts) along the interface between land and water.

When working with private landowners, Huron Pines also helps to promote goals consistent with State Forest Management Plans.

Through our Land Stewardship Programs, staff conduct one-on-one meetings with landowners to promote the entire toolkit of conservation options, such as forest stewardship management plans, farm bill programs, opportunities with Conservation Districts, wildlife food plantings, invasive species control, carbon offset programs, biofuel markets, conservation easements, soil testing, wetland protection, and other landowner incentive programs. This approach provides landowners with a link to other conservation service providers, reduces confusion, and is a more efficient use of resources than each individual organization attempting to promote their single focus program.



## Trends Impacting Core Programs

With changes in technology, resource use, energy consumption, population, and the economy, the world has changed rapidly in the past five years. It's important to recognize that the rapid changes will continue, and likely accelerate, during the next five years. Above all else, it's critical that the organization pay close attention to how these changes impact the organization and its service area, while pro-actively managing for the anticipated changes that will occur. With that in mind, below are the major trends that are anticipated to impact Huron Pines over the next five years.

Program Area	Trends impacting HP	Challenge	Opportunity
<b>Watershed Protection</b>	1) Decline in funding from state and federal government for projects involving high quality water resources, particularly for nonpoint source pollution control	1) Less funding for the type of projects most important for N. Michigan streams (e.g., road-stream crossings)	1) Less funding will force a re-assessment of this type of work by Huron Pines, resulting in more definable program outcomes. Support to address needs outlined in watershed management plans will need to come from the community; HP will need to make connection between projects and overall economic benefit
	2) In-stream enhancement funding (from the state) for the Au Sable is anticipated to return for a two year period	2) Difficult to explain the changing availability of major funding for this project to our partners; need to include & thank partners as the state funded project moves forward	2) Allows HP to use DNR funds for that project and apply funding from private sector to can other water resource projects
	3) More usage of water resources by recreational users and more pressure as a result of residential land development	3) Creates greater need for maintenance type projects; these are necessary but have very little appeal to funding sources	3) Need to make case for long-term funding for this type of work; staff and board will also need to be careful to avoid local conflicts that are based on user issues; there will be more opportunities to utilize volunteers on the smaller, maintenance type of field projects
	4) There will be more conflicts regarding consumptive uses, such as groundwater withdrawal, along with standards for quality	4) Improved state/federal policies are needed	4) Huron Pines may be able to assist with finding balanced solutions to local issues, which are often not either/or type issues
	5) Problems with invasive exotics will increase	5) Very difficult, sometimes impossible, to address	5) More educational outreach needed. HP will likely be asked to assist more with inventory, mapping and developing control plans

Program Area	Trends impacting HP	Challenge	Opportunity
<b>Land Stewardship</b>	1) Conservation District and forestry funding and services in severe decline and will likely continue to decline	1) Scarce resources are also impacting HP while calls for assistance continue to increase	1) Still a need for providing a gateway to conservation programs & HP can fulfill this role; all HP staff will need to become more well-rounded about discussing all of the available conservation programs, not just their area of specialty
	2) Second home development is significantly increasing in many of our counties – faster than anywhere else in MI	2) Parcelization, fragmentation and transient population make conservation efforts more difficult; smaller forestland ownerships (under 10 acres), by themselves, are too small to be effectively managed	2) More involvement with private landowner programs; opportunities to help develop forest ownership cooperatives among smaller ownerships
	3) More recreational user conflicts (e.g., ORV, horseback riding, mountain biking) will occur	3) Better recreational planning is needed, more communication is required	3) New collaborative partnerships will need to be formed w/ user groups
	4) Growing decline in public understanding of various land management practices (particularly forest mgt)	4) Results in PR issues, more time needed to be spent on education, and may lead to a change in policies that result in poor wildlife, water and forest management	4) HP should be able to take a larger role in this issue; can help with educating the public
	5) Increased emphasis on climate change & alternative energy will result in new incentive programs for landowners as well as new markets for biofuels	5) Emerging issues like climate change and the policies that result are often difficult to clearly communicate to the public; the politicized nature of this topic thus far will pose some barriers to communication	5) Huron Pines is a great place for the private and public sector to invest funding to get new local programs implemented

Program Area	Trends impacting HP	Challenge	Opportunity
<b>Leadership</b>	1) More grassroots groups contacting Huron Pines looking for help & collaboration opportunities	1) More demand on staff to help with needs, particularly those where there is no funding to offset the staff time	1) Huron Pines can further target our efforts in this area and seek long-term funding to help promote the program. This also has opened doors to many new partners
	2) HP AmeriCorps Program is growing and the program profile is increasing	2) Needs a lot of staff time/attention plus more matching funds to make it viable for the program to continue; HP will need to do a yearly assessment of the program design and compatibility of host sites participating in the program	2) Very high profile program that can greatly increase the positive conservation impact; can grow & expand as a program

Program Area	Trends impacting HP	Challenge	Opportunity
<b>General Organizational Issues</b>	1) Funding scarcity among groups will continue	1) This will drive more competition among organizations, making cooperation more difficult	1) Seek out new partnerships with non-traditional partners
	2) More landowner associations and conservation groups will want to join as members of HP	2) Current bylaws structure gives groups no formal role while maintaining a county sponsorship structure that is no longer effective	2) Modify bylaws to formalize group members and restrict organizational sponsorship (including counties and CDs) to dues paying members; increase dues to \$500/yr
	3) Unstable nature of funding streams will continue to make staffing projections difficult	3) May be more over/under of staffing than what's best for the organization	3) Other organizations will face similar problem & there are some opportunities for sharing staff and/or providing more contract services to other groups
	4) More and more people will be making use of rapidly advancing technology for communications	4) With all of the information available it will be more difficult to get them to pay attention/understand key things	4) More people will be easier to reach more often and for less money through electronic media; offer more information in bits (eg, the e-news)
	5) Technology will continue to change rapidly and the need for computer updates/assistance will occur	5) Increase costs, higher levels of staff frustration, need for more training	5) Continue to pursue cost saving opportunities; may be able to share some IT assistance with others
	6) Energy costs will continue to rise	6) It will become more difficult (costly) to travel	6) Re-assess value of number of face-to-face meetings; use the cheaper alternatives that are becoming available (web-based conferencing); be sure to include funding for travel costs into project budgets

Program Area	Trends impacting HP	Challenge	Opportunity
<b>General Organizational Issues (cont.)</b>	7) RC&D Program will continue to suffer from a lack of identity and funding	7) Possibility of more program requirements and paperwork, less return for Huron Pines; no help/support from state, regional or national RC&D councils	7) Utilize assistance from program (engineering, mapping, some office space) as long as the benefits outweigh the costs; drop participation/support for regional and national councils
	8) Push for more accountability continues at fed/state level, creating more paperwork and administrative headaches	8) More staff time spent on administering programs v. doing them; more delays in being reimbursed for expenses	8) Project budgets need to include more time for admin; the organization needs to hold a bit more of its assets in liquid form and pay more attention to cash flow; request advance payment and more frequent HP billing for our contracts
	9) Growth of organization over time	9) Office space, training, need for more admin help, need more funding; need to better track deliverables	9) Greater impact with getting more and more conservation work completed

## Management & Governance

Huron Pines is based in Grayling, Michigan and serves the 11 county region of Northeast Michigan.

The organization is governed by an 11 member Board of Directors that is representative (geographically and programmatically) of the services Huron Pines provides. In addition, as the bylaws are currently written, a representative from each County Board of Commissioners and County Conservation District constitute the organization's Full Council. The Full Council approves the work of the Board and votes on issues pertaining to bylaws and election of officers.

The Board employs an Executive Director to manage the day to day work of the organization and to add staff positions as the organization needs to complete its programs. Currently, Huron Pines has a Program Director to provide direction to specific projects, along with a Restoration Project Manager, Ecologist, Habitat Specialist, River Crew, accounting and program support staff. Huron Pines relies on USDA-NRCS for assistance with engineering and GIS mapping. The organization also contracts work to landscape and construction contractors, engineers, and others as needed.

## Future Direction of Organization

Based on Board and Staff planning sessions, along with input from partners via interviews with the Board, Huron Pines has identified three key values regarding the role of the organization. These are:

● **Leadership** – To successfully complete the type of large scale projects Huron Pines is involved with, one organization must fulfill a leadership role. There is a need to pull together all of the necessary partners to bring a project to fruition, manage the financial & administrative components of a project, enter into contracts with the private sector, and ensure that the project stays on track and meets conservation goals. Throughout its 35 year history, Huron Pines has often undertaken this role. Even as (and because) new groups and committees have developed, the need for this role continues to be great.

● **Start to finish capability** – Few groups can take a project idea all the way from “conception to completion.” In interviews with our partners, this was the service that was most appreciated by others.

● **Promote Northeast Michigan/create opportunities** – Through the grants that Huron Pines has been able to secure and the new programs offered, Huron Pines helps the region to be a better place in which to live, work and recreate. Through the efforts of the organization, many new jobs have been created, natural resources have been improved, and communities have had access to funding for projects that would otherwise have been unavailable to them. Additionally, Huron Pines believes that the region of Northeast Michigan is often overlooked by federal, state and private funding sources and that it is important for the group to continually remind others of the need for support for the area.

The planning process identified five key areas essential to the future success of program delivery and achieving the conservation mission of the organization. The key points listed below come from interviews from our partners and follow-up discussion among board and staff.

### 1) Make Huron Pines more marketable

- Make case about how improved conservation will have an economic benefit and improve quality of life
- Develop targeted success stories
- The majority of partners knew the organization is a not-for-profit, but quite a number still thought we were supported by federal government
- Tailor education materials to audience better; promote organization as a part of all educational outreach efforts

- Continue efforts to increase public profile – televised PSA’s, e-news, newsletter, website, more presentations to special groups, more press releases
- Ensure that all staff and board members can easily explain major programs of the organization and are up to date on key project issues/goals

## 2) Diversify our funding sources

- Approach corporations for support
- Promote a planned giving program
- Place more focus on membership program – double size over next five years (from \$30,000 in support to \$60,000)
- Tap into resource of retirees (those involved at the project level as volunteers will often end up being the best supporters of the organization)

## 3) Maintain credibility as we grow

- Stay focused and don’t take on more than we can handle – do not try to be everything for everyone.
- Focus on mission when evaluating every activity/project
- Provide more opportunities for professional staff development
- Continue recruitment of Board Members who bring a passion for natural resources and needed skills to the organization

## 4) Increase focus on pro-active, long-term projects

- Plan better (at all levels)
- Take on fewer “band-aid” projects
- Connect groups and individuals with ideas for small scale projects to other sources of assistance and, when not taking a project on, become better at letting them down but not leaving them helpless

## 5) Continue role of opening doors for others, providing tech assistance with fundraising, community organizing, etc.

- Continue to lead coalition building, facilitation – take the leadership role, as an organization, more often in emerging partnership projects
- Continue efforts such as hosting leadership training for watershed organizers
- Continue to look for collaboration opportunities and send out announcements pertaining to grant programs, etc
- Build on Huron Pines AmeriCorps effort
- Increase efforts to serve as the clearinghouse of information about conservation programs in the region

In addition to joint visioning sessions with the Board and Staff, Huron Pines interviewed key stakeholders. The interviews were conducted by individual Board members and were used to obtain candid feedback about perceptions, performance, and future direction of the organization. The interviews took place in the summer of 2007 and 18 individuals were interviewed, representing government agencies, nonprofit organizations, foundations, and private business.

The Board and Staff would like to thank the following individuals for taking the time to offer their thoughts as part of the planning process:

Bob Thorsen, Paul H. Young Chapter of Trout Unlimited  
Lori Phalen, Michigan Association of Conservation Districts  
John Dallas, Au Sable River North Branch Association  
Robert Bolinger, Cheboygan County Commissioner  
Ned Wickes, Higgins Lake resident  
Dave Borgeson, Fisheries Division Unit Supervisor  
Rick Shoemaker, MDEQ Surface Water Division  
Diane Rekowski, Northeast Michigan Council of Governments  
Ann Baughman, Freshwater Future  
Ken Dennings, Higgins Lake Foundation  
Rusty Gates, Anglers of the Au Sable  
Steve Rodock, NRCS Soil Scientist  
Jeff Silagy, MDEQ Land & Water Management Division  
Dan Stock, Pine River – Van Etten Lake Watershed Coalition  
Joe Sprys, Michigan Fly Fishing Club  
Kim McClain, Grayling City Council  
Roy Peterson, Presque Isle County resident  
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