

**Cass River Greenway
2014 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. Six additional launches are currently planned with construction targeted for 2015. They include; Bridgeport at Davis Park, Bridgeport at Dixie Highway, downtown Frankenmuth at the fish passage rock ramp, downtown Vassar, Vassar Township at Caine Road and Juniata Township at M-46. Major funders include Saginaw Bay WIN, Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund, Frankenmuth Jaycees, Mr. John Hoffman, Andersen Foundation, McNally Family Foundation, Harvey Randall Wickes Foundation, and Morley Foundation.

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

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

Due in part to the success of the Float and Swim the Cass events; the 2nd Annual Triathlon (The Bavarian Inn Experience) was held on August 2. Over 400 participants 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 2015.

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 Indian Fields. 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 11 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 2015. Additionally, the Cass River Greenway is now a member of the Saginaw Bay Cooperative Weed Management Area organization (a group of organizations focused on leveraging resources to address invasive plants that threaten our environment). The Saginaw Bay CWMA has submitted a grant request for funding to accelerate the treatment of invasive plants in our area.

Goal – Improve Water Quality of the Cass River:

Caro hosted the 6th Annual Cass River Clean Up on July 26. Forty-five volunteers worked to clean up the river from the Caro dam downstream to the MDOT Park on M-46. Two stake trucks full of metals, plastics and approximately 55 tires were collected. Next year's clean up will be hosted by Bridgeport.

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 project study and on-the-ground work was completed in 2013 and a report compiled in 2014. The Michigan DEQ and the Federal EPA have now approved the Cass River Watershed Management Plan. Additionally, a major funding request, based on the issues identified in the "plan", has been submitted to the MDEQ. The Watershed Management Plan can be found on our web site www.cassriver.org.

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 included phosphorus, suspended solids, dissolved oxygen, biological oxygen demand, fecal coliform, turbidity, nitrates and ph. The project was managed by Environmental Science Solutions, and supported by area wastewater treatment plants and Saginaw Valley State University. A final report was submitted and approved by the MDEQ. The results of the study indicated the overall quality of the water in the Cass River is "Good" and safe for recreational use. However, several tests under certain conditions indicated the potential for short term elevated levels of e-coli originating from tributary streams. The results of the study were incorporated into the Watershed Management Plan study.

Saginaw Bay RC&D has successfully led an initiative to secure funding for stream bank erosion control on the Cass River. Major donors include: Saginaw Bay WIN, Bay Area Community Foundation, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Star of the West Milling Co. and Frankenmuth Conservation Club. Work is planned for 2015 and 2016.

Thank you for your involvement and support.