

**Cass River Greenway
2012 Year in Review
By CRG Chairman, Robert Zeilinger**



Cass River Greenway
c/o 240 w. Genesee St.
Frankenmuth, MI 48734

Community Membership and Agency Support:

Organized in 2007, the Cass River Greenway Committee membership includes volunteer residents and municipal leaders from cities, communities and townships along the Cass River from Cass City downstream to Bridgeport. Expanding the volunteer base for work on the Cass River Greenway project is critical to achieving many of the committee's goals, and we welcome additional volunteers.

The Cass River Greenway Committee is strongly supported by federal, state and county agencies whose representatives are members of the committee. They include: MDEQ Water Bureau, US Fish & Wildlife Service, USDA/Saginaw RC&D, Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy, UM Flint-University Outreach, Saginaw Area Storm Water Authority, Saginaw and Tuscola County Conservation Districts, Tuscola County Road Commission, and The Nature Conservancy.

Goals Developed by the Cass River Greenway Committee:

- Develop Recreation Opportunities on the Cass River and along its corridor
- Encourage Preservation of Wildlife Habitat and Critical Natural Lands
- Improve Water Quality of the Cass River

Goal – Develop Recreation Opportunities on the Cass River and along its corridor:

The design and construction of a water trail on the Cass River is our top priority for this goal. Major accomplishments in 2012 included the May 15 ribbon cutting for the newly constructed canoe/kayak launch in Tuscola, installation of on-river water trail signs and 3-panel kiosk signs in Vassar, Tuscola and Frankenmuth. The kiosks include a Water Trail Map panel, a panel describing the history of the Cass River, and an artist rendering of wildlife found along the Cass River. The Lower Cass River Water Trail Map can be downloaded from our web site www.cassriver.org.

Plans for a new launch in Vassar are currently on hold, pending the removal of the breached dam in Vassar. US Fish & Wildlife Service and Saginaw Bay WIN have committed major grants for this project. Other funding requests are in process and engineering work has begun.

In 2013 a kayak path will be constructed through the new fish passage rock ramp in Frankenmuth as well as a portage built around the structure. Also, a newly formed committee will make recommendations for launch sites for the Upper Cass River Water Trail, running from Cass City downstream to Vassar.

A "Float and Swim the Cass River" event was held on June 16. The event was organized to highlight the new launches built in Tuscola and Frankenmuth. Twelve swimmers accompanied by two pontoon boats and approximately 20 canoes and kayaks joined in the fun. The feedback from the swimmers was so positive that a Triathlon (swim, bike, run) is being planned for August 2013 at Heritage Park in Frankenmuth.

Goal – Encourage Preservation of Wildlife Habitat and Critical Natural Lands:

The preservation of scenic vistas and wildlife habitat is important to a vibrant and healthy watershed. In partnership with UM Flint – University Outreach, the Cass River Greenway has completed and released a Natural Lands Inventory and Assessment document. The study involved an assessment of existing habitat lands and ranking them as to their value/importance to sustaining wildlife populations and environmental processes. The scope of the study included six townships along the Cass River:

Bridgeport, Frankenmuth, Tuscola, Vassar, Juniata, and Indian Fields. The 18-page report and associated maps are now being distributed to interested parties. The report and individual township maps are available on our web site www.cassriver.org and can be purchased from Frankenmuth Printing.

The second initiative in this area is a Phragmites control project. Phragmites is a non-native, invasive reed that threatens the ecological health of wetlands and the shorelines of lakes and rivers. Phragmites are extremely difficult to eradicate once they become well established, as evidenced by their total domination in many areas around the Saginaw Bay and area rivers. To date we have observed very little Phragmites on the banks of the Cass River. However, it is present and expanding along many roadside ditches in our area. Our intent is to eradicate Phragmites in our area before it invades the Cass River. In 2010, a demonstration project was implemented, spraying recommended herbicides to five sites of emergent Phragmites. The result was almost total eradication. In 2011, a student at Frankenmuth High School completed a senior project on Phragmites Control. As part of his project he surveyed every road in Frankenmuth and Bridgeport Townships and mapped locations of emergent Phragmites. With the support of the Saginaw County Road Commission, these sites were treated in September 2011. Again, the treatment proved to be very successful. In 2012 a volunteer drove and mapped phragmites locations along roadsides in 3 townships located in the southwest corner of Tuscola County. With the support of the Tuscola County Road Commission, those sites were treated in August. We plan on continuing this effort and expanding our outreach to private property owners in 2013.

Goal – Improve Water Quality of the Cass River:

The 4th Annual Cass River Clean Up was held on June 30 and over 50 volunteers worked to clean up the river from Tuscola to Vassar. Once again, trailers full of tires, plastic, metal and glass were removed from the river. Next year's clean up will take place between Vassar and the M-46 river crossing. This summer the Cass River Greenway submitted and won the Keep Michigan Beautiful President's Award for our "Annual Cass River Clean Up Program".

Improvement of river water quality is a watershed wide activity and involves a long-term commitment. In late 2010 the Michigan DEQ announced the Cass River Watershed had been selected for funding of a Watershed Management Plan project. This is an extremely important and necessary step in developing a long-term effort to improve water quality in the Cass River. The resulting report, due in early 2013, will prioritize the environmental problems within the watershed, suggest remediation projects and timelines, and recommend funding sources for the projects.

Also, late in 2010 the Cass River was one of three river systems in the Saginaw Bay Watershed selected for a "Land Use Policy" analysis to be conducted by Michigan State University. The objective of this study is to compare various municipal land use policies (master plans and ordinances) under various landscape conditions (agriculture, rural/developed, natural) and develop "best practice" land use policies that promote environmental stewardship practices that can be considered by municipalities statewide. The project was completed in 2012.

In August 2011 the Michigan DEQ awarded the Cass River Greenway a Water Quality Monitoring Project grant for a two-year study of the Cass River, testing water quality from sites upstream of Cass City to Bridgeport. Testing parameters include phosphorus, suspended solids, dissolved oxygen, biological oxygen demand, fecal coliform, turbidity, nitrates and ph. The project is being managed by Environmental Science Solutions, supported by area wastewater treatment plants and Saginaw Valley State University. Year one testing has been successfully completed.

Thank you for your involvement and support.