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## ALWAYS EXPLORING AT GRNA

**Our volunteers pictured above are heading out to monitor a remote parcel at GRNA. When exploration starts with a paddle on the Grass River, it can't possibly be a bad job.**

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### SUMMER SKIES AND STAR WATCHING

by

Anne Drake, Naturalist at GRNA

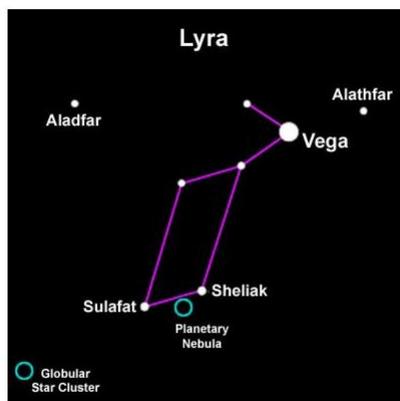


Way back in the 80s, I drove my kids around in a used Chevy Vega wagon. At the time, I had no idea that General Motors got the name Vega from the brightest star in the Summer Triangle. Back then, I was living in the city under bright streetlights. I wasn't in the habit of looking up at the stars.

And then. . . one night in June, everything changed. A summer trip in the aforementioned Vega took my family out to where skies were darker. Being summer, the Sun took forever to set. My young family was up late around the campfire. The sky was cloudless as the Moon appeared over the trees.

My young son looked up and said, “The Moon is broken, Mama.” “Broken? What are you talking about?”, I answered. Sure enough, when I looked up from the campfire, the Moon looked like it had a piece missing from it. “It’s a phase”, I said, finding this phenomenon hard to explain to a three-year-old. Then, his dad chimed in with a story of a big, hungry, hairy monster, roaming the night sky chomping off chunks of the Moon. Thanks Dad. Now the kid is terrified and won’t go to sleep in the tent. I tell my son that the monster only chomps moons (not children). And I assure him that somehow, someone would fix the Moon. . . pretty soon! Over the next few nights, we watched the Moon get bigger. (Good thing the Moon wasn’t waning or this could have been a real disaster).

On our next trip, looking straight up above us , we discovered Cygnus the Swan. With our fingers, we traced the stars that make up the swan’s long neck, and found the stars for the wings. At the short end of the swan, we picked out the star called Deneb. Deneb means “tail” in Arabic.



Isn’t that cool? I was hooked, and so was my son. Checking a star chart, we learned that there was a Summer Triangle made up of three bright stars in three different constellations. We had already found Deneb in Cygnus, so next we went looking for a star called Altair in the constellation Aquila. Aquila is supposed to be an eagle, but the eagle was harder to imagine than the previous swan. It was to the right of Deneb, a little more than the length of

an outstretched arm. Now, there was only one more star to find in the triangle. We couldn’t believe it. The star we were looking for was named “Vega”. Like our car! No way! It is the brightest star in the constellation Lyra . Lyra is supposed to look like a harp. (Ummmmm...maybe.) But we decided that what it really looked like was OUR CAR, the Chevy Vega wagon.

This time of year, most visitors to Grass River enjoy our trails when the Sun is still up! But imagine sitting on the dock in the wide expanse of Sedge Meadow, looking up into the glittering sky, and viewing the luminous arm of the Milky Way overhead. When you enter the world of Grass River at night, you hear the close sounds of geese and ducks out on Clam Lake. You catch the scent of balsam fir drifting through the air. As you scan the sky to the north, you may recognize the Big Dipper. To the east, you can find the Summer Triangle featuring the three bright stars Vega, Altair, and Deneb. There are countless “Night Sights” to explore. If you look to the south, there is a tea pot and a fish hook, and the Moon is magnificent! Don’t forget about the Moon! I could go on listing all the exciting things out there in the night sky, but I want you to discover them for yourself. Break out at night this summer, grab your whole family, and go sky watching. It is easier to find a dark sky location here in Northern Michigan.

*Night Sky Watching tips:*

1. Take a flashlight so you can see where you are going.
2. Cover your flashlight with red cellophane to preserve your night vision.
3. You may want to take along a blanket to lay on or a lawn chair that reclines to save your neck when you look up.
4. Binoculars are fun to use when looking at the Moon.
5. You may find a star chart or phone app useful.
6. Go to [www.earthsky.org](http://www.earthsky.org) for information on what’s going on up there on the night you go out. Look up the schedule of when the International Space Station (ISS) passes over your area.

*Use the Big Dipper to find and hop to other stars and constellations:*

*Find Polaris:*

1. By drawing a line through the two stars that make up the edge of the Big Dipper’s bowl and following that line to the next brightest star, you hop to Polaris (the North Star).

*Find Cassiopeia:*

2. Keep following along that same line you drew to find Polaris and you will come to a star pattern that looks like a lazy W. This is the constellation Cassiopeia.

*Find Arcturus:*

3. Follow the arc of the Big Dipper's handle down to the next big bright star. You have found the star Arcturus.

Exploring the summer sky is a fantastic adventure. Please take a little time this summer to get out and look up.

Lyra photo from Bright Hub

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## MEET OUR SUMMER INTERNS

We are so excited to have these two young people working with us this summer. Please stop and introduce yourself if you see them out on the trails or at the Grass River Center. This week they are getting acquainted with our first group of enthusiastic campers!



**Libby White** is a rising senior at the University of Miami in Florida. She is studying Ecosystem Science and Policy, Biology and Marine Science with hopes of one day working in the Conservation Biology field. Libby is from Columbus, OH but grew up coming to Northern Michigan in the summer. She is excited to be a part of the Grass River team this summer and hopes to learn everything she can about the area!



**Meagan Walters** is a returning college student working on making a career change to the conservation field. She attends NMC in the Freshwater Studies program. Meagan is originally from Traverse City and currently resides here with her two-year-old daughter and husband. "I love working at Grass River because I get to help people learn about all the reasons nature should be protected and cherished through hands-on experiences everyday!"

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## PROGRAMS ON THE HORIZON



### **Blooms & Birds Wildflower Walks**

**Weekly on Tuesdays at 10:00 am through September  
Free, but donations are appreciated**

Go for a relaxing stroll on the trails with GRNA docents Julie Hurd and Phil Jarvi each week to find and identify the beautiful and unique wildflowers at Grass River. Along the way we will listen and look for the birds that call Grass River

home.



### **Naturalist on the Trail**

**Fridays throughout the season, 10:00 am - 1:30 pm**

Every Friday this summer a naturalist will be stationed outdoors on our trail system offering a new mobile mini-program each week. Stop into the Grass River Center to find out where the naturalist is that day, or go find them on the trail! You can drop in any

time during the 3-hour window of the program. For all ages!

### **Kayak Grass River**

**Monday, June 28, 2021, 9:00 am - 11:30 am**



**\$45 per person - includes tour, kayak, PFD, and paddle for each participant**

There is no better way to experience Grass River than by paddling its calm waters and enjoying its unique wildlife! On these morning guided tours, visitors explore Grass River by kayak and find out about GRNA's conservation efforts, wetland plants, and wildlife. Adults only. Limited to small groups, must pre-register. Call GRNA to register: 231-350-9461, or email [james@grassriver.org](mailto:james@grassriver.org). This program meets at the Grass River Center and then walks to the dock to launch kayaks. Kayaks and paddles are provided and ready for you at the dock.



**Art on Thursdays  
Winged Creatures in Watercolor  
Thursday, July 1, 2021, 1:00 pm - 3:00 pm**

**\$10 per person, materials supplied**

*On select Thursdays this summer, join a naturalist for a reoccurring art program outdoors! We will explore painting, sketching, journaling, clay, and more!*

What has wings? Lots of things. Birds, bees, butterflies and bats. In this class we will illustrate the colorful flying creatures of GRNA. For adults and children 10 years and up. Materials supplied. Limited space. [Please pre-register.](#)

Another art program is taking place on July 15. The specific activity has not been announced. Check [www.grassriver.org](http://www.grassriver.org) for more information in the coming weeks.



**Evening River Paddle  
Thursday, July 1, 2021, 7:00 pm - 8:30 pm  
\$35 per person - includes tour, kayak, PFD, and paddle for each participant**

There is no better way to enjoy evening than on the Grass River, paddling its calm waters and enjoying its unique wildlife! On these guided tours, visitors explore Grass River by kayak (provided) with a naturalist and find out about GRNA's conservation efforts, wetland plants, and wildlife while enjoying the evening. Adults Only. Limited to small groups, must pre-register. Call GRNA to register: 231-350-9461, or email [james@grassriver.org](mailto:james@grassriver.org). This program meets at the Grass River Center and then walks to the dock to launch kayaks. Kayaks and paddles are provided and ready for you at the dock.

**Antrim Creek Hike**

**Saturdays, July 10 and 24, 10:00 am – 12:00 pm**



**Free**

On Select Saturdays this summer, join a Grass River naturalist at the Antrim Creek Natural Area South Entrance for an outdoor nature program and hike. Free to all ages!

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**NEW LOGO WEAR**

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

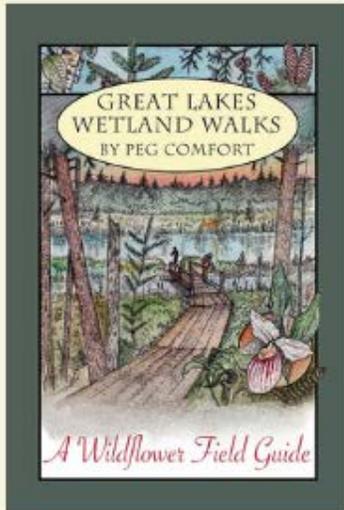
**The 2nd Edition of  
Grass River Natural Area's  
FIELD GUIDE  
to Northwest Michigan  
is now available.**



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

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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.

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