

UPPER BLACK RIVER COUNCIL

UPPER BLACK RUNS DEEP WITH CAROL ROSE

MANAGING THE UPPER BLACK RIVER MEANS DOING WHAT'S BEST FOR BROOK TROUT. IN 1993, AN ANGLER AND RIVER ENTHUSIAST NAMED BUD SLINGERLEND SAW DIMINISHING RETURNS IN HIS TROUT-FISHING TRIPS ON HIS FAVORITE STREAMS IN MONTMORENCY COUNTY.

"He fished the river for years and saw its condition deteriorating because of beavers and a lack of management," Carol Rose said of the late fisherman.

Singerlend, a charter member of the Montmorency County Conservation Club, got some people together to turn things around for the Black. The Upper Black River Council (UBRC) was formed and Rose, who lives northwest of Hillman in Montmorency County with her husband, Paul, has chaired it since 2008. "I love this river," she said. "It's been a part of my history since before we moved here."



WITHOUT A MEMBERSHIP PER SE, THE UBRC INSTEAD FUNCTIONS AS A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES, NONPROFITS, AND INDIVIDUALS THAT CAN PROVIDE RESOURCES AND MANPOWER TO RESTORATION PROJECTS IN THE WATERSHED.

Road commissions, fish biologists, private landowners and conservation groups have all gotten their feet wet – literally and figuratively – in projects on the Upper Black River.

"We've been able to fund a seasonal summer river crew to do instream habitat work – adding large woody debris and cutting pathways through blowdowns – to enhance angler satisfaction," Rose said. "Our focus has been doing what's best for the brookies and the habitats where they thrive." The Black differs from other area streams in that it is managed exclusively as a brook trout fishery. "There are no brown trout in Black Lake and, even if there were, there are two big dams on the Lower Black River that prevent fish passage (to the upper river) anyway," said Tim Cwalinski, fisheries biologist for the DNR. "It's been isolated in that way to only hold brook trout."



Cwalinski said the upper Black River supports a mostly daytime, high catch rate brook trout fishery for anglers. If brown trout were to be stocked there they would quickly outcompete and prey upon the native brook trout.

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IN LATE OCTOBER, CWALINSKI TOURED A STRETCH OF THE RIVER AND MADE NOTES OF WHERE FUTURE IN-STREAM HABITAT WORK SHOULD BE CARRIED OUT BY UBRC'S SUMMER WORK CREW – IN PARTICULAR, THE AREA OF KING'S BRIDGE NORTH OF ATLANTA.

WHILE SOME PROJECTS HAVE CENTERED ON PUTTING TREES AND BRUSH IN THE RIVER, OTHERS ARE AIMED AT UNDOING WHAT THE BEAVERS HAVE DONE.

Second only to humans in their ecological impact, beavers can enact huge changes in their landscape by building dams that impede fish movement and cause cold upstream habitats to warm.

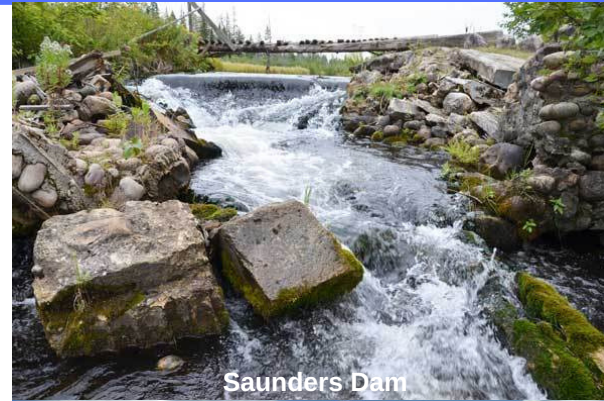
"This year we removed a huge beaver dam that reached a point where it was creating a large impoundment," Rose said. "A couple of our active volunteers took out part of it well in advance of our work bee day, when we removed the rest of the material. We weren't releasing a massive amount of sediment with it because the water had already had an opportunity to drain." Ongoing trapping keeps the beaver population in check.

In 2013, UBRC was part of a coalition to remove the concrete ruins of Saunders Dam that had obstructed the river for 60 years with its 5-foot cascade of fast-flowing water. The dam was first to go when the 517-acre property was bought by the state and numerous partners took part – including UBRC, Huron Pines, Treetops Resort, Jay's Sporting Goods, Headwaters chapter of Trout Unlimited, HeadWaters Land Conservancy and Little Traverse Conservancy, J&N Construction, Pigeon River Country Association, the DNR and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and a dozen individuals. "That was an example of how empowering these projects can be and how everyone can share in the success," Rose said. "It's redeeming to see structures that no longer have a purpose being taken out. The river is still in the process of healing itself and rebuilding."

Rose said a recent effort on Rattlesnake Creek, an upstream tributary of the Black, created new riffles for fall brook trout spawning beds, called redds.

"We had mountains of cobble, stone and pea gravel and had three different work bees where we were schlepping rocks and gravel 75 yards from the piles to the creek," she said. "When I went back in October the year we did it, sure enough I saw brook trout on redds at two of the three riffles we'd made."

More information about UBRC can be found online, www.upperblack.org.



Saunders Dam



Saunders Dam site after Dam Removal

