



# A *River* Made Whole

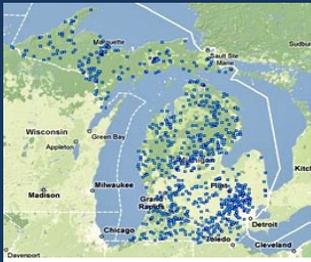
*How Teamwork Set Michigan's Pigeon River Free*



**Huron Pines**

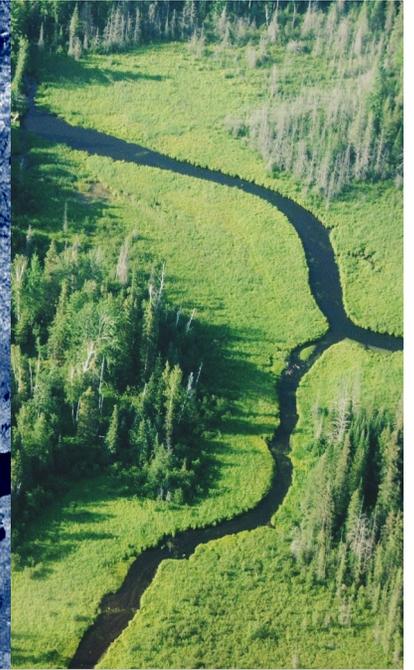
Protecting the Great Lakes  
by conserving the forests, lakes & streams  
of Northeast Michigan





*There are  
at least  
941 dams  
fragmenting  
Michigan's  
waterways  
alone.*

—National Inventory  
of Dams 2013



## Our Great Lakes—Defining the Michigan Experience

*Investing in the health of our water, wildlife & communities*

Looking at North America from space, you'll notice a striking feature—the Great Lakes system, that iconic freshwater chain containing 20% of the planet's surface fresh water. Huron Pines is a nonprofit organization uniquely positioned in the center of this vital system, and our corner of Michigan boasts many of the Great Lakes Basin's wildest, coldest, cleanest streams. So much more than blue lines on a map, these flowing and living river systems represent the top tier of global freshwater resources, and they are surrounded by thousands of acres of equally amazing forestlands and serene coastlines.

At Huron Pines, it's our mission to protect the Great Lakes by conserving the forests, lakes and streams of Northeast Michigan, and it's our passion to protect these astounding natural areas and the wildlife that call this place home. Unspoiled, untrammled and uncrowded, Northeast Michigan is an outdoor lover's paradise. We work hard to preserve the wild experience that calls people from all over into our quieter world.



## The Wild Pigeon River

### *Celebrating one of Michigan's most beloved blue ribbon trout streams*

The Pigeon River's headwaters begin in the rolling hills of Michigan's Otsego County and its meandering path flows north through large tracts of public land and eventually to Lake Huron. Its clean, icy flows support a thriving coldwater ecosystem including native brook trout, brown trout and steelhead. Majestic elk along with other wildlife of the Pigeon River Country State Forest leave their tracks along the stream and share its life-giving waters with the people who come to enjoy the Pigeon's peace, solace and opportunities for recreation.

The Pigeon River is special. It's designated a State Natural River and is one of Michigan's premier Blue Ribbon trout streams—an honor bestowed upon only 2% of Michigan's 38,000+ river miles. To qualify, streams must be both easily wadeable with clearance to cast a fly rod and able to support healthy trout populations and insect biodiversity. It's a classic example of what a northern Michigan stream should be, so it's no wonder that so many people longed to see it set free from the dam that fragmented it.

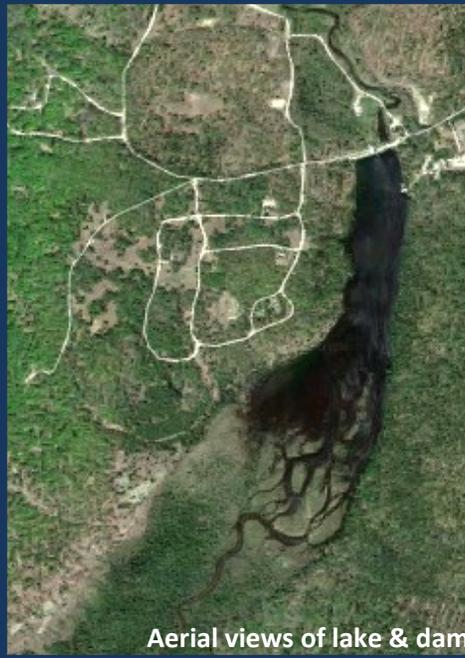
*“A guy loves a couple or three streams all his life and loves ‘em better than anything in the world.”*

—Ernest Hemingway  
(who often fished the Pigeon River)



*“Huron Pines works to unite people with different interests around a common goal. Because we stayed neutral through the legal conflict leading up to the project, we were able to successfully step in and help move things forward.”*

–Brad Jensen,  
Huron Pines



Aerial views of lake & dam

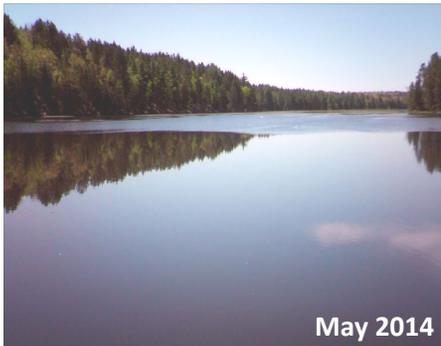


## A Turbulent Past

### *Working together through challenges for the good of people & wildlife*

Located 15 miles from the origin of the Pigeon River, Song of the Morning Dam had long disturbed natural river function, divided headwater habitat from the rest of the watershed, and blocked resident and migratory fish from Lake Huron from reaching critical spawning habitat upstream of the dam. The 45-acre impoundment created by the dam had also led to significant warming of the river’s cold water: bad news for trout. Multiple failures of the dam, most recently in 2008, had released large quantities of sand downstream, dropping dissolved oxygen levels and leading to the catastrophic fish kill of nearly 500,000 trout.

The impacts of the dam had been well documented including in the Michigan Department of Natural Resources’ Cheboygan River Assessment, which specifically recommended removal. Removing Song of the Morning Dam had been identified by natural resource managers as the #1 priority for restoration activities to benefit the Pigeon River and greater Cheboygan River watersheds. But the lake and dam were beloved by the property owners who found it peaceful, reflective and consistent with the property’s use as a yoga retreat. After six years of debate in the legal process, project stakeholders were finally ready to join together and move forward for the good of the river.



May 2014



June 2014



July 2014



August 2014



September 2015



## Time for Change

### *With the drawdown of the impoundment, the lake becomes a river*

During Phase I of the project, the drawdown of the impoundment led by Golden Lotus (the property owner), partners watched in wonder as the landscape transformed from a 45-acre lake to an open meadow bursting with new green life over the course of one summer. The dam's four-inch tall stoplogs were removed one by one, lowering the lake level in gentle increments every two to three days. As the impoundment drawdown proceeded, the new Pigeon River began to find a natural path through the open grassland, cutting down through layers of silt and organic matter that had accumulated and settled for more than a century.

Huron Pines and partners led a proactive outreach campaign to keep river users informed about the changes to the river, which appeared darker and more turbid during construction, similar to what you would see after a heavy rain. Part of this outreach was educating river users that, once completed, this project would result in long-term benefits for the health and wildlife of the river. A sand trap was prepared downstream of the site to remove excess sediment and ongoing monitoring took place to ensure that the water's dissolved oxygen levels remained high and that fish and other aquatic organisms were not threatened by the changes to the river.

*"Admittedly, everyone at Song of the Morning dearly loved the lake that for decades served as a reminder of the silent stillness of meditation that is our tradition.*

*However, when the opportunity arose to heal both the river and our relationships with neighbors, the promise of good will and a restored river outweighed the loss. I haven't looked back."*

—Linda Gabby,  
Golden Lotus



*“The ability to walk away from discord and personal self-interest and to restore good will has been, for me, the great teaching of this experience. This, and the discovery that our river has a voice! What a joy it is to hear the sound of the Pigeon River as it flows through our retreat center!”*

–Linda Gabby,  
Golden Lotus



## Coming Together

### *Project partners gather to celebrate reconnection of the Pigeon River*

It was exciting for our community to come together and do the right thing for the river and its users. After the lake drawdown, Phase II of the project—the actual dam removal—began. Leadership from a Steering Committee of partners coordinated by Huron Pines and including Golden Lotus, Pigeon River Country Association and Michigan Trout Unlimited assured that any project uncertainties and hurdles would be overcome through rigorous planning, decision-making and an unwavering dedication to the project.

The Steering Committee partners smoothly navigated the challenges of planning this complex project. They worked with the engineer—Huron Engineering and Surveying, Inc.—to coordinate logistics like the disconnection and reconnection of utility services to Song of the Morning Ranch, the sizing and design of the new bridge structure and downstream sandtrap, and a project fundraising campaign. Krenn Timber Bridge fabricated the components for the new bridge and delivered them to the site, ready for construction. Elmer’s Crane and Dozer was the onsite construction contractor. After much planning and effort, project partners celebrated the official project groundbreaking in October 2015.



## Making History

### *The Pigeon River is made whole after more than a century of fragmentation*

After so much planning and preparation, the actual removal of the dam seemed to happen very quickly. As the concrete structure—the only barrier on the Pigeon River—was removed, the river system was fully connected once again. Now, for the first time in more than a century, fish like brook trout, brown trout and steelhead can reach new upstream habitat. The project restored natural river processes, like the flow of woody material, sediment and nutrients, that mark a healthy, free-flowing stream, and it eliminated the thermal pollution that occurred when the sun warmed the water in the old wide, shallow impoundment.

These outcomes were accomplished through the dedication of the project Steering Committee and the investment of nearly \$600,000 by a huge array of funders and individuals who care about the Pigeon River, the wild Northeast Michigan experience and the health of our amazing Great Lakes (see a complete list of funders at the end of this book). The incredible community support for this project means that never again will the Pigeon River experience another catastrophic fish kill due to dam failure.

“You can’t go out and buy a trout stream. What we are witnessing is the rebirth of a river that the dam removal has allowed. A new channel is finding itself. Bugs that live in clean, clear, cold flowing water are moving into new homes—and trout, too!”

—Dave Smethurst,  
Michigan Trout  
Unlimited



“Long experience has shown us that dam removal is an excellent tool for restoring river health, revitalizing fish and wildlife, improving public safety, and reconnecting communities with their rivers. Now, the benefits are becoming even more pronounced as it is helping strengthen the resiliency of communities and wildlife in the face of a changing climate.”

–Bob Irvin,  
American Rivers



## Conservation Benefits Everyone

*Investment in natural resources leads to a better quality of life for all*

Here in Northeast Michigan, recreation and tourism are absolutely critical to our economy. Restoring river connectivity means that area residents and visitors can come here and enjoy rivers that support healthy fish populations for angling. It also means that our citizens will see fewer infrastructure failures and lower road maintenance costs with improved crossings that are generously sized to handle flooding and road runoff.

This project has been used as a living example of collaboration in action, illustrating how individuals and groups who sometimes have different motivations and values can work together toward a common goal. The Steering Committee has already brought more than 300 conservation partners including leaders from Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Michigan Department of Environmental Quality and Trout Unlimited chapters out to tour the project site and learn more about the restoration taking place. We also expanded the conversation about the need for natural resource protection to audiences like county commissioners, state and federal legislators, business partners and foundation leaders.



## Long-Lasting Results

### *The Pigeon River's restoration story doesn't end with dam removal*

The impacts of this project have reached far beyond the ecological benefits of dam removal. The project Steering Committee is committed to monitoring the Pigeon River as it continues to settle into a new, natural channel. As vegetation takes root along the riverbanks, Huron Pines and partners will develop a Vegetation Management Plan to make sure invasive species will not take over in the newly-exposed and fertile soil. Stream channel monitoring will also continue so that changes to the shape and flow of the river can be analyzed and understood.

Getting people from different economic and community development sectors together to discuss projects like this and what they mean for the Great Lakes region has been an enlightening and valuable process that will continue into the future. The hope of Huron Pines and the project Steering Committee is that by sharing the lessons learned through this project with others across the state and nation, we can help inform other river restoration efforts and provide a good example of a collaborative working partnership leading to success for people and wildlife. This project has also strengthened partnerships and resulted in long-term plans for future projects to improve and protect wildlife habitat throughout the Pigeon River Country State Forest.

*"I enjoy seeing the dramatic changes happening as the Pigeon River recovers. Changes and sand movement are being monitored at nine locations as the river finds its new channel."*

*—Joe Jarecki,  
Pigeon River Country  
Association*



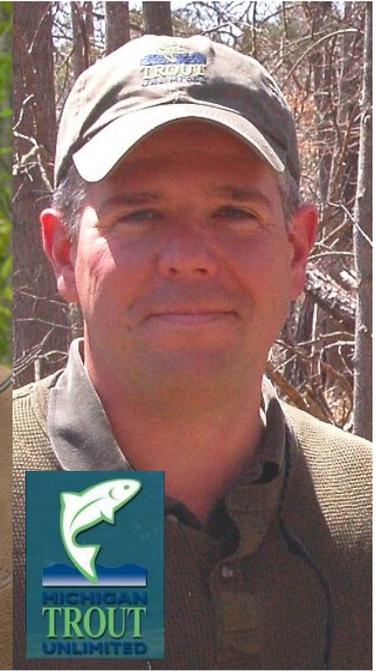
*“With our Steering Committee partners and generous project funders, we’ve had an amazing group of people to work with to remove the dam and achieve our common goal. At the end of the day we are just so very happy to celebrate, as a community, the Pigeon River made whole once again.”*

-Lisha Ramsdell,  
Huron Pines



Huron Pines

Golden Lotus, Inc.



## Meet the Dam Removal Steering Committee

### *Working together to reconnect the wild Pigeon River*

The dam removal project was led by a Steering Committee of representatives from Huron Pines, Golden Lotus, the Pigeon River Country Association and Michigan Trout Unlimited. Together, the Steering Committee worked smoothly through the complex project planning and construction process.

Each Steering Committee member brought an incredible amount of expertise to help drive the project forward. Huron Pines and Michigan Trout Unlimited provided technical guidance for the project from combined experience of more than a dozen dam removals of varying levels of complexity and community involvement. As the property owner, Golden Lotus was involved with each decision and extremely supportive of the project. The Pigeon River Country Association’s participation allowed for robust stream monitoring, strong engagement of the local community and successful fundraising efforts. Despite higher than anticipated construction costs that necessitated additional fundraising, the ultimate success of the project was possible because the right people were at the table to discuss challenges and find solutions.



April 2016



## Thank You!

*Strong support made this happen!*

No one partner could have reconnected the Pigeon River alone—our Steering Committee succeeded because of the help of many generous donors. Michigan DNR invested in the project by providing major funding through the Aquatic Habitat Grant Program and also contributed valuable expertise and guidance on restoration efforts and monitoring plans. Major funding from Great Lakes Fishery Trust, along with the contributions of Golden Lotus, Inc. were key for leveraging the remaining dollars needed from a wide array of corporate and foundation funders and individuals who care about the river. We sincerely thank all who helped make the Pigeon River whole!

## \$570,000 = Total Project Cost

- \$293,000** — Michigan Department of Natural Resources  
*Aquatic Habitat Grant Program*
- \$100,000** — Golden Lotus, Inc.
- \$46,000** — Great Lakes Fishery Trust
- \$21,000** — Pigeon River Country Association
- \$10,000** — Patagonia: World Trout Initiative
- \$10,000** — Great Lakes Energy People Fund
- \$10,000** — Charlevoix County Community Foundation  
*Anonymous donor*
- \$10,000** — Individual Contributions
- \$5,000** — J.A. Woollam Foundation
- \$5,000** — Mullett Lake Area Preservation Society
- \$5,000** — Otsego County Community Foundation  
*Dr. Patrick J. McNamara Fund*  
*Scott & Janice Lampert Fund*
- \$55,000** — In-kind match to the project



Huron Pines



Aquatic Habitat Grant



Golden Lotus, Inc.



Great Lakes Fishery Trust



patagonia



CHARLEVOIX COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION



Otsego County

community foundation

J.A. Woollam Foundation  
Individual Contributors

# Huron Pines

Protecting the Great Lakes by conserving  
the forests, lakes & streams of Northeast Michigan

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