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## AUTUMNFEST 2021



On Saturday, October 16th we welcomed over 100 people to Grass River Natural Area to celebrate autumn. Family members decorated bags to take out on the Trick or Treat Trail. They painted pumpkins; tested their skills pounding golf tees into pumpkins; built fairy houses; and enjoyed donut holes, s'mores, and cider. Then they were led out by a bumblebee to visit our naturalists dressed up as GRNA animals on the trail. The wolf and the raven talked about how they work together to find prey. Our furry skunk greeted them as they rounded the first turn on the trail and shared treats, not scent. Our otter came out of hiding to share some treats. And our toad took them through the Toad Zone where they learned about kinds of toads, warts and protective poison, and how toads roll their tongues out to catch insects. It was a beautiful day with much laughter and fun as well as education.

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## WELCOME BACK, LIAM

## MEET OUR NEW NATURALIST



Hello everyone, my name is Liam Fries and it is with great pride and pleasure that I return to accept a position as Grass River's newest Naturalist. Those of you that visited our center in the summer of 2019 might remember me as one of the Grass River interns that co-ran our summer camps. It really feels extraordinary to return to such a beautiful and wild place that is Grass River.

A little bit about myself and who I am: I was born and raised in Clarkston, Michigan, a little town in southeast Michigan. When I was a kid, I would spend the summer months up in our

family's tiny cottage in the UP near the Les Cheneaux Islands. The cottage was on Lake Huron and the sun, wind, and waves there aided in my falling in love with the natural beauty that is uniquely native to Michigan. I have very fond memories of catching crawfish in the shallow rock pools of the coastline. I wasn't alone, however, in my fondness for finding crawfish; mink families that lived near shore made crawfish a staple food in their diet. Minks, being the curious critters that they are, would often approach me, only to scurry away and hide behind large rocks, occasionally peeking their heads out to see if I was following them. The minks seemed to know that I was clumsy and slow on the rocky, uneven terrain in



comparison, and thus posed no real threat to them. I remember spending entire afternoons playing hide and seek with the mink families; even the young kits would want to come out and play.

Over a decade later, those childhood experiences in nature propelled my interest in biology and environmental science in college. I began attending Kalamazoo College in the fall of 2016, and from that point onwards my passion for the great outdoors only flourished. One of the classes in my first fall semester at Kalamazoo had a weekly field trip out to an area called the Lillian Anderson Arboretum. Originally an old plot of farmland, Lillian Anderson donated approximately 100 acres of her family's farm to the College in 1982. The Arboretum restored the land to its natural and wild form. I soon found myself jumping at any opportunity to return to this wondrous place.



I volunteered at the Arboretum's invasive species removal projects, where we would cut and remove Bittersweet, Garlic Mustard, and Autumn Olive. I enrolled in an entomology class, not originally for my fondness of bugs, but rather because I knew the school collected insect samples at the Arboretum. On particularly stressful nights before finals week, I found myself walking the trails at the Arboretum, like the Magnificent Pines Trail pictured here. Only out there could I feel my mind focus and calm. The more time I spent in the Arboretum, the more I fell in love with its rich and diverse landscape.

A couple of years later, when the time came to work on my senior thesis, I became aware of the programs and resources at Grass River Natural Area. Not long after, I found myself working as one of Grass River's summer interns in 2019. I met James Dake and Jenn Wright, the Education and Executive Directors of GRNA respectively, as well as the wonderful team of naturalists that lead many of Grass River's programs.



Between wildflower walks and kayak tours, I was given a crash course by James in the local habitats of Grass River as well as plants and animals that dwell there. Throughout the season, my duties and tasks changed with the months. One of the most prominent of these was co-running summer camps routinely held at the Center. Planning lessons for children ranging in ages from 6-11 presented its unique host of challenges; however, it was ultimately one of the most fulfilling aspects of working at Grass River. The picture at left shows campers after a successful day learning about and removing invasive Spotted Knapweed. At the end of every camp, without fail, parents would come up to me and tell me how much their child loved their first otter sighting or their satisfaction in releasing a newly hatched monarch butterfly.



Once August rolled in and the summer camps began winding down, I began northern fen research with James. Originally, the main purpose of this research was to attempt to find the elusive Massasauga Rattlesnake. However, once we spent a significant amount of time out in the fen, we realized that there was much more than just the illusive Massasauga to keep us busy. There were rare orchid species dotting every part of the fen; many forms of carnivorous plants like pitcher plant and sundew

thrived there; and herons, wood ducks, and loons flew overhead almost every day. Ultimately, the research we conducted out in the fens of Grass River was consolidated, refined, and published as my senior thesis.

So, what have I been up to since the summer of 2019? Well for starters, I graduated from Kalamazoo College in June of 2020. After that, I moved back to Clarkston and lived with my parents for a while. I spent the winter of 2020 working at the Hodgson Tree Farm, a local Christmas tree farm in Clarkston that I worked at with family and friends for the past 8 years. I was able to become involved with the DNR during this spring and summer of 2021 at Island Lake Recreation Area, where I became quite familiar with the day-to-day activities of a state park. While the job was stressful at times, especially on busy summer holidays, I learned a lot through hands-on experience and met a host of really cool people that serve our public lands. Outside of work, I love to mountain bike, hike, toss around frisbees with family and friends, sail, kayak, and perhaps most importantly, look for salamanders and minks.

And now I am back at Grass River! Hooray! There is something about this place that feels ethereal, almost like time passes differently up here. The crisp autumn air and the changing hues of the leaves are beauty that I was not able to enjoy for the two years prior. Despite the fall season, Grass River shows no sign of slowing down! There are so many programs happening each week. I am most excited to be a part of Owl Prowls that started last week and run throughout the fall season and the Grass River Wild Turkey Trot 5k happening Nov 13. It's good to be a part of the Grass River family again, and I hope I see you soon!

As you can see, Liam's interest in and passion for nature and Grass River Natural Area is boundless! Please stop out and meet him soon! His excitement is contagious!

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## **PROGRAMS ON THE HORIZON**

**Owl Prowls**

**Friday, October 22**

**Friday, October 29**

**Saturday, November 6**

**7:00 pm - 8:30 pm**



**\$10 per person, must pre-register**

Join us as we learn about our local owls and their conservation with an introductory presentation, and then head out for a night hike in search of these amazing birds.

Participants should be comfortable walking outdoors at night for about 1 mile on uneven trails. Bring a light. This is limited to small groups, so you must pre-register. **There will be no walk-in spaces available.** [Register at](#)

[www.grassriver.org/classes-and-programs.html](http://www.grassriver.org/classes-and-programs.html) or by clicking

[here.](#)



**Meet the Trees of Grass River**

**Sunday, October 24**

**1:00 pm - 3:00 pm**

**\$10 per person, pre-registration is encouraged**

Did you know that the buds for next year's leaves have already started to form? Those buds are unique to each tree species! Using Grass River's tree ID photographic guides, we will look at buds and fallen

leaves as we stroll along the boardwalk trail. Let's spend the afternoon meeting a few of Grass River's trees. We are sure to run into a few evergreens along the way too! [Register at www.grassriver.org/classes-and-programs.html](#) or by [clicking here.](#)



**Watercolor Class - Swirls and Silhouettes**

**Saturday, October 30**

**1:00 pm - 3:00 pm**

**\$10 per person, please preregister**

Using the swirls and colors of the sky, clouds, and water, instructor Arlene Westhoven will teach participants to create a colorful background using watercolors and other optional mediums. Then we

will superimpose dark silhouettes to create a dramatic autumn portrait. All ages and skill levels are welcome. All supplies provided. **Please preregister.** [Register at](#) [www.grassriver.org/classes-and-programs.html](http://www.grassriver.org/classes-and-programs.html) or by [clicking here.](#)

**Wild Turkey Trot 5K**

**Saturday, November 13**

**11:00 am**

**\$25 to \$39 for Turkey Trot shirt or sweatshirt - all ages welcome**

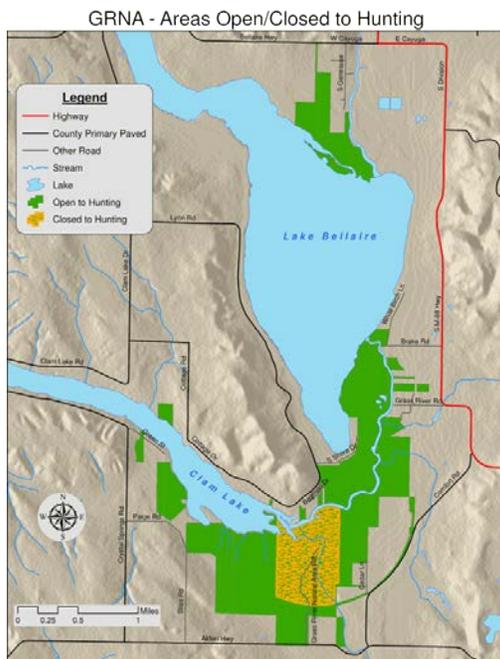


Celebrate autumn with a wild turkey trot 5k on the trails at Grass River Natural Area. Run or walk the designated course on race day with other participants or run your own 5k at your own convenience and submit your time later. To register for the race, simply purchase the Wild Turkey Trot T-shirt or Sweatshirt at: [www.bonfire.com/wild-turkey-trot-5k/](http://www.bonfire.com/wild-turkey-trot-5k/) The shirt will be mailed directly to you. All

proceeds go to support the educational programming at Grass River.

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**REMINDER**  
**HUNTING SEASON IS HERE**  
**TAKE CARE AND PLEASE OBSERVE THE RULES**



Many people enjoy hunting in the undisturbed areas in the Grass River Natural Area, and we welcome hunters as long as they observe the regulations set out by Antrim County.

**Antrim County Ordinance Section 13, #1 of 1988 allows hunting on Grass River Natural Area property outside of the “Education Zone” during appropriate hunting seasons.**

The Education Zone is shown in yellow on the map. An enlarged version can be viewed by [clicking here](#).

Please be considerate of the boundaries, as we educate the public in the Education Zone year-round. If these guidelines are not followed, hunting poses a risk to the public and our staff.

Also, please take care to stay off neighboring properties and observe a safe distance from permanent structures along GRNA's boundary.

If you are hiking at GRNA this fall, we ask that you consider wearing hunter orange, even when walking in the Education Zone, to make yourself highly visible.

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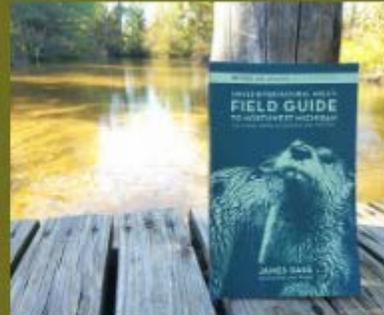
## GET READY FOR COLD TEMPERATURES

Purchase a shirt or hat 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.

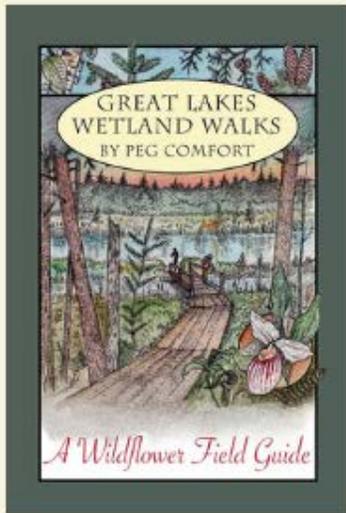
**The 2nd Edition of  
Grass River Natural Area's  
FIELD GUIDE  
to Northwest Michigan  
is now available.**



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  
Grass River Center Gift Shop.

It is perfect for hikers, gardeners, and  
nature enthusiasts.  
Artistic illustrations and photographs  
add to the book's appeal.

[Click here to order](#)

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Grass River Natural Area is a nonprofit organization that has flourished for fifty-two 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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