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A DAY IN THE LIFE

Tuesday, September 21, 2021

You never know what a day may bring in the life of the Grass River Natural Area staff. At 10:00 am the staff went on our monthly staff hike at Coy Mountain Preserve in Alden. Staff members take turns choosing a location that they either like to hike other than GRNA or somewhere they have never been and would like to visit. Amidst the drizzle (l. to r. above) Betsy, James, Emily, Franny, and Sheila with Jenn taking the selfie) walked this beautiful wooded location with a panoramic view of Torch Lake at the top of the climb.

At 5:30 that same night Jenn, Emily, and Betsy attended the Impact 100 Traverse City Annual Meeting at Blue Bridge Event Center in Grawn. As we told you in last month's In Otter News, GRNA was chosen as one of the five finalists in this year's grant award cycle. On Tuesday night, Jenn presented a ten-minute speech telling the philanthropic women, present and on Zoom, about our hopes to rebuild a portion of the boardwalk from the cabin to the river. After hearing from all five finalists, the Impact 100 members voted to award three $110,000 grants, and we are incredibly happy to announce that Grass River Natural Area was one of the recipients.

While our staff doesn't often go from hiking shoes to cocktail attire in one day, it was

certainly a day we will all remember for years to come. And knowing Jenn, the time outdoors was the perfect way to prepare her for the evening's event.

FULFILLING OUR MISSION TO PROTECT THE GRASS RIVER

GRNA's Conservation and Education Specialist, Emily Burke, was able to identify invasive New Zealand mudsnails found while sampling Shanty Creek with volunteers in the spring of 2021. While this is not what we want to find in the natural area, the biannual stream monitoring we conduct in our three streams that feed into the Grass River takes place to ensure the streams and subsequently, the river, remain healthy. If the mudsnails had gone undetected, they could have severely degraded the habitat over time.

The following article is an excerpt from a press release recently sent out by the Department of Natural Resources as a result of Grass River Natural Area's stream monitoring team's discovery.

"Anglers urged to step up prevention efforts during salmon season

Invasive New Zealand mudsnails have been detected at the mouth of Shanty Creek, a tributary of the Grass River in Antrim County. The snails were found during routine monitoring in May by the Grass River Natural Area Stream Watch project and confirmed through DNA analysis by Oakland University in August.

New Zealand mudsnails were first discovered in the United States in Idaho’s Snake River in 1987. Since then, the snails have spread throughout the western states and into areas of the Great Lakes by attaching themselves to boats, waders, and equipment.

The Grass River is now the sixth river system in Michigan known to be infested by the mudsnails. Their discovery in the Pere Marquette River in August 2015 signaled the first detection in a Michigan inland waterway. In 2016, populations were confirmed in the Boardman and Au Sable rivers. By 2017, the invasive snails were found in the Upper Manistee and Pine rivers.

'Anglers and boaters need to be especially vigilant in cleaning and disinfecting waders, boats, and any equipment that has been in the water before visiting a new location,' said Emily Bovee, a master's student with Oakland University's Aquatic Ecology Lab studying New Zealand mudsnails. "These snails are small and can attach themselves to boot soles, nets, or boat hulls, and can be hidden in mud or debris. They can survive out of water for up to two weeks.'

Michigan's salmon season, which peaks in September and October, draws thousands of anglers to Michigan's premier rivers.

'This is a time when people are likely to visit multiple rivers and streams over a few days,' said Lucas Nathan, Michigan Department of Natural Resources aquatic invasive species coordinator. 'If they are not cleaning equipment thoroughly each time, there is a potential to introduce New Zealand mudsnails into new waters.'

What harm can a snail do?

This brown to black, one-eighth-inch long mudsnail, a native of New Zealand, is considered invasive and is prohibited in Michigan due to the environmental harm it can cause to rivers, streams, and lakes. Because the snail reproduces by cloning (females develop complete embryos without fertilization), a single snail can start an entire population.

One snail can produce over 200 young in a year. Since few natural predators or parasites of this species exist in North America, their numbers grow rapidly each year. In some locations in western states, researchers have documented snails reaching densities of 300,000 per square meter. With that many mudsnails, food for other stream invertebrate populations can become scarce.

Fish that feed on native invertebrates like mayflies and caddisflies may find it more

difficult to forage in rivers invaded by New Zealand mudsnails. Fish will consume New Zealand mudsnails, but due to the snail's thick shell and a tightly closing "hatch" called the operculum, they offer the fish little nutritional value, are difficult for fish to digest, and can be excreted alive. Substituting mudsnails for native food sources can reduce the growth, condition, and ultimately the abundance of key sport fish including trout.

What is being done?

Since the initial detection, the DNR and Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy have incorporated mudsnail monitoring into their standard sampling procedures, increasing the potential for early detection in several rivers and streams each year.

Volunteers across the state, like those with the Grass River Natural Area Stream Watch, conduct regular monitoring of streams and rivers through the Michigan Clean Water Corps, or MiCorps, to determine stream health and look for invasive species. Other partners, including universities and cooperative invasive species management areas, also engage in annual monitoring.

'The Michigan Invasive Species Grant Program has been instrumental in fostering the development of CISMAs across the state, creating a network of local invasive species resources,' Nathan said. 'At the same time, the grant program supports research efforts like Oakland University's New Zealand mudsnail project, which has raised awareness among anglers, trained citizen scientists, and developed an important partnership with Trout Unlimited, which helped to initiate the NZMS Collaborative.'

Following (Emily) Burke's report, a team from Oakland University conducted monitoring on 15 sites in the Grass and Elk rivers but found no additional infestations. Local and state partners will continue to monitor the area and use outreach opportunities like Aquatic Invasive Species Awareness Week to educate the public about preventing the spread of New Zealand mudsnails and other harmful species.

What can you do?

The most important means of prevention is practicing good recreational hygiene. After a visit to one of Michigan's lakes, rivers, or streams; be sure to clean, drain, and dry your boat, trailer, and equipment before heading to a new destination.

The New Zealand mudsnail's small size requires careful examination and cleaning of places where plants, mud, or debris can be found on poles, nets, waders, boots, buckets, kayaks, canoes, and flotation devices. Anything that has been in the water or at the water's edge should be inspected before it is packed or loaded.

The NZMS Collaborative offers these simple steps for cleaning boots and waders:

- Stomp and inspect as soon as you leave the water to remove attached debris.
- Brush waders, soles, and laces to loosen remaining debris and mud.
- Spray boots and waders thoroughly with a disinfecting agent.
- Rinse after 20 minutes.
- Dry waders thoroughly before next use.

Additional information on New Zealand mudsnail, including how to report a suspected discovery of the snail, can be found at Michigan.gov/Invasives.

Michigan's Invasive Species Program is cooperatively implemented by the Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy, the Department of Natural Resources, and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development."

At this time, there is no known way to eradicate the mudsnail population, which makes monitoring and management of the area, even more imperative. According to Emily, "Additional steps that are being taken by GRNA, Inc. to reduce the potential for New Zealand mudsnail spread include partnering with the DNR to install signage at key access points to Shanty Creek and Grass River, incorporating New Zealand mudsnail surveys into routine stream monitoring, implementing strict decontamination protocols for all aquatic equipment, and communicating with partner organizations and local media outlets to increase the public's awareness of this new threat." Shanty Creek will be monitored again this weekend and time will be spent investigating the site where the mudsnails were initially discovered to determine if the infestation has spread.

AUTUMNFEST IS BACK

Saturday, October 16, 11:00 am - 2:00 pm

Autumnfest is GRNA's annual family-friendly celebration of all things fall. Come join us for fall-themed crafts inside the Grass River Center. Outside you can participate in fairy house building, play outdoor games including pumpkin pounding, make s'mores, enjoy other refreshments, and take a walk on our popular Trick-or-Treat trail. We hear there may even be an appearance by the Grass River Otter herself, along with several of her woodland friends! This is a free event for all, and we invite you to come and stay as long as you like.

The Grass River Center is ten years old in October, so we have lots to celebrate at this Autumnfest.

PROGRAMS ON THE HORIZON

NMC Programs at GRNA in October

Fall Mushroom Foray at Grass River Thursday, September 30
1:00 pm – 4:00 pm (Face to Face)
$49 per person

Tour the woods and fields with naturalists at Grass River Natural Area to freshen up your

mushroom identification skills. On the trek, you will seek, find, and identify fun fall fungi. In the process, learn about the life cycles, habitats, and features of these organisms. This course qualifies toward the Naturalist Certificate. Register online through NMC Extended Education at https://www.nmc.edu/resources/extended-education/find-a-class/adult-classes/index.html.

Owls of Northern Michigan
Thursday, October 14
7:00 pm - 9:00 pm (Face to Face)
$39 per person

Owls are fascinating birds. What is it about the elusive owl that sparks an air of mystery and intrigue? Join Grass River staff as we learn about local owls, their biology, identification, calls, and habits. Learn times and places to go searching for owls during day and night, and strategies to increase your success in finding them. Then, we 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 course qualifies toward the Naturalist Certificate. Register through NMC Extended Education at: https://www.nmc.edu/resources/extended-education/find-a-class/adult-classes/index.html

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Grass River Natural Area Programs

Fall Stewardship Day
Saturday, October 2
9:00 am - 12:00 pm

Summer is ushering in autumn, which means cooler weather and some good ol' fall season work! Come on out and join the many stewardship activities as we prepare the buildings, trails, and grounds for winter. No experience is necessary; just a pair of work gloves and an open spirit. Pre-registration is encouraged.

Email Brian at stewardship@grassriver.org

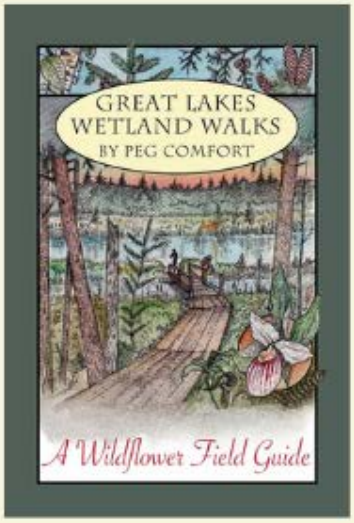
Owl Prowls
Fridays, October 15 and October 22
7:00pm - 8:30 pm
$10 per person, must pre-register

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.**

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

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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