

**Cass River Greenway
2023 – Year in Review
By CRG Chairman, Robert Zeilinger**



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

Organized in 2007, the Cass River Greenway has been working to increase recreational use and improve the environmental well being of the Cass River.

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

Pure Michigan Award

On April 12, 2023 at the annual Pure Michigan Governor's Conference on Tourism, the Cass River Water Trail was awarded the Pure Michigan Water Trail designation. Dave Lorenz, Vice President of Travel Michigan stated "This year's best in tourism awards honor those individuals and entities that go above and beyond in making Michigan a top travel destination and truly elevate the state's tourism industry".

Paddling Activity on the Cass River Water Trail

Currently there are three kayak/canoe liveries on the Cass River Water Trail; Frankenmuth Kayak Adventures in Frankenmuth, Sivak's Cass River Boat & Tube Rental in Vassar, and Wesleyan Woods Canoe & Kayak Trips in Vassar. Based on their feedback on booked trips and estimates of privately owned kayak trips, it is estimated that up over 1500 paddlers use the river annually.

12th Annual Paddle & Swim

This year's event was held on June 17. Similar to previous events, the paddle from Vassar and Tuscola to Frankenmuth was well attended with many paddlers and a few swimmers.

Lighted Kayak Paddle

Frankenmuth Parks & Rec sponsored a summer evening lighted kayak paddle on August 6. Approximately 50 kayaks, decorated in Christmas themed lights, paddled from the Heritage Park launch downstream to River Place and back.

Great Lakes Rendezvous

The annual event was held in Davis Park, Bridgeport, on August 18-20.

Lake Sturgeon Releases

The restoration of lake sturgeon in the Saginaw Bay continues annually, sponsored primarily by US Fish & Wildlife and MI DNR. The releases occur at the Cass, Flint, Shiawassee and Tittabawassee Rivers. St. Lorenz Lutheran School participates in the Sturgeon in the Classroom Program annually (one fish) and two releases of approximately 500 fish each are released in August and September.

Cass River Log Jam Removal

The committee recognizes that log jams are an ongoing concern and that large log jams can be very expensive to remove. The committee is interested in improving timely feedback regarding small blockages in the river so action can be taken before they form into large jams.

2023 Phragmites Plan

Once again, we received support from the Tuscola County Road Commission regarding phragmites control. The TCRC allocated funding to treat phragmites in a Cass River Watershed township

Cass River Launch Activities

Beyer Road Launch

Over the years, river ice and flooding have damaged the lower entry steps of the launch and covered them with silt. Funding from Tri-Star Trust, Frankenmuth Jaycees and Frankenmuth Community Foundation has been awarded to repair and improve the launch facilities. Work has begun in 2023 and will be completed in the summer of 2024.

-Caro Dam

Michael Clinesmith, Tuscola County EDC, reported that US Fish & Wildlife has granted the EDC seed money to further develop plans and costs to repair the dam and recreate a recreational pond upstream of the dam. A portage path around the dam is also included in the plan. Additional grant request and letters of support are in process.

-Land Transfer, Tuscola County Parks

Tuscola County has obtained title to three parcels along the Cass River in the vicinity of Chambers and Washburn Roads, in Indianfields Township. Many remember this property as part of the abandoned prison and hospital properties. The property has been assigned to the Tuscola County Parks & Rec Commission for development and administration. The long-range plan includes development of a public park and kayak launch. This launch would be the next upstream launch from our M-46 launch.

-Evergreen Park, Sanilac County

Sanilac County Parks Commission is planning the expansion and addition of a kayak launch at their existing Evergreen Park. A Michigan DNR Trust Fund grant has been approved and plans are being made. This park is located upstream of Cass City on the south branch of the Cass River, just off M-53.

-Cass City State Game Area

A rustic river access site in the Cass City State Game Area, which is downstream of Evergreen Park, has been completed. This is a very rustic “walk in access” site located upstream of Cass City.

Water Quality Monitoring Project

An extensive water quality monitoring project of the Cass River sponsored by the Cass River Greenway was completed in 2014. The results indicated the water quality of the Cass River was “good” and safe for recreational purposes. (See our website www.cassriver.org for details of the study). The study did indicate the two most important areas for improvement were silt from erosion and occasional high levels of e-coli bacteria.

Previous studies conducted by EGLE (formerly DEQ) on feeder creeks of the Cass River indicated frequent occurrences of high e-coli bacteria, above safe water conditions. Sources of the bacteria were not identified.

In 2023 a grant submitted by Saginaw County Conservation District, in partnership with EGLE and Cass River Greenway, to monitor four major creeks in the Cass River Watershed for e-coli contamination was approved. Water samples will be collected and analyzed at Saginaw Valley State University. The lab at SVSU has the capability to determine not only the presence and level of bacteria, but also whether the source is of human or animal origin. The creeks to be monitored are the Dead, Cole, Perry and Millington Creeks. The project will be completed in 2024.

Logging the Cass River

Mark Putman, a Cass River Greenway member and historian, completed a very detailed and informative book on the history of logging in the Cass River Watershed. The book includes many maps and general history of communities, residents and businesses. The hardcover book is available through Amazon books and also can be viewed on our water trail website, www.cassriverwatertrail.org.

A special thank you to our partner federal, state and county agencies, our donors and grant funders, our partner municipalities and universities, and our faithful volunteers.

December 15, 2023