

North Country Notes



The Newsletter of the Laughing Whitefish Audubon Society
Marquette and Alger Counties, Michigan

October 2017

LARGE FOREST RESERVE ESTABLISHED IN THE PESHEKEE HEADWATERS BARAGA COUNTY

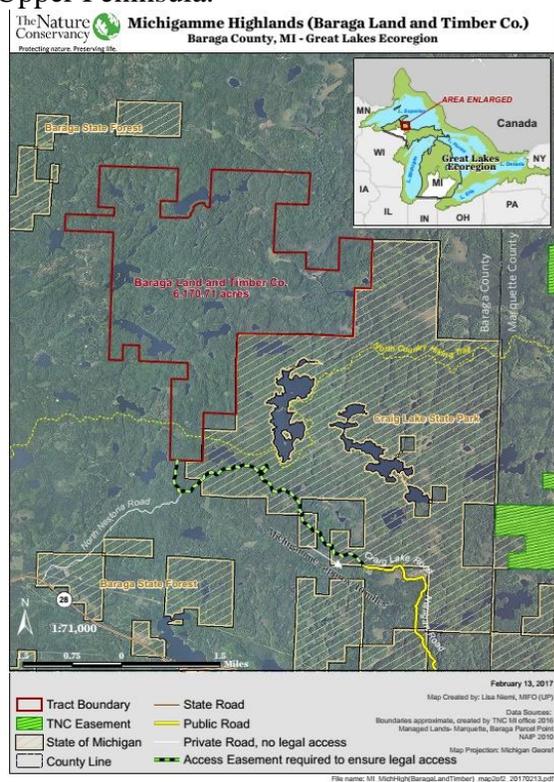
Jeff Knoop

After nearly two years of negotiations, coupled with a major fundraising effort, The Nature Conservancy recently closed on the protection of nearly 6,200 acres in eastern Baraga County. This acquisition is a keystone event in the proposed protection of a wildlife corridor that extends from the Huron Mountains south to the McCormick Wilderness and westward to Craig Lake State Park. The Conservation Area is known as the Michigamme Highlands a distinct ecoregion within the central portion of the Upper Peninsula.

The new forest reserve is adjacent to and lies on the west and north sides of Craig Lake State Park, a 9,000-acre state park. The new reserve features knob and valley terrain with elevational changes of up to 200 feet which is typical of the Michigamme Highlands, where the underlying ancient metamorphic bed rock has eroded into blockular ridges, dramatic cliffs and steep, narrow stream valleys. In more recent times, lakes throughout the area owe their existence to several continental ice sheets that carved “pockets” into the resistant bed rock, blocked and dammed stream valleys and, more recently, the lake building continues through the actions of North American beaver.

The property lies primarily within the Peshekee River headwaters. Named headwater lakes on the parcel include Loon, Fisher, Little Fisher, Wagner, Jim’s, High Life, Smith and Diana Lakes. In addition, there are 18 other smaller unnamed lakes and ponds on the property. Lakes represent nearly 500 acres of open water on the parcel. Some of the lake names are a faint reminder that the Miller Brewing Company, in the distance past, owned the parcel along with the adjacent State Park and the old camp lodge still present in Craig Lake Park.

Upland, northern hardwood forest is the dominant timber type on the property and consists primarily of young stands of hemlock, yellow, birch, white pine and



maple. The prior owner of the property, Baraga Land and Timber Company, used the property as a working forest primarily limiting cutting to upland areas and purposely avoiding the 2,000 acres of lakes and wetlands scattered across the parcel.



Landscape of Forest Reserve-photo from the Nature Conservancy.

In addition, the property housed the Loon Lake Fishing and Hunting Club for nearly 30 years. Forests near lakes, wetlands and sheltered stream valleys can best be described as “boreal forest” containing a mix of spruce, fir, hemlock, white cedar, and white pine. Portions of the property contain remnants of older growth timber containing a mix of maturing yellow birch, hemlock and white pine. Today, the property contains a network of forest roads, many are flooded out by beaver or reverting to forest.



Wetland with Beaver Dam
Photo from the Nature Conservancy

Ecologically, the property consists of stands of eastern white pine, northern white cedar and yellow birch, sugar maple, spruce/fir forests, over a thousand acres of wetlands and 5 miles of perennial streams. High quality examples of white cedar swamp, a conservation priority natural community are

present on the property. Other conservation habitats include riparian and flood plain forests and upland conifer and northern hardwood forests.

Moreover, the Michigan Natural Features Inventory Program lists several rare or outstanding community types including mesic northern forest, northern wet meadow, rich conifer swamp, muskeg, granite bedrock glade, poor fen, and a community of plants that grow on the granite cliffs which are listed as “endemic” to the Michigamme Highlands. Rare and threatened species include common loon, bald eagle, *Boloria frigga* (the Frigga fritillary a butterfly with circumpolar distribution, through the tundra and boreal regions of N. America and Europe) and at least one state threatened plant, narrow leaved gentian. We are hopeful that future surveys will reveal other undocumented rare species.

Moose are common on the property (with some luck you may see one) and continue to thrive throughout the Michigamme Highlands Conservation Area since re-introduction to the area 30 or so years ago. Prime habitat exists for several rare and threatened transient animal species including: northern goshawk, eastern gray wolf, and Canada lynx.

The purchase of this parcel was made possible through the heirs of the Baraga Land and Timber Company whom generously made a \$5 million-dollar land gift (50% of the land value) to make the acquisition possible. Many thanks go out to Baraga Land and Timber for their forethought and generosity in helping preserve one of Michigan’s finest forest reserves.

Access to this remote part of the UP is best made via the North Country Trail (NCT) which passes through the southern portion of the property. Park at the main Craig Lake State parking lot and catch the nearby NCT



Land of Many Lakes-Photo from the Nature Conservancy westward about a mile to the first gravel

road. Take the gravel road to the right (northward) and enjoy Michigan's newest forest reserve! The hike is long with only vestiges of old logging roads providing limited access so please remember to take a

good map and compass (maps are available upon request by e-mailing The Nature Conservancy at upmichigan@tnc.org). Access to the area is open to foot travel only and passive recreational uses include hiking, fishing, hunting, skiing and other similar low impact uses.

Thanks to Our Members for Their Extra Donations and Support **Ann Joyal, Treasurer**

In September 2017 the Laughing Whitefish Audubon Society had 72 active members whose dues support activities such as printing and mailing our quarterly newsletter, and program costs including room-rental, data-projector rental, and mileage reimbursement for speakers.

A number of our members made additional donations to help with extra club projects or expenses. These donations also funded the *LWAS Avian Research or Conservation Grant* which was awarded to Zach Gayk to help fund his research on flight-calling in wood-warblers in the Bete Grise area of the Keweenaw Peninsula.

Thanks to the following people who made extra contributions from September 2016-August 2017. Without your help our projects would not have been possible:

Arnold Aho, Ron Annelin, Priscilla Burnham and Lou Chappell, Loren and Mary Clifford, Bill and Kathy Davis, Bryon and Amy Ennis, Richard Gray, Skye Haas, Dan Hardie, Jim Hayward, Clyde and Debby Hecox, Deb Laurie and Scott Hickman, Mark and Joanie Hubinger, Lois Hutchings, Ann Joyal, Keith Kepler, Cindy Lynne and Jeff Knoop, Elizabeth Koch, Matt and Natasha Koss, Steve and Paulette Lindberg, Jim McCommons, Joanna Mitchell, Tory Parlin, Ann Richardson, Clare and Michael Sauer, Mary and Don Snitgen, Martin Steindler, Carol Ann Stuht, Mary Turvey, Tina Hall and Bruce Ventura, Cathy and Steve Waller.

Chocolay Bayou Nature Preserve **Bruce Ventura**

Progress continues in the development of the Chocolay Bayou Nature Preserve. This nearly 13 acre property near the mouth of the Chocolay River in Harvey was purchased by the Upper Peninsula Land Conservancy in 2016, with the help of many individual donors and organizations,

including Laughing Whitefish Audubon. Since that time, a number of improvements have been made on the property to make visitor access easier, while still keeping the property essentially wild.

Two trails have been marked on the Preserve; both are loops that connect with

trailhead kiosks that have maps and brochures about the preserve. The south loop meanders through a pine woods of Red, White and Jack pines. It is relatively open woods, with only a smattering of undergrowth due to the shadowing by the pines. This trail can be accessed from Main Street; the entrance is just west of the Chocoley Shores apartment complex across the street from the Chocoley Bar and Restaurant (which is currently closed and for sale.....anyone want to buy a restaurant??) The north loop can be accessed from the Iron Ore Heritage Trail. A newly installed split rail fence and stairway clearly mark the Preserve entrance from the IOHT. The loop follows an old two-track road westward to a point on the bayou, and then loops back through a mixed woods of Balsam Fir, birch, maple, pine and alder. The old two-track is easy walking on level ground; the return portion of the loop is somewhat up and down as it winds along the bayou shore and into the woods. Both trails have views of a variety of habitats, including open mature pines; dense mixed growth deciduous and evergreen woods; small open meadows; open water of the bayou; and hardwood/evergreen swamp.

This past spring, a boardwalk was constructed across the swampland, connecting the north and south loop trails. About 250 hours of volunteer labor was given by a number of individuals to construct about 350 feet of boardwalk. Many more people contributed financially to this project; their names are engraved on wooden plaques that are installed along the edges of the boardwalk. Check out the names for people you know as you travel over the boardwalk. And keep your ears and eyes open for the sounds and sightings of the creatures that live here. Breathe deeply and enjoy the smells of the swamp, too. Notable along the boardwalk are several large Tamarack and White Pine trees; the

boardwalk rises slightly to pass over the huge buttress roots of a Tamarack that is nearly two feet in diameter.

New this Fall is a birders' blind at the northwest corner of the south loop trail. It overlooks the swampland and open water of the bayou, and should provide a good shelter from which to view birds and other wildlife on this corner of the Preserve. eBird has a Chocoley River site in its data base. The marker for this site is placed at the bridge on the Iron Ore Heritage Trail where the trail crosses the bayou. This bridge is very near the northwest corner of the Preserve property. 84 species of birds have been reported for this site over the past eleven years. A second site could be established for the birders' blind site; it would undoubtedly add to the Preserve total species count, especially during Spring and Fall migration periods.

More information about this Preserve and other preserves and reserves owned by UPLC can be obtained at the UPLC website (www.luplandconservancy.org), by email (uplc@uplandconservancy.org), or by calling (906) 225-8067.



Boardwalk across the wetland.....construction nearly completed in this June 2017 photo. The boardwalk is now accessible from both of the loop trails.



Birding blind at the northwest corner of the south loop trail. A step at the doorway remains to be added; otherwise, the blind is ready for you to use. A bench inside allows for comfortable sitting while watching wildlife.

LWAS Avian Research/Conservation Grant is Available

In 2014 the Laughing Whitefish Audubon Society instituted an Avian Research Grant of \$500, available to individuals or non-profit organizations for birding research done in the Upper Peninsula. The grant has since funded research on the Yellow Dog Plains, Peninsula Point (Stonington Peninsula) and recently on the Keweenaw Peninsula.

In 2016 the group expanded the grant to include conservation projects that will improve birding habitat or populations. Again, the work should take place in the Upper Peninsula.

We would like to encourage applications for this year's grant. All applications must be received by January 15, 2018 and the guidelines are posted on the Laughing Whitefish Audubon web page under the tab marked "Research/Conservation Grant"

<https://laughingwhitefishaudubon.org/research-grant/>

The application process is quite simple. If you know of an individual or an organization that might be able to use this grant, please have them check out the information on the webpage – or contact an LWAS board member. THANKS!!

2017-2018 Christmas Bird Count Dates

The National Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Count (CBC) takes place annually from December 14 – January 5 and has been in existence for 118 years, making it the longest-running wildlife census in the country. Join with other birders to collect important information that is used to assess the health of the nation's bird populations. For trends shown by CBC data, see the Audubon's "State of the Birds" report at <http://birds.audubon.org/state-birds>.

ALL BIRDERS ARE WELCOME: Beginning birders will be paired with more experienced observers. This is a great way to learn more about the birds in your area. DRESS WARMLY!

Christmas Bird Counts in the local area:

- **December 16, 2017 (Saturday) - Marquette –**
The compiler is Melinda Stamp at mstamp@mstamp.net or 906-869-2489.
Meet at 8:00 a.m. in the parking lot at Mattson Lower Harbor Park in Marquette. No advanced registration is necessary. Feeder forms are available by pre-registering with Melinda. The count circle covers a 7.5-mile radius centered on Old City Hall at 4th & Washington St.
- **December 17, 2017 (Sunday) - AuTrain**

The compiler is Scott Hickman at suboscine@gmail.com or 906-892-8603.

Please use the email address for communication since count information is distributed by email. Please let Scott know at least 4 days in advance if you want to participate so that count circle coverage can be properly coordinated and communicated to all participants.

- **December 20, 2017 (Wednesday) – Cedarville and Les Cheneaux**

The compiler is Elliot Nelson.

For information, contact Elliot at elliottkarlnelson@gmail.com or at elliottne@msu.edu

- **January 2, 2018 (Tuesday) - Gwinn**

The compiler is Brian Johnson at baidaj@yahoo.com or 231-557-4011. Contact Brian for meeting place and time.

- **TBD – Michigamme Highlands - Peshekee Grade**

The compiler is Gary Palmer at jgpalmer@gmail.com. Contact Gary for more information.

Consider Joining the LWAS Executive Board!

The LWAS Bylaws specify that the Executive Board must consist of at least 7 members, including a Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, Secretary, and Treasurer. There is no upper limit to the board and currently there are nine members: Jeff Knoop (Chairperson), Amanda O'Neill (Vice-Chairperson), Ann Joyal (Secretary/Treasurer), Beth Olson (newsletter), Skye Haas, Jude Holloway, Alec Olivier, Gary Palmer, Bruce Ventura. Terms expire every year on November 30, but may be renewed with member-approval.

The Executive Board would like to encourage some additional members to join the board. There are only three Executive Board meetings a year, and each meeting usually lasts from about 6:30 – 8:30 in the evening. Duties include planning the program schedule, suggesting field trips, planning the content of the quarterly newsletter, and supervising expenditures – including selecting a yearly LWAS Research/Conservation Grant recipient. Members of the Executive Board have varying degrees of birding skills (from expert to beginner) and birding expertise is NOT a prerequisite for serving on the board.

We would enjoy having additional Board members and would welcome new ideas and perspectives. Since there is no upper limit to the size of the board, there is no competitive voting. If you would like to join the LWAS board, please contact by November 3rd one of the following officers: Jeff Knoop (jeffknoop1@charter.net), Amanda O'Neill (amandajoneill@gmail.com), Beth Olson (tolson@chartermi.net) or Ann Joyal (ajoyal@nmu.edu or phone 226-6749). Your name will be added to the slate of Executive Board members for renewal/approval at the November 8th Membership Meeting.

Please come to the Membership Meeting and enjoy the excellent photography of our members and share some tasty snacks with us. It is a great time to interact informally with other members of the group.

Annual Field Trip to Michigamme Highlands

(includes the Peshekee Grade and/or The Nature Conservancy land in the Craig Lake area)

Each fall, the Laughing Whitefish Audubon Society sponsors a field trip to the Michigamme Highlands to view boreal species and Canadian migrants. This year, as well as the Peshekee Grade, Jeff Knoop may be able to take the group to the newly acquired Nature Conservancy land bordering Craig Lake.

Date: November 11 (Saturday)

Carpool: Meet in the parking lot at 4th and Spring Streets in Marquette

Time: 7:30 a.m.

Trip leader: Skye Haas

For information: contact Skye at theowlranch@gmail.com

Everyone is welcome. Dress warmly and bring binoculars, food and water. For this field trip, it may be a good idea to pack a lunch.

Bird species on this trip may include Boreal Chickadee, Gray Jay, Black-backed Woodpecker and possibly some species from Canada, such as White-winged or Red Crossbill, Pine Grosbeak, Redpoll and Pine Siskin. In past years there have been other surprises such as Evening Grosbeak and even a Northern Cardinal.

Upcoming Laughing Whitefish Audubon Programs

Laughing Whitefish Audubon meetings are held in the Community Room of Peter White Public Library in Marquette at 7:00 p.m. We usually meet on the second Wednesday of the month, although the date may occasionally vary due to scheduling conflicts with the library. For information, contact Ann Joyal at ajoyal@nmu.edu or at 226-6749.

- **November 8 (Wednesday) *Annual Membership Meeting and Social Gathering***
This is an informal social event where members are invited to bring their digital photographs of birds and other nature-oriented subjects to share with the audience. A computer & digital projector will be provided, and light refreshments will be served. The program will be preceded by a brief business meeting. Please come and bring a few photos to share!
- **DECEMBER – WE HAVE NO MEETING.** Considering participation in one of our local Christmas bird counts.
- **January 10 (Wednesday) *“Photos from Thirty-three Years of Life in the Back Country”***
This program is a photo essay featuring Thom Skelding’s excellent photographs of the landscapes, animals and birds that he has encountered in the woods near his home during the last 33 years – scenes that may be familiar to many in the audience.
- **February 8 (Wednesday)** Program by Gary Palmer. Description will follow in the next newsletter.
- **March 13 (TUESDAY)** Program by Nate Martineau. Description will follow in the next newsletter.

Skye Haas to lead a trip to South Texas in February 2018

Tuesday, February 13, 2018 to Wednesday, February 21, 2018 Tour Duration: 9 days Tour Price: \$2,350 USD Tour Start/Ends: Corpus Christi/McAllen Texas Wonderful, often easy, birding. Boat trip for Whooping Cranes and other wading birds. Lots of Mexican specialties that are located nowhere else in the U.S. Excellent reserves and birding areas. A few of us LWAS members are already planning on this great trip. Hope you can too! For more information:

<http://www.eagle-eye.com/South-Texas-Birding-Tour>

Laughing Whitefish Audubon Society Membership Form

Dues support the newsletter, programs, & local birding activities. Donations are tax-deductible.

Your name (or gift-recipient's name): _____

Street: _____

City, State and Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Address _____

(E-mail addresses are not given to other groups or commercial entities)

Annual Membership fees (please check one)

Gift membership - \$15 Regular membership - \$15 OR Student - \$5.00

How would you like to receive your newsletter? (check one) e-mail or postal service

Additional donations:

\$_____ General Expenses for club projects

\$_____ Research/Conservation Grant to fund birding research/conservation in the
UP

FOR GIFT MEMBERSHIPS please supply your name and the recipient will be notified of your gift: DONOR NAME: _____

Mail this form, along with your check (payable to LWAS) to:

Ann Joyal, 346 W. Crescent St. Marquette, MI 49855 (ajoyal@nmu.edu or 906-226-6749)

c/o Beth Olsson
5 Arrowhead Dr.
Marquette, MI 49855

