

Upper Black River Council

The Upper Black River in Cheboygan and Montmorency counties is a State of Michigan “Blue Ribbon Trout Stream” and is in the only watershed in northern Michigan to be exclusively managed for native brook trout. The river is also home to the endangered Hungerford’s crawling water beetle and serves as a major tributary to Black Lake where one of the largest inland populations of lake sturgeon resides. For almost 20 years, the Upper Black River Council (UBRC) has been working tirelessly to promote and enhance the river for better living and spawning conditions for the brook trout and other native habitat.

The UBRC has partnered with over two dozen agencies and organizations throughout the years, and the result is a continued focus on brook trout habitat through research, education, and projects. The council relies heavily on the knowledge and input of biologists and resource professionals when considering ways to sustain or improve instream conditions for the brook trout and what they feed on. The presence of the endangered beetle, located in only three watersheds in the nation that we know of, creates an extra layer of complexity for permitting and project implementation, but adds another unique trait to the watershed.

“The UBRC has been a very fluid organization since its founding in 1992 and the work being done now is merely an extension and continuation of the work begun by a few key people,” says UBRC Chair Carol Rose. “We’ve been very fortunate to have an excellent group of partners, all focused on the same objectives for the Upper Black River, and are pleased that the work we’ve all been a part of over the years has benefitted the overall health of the fishery for both the brook trout and the aquatic insects and macroinvertebrates they feed on. It has also benefitted the local economy, both from tourism interests and by providing some good summer jobs for our river crew members over the years, too.”

Because of the great work that they do, Huron Pines is partnering with UBRC to pass through some of our project funding in the Black River Watershed to the UBRC crew to complete more projects. At a recent UBRC meeting, landowners from neighboring Mullett Lake voiced their interest in starting a group similar to the UBRC to do work on the Pigeon River, which flows into Mullett Lake in Cheboygan County. While the UBRC has employed a small river crew for a number of summers, the Pigeon River has no such crew, but the property owners at the mouth of the Pigeon have recognized the need for improvements and project implementation. By using the UBRC blueprint of research, information gathering, and project implementation through partnerships, other groups in Northeast Michigan can more easily identify the needs of the resources that are unique to that area.

HP in the Cheboygan River Watershed

After completing our sturgeon spawning protection projects on the Upper Black River, we’re moving to some of the other rivers that comprise the overall Cheboygan River Watershed.

With the enthusiastic involvement of local DNR fisheries staff and the many other partner groups in the area, we’ll be placing Large Woody Debris structures in the Pigeon and Sturgeon Rivers this year and planning for future road/stream crossing repairs.

Right: Volunteers from UBRC at a work bee on Rattlesnake Creek, where they placed rocks in the stream to improve fish habitat.

