

**Cass River Greenway
2013 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, Saginaw Bay 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. Plans for a new launch in Vassar are once again moving forward, now that the dam removal project is complete. The proposed site is located off S. Water Street, near the site of the old dam. A grant from Saginaw Bay WIN has been approved, additional fund raising is in process and launch construction is targeted for 2015.

A new launch is also being considered for the M-46 Cass River crossing location. Discussions have been held with MDOT, MDNR, and Juniata Township representatives. Currently, the location of choice is at the MDNR State Game parking area, just off M-46. An application/permit is being prepared by the Cass River Greenway for MDNR consideration. The launch concept would entail a low impact, low cost launch facility.

The potential for a new launch at the Caine Road Cass River crossing is also being investigated. Finally, a kayak path will be constructed through the new fish passage rock ramp in Frankenmuth as well as a portage built around the structure. Construction is planned for 2014.

The Lower Cass River Water Trail Map can be downloaded from our web site www.cassriver.org.

The 2nd Annual Float and Swim the Cass River was held in June. Eight swimmers accompanied by 3 pontoon boats and approximately 30 kayaks and canoes made the swim/float from Tuscola to Frankenmuth.

In part due to the success of the Float and Swim the Cass events, a triathlon (The Experience@Frankenmuth – Tri for Life) was held on August 3. 332 people from across the mid-west and Canada registered for the event (swim, bike and run). The event was very well organized and feedback from the participants was very positive. It is expected the event will be held again in 2014.

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 (forests, grasslands, wetlands, etc.) and ranked 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 from Bridgeport upstream to Caro. The townships included Bridgeport, Frankenmuth, Tuscola, Vassar, Juniata, and Indianfields. 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 program. 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. This effort began in 2010 with a demonstration treatment project on five sites. Since then we have partnered with the Saginaw and Tuscola County Road Commissions to locate and treat phragmites along roadways in 8 townships along the Cass River corridor. In addition, approximately 6 private properties have been treated each year. We plan on continuing this effort and expanding our outreach to private property owners in 2014.

Goal – Improve Water Quality of the Cass River:

Vassar hosted the 5th Annual Cass River Clean Up on July 20 and over 50 volunteers worked to clean up the river from Vassar upstream to M-46. Once again, trailers full of tires, plastic, metal and glass were removed from the river. Next year's clean up will be hosted by Caro and take place between Caro and M-46.

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 2014, will prioritize the environmental problems within the watershed, suggest remediation projects and timelines, and recommend funding sources for the projects.

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. The testing has been successfully completed and a final report will be completed in the first quarter of 2014.

Other Achievements:

The Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy honored the Cass River Greenway at their annual meeting where we were awarded their Osprey Award for the "Outstanding Conservation Organization".

In June, our web site was updated and upgraded. The web site includes many great photos and a much easier means of loading and managing content. See www.cassriver.org.

Thank you for your involvement and support.

