

PRESQUE ISLE CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Annual Report 2010

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An ecological disaster known as the Dust Bowl occurred during the early 1930's (Great Depression Era) due to abuse and misuse of land in the United States. This resulted in huge losses of fertile farm land and the U.S. Congress declared soil and water conservation a national priority. Thus, the idea and creation of the conservation district was born.

In 1937 the State of Michigan passed *The Soil Conservation District Law, Act 297 of Public Act of 1937*, as amended, that created "soil conservation districts" to engage in conserving soil and water resources and control and prevent soil erosion. In April 1948 local landowners discussed the need to have a soil conservation district in Presque Isle County. On 7 April 1949, in Hawks, a public hearing was held and attended by 160 people. At that time the Presque Isle Soil Conservation District was established by a referendum vote of 159 to 1. In June 1999 the "soil conservation district" law was amended and the word "soil" was removed because the District is also involved in aquatic issues.



Figure 1. District logo.

Presque Isle Conservation District (PICD) is a unique local unit of State Government utilizing resources of State, Federal and private sectors to work with solving conservation problems. Conservation Districts work in local communities to provide linkages between land managers and a host of conservation service providers in Michigan.

Today there are more than 3,000 locally governed Conservation Districts in the United States. They are charged with the responsibility of conducting programs to assist landowners in controlling wind and water erosion and prevent sedimentation in waters; managing surface and groundwater resources; controlling non-point sources of pollution to surface water, groundwater, and air; and the wise use of local natural resources.

The Presque Isle Conservation District was created by concerned landowners and is administered by a publicly elected board of five directors. Those directors currently are: Julian Pilarski, Chair; Leann Hopp, Secretary/Treasurer; Ralph Viegelahn, Vice-Chair; Larry Karsten, and Theresa Krist. A biographical sketch of each director follows.

Julian Pilarski - Posen. Longest serving current board member at more than 22 years, term expires Nov. 2012. Married, four children, wife Judy. Education; Posen High School, B.S. in business & economics from Northern Michigan University, M.S. in guidance & counseling from Central Michigan University (CMU). Taught school for 17 years. Occupation; farmer of soybeans & wheat, farms up to 1700 acres on his own and leased land. Son participates in farming with him. Wife was school teacher (retired) and engineer.

Leann Hopp - Hawks. Board member about 16 years, term expires Nov. 2011. Married, three children, husband Ron. Education; Rogers City High School, Saginaw Business Institute. Works for Presque Isle County Farm Bureau as Office Manager. Part time farmer raising sheep (about 100 animals), and she and her husband farm about 100 acres and raise corn, hay, and sunflowers.

Ralph Viegelahn - Rogers City. Board member 13 years, term expires Nov. 2013. Married, wife Kerry, five children. Education; Rogers City High School. Occupation, farmer and agri-business owner. Farms over 100 acres raising potatoes, soybeans, alfalfa, and corn. Business owner that sells fertilizer and farm chemicals.

Lawrence Karsten - Rogers City.

Board member for two years, term expires Nov. 2011. Married, wife Deanna, four girls, ten grandchildren. Education; Rogers City High School, received four year degree in dairy production from Michigan State University. Occupation; farmer, raises dairy cattle on 250 acre farm, cooperates with brother on production duties, retired dairy herd during recent years. Two or more grandkids may possibly take over the farm when Larry retires.

Theresa Krist - Rogers City. Board member for one year, term expires Nov. 2013. Married, husband Frank, one son. Education; Parkside High School, Jackson, MI; Associate Degree, Jackson Community College; B.S. degree in biology and history from Central Michigan University. Retired, worked 30 years for the U.S. Postal Service in Rogers City. Hobbies include gardening, fishing, exercising to stay in shape, and establishing a 20 acre arboretum.

The PICD has been located in Rogers City since its inception and its current address is 658 South Bradley Highway. The office hours are from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Tuesday, Wednesday, and

Thursday. Office phone number is 989-734-4000 and the fax number is 989-734-7920. You can reach us by email at rstedmanPICD@speednetllc.com. The district is run by an Administrator, Ralph Stedman, whom has been on duty since February 2007.



Figure 2. PICD office.

Major resource concerns of the PICD at this time are; soil erosion and sedimentation into rivers and lakes, deteriorating road stream crossings that contribute to stream degradation, and invasive species (primarily plants). The first two items are related because both can contribute to a loss of fish and invertebrate habitat and spawning areas. There are three primary issues related to soil erosion, sedimentation, and deteriorating road stream crossings that we want to address in the coming years and those are; 1) erosion prevention and



Figure 3. Erosion site.

control, 2) habitat restoration, enhancement, and protection, and 3) repair or replace those road stream crossings that are the most degraded and/or contribute to stream sedimentation and/or restrict fish passage.

The primary source of funding for the Presque Isle Conservation District is through tax dollars that are appropriated by the Presque Isle County Commissioners. That appropriation was \$15,000.00 in FY 2010. Since we are a local entity of state government all our financial reports and district operations are overseen by the Environmental Stewardship Division in the Michigan Department of Agriculture whom receive and file all district reports. An annual spring tree sale is the second main source of funds for the District. Each April the PICD sells native trees, shrubs, fruit trees, and ornamental plants for the purpose of reforestation and wildlife habitat enhancement. We also sell plants during fall (September) by special order. We had a moderately successful spring tree sale and made \$4,246 on sales of



Figure 4. Nanking cherry tree and berries.

\$11,410. Our profit margin was 37% in 2010, or 7% less than in 2009 even though the Administrator increased marketing efforts for the tree sale. Our customer base was virtually the same (126 customers versus 124 last year) yet our average order declined by \$35 (28%) this year. The poor economy in northeast Michigan is a likely contributor to the reduced sales volume this year. Our fall tree sale is minor and our profit was \$53 on sales of \$173.

Because of the loss of the State of Michigan funding in 2010 the Administrator must be aware of other sources of money to fund the district and conduct programs. One of the partnerships he has fostered is with the Huron Pines Resource Conservation & Development (RC & D) Council. That partnership resulted in the PICD serving as an independent contractor for Huron Pines on the Silver Creek Super Project. The work during 2010 (water monitoring) brought in \$2,500 to the district's general operations. The Administrator also partnered with the Presque Isle County Drain Commissioner to write a grant proposal through the Great Lakes Fish & Wildlife Restoration Act for \$120,000 to correct a sedimentation and erosion problem at Ocqueoc Lake. Unfortunately, the grant proposal was not successful.

The Silver Creek Super Project is an outgrowth of the work the Administrator participated in as a member of the Ocqueoc River Habitat & Restoration Committee. The goal of the project is to replace and/or repair road stream

culverts that interfere with fish passage or contribute to sedimentation in Silver Creek. Silver Creek is a main tributary to the Ocqueoc River watershed that contributes cold, clean water to the Ocqueoc River. The Administrator is the lead investigator in collecting Silver Creek water temperatures and doing water monitoring chemical analyses. He wrote a 19 page Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP) which detailed the description, objectives, study design, methods, quality control and data management of the Silver Creek water monitoring portion of the study.

The PICD Administrator and the P.I. County Drain Commissioner continued their water monitoring study of the Ocqueoc River and its tributaries. During 2010 a total of 11 HOBO Pro v2 water temperature monitors were set from May to July. Four were set in the mainstream, six in Silver Creek, and one in the Little Ocqueoc River. Three of those in Silver Creek were set for the Silver Creek Super Project. We started to retrieve the loggers in late September but due to late season rains the remaining loggers were hard to find and were not removed until early November. Temperature data will be summarized and analyzed during winter and



Figure 5. HOBO V2 temperature logger.

compared to previous years data. It is important to note that we did not lose any loggers even though we had weather problems. During the course of the four year study

we have set and retrieved 50 temperature loggers with no losses. That is important considering the \$105 cost for each logger, not to mention the amount of data that would be lost by not

finding the logger. One lesson we learned from the temperature studies is that if we wait until late October-early November to retrieve the loggers they are harder to locate due to increased rainfall which increases stream depth.

A summary of the Ocqueoc River data is that the water is warmest further upstream near its headwaters (south Bismarck Township) and becomes significantly warmer after it flows through the lakes on the Ocqueoc River (Lake Nettie, Upper and Lower Barnhart Lakes, Lake Emma). The water becomes warmer because it is retained in the lakes and the dams only allow surface water (the warmest water) to flow downstream. The river is then cooled as you go downstream from Millersburg because of the tributaries that empty into the Ocqueoc. As a result, as you go downstream from Millersburg to Ocqueoc Lake the water is significantly cooler at each downstream site than it was at the site immediately upstream of it due to the cold water inflow from Indian Creek, the Little Ocqueoc River, and Silver Creek as well as some smaller tributaries.

The Administrator made presentations during the year to highlight and inform some groups about the activities of the conservation district. Ralph was the keynote speaker at the Presque Isle Sportsman's Club on Saturday, 30 January, to show what the district had been doing during 2008 & 2009 and what activities were planned for 2010. A similar presentation was given to the Presque Isle County Commissioners, and audience, at the commission meeting on 9 June. The Administrator partnered with the drain commissioner to make a water monitoring presentation in August at the Sea Grant Community Based Education (CBE) workshop at the Trout

River with Brandon Schroeder of Sea Grant. The intent of the workshop was to introduce teachers to basic water quality techniques they could use to teach their students.

The conservation district is attempting to present workshops and programs that are of interest and benefit to county residents. We held a live fish day on 19 June for anyone to buy fish to stock in their farm pond. We contract with a hatchery and they drive the fish truck to Rogers City so people can pick up their fish in town. There were seven species of fish to choose from as well as pond supplies. Because the fish were



Figure 6. Counting fish into buckets on Fish Day.

dispersed quickly buyers placed the fish into their ponds in less than an hour which greatly increases survival. Another attempt to bring information to residents was when the Administrator partnered with the Presque Isle District Library and arranged for Dr. Randy Baker to present a talk on "Survival of the White Tailed Deer".

The conservation district and its partners (MSU Extension, Hoefft State Park, Rogers City Marina, & 40 Mile Pt. Lighthouse) conducted a second geocache event in Rogers City and at the Herman Vogler Conservation Area. This is a three day (Friday evening, all day Saturday & Sunday) event that is free to participants and took place during the last weekend in August. To measure our success we conducted an economic impact study of those that attended the geocache event. Results showed we had about 45 people attend of which 40 were from out of town. There were 12 teams

that responded to the questionnaire and eight teams indicated they would not have visited Rogers City if not for the geocache event. Of those that



Figure 7. Participants at geocache event.

responded, they spent money on hotels and motels, camping, fuel, groceries, restaurants and taverns, souvenirs, etc. The average amount spent per team was \$218.00 which helped boost the local economy (MSU Extension).

The district Administrator is involved in an assortment of other activities during the year, either as a committee member or an interested partner to further the cause of a conservation program in Presque Isle County. An assortment of some of these activities are summarized by the bulleted list below:

- planted 1200 brown trout in Trout River Pond at HVCA that were raised by the MI DNR
- received 26 hours of volunteer time to help with spring tree sale
- worked with Scott Pawloski, engineer, of R.S. Scott Associates, Inc., Alpena, an engineering firm, to try and determine the present status and condition of the Trout River dam in Herman Vogler Conservation Area
- collaborated with Presque Isle County clerk and airport manager and negotiated a discount rate for wireless high speed internet that was installed in the office during

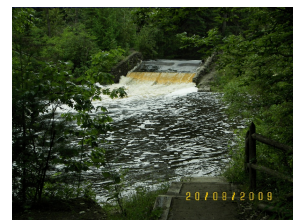


Figure 8. Trout River dam & spillway.

- January attended the Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative (GLSI) workshop in Indian River to discuss partnerships with local area teachers
- Administrator and Directors worked with Richard Deuell, NEMCOG, to apply for a grant to Coastal Zone Management Program to fund a Comprehensive Resource Management Plan for HVCA. PICD must have a management plan in place before it is eligible to apply for many grants
- applied to Huron Pines AmeriCorps program to enlist the services of an AmeriCorps member and made inquiries to various partners about acquiring funding for the position
- Presque Isle Conservation District was one of only four conservation districts in northern Michigan to be awarded (based upon the application) an AmeriCorps member for 2011
- registered observer of the Michigan Invasive Species Information Network and reported three occurrences of Japanese knotweed (invasive species) in Presque Isle and Emmet counties
- obtained information from USGS Sea Lamprey Control about research work conducted in the Trout River
- supplied information to MDNRE wildlife biologist on farm implement rentals
- scheduled Jennifer Kleitch, MDNRE wildlife biologist from Atlanta, MI, to make presentation at our 2010 annual meeting on "Wolves in Michigan". Jennifer is the biologist for northeast Michigan and recently took over the study of

wolves in the lower peninsula of Michigan

- dealt with Internal Revenue Service to detail where we overpaid our taxes in a previous year so we could obtain a \$177.88 refund from them

The district office receives dozens of phone calls for information throughout the year of which about 50 or more are for very specific topics. An assortment of some of the calls are as follows:

- invasive species buckthorn in Posen
- information on carbon trading program
- tree in yard has elm disease, what can she do?
- need soil and topographic maps for a well site
- how to fertilize fruit trees
- yellow sap oozing from cherry tree, what is it?
- needs a lease for farmland
- 'silver' colored tree has grown out of hand
- bats in the attic
- erosion site needs to be stabilized, what plants are recommended?
- maple and oak trees are dying along road, what can be done?
- farmer grew popcorn and it won't pop, what can be done?
- moles and voles around house are burrowing into yard, what to do?
- etc.

The conservation district Administrator sits on a couple of committees to participate in programs in the county and to offer an opinion from the conservation perspective. Ralph is an active member of the Ocqueoc River Habitat Restoration and Protection Committee and of the Rogers City Parks and Recreation

Committee. He is also an active participant in the Ocqueoc River Watershed Commission attending meetings and conducting the yearly water monitoring program. Through his work on the Habitat Restoration Committee he became an independent contractor through Huron Pines to do water monitoring on Silver Creek as part of the Silver Creek Super Project.

The Silver Creek Super Project is a collaboration of eight partners that are working to replace and improve road stream crossings on Silver Creek in Presque Isle County. The Administrator wrote the QAPP that had to be submitted to the MDNRE for approval before the project could proceed. Once the project was approved the Administrator and his assistant set temperature monitors



Figure 9. Coliform bacteria test on river water.

(three for project, six total) in Silver Creek and they also sampled it for chemical analyses (DO, pH, nitrates, phosphates, turbidity, coliform bacteria) during July and September.

A second activity performed as part of the Silver Creek Super Project was a demonstration day on the river during June. Huron Pines organized its partners to present the purpose and scope of the Silver Creek Super Project to area residents to inform them about the intent and purpose of the work on Silver Creek. This was a day long event which brought in many interested people to see what was going on in this valuable tributary.

Part of the duties of the PICD Administrator are to review permits from state and federal agencies that deal with

land and water resources in the county. During this past year five permit applications were reviewed. These were from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment (MDNRE) to upgrade several miles of the existing Cheboygan to Alpena snowmobile trail to accommodate bicycle usage. The sites occurred in Krakow, Metz, Allis, and Case Townships. No problems were foreseen with the applications.

The conservation district also received and filed seven State of Michigan - Farmland Development and Rights Agreements with local farmers. An eighth development rights agreement, with another local farmer, necessitated a site visit by the Administrator and NRCS agent to verify the farm operation.

A large part of the Administrator's job during certain times of the year involves report writing. In addition to the grant applications he worked on in 2010 he also wrote a final report on the Rainy River which was submitted to the Black Lake Association as part of the Rainy River water monitoring study. The report was the final requirement to complete the study.

One of the duties of the Administrator is that he is expected to remain current on conservation issues and items of importance to Presque Isle County. An important aspect of that duty is to keep up to date on training, as time and finances will allow. Ralph was able to attend four important training sessions in 2010 with board approval. The first occurred in February at a grant workshop taught by the MDNRE. The workshop helped teach the important points of applying for DNR grants and what grants that conservation districts would be eligible for. The MACD summer

conference took place in June and taught attendees about MDA programs, advice on how to promote your district on various levels, training sessions, invasive species (which served as a facilitator for the AmeriCorps position PICD was awarded), and some initiatives districts can use in their county. July was the Huron Pines Small Dams Conference which had great relevance to the Trout River Dam at HVCA. Information learned from this conference enabled Ralph to better communicate with dam engineers that need to inspect the Trout River dam.



Figure 10. Japanese knotweed - invasive.

An Invasive Species Training was conducted in Curtis, MI, by the Michigan DNR during August which taught a complete identification and treatment protocol.

This was probably the most important training attended all year by Ralph since he used this class as a spring board for designing an invasive species program for PICD in Presque Isle County.

In order to contribute to, and benefit, the citizens of Presque Isle County the PICD staff must interact with them. This may be on a personal (face to face, phone call) or impersonal level (newspaper announcement, mailing, brochure, information sheet, etc.). People helped throughout the year included some of the activities stated previously in this report as well as many single point contacts. Those contacts consisted of: 147 people from in-office visits and phone calls, 1 land-owner on-site visit, 191 people (adults and youths) served during educational program presentations, 127 conservation sales customers, 26 information requests regarding a wide assortment of environmental topics

(land, water, wildlife, trees, plants, and county information). The PICD received 84 hours of volunteer help during the year. Volunteers helped with distribution during the spring tree sale as well as water monitoring, Herman Vogler, and assorted activities. The district was also able to potentially reach 30,250 county residents (total of five occasions) through newspaper articles that supplied information about things happening in the county.



There are many activities planned by the PICD during 2011. As usual, the biggest project of the year is the Spring Tree Sale.

Customers will be able to select trees and shrubs during March and be able to pick them up on 15 & 16 April at the Lakeside Pavilion in Rogers City. Then on 30 April the district is sponsoring a Fruit Tree Seminar taught by Steve Fouch from the Benzie County MSUE office. Steve is a fruit tree expert in northern Michigan who acquired his M.S. degree by studying fruit trees. In early June we plan to conduct a Rain Barrel Workshop where attendees will be able to build their own rain barrel, much cheaper than purchasing it online, and take it home with them. We have our Live Fish Day scheduled for 25 June where residents can purchase seven different species of fish to stock in their ponds. The Administrator and Drain Commissioner will continue their water monitoring on the Ocqueoc River system from May to October in 2011. Ralph is also working



with Holly Wirgau, Rogers City school teacher, through the Great Lake Stewardship Initiative (GLSI) to advise middle school students on their water monitoring efforts on the Trout River. The PICD is planning another geocache event with its partners that will take place the last weekend in August.

Other projects on the horizon are the Silver Creek Super Project (mentioned above) and the Presque Isle Invasive Species Education and Removal program which will be the primary responsibility of the AmeriCorps member hired for that purpose. Our AmeriCorps member will spend time helping to educate local teachers and students on water monitoring projects in the county as well as setting up some rudimentary forestry information that can be disseminated to local landowners.



The AmeriCorps member will also design and conduct various information and education seminars to get pertinent information into residents hands. The topic of most of those seminars are yet to be determined, but they will certainly involve some

invasive species programs and volunteer invasive species removal dates.

The staff and Directors of the Presque Isle Conservation District are doing their best to address the resource needs of the county. They have made attempts to reach out to county residents to let the residents know the District is here to serve them. The Administrator corrected accounting problems that were present during recent years. He has also been successful in bringing in additional funding for activities, such as acquiring funding to hire the AmeriCorps worker. At this time the major impediment to increased office time and projects that benefit the community is the lack of additional funding. The Presque Isle County Commissioners have stepped up to cover expenses that have been taken away by state funding cuts. Their contribution has enabled the district to keep its doors open during the year and to keep helping county residents any way we possibly can. With some perseverance, hard work, and a little luck the conservation district will be able to promote projects beneficial to a wide range of county residents and the environment, and will be able to secure additional funding to expand its resources and their impact in the county.