

COMMUNITY UPDATE:

THE CHAIN OF LAKES

It's difficult to overstate the beauty and importance of the Chain of Lakes watershed. From its beginnings near Beals Lake to its outlet in Elk Rapids, this collection of picturesque lakes and rivers is a truly iconic part of the northern Michigan landscape.

The numbers speak for themselves. This roughly 500-square mile watershed contains 55 miles of interconnected lakes and rivers. Among those are Torch and Elk, two of the deepest and largest inland lakes in the state. It's fed by nearly 200 streams and creeks, and it sends an astonishing 180 billion gallons of water each year into Grand Traverse Bay – that's 60 percent of the overland flow into the entire bay!

But the Chain of Lakes is, of course, much more than numbers. For generations, residents and visitors have treasured special places along the Chain. From fruit farms and forests to cozy cabins on the lake, these places capture the very essence of what it means to be "Up North" in Michigan.

Since our inception in 1991, the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy has worked tirelessly to protect land within this watershed. We've protected about 5,800 acres of natural, scenic and farm land within the Chain and manage 3,300 more acres, all part of the nearly 39,000 acres we've protected in our service area of Antrim, Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska and Manistee counties.

Protecting this land not only safeguards the special places that people love, but it also plays an extremely important role in preserving water quality for the entire region. We are truly fortunate to have some of the highest water quality in the state, and we must never take that for granted.

Please enjoy this review of GTRLC's efforts in the Chain of Lakes watershed. Our organization turns 25 this year, and we're looking forward to many more years of serving residents of and visitors to this amazing place.

SUMMER 2016



CHAIN OF LAKES WATERSHED

WATERSHED
ENCOMPASSES
500
SQUARE
MILES OF
LAND

9,169
ACRES OF LAND IN THE
WATERSHED PROTECTED
OR MANAGED BY GTRLC
SO FAR

14
INTERCONNECTED
LAKES & RIVERS

- | | |
|----------------|-------------------|
| Beals Lake | Hanley Lake |
| Scotts Lake | Intermediate Lake |
| Six Mile Lake | Lake Bellaire |
| St. Clair Lake | Clam Lake |
| Ellsworth Lake | Lake Skegemog |
| Wilson Lake | Elk Lake |
| Ben-Way Lake | Torch Lake |

55
MILES
OF INTERCONNECTED
LAKES & RIVERS

200
CREEKS AND
STREAMS FEED
THIS CHAIN

60% OF ALL WATER FLOWING
OVER LAND INTO GRAND
TRAVERSE BAY COMES
FROM THE CHAIN OF
LAKES WATERSHED

180
BILLION
GALLONS OF WATER
PER YEAR FLOW INTO
GT BAY AT ELK RAPIDS

PERMANENTLY PROTECTING
LANDS FOR WATER QUALITY
PURPOSES MITIGATES SEDIMENT
AND NUTRIENT FLOWS INTO
WATER USED FOR DRINKING AND
RECREATION.

* East Bay Shoreline & Tributaries Watershed is shown
graphically as part of the Chain of Lakes Watershed.



ST. CLAIR LAKE-SIX MILE LAKE NATURAL AREA

GTRLC executive director Glen Chown has long been fond of calling St. Clair Lake-Six Mile Lake Natural Area the “Amazon of the North” – and a peaceful kayak or canoe trip along the unspoiled shoreline of this wild and special place quickly reveals why the comparison isn’t far-fetched.

This gem of a natural area, established in 1993, protects some of the most beautiful natural land in the Chain of Lakes. It includes more than 250 acres of diverse and critical land along St. Clair Lake, Six Mile Lake and the interconnecting river. Aside from wetlands, the preserve has impressive stands of old growth cedar/conifer swamps, mixed hardwood forest and upland habitat.

This mixture of habitats is bursting with wildlife year round, offering residents and visitors a chance to truly immerse themselves in nature. Deer, muskrat, river otter, beaver and mink

are often spotted here. They’re joined by great blue herons, kingfishers, bald eagles and a variety of woodpeckers and songbirds.

Its shores and wetlands are carpeted with wild roses, cardinal flowers, purple fringed orchid, blue flag iris, a variety of ferns and a host of colorful marsh plants. Shallow protected areas provide the perfect breeding and feeding grounds for northern pike, bass and several species of sunfish and shiners.

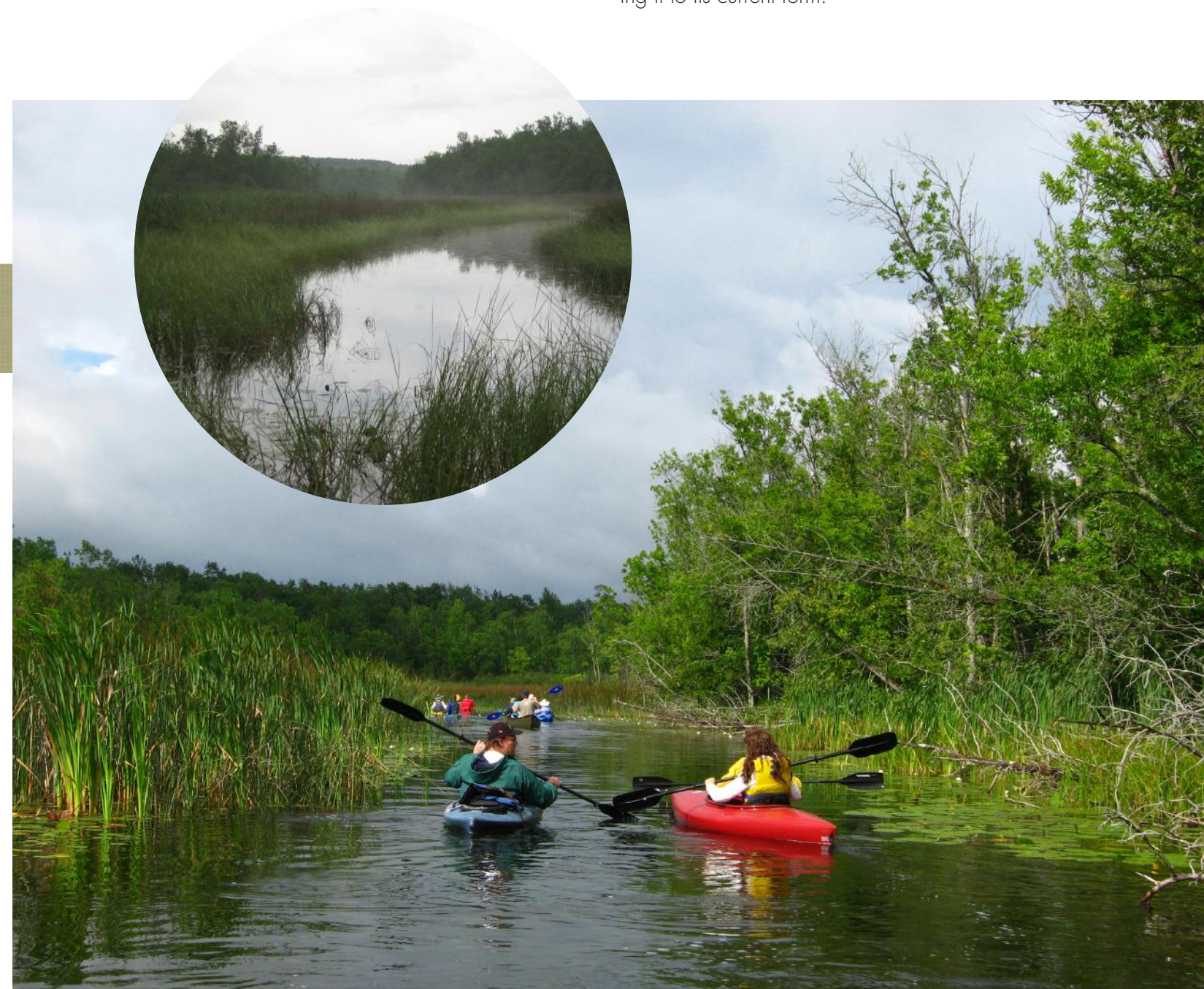
In short, SCL-SML is a nature lover’s – and nature photographer’s – paradise. This preserve is best viewed by boat with a camera or binoculars in tow, as trails are deliberately limited to protect wildlife habitat. More than one mile of shoreline means there are ample opportunities to observe wildlife along the river and up into the surrounding habitat.

The preserve includes a small watercraft launch near the entrance to St. Clair Lake, with access off of County Highway 48 between Ellsworth and East Jordan. Canoers or kayakers can go downstream into St. Clair Lake, or upstream through the bulk of the natural area and into Six Mile Lake. The current is not overpowering, making upstream travel manageable.

Those not keen on boats can always make use of a viewing platform near the boat launch. This spot is particularly popular for lunch or picnics, as it provides a beautiful view and regular glimpses of a wide variety of birds.

Like so many other properties protected by GTRLC, the St. Clair Lake-Six Mile Lake Natural Area is the result of a dedicated group of citizens coming together for a common cause. These citizens, including JoAnne Beemon, Cherie Hogan and several others, worked hard to raise money so GTRLC and the Little Traverse Conservancy could band together and purchase the initial 17 acres in late 1993. GTRLC provided assistance and support to the citizen’s group as it diligently worked to raise funds.

In the years since, GTRLC has worked with the Little Traverse Conservancy to secure 11 additions to the preserve, bringing it to its current form.





GOLDEN-DAYS LOON PRESERVE and LOON NURSERY

The Common Loon is one of the most iconic and well-known symbols of unspoiled northern wilderness. The haunting call, striking plumage and distinctive silhouette of these large diving birds are a welcome addition to outdoor adventures throughout the region.

Two properties protected by GTRLC are designed to safeguard these majestic birds as they breed and raise their young on Lake Bellaire. The Golden-Days Loon Preserve, owned by GTRLC, and the nearby Loon Nursery, owned by Forest Home Township, provide critical habitat along the northern tip of the lake. The two preserves combined total 49 acres and provide roughly 2,000 feet of lake frontage.

The Golden-Days preserve is situated on the shore of a shallow cove. It includes two cold water creeks that meander through a hardwood/conifer swamp before emptying into the lake. This swamp includes dense canopy and open canopy areas along the water's edge, and this important transition from the water to the land provides cover and forage for loons and other wildlife. Loons have nested in the area for generations, and a nesting platform was placed at the site in 1989.

GTRLC purchased this property in 1998 after a fundraising effort. It is managed as a sanctuary, meaning land access by the public is discouraged in an effort to provide minimal disturbances to loons and other wildlife. Canoes or kayaks can be launched at a rustic state-owned launch that sits on the eastern edge of the property, and onlookers are encouraged to maintain

a respectful distance as they observe wildlife.

The state-owned launch and a private parcel separate our Golden-Days preserve from the township's Loon Nursery. The nursery was secured in 2001 after we helped the township apply for and receive a Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund grant to acquire the property, which was slated for development. The loon nursery includes much of the same highly critical habitat as is found at Golden Days, and the two preserves together protect much of the entire northern tip of the lake.

The township maintains a trail down to a viewing platform on the water's edge. The platform is open from dawn to dusk, with parking off of Bellaire Highway.

Although wildlife protection was a focus of both these projects, there's much more to the story. Because these properties preserve a significant amount of Lake Bellaire shoreline, they are also tremendously important from a water quality standpoint. Thick natural buffers along the lake's edge serve as important filtration systems that remove large quantities of impurities and sediments from surface water as it enters the lake.

GTRLC's efforts along Lake Bellaire also include protection of an additional 280 acres with 5,800 feet of shoreline on the west side of the lake starting less than mile south of Golden-Days. This land

remains private, but was protected from development through conservation easements granted by the Fisher, Lessard, and Boucher families beginning in the early 1990s.



For additional information, maps and more, visit www.gtrlc.org



GLACIAL HILLS PATHWAY and NATURAL AREA

From the first drops of water that spring up in the remote woods of central Antrim County to the billions of gallons churning out of the dam in Elk Rapids, the Chain of Lakes watershed has no shortage of breathtakingly beautiful spots.

But few places offer so much for so many as the Glacial Hills Pathway and Natural Area just north of Bellaire. This roughly 760-acre beauty is quickly becoming one of the hottest mountain bike destinations in the state, and it's also a wonderful spot for snowshoeing, hiking, cross-country skiing, hunting, birdwatching and wildlife viewing.

Roughly 31.5 miles of well-planned trails wind through gorgeous, rolling hills at Glacial, which is just a stone's throw from downtown Bellaire. Unlike other trail systems on similar acreage, Glacial offers an incredible array of habitat types loaded with wildlife. Two hardwood forest types, three wetland habitats, a shrub thicket and wet mesic forest support more than 20 species of trees, about 100 species of flowers and more than 100 species of birds.

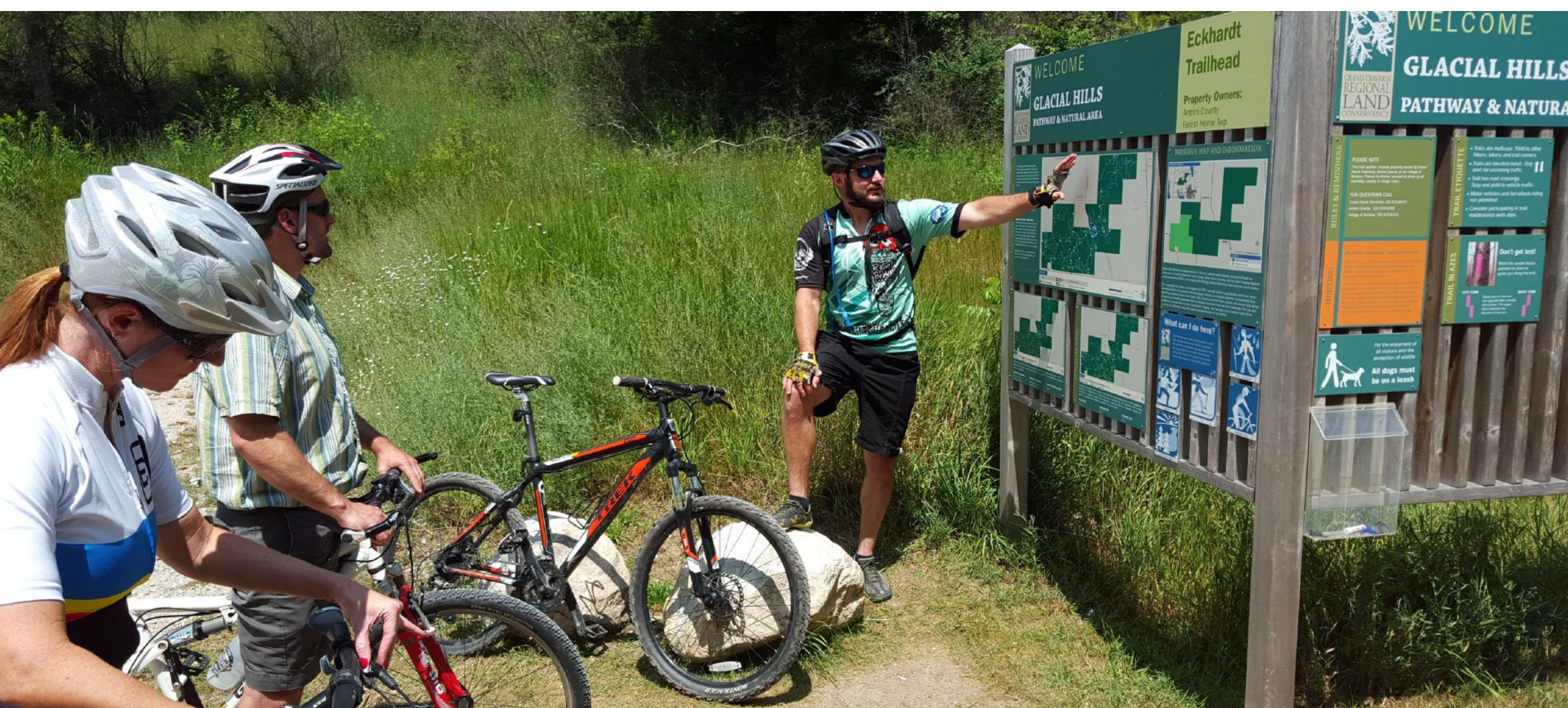
The trails themselves vary in length and difficulty. Most are designed for cyclists of intermediate skill level, who will

delight in trails that dip, rise, twist and turn through beautiful hardwood forests. A recently built novice loop is specifically designed to encourage beginners to engage in the wonderful world of mountain bike riding.

All trails are open for cycling in addition to hiking and other activities. Kiosks and trail markers offer suggestions on the best trails for hiking and other activities. Several vantage points offer glimpses of Lake Bellaire and Torch Lake, and the natural area is particularly well known for its displays of blazing fall color.

GTRLC was instrumental in the formation of this popular natural area. Fragmented public land existed in the area, and we helped secure the 345-acre parcel needed to tie it all together. After negotiating with the landowner, we helped Antrim County and Forest Home Township apply for Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund grants to acquire this missing link.

With the aid of a tremendous group of volunteers and many fantastic partners, we also designed and built the trail system. Americorps, Goodwill Greenscapes Crew, Traverse City Area Public Schools, the Northern Michigan Mountain Biking Association and other organizations were vital partners in our efforts. Our work continues in the form of serving on a steering committee for the property, in addition to supporting trail maintenance and stewardship efforts.



OTHER CHAIN OF LAKES PROJECTS

The Chain of Lakes watershed is home to several other properties protected by GTRLC. In addition to several private conservation easements, the following preserves and natural areas lie within or near the Chain's watershed. Land access is discour-

aged at few of these places in order to protect sensitive habitats, but visitors are encouraged to view them from a watercraft. For more information, directions to any of these preserves and maps of trails (where applicable), visit www.gtrlc.org.

PRIVATE LAND PROTECTION

A public nature preserve is a great way to protect land for perpetuity. But often times, landowners would like to protect their land without donating or selling it. They might want to pass it on to their heirs or continue to use the land for farming, wildlife viewing or other activities.

Enter the conservation easement. This versatile tool has allowed GTRLC to protect thousands of acres in our service area, including the Chain of Lakes. Of the roughly 5,800 acres we've protected throughout the chain, about 3,700 were protected through conservation easements.

A conservation easement is a legal agreement between a landowner and a land trust or government agency that permanently limits uses of the land in order to protect its conservation values. It allows landowners to continue to own and use their land, and they can also sell it or pass it on to heirs.

Within the Chain's watershed, we have worked with landowners to secure conservation easements on spectacular natural land in addition to critical farmland. Much of the Chain's watershed lies within the fabled West Michigan Fruit Belt, a unique agricultural zone known for high outputs of apples, cherries, grapes and other fruit. The American Farmland Trust called this fruit belt, which runs from the Indiana border to the tip of the Lower Peninsula, one of the 20 most threatened agricultural regions in the entire nation!

Protecting farmland not only preserves agricultural heritage and production, but it also has a tremendous impact on water quality. A well-managed fruit farm, which often includes sections of woodlands or other buffers, offers a high degree of water filtration. Studies have shown that protected farmland can prevent hundreds of tons of sediment and thousands of pounds of nitrogen, phosphorus and other contaminants from making it to the bay.

One such protected farm, owned by the Reiley family, consists of 1,080 contiguous acres and includes the headwaters of four streams that feed the Chain watershed. Despite being near the heart of great fruit country, Florence and Herb Reiley have farmed hardwood and evergreen trees on this property for decades. And although the trees are farmed – the hardwoods primarily for veneer, the evergreens for Christmas trees – careful management has meant the property looks far more natural than not.

They've worked with the same logger for decades, carefully selecting trees and leaving downed trees on the ground to naturally decompose. Many of the evergreen trees are massive, and large specimens have ended up on the presidential ranches of Lyndon B. Johnson and George H. W. Bush, and at the White House itself during the Johnson administration.

Protection of this farm alone prevents nearly 4,000 pounds of nitrogen, 538 pounds of phosphorus and 74 tons of sediment, per year, from entering the bay, according to

Environmental Protection Agency calculations. Although many conservation easements are donated, we used a grant from the federal Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) to purchase this easement.

Highlights of natural land protection include the four Hitchcock Swamp easements. This swamp in central Antrim County is considered to be the true headwa-

ters of the Chain, as the Intermediate River originates in the swamp and flows north to Beals Lake, the first in the Chain. Much of the swamp is protected under state or county ownership, but these four easements extend protection of the Intermediate River downstream, adding an additional 295 acres and a combined mile of river frontage.



Seven Bridges Natural Area (Kalkaska County/314 acres): This truly enchanting jewel is beautiful in all four seasons. The Rapid River is braided (separated into multiple channels) here as it spills through forests of tamarack and cedar, and a series of bridges allow visitors to relax and soak up picturesque views. The most scenic portions of this property are a short walk in from Valley Road, though a larger loop goes back into forests and open meadows. This property was protected in 1997 after GTRLC helped secure a Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund grant and handled additional fundraising.

Bauer Nature Preserve (Antrim County/362 acres): The Bauer Preserve is a wonderful place to escape into nature. This property features forested valleys, steep ridges, wetlands and nearly 2,200 feet of frontage on the Intermediate (Dingman) River below Scott Lake. Lowland hardwoods, shrub and wetlands occupy the lower portion of the preserve, while northern mesic forests cover the steep hills. A trail here includes a loop atop a forested ridge with a spur to a platform along the river. An excellent place to view fall colors!

Wilcox-Palmer-Shah Nature Preserve (Antrim County/41 acres): This preserve lies along East Grand Traverse Bay just north of the Chain of Lakes' outlet in Elk Rapids. This beautiful slice of shoreline offers a wonderful place to relax and take in a sunset or a view of the bay. A roadside turnout includes an informational kiosk and a short boardwalk with stairs that lead to the beach. Visitors are encouraged to stay on marked paths and relatively close to the water along the beach because of the presence of Pitcher's Thistle and Lake Huron tansy, two rare and protected plants.

Palastra-Holm Nature Preserve (Grand Traverse County/37 acres): Like the Golden-Days Loon Preserve and a handful of other properties we manage, this preserve on the west side of Elk Lake is designated as a sanctuary by GTRLC, meaning public access is discouraged to protect critical and fragile wildlife habitats. That said, this is another excellent place to view birds and wildlife from a kayak or other small watercraft. This preserve is largely a hardwood-conifer swamp dominated by cedar, hemlock and other lowland trees. Roughly 1,500 feet of Elk Lake shoreline are protected here, providing water quality and habitat benefits.

Cosner & Bennett-Barnes Preserve (Antrim County/135 acres): This preserve lies within the neighboring Jordan River watershed – and what a watershed it is! The beautiful Jordan, long considered a crown jewel of Michigan rivers, was the first river included in the Michigan Natural Rivers Act of 1970, designed to safeguard the state's finest river systems. Visitors to this preserve can enjoy a trail system through swamps, hardwood forests and open field. The trail also passes over Bennett Creek, which flows through the preserve and empties into the Jordan just east of the preserve boundary. Because this preserve abuts state land, it forms a highly valuable chunk of habitat for a diverse set of flora and fauna.

Skegemog Lake Wildlife Area (3,300 acres/Antrim and Kalkaska County): While GTRLC did not play a role in protecting this massive and important natural area – which was established through a grassroots effort about 20 years before our organization was founded – we've been responsible for land stewardship there since 1997. Visitors can access this property from four parking areas and enjoy more than five miles of trail that wind through this vast and diverse property teeming with plant and animal life. The sheer size of this preserve, coupled with its seven miles of shoreline, makes it an enjoyable place to immerse one's self in nature.



ANTRIM CREEK and TORCH BAY BEACH

If not diverted off for another purpose, each drop of water that begins in the upper Chain of Lakes eventually makes it to Grand Traverse Bay, the beautiful and defining body of water that literally and figuratively shapes our region.

This dazzling body of water, 32 miles long, 10 miles wide and nearly 600 feet deep, is the heart and soul of a regional culture tied so intimately to water. Along its shores are countless places where generations of locals and visitors have relaxed and refreshed.

Among those places are the Antrim Creek Natural Area and Torch Bay Beach. Situated about six miles apart along Antrim County's coast, both are wonderful slices of coast with ample recreational opportunities and sweeping views of the deep blue bay.

At 156 acres, the land that became Antrim Creek was the largest remaining privately held parcel on East Grand Traverse Bay before GTRLC helped Antrim County apply for and secure a \$4.7 million Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund grant to purchase it in 1996. Although the land had been privately owned for decades, the owners quietly allowed the public to enjoy it, meaning local residents and visitors developed deep ties to this special place.

Aside from helping the county secure a trust fund grant, we also secured roughly \$500,000 from the Flint-based C.S. Mott Foundation to cover the costs of a purchase option and an endowment for care of the property.

In addition to a full mile of Lake Michigan shoreline, Antrim Creek features an

incredible array of landscapes, including hardwood forest, forested wetlands, conifer swamp, shrub thicket, coastal dune and a portion of its beautiful namesake creek where it empties into the lake. This beautiful preserve features two threatened plants – Lake Huron Tansy and Pitcher's Thistle – and is a great spot for spring wildflower viewing.

History buffs will also appreciate that the property is the site of one of Antrim County's first settlements. Antrim City, as it was known, was a thriving lumber town and port on the coast between Elk Rapids and Charlevoix. Like many other 19th century settlements that dotted the northern wilderness, it disappeared shortly after the turn of the century, leaving an old cemetery as the only sign of its once-bustling existence.

The Antrim Creek Natural Area offers a trail system, parking, and restroom facilities in addition to unspoiled beach and shoreline for swimming, picnicking and more. Because it and Torch Bay Beach both face west, they are also favorite spots to stop and watch the sun set over the open bay and Leelanau County in the distance.

Torch Bay Beach is only a stone's throw from U.S. 31 along Traverse Bay Road, but this 37-acre preserve is overlooked by most people humming along this busy thoroughfare. Like its much larger cousin up the coast, Torch Bay Beach definitely packs a punch – mature forests, coastal ponds and wetland, dunes

and more than 700 feet of pristine shoreline along the bay. Although a beautiful 1.4 mile trail exists for those looking for a leisurely walk through the woods, it's also easy to

park near the water's edge for swimming or any other purpose. A rustic boat launch is ideal for launching canoes and kayaks, but isn't suitable for larger crafts.



MAPLEHURST and TORCH RIDGE

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We're so happy about the effort to protect the former Camp Maplehurst property. There are thousands of camp alumni that probably will come back, and it makes me feel wonderful to know that the place is being protected so that they and their kids can always come back and enjoy it. I never wanted to see it developed, and to know that it will be saved is a great, great thing. Our whole family is happy about it, and I speak for thousands of former campers who I'm sure will be thrilled.

- Laurence Cohn, whose father, Tom Cohn, founded Camp Maplehurst in 1955. Laurence served as director after his father's retirement until the camp closed in 2011.

Although we're very proud of the work we've accomplished in the Chain of Lakes in our first 25 years, some of the best may be yet to come.

Right now, we're working to protect two of the largest remaining intact parcels near mighty Torch Lake. One is the former Camp Maplehurst property, a spectacular 400-acre parcel on the west side of the lake near Kewadin. The other is a 435-acre private farm high on a ridge on the east side of the lake, the protection of which will help preserve water quality and scenic views.

Camp Maplehurst was treasured by generations of campers and counselors from its founding in 1955 by the Cohn family until it closed a few years ago. This beautiful property has northern hardwood forests and open meadows that surround Lake Maplehurst, a 60-acre spring-fed gem. Its position on high ground means visitors have excellent views of Torch Lake, Elk Lake and Grand Traverse Bay.

We're helping Milton Township apply for a \$1.9 million Michigan Natural Resources Trust fund grant so the land can be used for a public park. If approved in December 2016, this grant would cover about 70 percent of the cost to acquire the land. We anticipate a need of about \$1.8 million to cover a local match requirement for the grant, the cost of immediate stewardship (including the demolition of several aging buildings) and an endowment for the property's care.



The property has tremendous potential as a park, with opportunities for hiking, snowshoeing, fishing, boating and much, more. The trust fund board will decide whether or not to approve the project in December.

The private farm, owned by the Rowe family and dubbed Torch Ridge, has a mile long ridge that looms over the lake. Because homes have already been built on most properties at the water's edge, developers will now likely focus on high ground that

provides exquisite views of the lake. A development plan, completed as part of our appraisal process, shows the potential for dozens of home sites on the property, including as many as 24 along the ridge itself.

We have a signed option to buy a conservation easement on the property, and we're now fundraising to complete the purchase. Although this land will remain in private hands and won't be open to the public, we'll all benefit from its protection. This ridge serves a very important role in filtering and cleansing water that enters Torch Lake, a role that would be severely diminished upon development. Protection will also preserve beautiful natural view enjoyed by those who use the lake.

We've always considered ourselves to be just borrowing this land from our kids. But it really sank in for a little while there that we might be forced to sell it. Now that the conservancy easement has come into play, it's been a huge relief. It's exciting to know that this land will always be there for my kids, and it will be there for my grandkids. It's a win-win scenario for us, and it gives us the financial security to keep the land. This ensures for us and our neighbors that this land will stay the way it is forever, and that's very rewarding.

-Brad Rowe, who is selling a conservation easement on his 435-acre farm near Torch Lake.

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To learn more about these projects and how you can support them, please contact Anthony Rupard, arupard@gtirlc.org or 231-929-7911.



ABOUT GTRLC

The Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy (GTRLC) was founded in 1991 and works to protect and care for vital pieces of land in Antrim, Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska and Manistee Counties. We are one of more than 1,500 conservancies – also known as land trusts – that protect land across the country.

Our mission is to protect natural, scenic, farm and forest lands, and to advance stewardship of those lands, now and for future generations. With the support of individual donors and foundations, and through partnerships with local, state and federal agencies, we have protected more than 39,000 acres of land and more than 121 miles of shoreline along the region's exceptional rivers, lakes and streams.

We accomplish land protection through a variety of methods, the most common of which are:

Conservation Easements: A large portion of our work is with private landowners who have sold or given us their property development rights through a conservation easement. In these agreements, the property owner voluntarily places restrictions on the land for perpetuity. Each easement is different and takes into account the owner's wishes for the property while permanently protecting water and land quality, natural features and other conservation-minded elements. GTRLC is responsible for regularly monitoring easements to ensure the terms are upheld.

Direct Purchase or Donation: GTRLC raises funds to purchase certain parcels, and landowners also donate or bequeath land to our organization. Most of these properties are then owned and managed by GTRLC as public nature preserves. We currently own and manage 34 preserves in our service area.

Community Assists: We frequently assist communities in creating public parks and natural areas by providing expertise in fund acquisition (from private and public sources), land purchase, land improvement and much more.

GTRLC is headquartered in Traverse City and operated as a 501 (c)3 nonprofit organization. Our staff of 25 includes naturalists, land protection specialists and a dedicated land stewardship team. We are governed by a board of directors comprised of local residents passionate about conservation.

Our organization depends on the support of donations from individuals, businesses and foundations. We also rely on the continued support of hundreds of dedicated volunteers who help us care for the land we protect.

