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AND THE WINNERS ARE...

RESULTS OF 2020 PHOTO CONTEST ARE NOW IN



The judges have spoken and we are pleased to present our winners from the 23 entries in the 2020 Photo Contest.

- **Judges' Choice Award** goes to Mark Harder's wood frog photo, which is featured in the cover photo of this issue of In Otter News.

And...

- **People's Choice Award**, selected by our Facebook followers, goes to Allison Ferris for her photograph of the traditional river hair dip, shown above. According to Allison, her children recreate this photo every time they cross this bridge on the boardwalk at GRNA.

Congratulations to both of our winners, and thank you to everyone who submitted photos. We love how these photos express all that Grass River Natural Area has to offer - spectacular wildlife, beautiful scenery, and family traditions.

Once again this year, we will be using many of the photos in our publications, because who better portrays the essence of GRNA than all of you!!

WORTHWHILE ENDEAVORS - EAGLES AND GRNA

by

James Dake, Education Director at GRNA



As I paddled the river during a winter kayak the other day (in a full dry suit and PFD for safety, of course), I noticed two large shadows careen across the cold, calm waters of Grass River. I glanced up from my kayak and saw two majestic and mature bald eagles land in a tall white pine along the river, their brilliant white heads glistening in the winter sun. I sat quietly

and motionless for a long time, watching the pair survey their surroundings. There were no sounds on the river aside from the gentle lap of water muffled by the snowy riverbank. No matter how many times I see them, or how common it becomes, the size of a bald eagle still stops me in my tracks - or in this case, in my boat. Their impressive wingspan of over 6 feet and their tendency to soar high in the sky only adds to their stately stature. Some bald eagles will migrate to warmer places in the summer with open waters, but where there is open water with good fishing all winter, like the Grass River and neighboring lakes, bald eagles stick around. I am sure many of you have seen eagles out on the ice of a lake where there is an open hole or along the ice shelf edges - a common scene in winter in Northern Michigan.



In one afternoon paddle, I ended up seeing four bald eagles, two mature and two in you are looking to spot bald eagles, look for areas near water with tall, mature trees where the eagles can get a good view of the landscape. Earlier in November, we spotted a bald eagle flying over Grass River carrying nesting material, likely one of the two mature eagles I saw on this day. Bald eagles

begin preparing nests as early as November, as it can take up to 3 months to build! And they often make repairs to nests year-round, reusing and adding to nests year after year. A tall, sturdy conifer is often the best candidate in which to spot a nest as well. There are several that can be spotted around the Natural Area. Being some of the largest bird nests, these massive structures of sticks, grass, and cornstalks, can be 6 feet across! Bald eagles also mate for life. And with eagles often living past their 30s in the wild, it is possible that a pair you see has been together for many years.

So, why is my article titled "Worthwhile Endeavors"? The conservation story of bald eagles is one that is often cited as an example of a successful recovery. For me, it parallels Grass River's own story. Efforts beginning in the 1960's and continuing to today, resulted in the increased and healthy numbers of bald eagles we see today. In the same way, I am thankful for the passionate folks that protected and saw the importance of Grass River, stewarded it patiently over these past 50+ years, and watched it flourish. Without the people who saw the value in preservation of the majestic bald eagle and those who worked to protect the fragile environment and vital resources at Grass River Natural Area, both could have been lost forever. All worthwhile endeavors take time.



The photo at left is not a photo of James kayaking in winter, but it is one of the photos submitted to the 2020 Photo Contest by Kathryn Gray. At GRNA, Kathryn, we think any photo of James is a WINNER!

PROGRAMS ON THE HORIZON

The Zoom Tuesday classes were wonderfully successful in February, and we thank all of you who signed up to attend. They are returning for March. Additionally, for the rest of February and on into March we are returning to some in person outdoor programming. And the series of classes through NMC Extended Education that are partially online and partially outdoors at GRNA also continue.



Kids Free-Ski Saturday

Saturday February 20, 2021

while the Center is open, 10:00 am to 4:00 pm

Bring the kids out for a ski at Grass River. We have 12 pairs of youth skis, designed for ages 6-11. Check them out for free this Saturday with the rental fee waived. We will have a small loop for kids to practice on. Skis are available on a first-come, first-served basis.



Lantern-lit Ski and Snowshoe

Friday February 26, 2021 - 6:00 pm to 9:00 pm

\$5 per person

Lantern light reflecting off of freshly fallen snow is a great way to enjoy the forest in winter. Enjoy an evening ski on GRNA's groomed ski trails, or snowshoe the boardwalk to the river. We will have a warm campfire at the Center pavilion and the heated building will be open and staffed, with one group/household allowed indoors at a time. Masks are required inside the Center and at the Pavilion. Come any time during the 3-hour, self-guided, "open-house" style ski or snowshoe. Bring a flashlight

or headlamp. If it is clear there may be moon light. Adult snowshoes, and child skis and snowshoes, are available for rent at the Grass River Center for an additional \$5 rental fee during the program, or bring your own.



Late Winter Tracking

Tuesday, March 2, 2021, Noon - 1:00 pm

Free Zoom program

Join Emily Burke to explore the science and art of wildlife tracking. Late winter is a perfect time of year to learn or improve this skill, with snow and the mud created from melting snow providing great mediums for preserving tracks. In this program, we'll discover how to identify tracks of Northern Michigan mammals to the species level, discuss gait and animal movement patterns, and learn how to glean information like an animal's direction, speed, and when it traveled through the area, all from its tracks! Can you identify who made the tracks in the photo?



Tapping Maple Trees

Saturday March 13, 2021 - 11:00 am - 12:30 pm

\$10 per person, limited space, must pre-register

Discover the ceremonial art of maple tapping by learning both traditional and modern methods. This program will cover all the equipment you need as well as how to do it at home. Get a chance to tap a tree, and see maple syrup being made, from tree to bottle. This program will take place all outdoors with a small group. Limited space. Must pre-register.



Zoom Program by James Dake, subject TBA

Tuesday, March 16, 2021



Spring Equinox Bird Walk

Saturday March 20, 2021 - 9:00 am to 11:00 am

\$5 per person, must pre-register

Who are the first birds to show up in the spring? Join us for the first walk in our birding series, on the first day of spring as we look and listen for these early arrivals. Binoculars are available to borrow, or bring your own. If there is still snow bring snowshoes, or rent some for an additional \$5 in the Grass River Center. Limited space. Must pre-register.

Moonlight Owling

Friday March 26, 2021 - 7:00 pm to 8:30 pm

\$10 per person, limited space, must pre-register

Do you know which owl you're hearing when they "hoot" at night? Many owls have already begun nesting by this time of year. Learn about the calls and habits of local owls and then take



a hike under moonlight to listen for owls. Bring a light. Snowshoes are available for rent if snow is deep, or bring your own. Limited space. Must pre-register.

NMC classes include tapping into the science of maple syrup production and learning about river otters. There is a cost for these programs. Additional information on these classes can be found at <https://www.grassriver.org/classes-and-programs.html>.

Watch Facebook and our [website](#) for additional in person programs as they are scheduled. New micro-classes appear regularly on [Facebook](#) as well.

BOARDWALK REPLACEMENT NEWS

As you may know, GRNA is applying for a grant from the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund through the DNR for phase 2 of our boardwalk replacement which is the river access portion of the trail, observation areas, and the dock area. On Thursday, February 18th, Antrim County held a public meeting, which is one of the requirements of the grant application. The meeting was done by Zoom and we sent out a link to the meeting, which we learned at the last minute did not include the Passcode to get in.

Because we want you to be informed and be able to ask questions, if you have them, Jenn is going to make the presentation again on Thursday, March 4. You must pre-register to attend the Zoom meeting. We hope to see you there.

Thursday, March 4th at 6:30pm EST.

Registration is here: <https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZ0qf-usqj4vG9Oi-PF-PGL226ErYSHu2S7v> **You must register to receive the link to the actual meeting.**

The tracks referenced in the Late Winter Tracking program are from a bobcat.

NEW LOGO WEAR

Purchase a shirt for yourself or as a gift and GRNA benefits



Choose from any of the logos featured above printed on a variety of styles, colors, & sizes from youth to adult.

Order online by clicking on this box.

A portion of the sale comes back to GRNA as a donation.

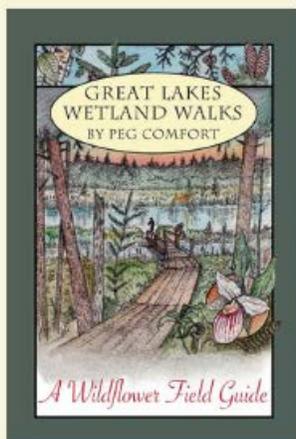
**The 2nd Edition of
Grass River Natural Area's
FIELD GUIDE
to Northwest Michigan
is now available.**



This guide is written and compiled by GRNA Education Director James Dake. It features several new and expanded sections and a new Foreword by Executive Director Jenn Wright.

Cost is \$18.87 plus tax

Order online by clicking on this box or available at the Grass River Center Gift Shop



**This beautiful and
informative book
is available online and in the
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nature enthusiasts.**

**Artistic illustrations and photographs
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CONSIDER A DONATION

Our financial well being is dependent on programming dollars and donations, and with the former sidelined for the most part at the moment, donations are of paramount importance. Your generous support is always greatly appreciated, but in these difficult days, your willingness to help us continue our mission with a personal donation promotes you to Nature Warrior status at GRNA.

Grass River Natural Area is a nonprofit organization that has flourished for fifty-one years because of the generous support of people who value our mission "to manage the Grass River Natural Area, conserve and protect its watershed, and provide opportunities that increase knowledge, appreciation and community-wide stewardship of the natural environment".

If you believe in our mission and want to help us fulfill it for many years to come, please click on the Donate button below. Your support is greatly appreciated.

DONATE



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