Nearly 100 years of Conservation in Pigeon River Country

Ray Hoobler comes from a family that has always appreciated the outdoors and the environment. Rooted in the first trips north to fish in the early part of the 20th century, throughout actively fighting to protect the Pigeon River State Forest from oil interests in the 1970s, and most recently through the donation of a conservation easement in 2009 the Hoobler family has been part of the fabric of Pigeon River Country for almost 100 years. From the time Ray’s grandfather first discovered the beauty of Pigeon River Country – the majesty of its rivers and the solitude of its forests – he realized that this was a place that was special and to be respected, and he made sure that this belief was handed down to future generations.

At a time when most of the region’s landscape was reminiscent of Hemingway’s “pine barren landscape,” Ray’s grandfather, B. Raymond Hoobler would bring his son to fish under the cool shade of a small stand of tall pines next to the Pigeon River. Decades of heavy logging and a series of devastating forest fires had left Pigeon River County almost devoid of tall trees and the ground covered with blackened tree trunks and scrubby growth. This group of pines had defeated saws, axes, and fire to become very special to B. Raymond and his son Sibley. In 1929 the property was put up for sale by the Yuill Brothers, a logging family in the area, and B. Raymond purchased the parcel which they aptly named Camp O’Pines to commemorate what first drew them there. In addition to this unique stand of trees, Ray’s grandfather recognized that the land he purchased adjacent to what is now the Pigeon River State Forest and located on the banks of the crystal clear Pigeon River was special for many reasons - special to the lives of his family, the strength of his community, and to the health of the local watersheds, forests, and wildlife.

The property in Pigeon River country became the place where Ray’s father, Dr. Sibley Hoobler, learned to fish and spent time exploring the forests. In *A Personal Review 1930-1987*, he writes, “In all the years of my life, the cabin in the woods of Northern Michigan has been my greatest love.” He recalls using the Pigeon River property as a retreat to write a medical book as well a place to share with his friends who would visit, leaving the stress of medical practice and study behind. Over the years, the family started many traditions like hanging a large piece of steel railroad track from a tree next to the main cabin as a way to call fishermen to the daily meal, back from the river below. Dr. Hoobler recollects how, from the time he was an eagle scout, they would raise and lower the flag every day and how with each passing year the tradition grew. His brother-in-law, a veteran back from the Russian Front, taught him the triangle fold for the American flag, and a recording of the bugle was discovered and played. Ray recalls that his father was “long interested in retaining the wild character of the Pigeon,” and that this
ideal was why he joined the fight against oil exploration and drilling in the Pigeon River State Forest in the 1970s.

To ensure that these traditions will be carried on by his children and grandchildren the donation of a conservation easement was a natural choice for Ray. A conservation easement would underscore his personal philosophy on land protection, as well as those that his father and grandfather had held in such high regard. After approaching HeadWaters about donating a conservation easement on his property nearly 10 years ago, the Hoobler easement hit its stride in the last three years. Ray attributes the Conservancy’s headquarters moving to Gaylord as a major reason for his easement moving forward. “At that time, focus shifted to the Pigeon,” he says. Over a period of 24 months Land Protection staff drafted the baseline and easement documents for Ray to review, edit, and finalize. The final product, signed by Ray and his wife, Frances Kuehn, at the end of May 2009 was a strong, well planned conservation easement on an important piece of property.

The donation of the Camp O’Pines easement will ensure that nearly 400 acres situated within Pigeon River Country, including nearly 10,000 feet of frontage on the Pigeon River is protected forever, while at the same time allowing Ray to carry forward the Hoobler family tradition of conservation without burdening his children with higher property taxes. By placing a conservation easement on Camp O’Pines “taxes will be reduced when I die” says Ray, meaning that his family will be able to keep and enjoy the property rather than having to divide and sell it to pay higher property taxes that result from transferring land. The Hoobler conservation easement brings together a comprehensive recording of family and land use history, current landowner goals, and future stewardship planning. Ray and Frances took the time to work with Conservancy staff to ensure that their easement would leave a legacy of stewardship for their family and community. HeadWaters is thrilled to add the Hoobler easement to the properties it protects. It is another excellent example of how landowners can actively steward their land to fulfill their personal vision for their property, within a set of restrictions that they have helped to design, all to ensure comprehensive protection of habitat values that are vital to ecosystem integrity. In Ray’s case, he is actively managing his forests mostly to reduce the danger of large windfalls in his older stands. All of this is in accordance with a Forestry Management Plan, he had written by a Certified Forester and approved by the Conservancy. “The Conservancy is a partner” Ray states when asked about his decision to conduct timber harvests.

The Camp O’Pines easement represents a huge stepping stone for conservation in northeast Michigan. By agreeing to restrict division and development on his property, Ray is effectively allowing the unfragmented landscape of the Pigeon River State Forest to extend beyond its borders. The conservation values identified in the Hoobler conservation easement include the protection of major wildlife corridors within the Pigeon River country for the benefit of animals such as elk, deer, bear, and other native creatures, as well as protection for the state threatened Ram’s Head Lady Slipper that blooms a delicate pink against the brown backdrop of the forest floor, each spring. Ray’s respect for his property and its natural features are evident in his decision to designate 100 acres of cedar swamp as an “Undistrubed Natural Area” never to be developed or disturbed regardless of ownership and conveyance. These are unique characteristics of Pigeon River Country that would otherwise be lost without the protection afforded to them by the Hoobler easement – for the future generations of Otsego County and northeast Michigan, not just the Hoobler family. “The Pigeon [River Country] is an area of Michigan meant for its citizens” says Ray, “it’s not wilderness, but it retains characteristics of long ago.”
March 6th Snowshoe Hike a Great Success

On Saturday March 6th, HeadWaters hosted their first outreach event for 2010 – an interpretive snowshoe hike on the Hoobler conservation easement property, located in Pigeon River County. This was the first of four programs that the Conservancy will be hosting throughout 2010, each with the goal of bringing the public closer to the land conservation work that the Conservancy is doing throughout northeast Lower Michigan. These outdoor, interactive events are designed to give people a rare, firsthand look at some of the most scenic places that HeadWaters is protecting.

HeadWaters was thrilled that 35 people arrived to enjoy sunshine and warm temperatures. Pigeon River State Forest naturalist and historian, Joe Jarecki, wove together historical and natural resource facts beautifully and underscored the importance of conserving large tracts of land like the Hoobler’s. Director of Land Protection, John Frye, was on hand to answer questions about how the partnership between the Conservancy and the Hoobler family was formed, and how others can donate conservation easements.

After seeing wintery views of the Pigeon River, wonderful examples of elk habitat, and sharing in discussions on active forest management on conservation properties, hikers gathered around a bonfire to roast marshmallows and drink spiced cider. As people enjoyed the scenery Joe’s wife, Judi, showed people several elk sheds that she had found in the forest over the years.

The Conservancy would like to thank the Hoobler family for graciously allowing HeadWaters to kick off our outreach events on their property. Also, many thanks go to Joe Jarecki for leading the group and providing hikers with excellent information. Without the support and cooperation of the Hooblers, Joe, and all of the participants, this event would not have been possible. To all of you – thank you!

HeadWaters is looking to carry on the success and spirit of the snowshoe hike as we set our sights on our summer event – a geocaching adventure for families at the Marguerite Gahagan Nature Preserve in Roscommon. This will be a great opportunity to learn orienteering skills and discover an activity that will get your family outdoors, enjoying our area’s beautiful places together! For more information on the July 31st event please contact our office at 989-731-0573 or via e-mail at land@headwatersconservancy.org.
The HeadWaters Land Protection staff receives many questions from landowners regarding the types of activities they can engage in to steward the natural features of their property. As a result, a collection of articles will appear in the forthcoming issues of *Currents* discussing various stewardship topics. These articles will help direct landowners to the professional agencies and resources that exist to encourage land stewardship in the community. HeadWaters stresses that although the topics discussed in this series are generally accepted activities, conservation easement owners are required to contact land protection staff before engaging in any management activity.

In this issue, Michael Mang, Certified Forrester (CF) introduces the philosophy of stewardship and discusses the various reasons that drive landowners’ management decisions.

**LAND STEWARDSHIP: WHAT, WHY, and HOW**

*Michael Mang, CF*

**What is Land Stewardship?** People who own land do so for many reasons, and northeast Michigan is no exception. For some, it is strictly economic - the intention is to hold land for awhile and then sell it for a profit. Others may develop the property for residential or commercial uses like retail shopping. These uses will always be an important part of land use planning. In such cases, the land serves as a foundation, or a platform, for activities to occur upon. The land on which retail shopping malls are built does not actively interact with parking cars, buying clothing, and eating fast foods. All of these activities occur on commercial properties but they do not need the natural systems of that land to happen successfully.

Other people own tracts of land for the active and integral role the land itself plays in the activities that unfold in, and on, that space. The waters, forests, soils, and wildlife are all reasons why people choose to use their land for activities like growing farm crops, growing trees, and enjoying outdoor recreation. The natural resources that are intrinsic to the landscape of the property are what drive this group to purchase land. In such uses, the land is more than a platform - it is a living and active participant in the activities and interactions that it supports. In these situations, how we as landowners interact with our environment determines how the land and the ecological processes it supports will function. This interaction determines the type and intensity of land stewardship we engage in.

“Intensity” here refers to the quality of the stewardship activity not the quantity. Stewardship activities can be small projects that yield big returns because they are focused on maintaining or enhancing the natural resource values present in the land, which the owner recognizes as valuable. The *Dictionary of Forestry*, published by the Society of American Foresters, defines stewardship as “the administration of land and associated resources in a manner that enables their passing on to future generations in a healthy condition”. Stewardship is activity that occurs now that will positively influence the land for the future.

**Why do Stewardship?** Landowners who value their land for the worth provided by clean air, clean water, a rising trout, a towering pine, or howling coyotes, understand that being active stewards increases the ecosystem integrity of their property in the long-term and for future generations. These people recognize that their individual plot is connected to a larger environmental system and because of this interconnection they understand the economic value of good stewardship. For example the decision to leave surfaces unpaved and vegetated actively protects watersheds but in addition to this, it saves the landowner and their community money down the road. By choosing not to harden surfaces means a reduction in soil erosion, contamination of water sources, and the need for increased drainage infrastructure. All of these are added costs that result from the increased volume of stormwater runoff no longer being captured by healthy soils, plants, and roots. In these times of concern over climate change, it is worth noting that vegetation also removes carbon from the atmosphere and cools the air, therefore saving the costs of energy production and use. Stewardship, like ecosystems themselves, functions on numerous scales.
How to do Stewardship? Many landowners recognize that their property contains a number of different natural values – forest, riverfront, wetlands – and they want to conduct daily activities without harming these features for future generations. A good land stewardship plan brings together a landowner’s personal goals for the property and respect for natural systems. To begin planning a landowner must assess the property for both the natural features they wish to protect and any problems like soil erosion, rutting of vegetative areas, or the presence of invasive or exotic species, that may exist. Following this assessment the landowner can begin to research and implement stewardship activities. Restoration projects may include placing large woody debris structures along a river bank to reduce erosion and provide fish cover, or removing invasive species through professionally recommended methods. In the case of agricultural land an owner may put methods in place to water livestock in a way that reduces erosion around natural water bodies.

Stewardship plans also include methods to enhance aspects of the landscape, such as active timber management for forest health, or the creation of wildlife food plots and vegetated corridors to provide wildlife cover. These are all examples of good stewardship practices that work with natural systems and result in specific outcomes, driven by the landowner’s unique goals and values. A number of programs and organizations are available to help with planning and implementing appropriate stewardship projects, and in some cases these agencies have cost share programs to help defray costs and encourage good stewardship.

In upcoming articles specific stewardship practices will be discussed and the agencies available to help with planning projects will be highlighted. Programs are available through the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment (DNRE) or Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and both agencies are available to landowners thinking about conducting natural resource improvement or enhancement activities on their property.

A Closer Look at Conservation Easement Monitoring

As spring approaches, land trusts nationwide put considerable effort into their final monitoring plans, making sure that all conservation easement landowners have been contacted in writing about the upcoming inspection season. Most importantly this letter is used to schedule a time to speak with the landowner about their property.

HeadWaters has the responsibility to monitor and enforce every conservation easement they hold in perpetuity. This responsibility to protect and enforce conservation easement restrictions is the number one priority of any land trust, and HeadWaters accomplishes this task through “monitoring visits”. These visits occur at least annually on each of the Conservancy’s 74 easement properties by a specially trained HeadWaters representative, usually between May 15 and October 15.

Often HeadWaters is asked; what does annual monitoring involve and what is the landowner’s responsibility? A monitoring visit can be a casual walk through the property, or if the easement is large enough, a tour on a utility vehicle provided by the landowner. The basic goal of the visit is to look for possible violations by landowners or third-party trespass, and to ensure that the conservation values of the easement are being protected. If violations like water diversion or gravel mining are discovered, HeadWaters can take quick action to remediate the violation and return that land to its original condition. The inspection also provides HeadWaters the chance to review any previously approved activities, such as building construction or a completed timber harvest.

Although HeadWaters does not require that the landowner be present for the annual monitoring inspection, it is highly recommended that they be there to speak with the Conservancy’s representative. When the landowner is present HeadWaters can discuss changes to the land directly with them, and can present appropriate stewardship recommendations. If a landowner is not available at the time of the monitoring visit, they have an obligation to speak with the inspector either before or after the visit to discuss the monitor’s observations, and to clarify any questions that may have arisen. When the inspection is complete, the final monitoring report is reviewed by the property owner. This is the landowner’s chance to approve or dispute the Conservancy’s findings. If the landowner is satisfied with the report they are asked to sign it and return it to HeadWaters.

If you are a conservation easement landowner and have planned changes or stewardship activities in mind for this calendar year, please call our office to discuss the proposed activity with our Land Protection staff. If you are interested in assisting in the conservation easement monitoring program in your county, please contact our office to learn how to become a volunteer.
HeadWaters Land Conservancy
Featured on WCMU Public Television

In 2009, HeadWaters was featured in a two part WCMU Public Television original series - “Michigan Land Conservation.” The documentary showcases the natural beauty of Michigan that will be protected for countless generations thanks to the generosity of forward thinking landowners and communities. Producers spent time with several land conservancies across Michigan, capturing stories of dedication to preserving Michigan’s natural beauty. “I had the opportunity to give the producers a glimpse of our work by concluding their visit to our area with a snowshoe trek in the Pigeon River Country. It was very exciting to put them in snowshoes and hike - something they had never done before.” stated John Frye, Director of Land Protection.

The first part of the program explores the motivations behind why people work with local land conservancies. “Everyone we spoke with was extremely passionate about their efforts to protect the extraordinary beauty we have in Michigan,” said WCMU producer Courtney Brooks. “Being able to say that the land will remain unchanged for future generations was something they were abundantly proud of and excited to share with us and our viewers.”

Part two of the program focuses on personal stories of land preservation. Featured properties include a HeadWaters protected Lake Huron property that was once a Michelin four star resort and concludes in the Pigeon River State Forest, capturing the story of a family that has a legacy of almost 100 years of land preservation. HeadWaters is proud that these land donation stories were featured as it brings focus to the types of landowners that characterize the Conservancy’s service area. “HeadWaters Land Conservancy was very fortunate to be one of the featured land conservancies and we were all excited to have the opportunity to share our history, mission, and successes with WCMU and the public” said Frye.

The program originally aired in the fall of 2009 however WCMU plans to re-air the feature in 2010. If you would like to view the WCMU video in our office, please call ahead and we can make it available on one of our computers. Copies are available for purchase by calling the WCMU Reception Desk at 800-727-9268.

Joe Jarecki is interviewed by WCMU TV producer Sarah Adams
Ray Hoobler signs the family’s conservation easement on film
HeadWaters set to Begin ACE Program

HeadWaters Land Conservancy is pleased to announce its acceptance into the Land Trust Alliance Advancing Conservancy Excellence (ACE) program. The ACE program is a $1 million dollar, three year initiative, designed to help Michigan land conservancies become better performers in the land trust community. The program is administered by the Land Trust Alliance, a national governing body for land conservancies throughout the country.

Acceptance into the ACE program is a competitive process and conservancies must demonstrate their capacity for successful participation as well as their likelihood to have a significant conservation impact in their service area. ACE participants have access to technical training, organizational assessments, mentoring, consultations, and capacity grants tailored individually to their needs.

HeadWaters is joined by the Cadillac Area Land Conservancy, and the Land Conservancy of West Michigan as the most recent participants.

Accreditation is obtained through the Land Trust Alliance’s independent Accreditation Commission, and is an achievement that indicates that a land trust is performing conservation in accordance with national standards. HeadWaters is excited to eventually join the four Michigan land conservancies that have already achieved this status: Chikaming Open Lands, Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy, Leelanau Conservancy, and Legacy Land Conservancy.

HeadWaters Land Conservancy has been protecting northern Michigan lands since 1994, and has over 8400 acres and 27 miles of riparian frontage protected with conservation easements. The strategic partnerships that HeadWaters will form with other Michigan land trusts through the ACE process, will strengthen the Conservancy’s operational and land conservation procedures in order to better serve the public of northeast Lower Michigan for many years to come.

In December HeadWaters lost two dear friends and champions of conservation – Rusty Gates and Joe Kutkuhn. Serving as a board member and our first board chair respectively, Rusty and Joe were tireless advisors and advocates for our organization as they worked diligently to further the vision of land and natural resource conservation for our area, year after year. Both men will be greatly missed. With the strength and conviction that these men instilled in us, HeadWaters will endeavor to raise awareness and increase our efforts to protect northeast Michigan’s most scenic and natural rivers, lands, and forests.”
HeadWaters would like to thank the following people and organizations for their help making our events and conservation work a success:

- Ray Hoobler and Frances Kuehn for allowing HeadWaters to use their property as the location for the winter outreach event
- Joe Jarecki for leading the interpretive snowshoe hike for the Conservancy's winter outreach program
- Judi Jarecki for all of her help in planning the winter outreach program and for lending elk sheds and maps of the area from her personal collection
- Dr. Wendy Frye, Patrick Ertel, and Liz Padalino for their help setting up for, and cleaning up after, the winter outreach event
- Tim Sheldon for lending HeadWaters a propane burner for use during the winter outreach event
- Corwith Township Hall and Township Supervisor Andy Noeske for allowing us to gather snowshoe hikers in their parking lot.
- The Land Committee - Jim Supina, Joe Jarecki, Dave Nadolsky, Jerry Smith, Mike Mang, Glen Eberly, Bill Duncanson, and Roger Rasmussen for their hard work and time over the winter months reviewing land protection policy
- Glen Eberly for taking HeadWaters materials to the Michigan Fly Fishing Expo in Warren, MI
- Mike Mang for contributing a stewardship article to the spring newsletter
- Chris Engle of the Gaylord Herald Times, for great media support of the snowshoe event.
- All newspapers and local publications that helped spread the word about the snowshoe event.
- All of the participants who attended the March 6th outreach event, making it a huge success

HeadWaters Land Conservancy Wish List

People interested in helping staff paint and spruce up the exterior of the HeadWaters Office

Gently used/new 4-wheel drive work vehicle for the Land Protection Program

2 Gently used/new GPS handheld units for the Volunteer Monitoring Program

Volunteers to join our volunteer monitoring team for the 2010 field season - training to be held June 5th, 2010