

- DNR NEWS -

July 18, 2018

Contact: [Kerry Wieber](#), 517-643-1256

Celebrate forest conservation and public access at Pilgrim River event Tuesday



The brook trout-filled Pilgrim River in the heart of Houghton County, Michigan, winds through acres of prime forestland, unique land formations, recreational trails and habitat for an array of wildlife including deer, black bear, mink, otter, bald eagles, raptors and song birds.

Thanks to a recently completed project that partnered the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, the Keweenaw Land Trust and the community in acquiring a conservation easement on

nearly 1,300 acres of this forestland, 3.5 miles of the Pilgrim River corridor is protected for the enjoyment of current and future generations.

A celebration of this accomplishment is planned at 11 a.m. Tuesday, July 24.

The event will take place on a bluff overlooking the Pilgrim River on what is known as the Heritage Tract, located on Boundary Road south of Houghton. Speakers at the ceremony include DNR Director Keith Creagh, Keweenaw Land Trust Executive Director Evan McDonald, U.S. Forest Service representative Neal Bungard, and the landowners who had the foresight to protect their important forestland through this project. A ceremonial deed signing and guided hike through the property will follow the ceremony.

The completion of the Pilgrim River Forest project is due to a years-long, widespread community effort to raise money and support for the protection of the land through the U.S. Forest Service's Forest Legacy Program.

This program ensures that the important forest on this property will be managed sustainably in perpetuity and allows for public recreational use of the land, said Deb Begalle, Michigan's state forester and chief of the DNR Forest Resources Division.

Joe and Mary Hovel, who became interested in protecting and managing quality forests after a career building log homes in Wisconsin, purchased the land that comprises the Pilgrim River Forest after completing a Forest Legacy project in their home state of Wisconsin in 2009.

There were other properties we looked at that would have fit the bill, but the Pilgrim River Forest property had a special appeal, Joe Hovel said. Part of that was the community support, including the efforts of the Keweenaw Land Trust and the Copper Country Chapter of Trout Unlimited.

Hovel said one of the things he likes about the project is that, besides the environmental benefits, there are economic and social benefits for the community, with opportunities for tourists and locals alike.

People don't drive to the Upper Peninsula to see stumps and blacktop, he said. They come here to see the forests and the rivers and the lakes. The social benefits might be as simple as the Pilgrim River Forest maintaining a place for somebody in the neighborhood to take their kids for a hike or to go hunting.

And that's not all, he said.

The fourth benefit to the public, and it's maybe the most obvious and yet the least understood, is the intrinsic benefit, Hovel said. There are things about protecting these forest lands that we might not even have a clue about yet. For example, he points to the Canada yew which grows in the forest understory. It contains ingredients that can be used to make anti-cancer drugs.

The health of this watershed is important for the health of the larger ecosystem, McDonald said. Protection of the surrounding forestland will inherently protect the quality of the Pilgrim River.

Additional public benefits include access for a variety of recreational opportunities such as hunting, fishing, hiking, bird watching, mountain biking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and wildlife viewing.

The conservation easements were purchased using money from a \$550,000 grant to the DNR through the U.S. Forest Service's Forest Legacy Program, a \$170,000 donation to the DNR from the Pilgrim River Watershed Project, and the donation of a conservation easement to Keweenaw Land Trust on 192 acres of the project area by a private landowner. The DNR holds the conservation easements on the remaining 1,103 acres of the project.

Michigan has more than 150,000 acres of land protected through the Forest Legacy Program. To learn more about it, contact DNR forest land administrator [Kerry Wieber](#) at 517-643-1256, or visit www.michigan.gov/privateforestland.

Directions to the ceremony

From Houghton, take M-26 south. Turn left onto Green Acres Road and follow that until it continues on to Superior Road. After traveling 2.5 miles on Superior Road, turn left onto Boundary Road. Parking is about a half-mile down on the left.

From Baraga, take US-41 north. Just north of Chassell, turn left onto Massie Road and travel 1.5 miles. Turn right onto Paradise Road and travel 1 mile. Turn left onto Boundary Road. Parking is approximately 1.5 miles down on the right.

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources is committed to the conservation, protection, management, use and enjoyment of the state's natural and cultural resources for current and future generations. For more information, go to www.michigan.gov/dnr.