



Little South Branch Neighbors Unite to Restore River Habitat

What started as a conversation among neighbors two years ago has grown into a powerful grassroots effort to protect and restore the Little South Branch of the Pere Marquette River. Property owners along this cherished stretch of water have come together with a shared vision: to improve fish habitat and preserve the river's health for generations to come.

Since forming their volunteer-led initiative, the group has raised **over \$90,000** to kick off **Phase 1** of a multi-year river restoration project. The funds—donated by individual landowners, local businesses, and conservation supporters—will go directly toward in-stream improvements that enhance habitat for cold-water fish species like rainbow and brown trout.

In partnership with the **Conservation Resource Alliance (CRA)**, the group is managing the project with expert oversight. CRA brings technical knowledge, project management, and grant-writing support—ensuring that the restoration efforts are guided by science and executed with care.

This first phase will address degraded habitat conditions through wood placement, erosion control, and reconnection of natural stream features in a small section. Long-term goals include restoring the river's ecological integrity and protecting its value as a wild and scenic recreational resource in the Little South area.

The LCRPOA applauds these neighbors for their leadership and dedication. Their success shows the power of local stewardship—and what's possible when river communities work together.

Lake County Riverside Property Owners Association: P.O. Box 13, Baldwin, MI 49304 www.lcrpoa.org

Summer 2025 River Watch Newsletter

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BOARD MEETINGS

May 17, 2025

June 21, 2025

July 19, 2025: Annual Meeting

September 20, 2025

October 18, 2025

Progress Flows Forward: Baldwin Dam Removal Underway

The long-anticipated removal of the Baldwin Dam on the Baldwin River will soon be underway—an exciting and vital step forward for river restoration in Lake County. This project marks a major milestone in protecting the ecological health of the Baldwin River, a key tributary of the Pere Marquette River system.

Why Remove the Dam?

Built decades ago, the Baldwin Dam had outlived its functional purpose and had become a barrier to natural river flow and fish passage. Its presence disrupted habitat connectivity and water temperature regulation—both essential for maintaining a healthy cold-water fishery. Removal of the dam will help restore natural sediment movement, improve fish migration (particularly for native brook trout), and enhance overall river function.

Who's Making This Possible?

This important restoration effort is made possible through the leadership of the **Conservation Resource Alliance (CRA)**, a trusted regional nonprofit dedicated to protecting and restoring Northern Michigan's rivers. CRA has worked tirelessly to coordinate funding, engineering, and permitting for this complex project.

Funding support comes from a variety of sources, including:

- **Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR)**
- **Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI)**
- **Private foundations and grants**

The collaboration between CRA and local stakeholders has been key. Our Association has strongly supported this project as part of our mission to be stewards of the Pere Marquette River system.

What Comes Next?

As the river reclaims its natural course, LCRPOA will continue to monitor progress and advocate for science-based conservation. Property owners along the river can expect improved habitat, enhanced water quality, and better opportunities for paddling and fishing in the years to come.

We are proud to be a part of this legacy of conservation and thank all who have contributed to the health of our rivers—now and for future generations.

Upcoming events

ANNUAL MEETING: Saturday, July 19 11:00am – 12:30 Light lunch to follow.

Scouting America River Clean up: Thursday, August 7 8am Baldwin Canoe Rental

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Preserving Our River Legacy: Understanding the Natural Rivers Program

“We do not inherit the river from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children.”

Since 1970, Michigan’s **Natural Rivers Program (NRP)** has been a cornerstone of river conservation — protecting some of the state’s most treasured waterways, including our own **Pere Marquette River**. As a riverfront property owner, understanding this program is more than important — it is part of your role as a steward of this extraordinary natural resource.

What Is the Natural Rivers Program?

The Natural Rivers Program was established to **preserve the natural, scenic, and recreational qualities** of select Michigan rivers by setting **common-sense land use and development guidelines** within designated river corridors.

Managed by the **Michigan Department of Natural Resources**, the program helps maintain water quality, prevent erosion, and protect wildlife habitat — all while respecting private landownership.

The Pere Marquette River was one of the **first rivers** to be protected under this initiative.

What It Means for You as a Property Owner

If your land lies within a designated **Natural River corridor**, the following standards typically apply:

- **Building Setbacks:** New homes and structures must be set back from the river — usually **150 feet** depending on location and zoning.
 - **Vegetation Protection:** Natural riverbank vegetation must be maintained to protect against erosion and pollution. — **75 feet**
 - **Dock and Access Standards:** New docks and river access structures must be **low-impact** and **visually unobtrusive**.
 - **Subdivision & Road Guidelines:** Land divisions and driveways are carefully managed to preserve the natural appearance and integrity of the riverfront.
 - **Building new or remodeling Permits:** Are required from the DNA prior to obtaining one from local zoning authorities if within the general **400-foot** corridor of the river.
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Benefits to You and Your Property

1. **Higher Property Values**
Natural Rivers tend to command **premium market interest** due to their protected, pristine character.
 2. **Better Water Quality**
Vegetated buffers help filter pollutants and reduce storm runoffs, keeping your water **cleaner** and **healthier**.
 3. **More Wildlife, More Enjoyment**
Natural shorelines attract birds, fish, and pollinators — enriching your experience of the land and water.
 4. **Lower Risk of Erosion and Flooding**
Healthy riparian zones reduce costly bank collapse and mitigate minor flooding.
 5. **Shared Heritage**
Your part of a **community-wide legacy of protection** — preserving the Pere Marquette for generations.
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A Win for the River Ecosystem

The Natural Rivers Program does not just benefit individual owners — it is a system-wide safeguard:

- **Limits overdevelopment**
- **Sustains biodiversity.**
- **Preserves scenic views.**
- **Supports recreation and tourism.**

Rivers like the Pere Marquette are the lifeblood of Michigan's outdoor heritage. The NRP ensures they remain **fishable, swimmable, and beautiful** far into the future.

Our Association's Role

The **Lake County Riverside Property Owners Association** is a dedicated supporter of the NRP. We applaud the efforts of our members and neighbors along the Little South Branch and other sections of the river for their active stewardship.

Let us continue working together — respecting the river, following best practices, and spreading awareness of the Natural Rivers Program.

To Learn More

Visit: www.michigan.gov/dnr/NRP DNR Zoning: Brian Burrows buryb@michigan.gov
Or contact your local zoning administrator for specific property guidance.

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