

**Cass River Greenway
2018 – 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 now been working for over a decade 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

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

The design and construction of a water trail on the Cass River has been our top priority for this goal. In 2018 the Cass River Water Trail was expanded to include 13 public access sites, the most recent being at Hoffmann Community Park located at the intersection of Dixie Highway and the Cass River. The water trail now runs 37.5 miles from the upstream site at M-46 Bridge (between Caro and Vassar) and ends at Wickes Park on the Saginaw River in the City of Saginaw. The Wickes Park launch is significant because it provides for a unique paddling experience through the Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge, which lies between the last two launch sites on the water trail.

A new interactive website, www.cassriverwatertrail.org was developed and launched to help promote the new water trail. Additionally, new updated signage has been installed at the launch sites and a new Cass River Water Trail brochure has been printed.

Paddling activity continues to increase on the Cass River. Two new canoe/kayak livery businesses have been established; Frankenmuth Kayak Adventures and Sivak's Cass River Boat & Tube Rental. River related community events included The 7th Annual Paddle & Swim, The Tri-Bavaria Triathlon, The Great Lakes Rendezvous and Canoe the Cass River with Tom Lounsbury.

Moving forward the Cass River Greenway is finalizing plans to apply for National and State Water Trail Designation Status. Designation status provides widespread exposure and opportunities to promote our region as a tourist destination for paddling related activities.

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 2011 the Cass River Greenway, in partnership with UM Flint, 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 report and individual township maps are available on our web site www.cassriver.org.

The second initiative for this goal 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. 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 each year to locate and treat phragmites along roadways in townships near the Cass River corridor. Our joint efforts have treated 19 townships to date. In 2018 Tuscola County Road Commission treated Juniata, Indianfields and Fremont Townships.

In 2018 a major logjam was discovered on the Cass River. The logjam is located downstream of Bridgeport's Davis Park launch, blocks passage downstream and creates a flooding hazard. Fundraising is in process as the year ends, and mid-winter is planned for removal.

Goal – Improve Water Quality of the Cass River:

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. The DEQ and EPA approved the resulting report in 2015. The report prioritized the environmental problems within the watershed, suggests remediation projects and timelines, and recommends funding sources for the projects. Areas of concern included sedimentation, e-coli contamination and streambank erosion. The Cass River Watershed Management Plan can be found on www.cassriver.org.

In late 2015 a project was approved and funded by the DEQ to implement Best Practices in Livestock and Manure Management in operations near several tributaries of the Cass River. The purpose of the project was to reduce documented e-coli in four streams located in Saginaw and Tuscola counties. Unfortunately, the project was closed out in 2018 without any livestock owners volunteering to participate in the program.

Every year, beginning in 2008, the Cass River Greenway, in partnership with a “river community,” has sponsored a river cleanup. The event is scheduled when river conditions allow for walking in or along the shoreline as much as possible, thus exposing as much trash as possible. On average, 40 to 50 volunteers show up for the event and clean 4 to 5 miles of river. Canoes are used as “trash barges” and trash and tire recycle businesses donate equipment for disposal. In August of 2018 an area downstream of Cass City was cleaned. Approximately 80 tires were removed from the river. Several tires were so large a second event was scheduled to remove them. To date we have cleaned over 45 miles of river, collecting hundreds of tires, car-truck-farm equipment parts, furniture, cans and bottles. Nearly the entire river from Cass City to Bridgeport has been cleaned.

Recognition

On April 19 the Cass River Greenway was awarded the Group Community Service award by the Tuscola County Stars committee at the 16th annual “Celebrating Tuscola’s Stars Award ceremony. We were recognized for our efforts in cleaning up and promoting the Cass River over the past 10 years.

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.

