



# Currents

## **An Au Sable Landowner Continues a Family Legacy of Conservation**

**P**icture a beautiful, crisp fall morning in northern Michigan. You have just hung up your waders and the sun is sparkling in the water still clinging to them. Your favorite mug is filled with fresh coffee and you settle in at the kitchen table to watch the majestic Au Sable River flow by your front window. Sounds pretty special, right? That is what nearly every morning has been like for Gary Neumann since the mid 1980s. Thinking of the view of the river from the front room of his lodge nestled on the banks of the North Branch of the Au Sable he says, "It's a nice way to start the day." This may seem like an understatement, but when you talk to Mr. Neumann about his property you quickly understand that he has a very deep appreciation for where he lives, and the watershed and community that it is a part of.

Consisting of 23 acres and including approximately 1000 feet of frontage on the North Branch of the Au Sable River, it is easy to understand that protecting the Neumann property forever, has larger implications for the health of the Au Sable River watershed. The Au Sable River flows for approximately 100 miles, spanning 6 counties and is the largest tributary to Lake Huron. It is known the world over for its cold, clear water, and healthy brook and brown trout populations. When asked about the importance of Mr. Neumann's donation of a conservation easement on his riverfront property, Director of Land Protection, John Frye says, "with the placement of a conservation easement on the Neumann property, it not only protects almost 1000 feet of frontage from development along

the North Branch, but provided Gary a unique opportunity to follow in his father's footsteps of river preservation and trout habitat improvement."

Born and raised in Saginaw, Michigan, Gary and his family often traveled north to the Grayling area to escape the city and cast flies quietly over the Au Sable's waters. For Gary, his love of fly fishing and respect for Michigan's rivers came naturally. His father, Art Neumann opened what would eventually be known as Wanigas Rod Company (that's Saginaw spelled backwards!) in his backyard, after returning home from military service during World War II. Art had an acute awareness and understanding of the need for resource conservation, and the shop became a meeting place for serious fisherman, passionate about the outdoors and protecting the resource that provided them so much enjoyment. Gary and his childhood friends took full advantage of this golden opportunity and learned everything they could about fly tying, fly fishing, and the need to respect the resource you are using so that it continues to thrive for future generations.

Gary's father was so passionate about this last lesson that in July of 1959 he, along with 15 other conservationists, founded Trout Unlimited at the Grayling home of George Griffith. Since that day, Trout Unlimited has grown to become a powerful advocate for the protection, conservation, and restoration of coldwater fisheries and their watersheds, with the vision that future generations be ensured a thriving population of native and wild coldwater fish throughout their North American range. From that first meeting, the organization has grown to include 400 chapters across the United States and celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary this past

## **IN THIS ISSUE**

An Au Sable Landowner Continues a Family Legacy of Conservation ..... 1  
 Outreach Events ..... 3  
 New Volunteer Opportunity Coming to Headwaters Land Conservancy ..... 4

Roger Rasmussen ..... 5  
 2009 Land Protection and Stewardship Update ..... 6  
 Headwaters Donor List ..... 7

July. Art Neumann's involvement in the creation of Trout Unlimited continued a tradition of conservation passed down to him by his father, and most certainly helped set the stage for his son's life on the river.

Maybe it was fate then, that Mr. Neumann would end up buying a piece of property that originally belonged to William B. Mershon, a prominent lumber baron from Saginaw in the late 1800s, but also one of the region's first voices for conservation. Mershon, like Gary's father, also lives on through Trout Unlimited. The William B. Mershon Chapter of Trout Unlimited is located in the Saginaw area, and participates in restoration projects on the Au Sable River each year. Part of Gary's cabin is the original maid's quarters remaining from William B. Mershon's residence known as High Bank Lodge. Both Neumann and the Lovells Historical Society have pictures showing Mershon enjoying his property and depicting how the landscape has changed



since his ownership. Today, Gary can point to stands of mature red and white pine surrounding his cabin that were planted by Mershon himself, after the area was extensively clear cut nearly a century ago.

It was the combination of history, watershed protection, and desire to keep the property in his family that led Mr. Neumann to approach the Conservancy about placing his property in a conservation easement in September of 2009. After speaking with HeadWater's Board Member Bill Duncanson, also a conservation easement donor, Neumann recognized that by placing a conservation easement on his property this important piece of the Au Sable River watershed and his special memories of time spent there would be protected forever. "Time marches on," says Neumann, "and anyone contemplating the idea that they want their property to stay as it is now, doesn't have many options other than a conservation easement."

The State of Michigan has also recognized a need for private land preservation. In 2006 legislature passed Public Act 446, which eliminates the "pop-up" tax on the transfer of land enrolled in a permanent conservation easement. Any land enrolled in a conservation easement will not have its taxable value increased to the State Equalized Value when ownership changes. Too often it is the increased property taxes that make the difference between heirs being able to keep land in the family or having to divide and sell it in order to pay the increased property taxes. For Neumann, this was an added incentive for completing his conservation easement. His daughter, who will eventually own the land, wants her children and their children to experience the beauty of the Au Sable and the history that exists in the Lovells area. "She remembers it this way," he says, and it's important to him that the next generation of the Neumann family has a place to learn an appreciation for the outdoors just as he did.

Mr. Neumann's experience is an excellent example of how HeadWaters and private landowners are working together to protect significant pieces of history, the environment, and family tradition. Of his experience Neumann says, "The HeadWaters staff was prompt and professional. I understood the [monetary] costs [to me] and was able to look through the easement drafts closely." With the signing of his conservation easement in December, Mr. Neumann now has the peace of mind that his property will be protected in perpetuity and will remain an important piece of his family and community's history. "I feel very fortunate day to day, to live where I live," he says.

William B. Mershon examining the young white pine he planted on his Au Sable property, now owned by Gary Neumann.

## Outreach Event Descriptions

If you are interested in participation in any of these events, please RSVP by calling 989-731-0573 or e-mailing us at [land@headwatersconservancy.org](mailto:land@headwatersconservancy.org)

### Saturday March 6<sup>th</sup> 10:00am to 12:30pm - Snowshoe hike through Pigeon River Country

Local naturalist and Pigeon River State Forest historian, Joe Jarecki, will lead us on a snowshoe hike through beautiful Pigeon River country to experience one of the Conservancy's newest conservation successes! As we hike along a cedar swamp to overlook the beautiful Pigeon River, we'll learn about the history and significance of the Pigeon River State Forest to our area and about how HeadWaters Land Conservancy is partnering with local landowners to help protect it forever. After the hike we'll continue to enjoy the beautiful winter surroundings while warming ourselves with cups of hot cider around an outdoor bonfire! Snow will be deep in Pigeon River country this time of year so snowshoes will be necessary to participate in this event.

There are places in the area to rent snowshoes. The contact information for some of these merchants is listed below.

**The Cross Country Ski Shop**, Grayling – 1.800.889.7456  
[www.xcskishop.com](http://www.xcskishop.com)

**The Alhorn Sport Shop**, Gaylord – 989.732.5616

**Big Bear Adventures**, Indian River – 231.238.8181  
[www.bigbearadventures.com](http://www.bigbearadventures.com)

**The Cross Country Ski Headquarters**, Higgins Lake – 989.821.5868 [www.cross-country-ski.com](http://www.cross-country-ski.com)

### Saturday May 1st -Tree Planting Event to Celebrate Join Hands Day

Come help HeadWaters Land Conservancy celebrate "Join Hands Day" a national day of service designed to connect youths and adults to help make a difference in their community! We will be planting hundreds of trees in an effort to strengthen our environment and beautify our community. Planting trees is rewarding but requires some effort! Please bring a good pair of work gloves, sturdy footwear, and comfortable clothing that you don't mind getting dirty. So young and old unite and help us celebrate a tradition of volunteer service that is 150 years old! To find out more about Join Hands Day please visit their website [www.joinhandsday.org](http://www.joinhandsday.org).

### Saturday July 31st, 2010 - It's a Geocaching Adventure!

Do you often find yourself day dreaming about hunting for treasure in wild and beautiful places? Do you enjoy the thrill of stepping into the wilderness with only a compass and your trusty GPS unit to guide you? If you do, then you might be a geocacher and not even know it! Geocaching is an exciting activity that is quickly becoming a worldwide phenomenon, and is uniting people of all ages, with a deep sense of appreciation for the environment and a strong

commitment to community. Come join HeadWaters Land Conservancy as we go on our own geocaching adventure at the Marguerite Gahagan Nature Preserve in Roscommon, MI! We'll head out on an exciting adventure through forests, along rivers, and through fields learning valuable navigation and orientation skills while at the same time increasing our appreciation for the beautiful lands of northern Michigan. Compass and GPS equipment will be provided for this event, however if you have your own we ask that you please bring it along. This event will include trekking through the woods so sturdy shoes and comfortable clothes are a must. All great treasure hunters bring a hat for protection from the sun, sunscreen, bug spray, and water so we ask that you do the same!

### Saturday September 11th, 2010 - Enjoy Fall in Northern Michigan!

Join HeadWaters Land Conservancy as we celebrate the gorgeous colors and crisp, refreshing temperatures of fall while touring a special conservation easement property. This is an opportunity to view the changing colors, observe birds as they start their fall migration south, and learn about how HeadWaters Land Conservancy is working to protect the scenic lands of northern Michigan so we always have a place to enjoy the bounties of nature. Fall in northern Michigan can bring cooler temperatures, so please dress appropriately. We will be doing some walking so sturdy shoes are a must and we suggest you pack some water and a snack to stay energized.

For updated information on the Conservancy's 2010 Outreach Events please check the "News" section of our website [land@headwatersconservancy.org](mailto:land@headwatersconservancy.org) Information regarding locations, times, and items you may need to bring will be posted here as we get closer to event dates. Thank you so much for your interest in the conservation work HeadWaters Land Conservancy is doing!



Pigeon River

## New Volunteer Opportunity Coming to HeadWaters Land Conservancy

**D**o you have an interest in the environment and environmental conservation? Are you someone who would like to become more involved in your community but can't find the right volunteer opportunity? HeadWaters Land Conservancy is working hard to develop a brand new volunteer program that will allow you to spend time outdoors enjoying all of the beauty that northern Michigan has to offer while ensuring that those scenic places are protected forever.

The Conservancy's Land Protection duties are growing with every passing year and with the donation of five new conservation easements in 2009, HeadWaters is now responsible for 73 easement properties totaling 8226 acres and 27.08 miles of waterfront. Conservation Easements are an important tool in protecting the natural places in northern Michigan but with each one, the Conservancy inherits the responsibility to uphold the conservation values unique to each easement property. Looking ahead to the 2010 monitoring season, visits will have to be conducted on 73 properties located throughout the Conservancy's 11 county service area, and all within the confines of northern Michigan's short field season. Currently HeadWaters has a small and dedicated group of volunteers and staff working hard to visit each property and conduct annual monitoring visits, but more are needed!

The Conservancy is calling on interested, dedicated people who are passionate about the environment and protecting northern Michigan's scenic areas to join our group! Huron Pines AmeriCorps Member, Abigail Ertel, is working with Director of Land Protection, John Frye to develop a brand new volunteer opportunity called the Volunteer Monitoring Program. This opportunity will provide volunteers the chance to personally experience some of area's most remarkable lands while sharpening orienteering, navigation, and native plant and animal identification skills.

Interested volunteers are asked to attend a one day (approximately 6 hour) orientation session set for June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2010 at the HeadWaters office. This training day will consist of a morning educational session covering the Conservancy's monitoring policies and procedures, and an afternoon field trip to an easement property to learn the steps necessary for successfully completing a monitoring visit. Experience using a handheld GPS unit, a compass, and aerial photographs is beneficial. Once volunteers have completed the training day they will be asked to monitor at least two properties over the course of the field season, running from June 1st to October 31st. The total number of hours expected from each volunteer will range between 12 and 14 hours.

If becoming a Volunteer Monitor with HeadWaters Land Conservancy sounds like the volunteer opportunity you've been looking for, please mark June 5th, 2010 on your calendar and come join the Conservancy's Land Protection Staff for a fun day of learning and hands-on experience with land conservation work that's happening right here in your area. Volunteer service

is a great way to get involved and make a difference in your community and HeadWaters is proud to offer a new and exciting opportunity to help make that difference!

For more information on the Volunteer Monitoring program, or to sign up, please contact our land protection staff at 989-731-0573 or by e-mailing [land@headwatersconservancy.org](mailto:land@headwatersconservancy.org). Please check our website, [www.headwatersconservancy.org](http://www.headwatersconservancy.org) as we get closer to the training date for addition details.



### **Huron Pines AmeriCorps Member Serving with HeadWaters**

If you've stopped by the office lately, you may have been met with a new face. HeadWaters Land Conservancy recently received the opportunity to host a Huron Pines AmeriCorps Member for a one year term of service. Abigail Ertel will be serving with the Conservancy as a Land Protection Specialist until the end of September 2010. Her responsibilities will include organizing the quarterly newsletter, working to develop and implement a new Volunteer Monitoring program to assist Land Protection staff meet yearly monitoring goals, and to create and organize four outreach events. These events will help the Conservancy better connect community members with the work they do to protect land as well as creating an opportunity to experience the Conservancy's conservation easement properties.

AmeriCorps is a national network that engages over 75,000 citizens a year, aged 17 or older, in community service. AmeriCorps members serve with non-profit organizations at the local, state, and national level in areas of public safety, health, education, and the environment. Since 1994, more than 500,000 members have worked to meet critical needs in their communities by developing programs to combat hunger, illiteracy, and to provide disaster response, affordable housing, and a cleaner, healthier environment.

Huron Pines AmeriCorps is the only conservation based AmeriCorps program in the state of Michigan. Huron Pines, a nonprofit in Grayling who administers the program, focuses on conserving the forests, lakes, and streams of Michigan's northeast eleven counties. Huron Pines AmeriCorps members help environmental non-profit organizations meet their goals to steward the region's natural resources by serving in four key areas: volunteer engagement, habitat restoration, environmental stewardship, and through

developing new conservation services. Through these efforts Huron Pines AmeriCorps members are strengthening the organizations they serve, which in turn creates more effective natural resource conservation.

When asked about her upcoming year of service Abigail said, "I'm really looking forward to helping HeadWaters Land Conservancy grow their volunteer outreach and programming efforts. I feel that one of the most important things you can do to take pride in your community is to become involved with local organizations. Not only is Huron Pines AmeriCorps providing me with the opportunity to serve locally with HeadWaters Land Conservancy, but I have the chance to create an avenue for others to do so as well."

So, next time you're in the office take a moment to ask Abigail how you can become more involved in the Conservancy's programs or to learn more about Huron Pines AmeriCorps and how it is strengthening northern Michigan communities. AmeriCorps members are motivated to get things done and Abigail is ready to fulfill that role while serving with HeadWaters Land Conservancy

Huron Pines AmeriCorps is supported in part by the Corporation for National and Community Service, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, DTE Energy Foundation, Huron Pines and contributions from host sites. For more information, visit [www.huronpinesamericorps.org](http://www.huronpinesamericorps.org).

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### **Roger Rasmussen, according to the Encarta Dictionary**

**Volunteer** - Somebody who works for nothing.

**Selfless** - Putting other people's needs, interest, or wishes before your own.

**Conservationist** - A supporter of or advocate for the preservation of the environment, especially the natural world. (It is listed as a noun, but I like to think of it as a verb.)

AND, if there could be a photo next to all three, it may look something like the one shown here.

Roger Rasmussen was a founding Board Member for HeadWaters Land Conservancy. He has been part of our organization since its inception in 1994. During the past 16 years, Roger has served HeadWaters in countless ways including board member recruitment, planning, conservation easement procurement, field work, and teacher.

Roger has also been the Deputy Director of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, chaired the Timber Bridge Initiative overseeing 30 bridge projects, was an advisor in the development of the Marguerite Gahagan Nature Preserve, and responsible for most of the mature red and jack pine plantings in Otsego, Antrim and Charlevoix Counties.

Roger has been retired for over 30 years, but somehow finds the energy to volunteer his expertise almost every day of the year. Just this past year he mentioned that he was going to

be slowing down a bit so that he could spend more time with his family, including more time at his camp on Drummond Island. This fall when asked how his visit was to the Island he said "Oh, I only had time to get up there for a day". So, you can see that he is still diligently working away to fulfill the needs of landowners and to help answer their environmental questions.

Today Roger is still active with HeadWaters, not as a board member, but as field volunteer and land committee member.



He also serves as a First Responder for Huron Pines, another volunteer group serving the needs of landowners with environmental planning.

Never one for recognition, Roger has always been quite modest and full of humility. Fortunately, good actions never go unnoticed and in 2009 Roger received the President's Volunteer Service Award from the Michigan Community Service Commission, an award recognizing and honoring volunteers who set the standard for service, encourage a sustained commitment to civic participation, and inspires others

to make service a central part of their lives.

Roger has continued to inspire all of us at HeadWaters Land Conservancy with his commitment to protecting the lands and waters of northern Michigan. If you are interested in following in Roger's footsteps, please call our office at (989) 731-0573 or visit our web site at [www.headwatersconservancy.org](http://www.headwatersconservancy.org).

## 2009 Land Protection and Stewardship Update

2009 was a very progressive year for HeadWaters and its land protection department. To begin with, the conservation easement monitoring crew had a 100% completion rate for the annual property inspections. This is important because it means that all of the conservation easement properties that HeadWaters is responsible for protecting were inspected and their condition evaluated. This inspection process is crucial because it provides an opportunity to meet with conservation easement landowners to discuss any planned changes they have for their property and helps to further our working relationship with the true stewards of the land. The monitoring visit helps to deter violations and our consistent presence shows our commitment to ensuring the protection of the land and fulfilling our conservation easement enforcement obligation. Finally, the most important reason for regular property inspection is so that if a violation occurs, we can catch it early and create a remediation plan with the landowner to correct the problem and restore the land to its original condition.

Another important accomplishment for the land protection department was the establishment of an advisory land committee that consists of several dedicated volunteers, all with very different life experiences. This group meets monthly during the winter and primarily works on updating old policies and helps to create new policies. This evaluation process provides a great educational opportunity for both the staff and volunteers. Having the Land Committee evaluate our existing practices, in combination with the researching and brainstorming of new practices, creates processes that allow our land protection efforts to be more permanent. The variety of professional and personal skills possessed by the Land Committee allows HeadWaters to successfully modify and strengthen our policies, so that they best reflect current laws and regulations. Ultimately, this process means we can be confident that any project we work on will stand up to any legal challenge in the future and remain in permanent protection. A direct result of annual self evaluation and the creation of new policies is that the staff and volunteers are

provided with a board approved plan of action for completing mission focused projects.

There were 5 new conservation easement projects completed in 2009. Collectively, these projects will protect over 820 acres, including over 21,500 feet of waterfront. The projects were located in 3 different counties (Crawford, Otsego and Oscoda) and in two different watersheds (the Pigeon and Au Sable). Two of these projects were part of the Pigeon River Habitat Initiative, and the three other projects were part of the Au Sable River Great Lakes Fishery Trust Program. These two different programs are important to mention because they both involve several agencies and priority lands that have been identified for protection due to their size, location, and natural features.

When we evaluate our totals for the end of each year, it is hard to compare the numbers from one year to the next due to the unpredictable duration of a project and because of the many variables that can arise. Variables involved in a conservation easement project include family size, property size, location of the property, identification of conservation values, number of agencies involved, and overall complexity of the restrictions of the easement. One of the projects completed in 2009 evolved and changed for over ten years, finally coming to a close in the spring. This project included several hundred acres, two family members that both lived out of state, and a complete turnover in staff at HeadWaters. By comparison, another project completed in 2009, which is definitely the exception to the duration of a project, took only three months to complete after a visit by a neighbor, who also happens to be a Board Member and conservation easement donor for HeadWaters.

We are looking forward to all the projects and challenges that 2010 has in store for us. Please look us up on the web at [www.headwatersconservancy.org](http://www.headwatersconservancy.org), or call our office with any questions or suggestions.

**HeadWaters Land Conservancy gratefully acknowledges its generous supporters for the 2009 year. All gifts to the Conservancy are listed annually, by donor, in our first issue of each year. This listing includes all project and general giving.**

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