YOUR GIFT WILL:

- **Permanently protect 265 acres of high-quality and naturally-filtering rich conifer swamp habitat.**
- **Safeguard nearly 9,000 feet of coldwater stream frontage, including portions of Battle Creek—Elk Lake's largest tributary.**
- **Protect critical habitat for brook trout, black bear and other native wildlife.**
- **Support trail and infrastructure improvements that will connect Battle Creek Natural Area to the Lossie Road Nature Trail and install new footbridges, boardwalk and a viewing platform overlooking Elk Lake.**

SUPPORT THIS PROJECT

Total project cost and fundraising need**: $1,845,286**

The Hershey Family Foundation has generously offered a 1:1 challenge, matching every gift to the project up to $100,000.

Contact:
Erin Whiting, Senior Charitable Giving Specialist
p: 231.922.1259
e: ewhiting@gtrlc.org

**In the event that fundraising support for a project exceeds the original project fundraising goal, the Conservancy will allocate the overage to purposes that the Conservancy determines further its mission, such as organizational costs, to protect additional land, or to care for the long-term stewardship of protected land.*









Proposed

MABEL CREEK NATURE SANCTUARY

April 2025

Love the land. *Pass it on.*

The Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy (GTRLC) has long been a steward of the Elk River Chain of Lakes (ERCL) watershed, protecting and supporting lands like Torch River Ridge: A Cotanche Family Legacy, Skegemog Lake Wildlife Area, North Skegemog Nature Preserve, the Palastra-Holm Nature Sanctuary and the Battle Creek Natural Area.

From its headwaters near East Jordan to its outlet in Elk Rapids, the ERCL watershed covers 500 square miles via 55 miles of interconnected lakes and streams. It is the largest watershed feeding Grand Traverse Bay, supplying roughly 60% of the surface water that flows into the bay. These waters contribute to the health of human and wildlife communities, supporting abundant fisheries, magnificent views and ample recreational opportunities.

Today, we have an extraordinary chance to build on our conservation legacy with the proposed Mabel Creek Nature Sanctuary and trail improvements at the adjacent Battle Creek Natural Area.

Mabel Creek Nature Sanctuary

The proposed sanctuary ranks in the top 1% of properties scored in GTRLC's Priority Landscape Atlas—making it among the lands with the highest conservation value in our service area. Protecting this property provides significant habitat and water quality benefits for Elk Lake and the broader watershed.

This roughly 265-acre property primarily consists of high-quality rich conifer swamp habitat, threaded by nearly 9,000 feet of coldwater stream frontage along Mabel and Battle Creeks. The creeks meander through the swamp and converge at the property's southern boundary before flowing into Elk Lake, where Battle Creek—one of the lake's largest tributaries—contributes approximately six billion gallons of clean water each year. Healthy cedar swamp wetlands naturally filter water as it moves through the landscape, helping to keep Elk Lake clean for wildlife and the thousands of anglers, boaters and swimmers who enjoy it each year.

The property's streams provide essential habitat for native fish such as brook trout, a bellwether species that can only survive in cold, clean water. Numerous waterfowl, amphibians and reptiles thrive in its connected stream corridor and surrounding wetlands.

Adjacent to the Battle Creek Natural Area, the proposed sanctuary would create a 518-acre contiguous block of protected land. Both properties are part of a larger network of protected lands within the watershed, spanning nearly 5,000 acres and stretching across 12 miles of waterfront from Elk Lake's southern shore to the Torch River. This significant wildlife corridor supports black bears, bobcats and other animals that need expansive areas to roam, breed and find food and shelter, as well as numerous bird species. The Northern Goshawk and American Bittern—both species of special concern in Michigan—have been observed in the watershed, along with threatened species like the Red-shouldered Hawk and Caspian Tern. By safeguarding this land, we not only protect its unique ecosystems but also enhance the connectivity and ecological resilience of this critical landscape.

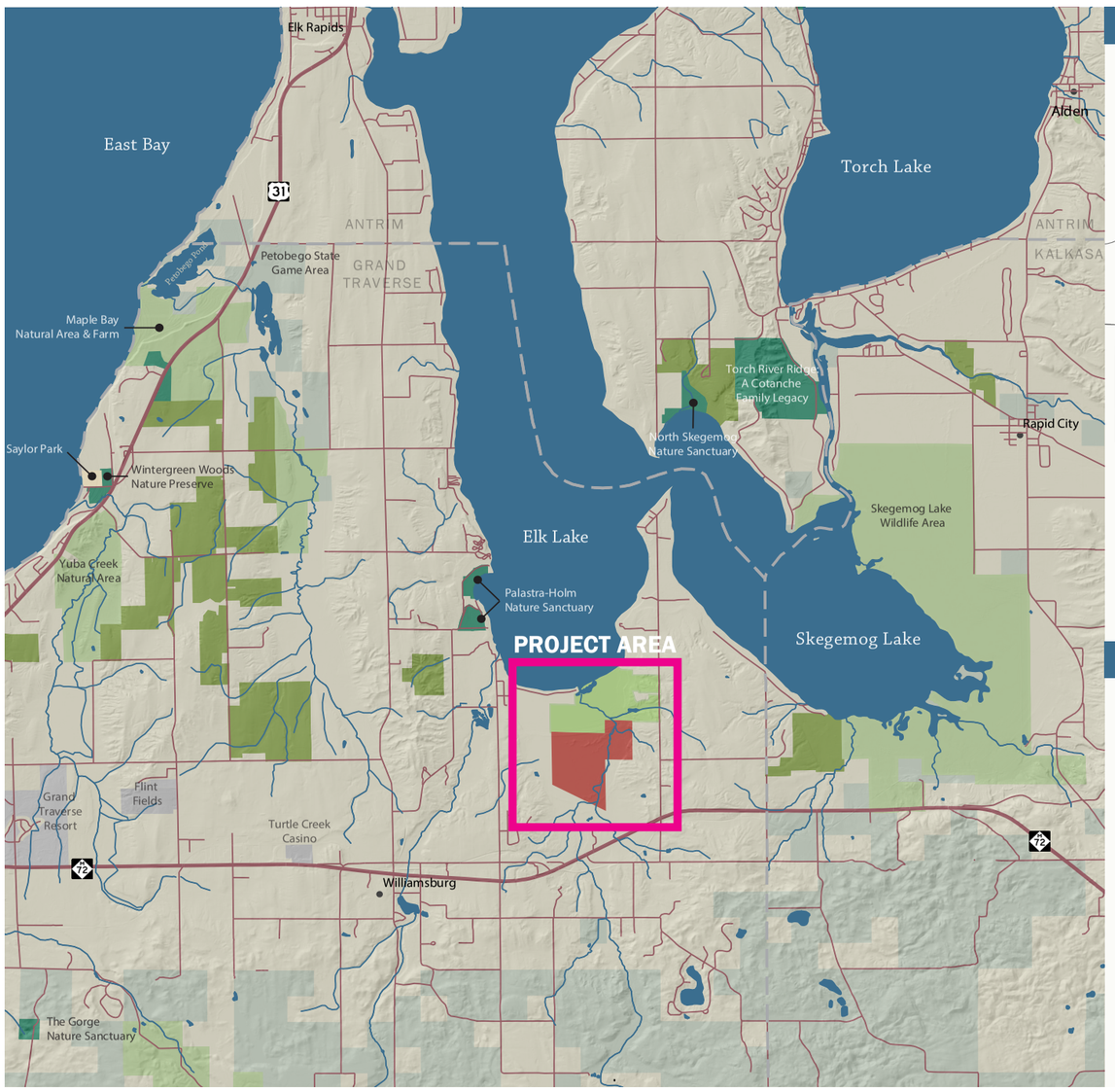
Battle Creek Natural Area Trail Improvements

Approximately 20 years ago, GTRLC helped Whitewater Township protect and acquire Battle Creek Natural Area as a publicly-accessible park. Today, a short trail and an informal two-track exist there, while the historic and well-loved Lossie Road Nature Trail crosses the southern end of the property between Cook and Skegemog Point roads. But the two trail systems have never been connected.

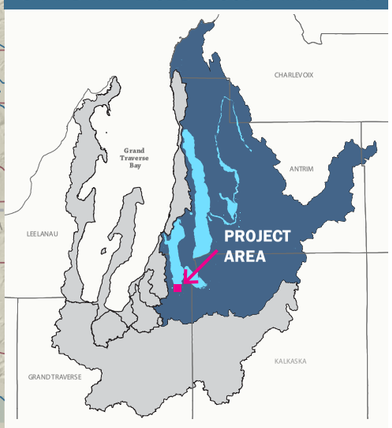
This project offers an opportunity to improve existing infrastructure and secure an investment that will serve this community for generations to come. Working closely with Whitewater Township, GTRLC's stewardship team has designed a plan to link the two trails through the proposed sanctuary and natural area via a new boardwalk and footbridge. Plans also call for installing a new footbridge that crosses Battle Creek along the Lossie Trail.

Additionally, the existing Battle Creek Natural Area Trail will be decommissioned and replaced with a longer, more sustainable trail system that befits the landscape. Plans include a new loop around a scenic pond, roughly two miles of hand-built trail through the woods, 1,430 linear feet of boardwalk and a boardwalk spur leading to a new viewing platform near Elk Lake's shoreline; offering visitors exceptional views of the lake, wildlife and surrounding habitat.

PROJECT AREA CONTEXT MAP



GRAND TRAVERSE BAY SUBWATERSHEDS

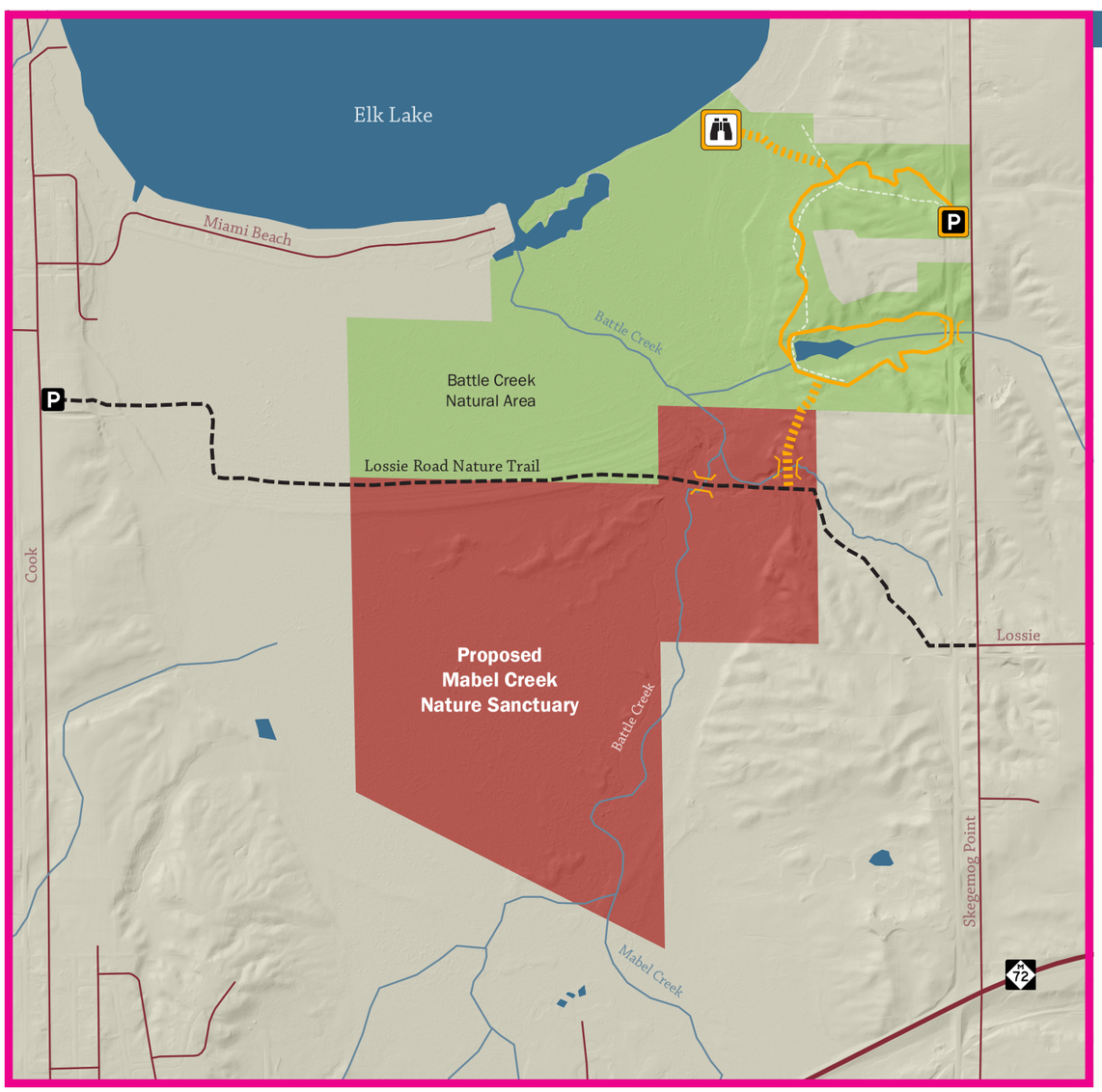


- Elk River Chain of Lakes
- Other Grand Traverse Bay Subwatersheds

MAP LEGEND

- GTRLC Nature Preserves or Sanctuaries (Public Access)
- Other Land Protected or Managed by GTRLC (Public Access)
- Proposed Mabel Creek Nature Sanctuary
- Private Land Protected by GTRLC
- State Land (Public Access)

PROJECT AREA MAP



LEGEND

- Battle Creek Natural Area (protected by GTRLC/ owned by Whitewater Twp.)
- Proposed Mabel Creek Nature Sanctuary (to be owned by GTRLC)
- Proposed Viewing Platform
- Proposed Trail
- Proposed Boardwalk
- Proposed Bridge (new or replacement)
- Proposed Parking Area Improvements
- Lossie Road Nature Trail
- Existing Battle Creek Trail
- Parking Area