

Newsletter of the Gahagan Nature Preserve, Inc.
P.O. Box 421, Roscommon, MI 48653 • 989-275-3217 • www.GahaganNature.org
Issue #28 ~ Spring 2015

North Woods Call Era Ends

By Brian Hutchins

For those of closely connected to the Marguerite Gahagan Nature Preserve, sad news arrived last September. Mike Van Buren, the third publisher of The North Woods Call, announced he would close the newspaper.

Marguerite founded the paper in 1953, wrote and published it for 16 years in Johannesburg and then at her cabin at the present Gahagan Nature Preserve. It was an amazing story. An award-winning journalist leaves a secure job in Detroit, moves north to Johannesburg in 1953 to start a newspaper about resource conservation and the northern life - with hardly a bit of experience about the topic at hand! Financed on her own, seemingly with saved earnings from her syndicated novels, Miss Gahagan became a one-woman conservation writing empire. Her paper was the leading voice for Michigan conservation affairs. It influenced public policy. It kept politicians honest and made bureaucrats answer tough questions.

Glen Sheppard purchased the publication from her in 1969, moving it to Charlevoix. Mr. Sheppard continued the legacy until his death in 2011. Following his passing, Mr. Van Buren bought The Call and resumed it after an 18 month hiatus. A myriad of consequences made him decide in September 2014 to forgo continuation. Interestingly, in 2008 the Gahagan Board negotiated with Glen Sheppard to purchase The Call and move it back to Roscommon. The parties could not come to a complete agreement at the time. Now, more than 60 years from when it first came to print, The Call met its final demise - a fate that many publications have met or are facing because of technological changes. Let us not forget how important it was in its time.



Want to know more about the The North Woods Call and its founder? Order Pine Whispers: The Biography and Writings of Marguerite Gahagan from GahaganNature.org. Proceeds from the purchase go directly to the preserve's environmental education programs for area youth.

Marguerite Gahagan Nature Preserve Board of Directors ~ 2015

A 503(c) non-profit organization whose mission is to protect the balanced habitat that supports a wide variety of plant and animal species.

Chairperson: Jeff Mellgren
Vice Chair: Troy Fairbanks
Secretary: Bobbie Werle
Brian Hutchins
Susan Huffman
Theresa Bradley

Tom Dale, Education Director
275-8206
thdale@core.com

Tracy Bosworth, Executive Director
989-390-0903
adm@GahaganNature.org

www.GahaganNature.org

Donations and Memorials

The Marguerite Gahagan Nature Preserve thanks the following organizations and individuals that kindly donated to our mission during 2014 and early 2015.

Scott Montross in honor of Janice Montross
William Burrows in memory of Lydia Burrows
Richard Seton in memory of Toni Seton
Robert M. Boudeman Trust Fund
Cowell Family San Diego Foundation in honor of
Cliff & Carolyn Colwell
Gary and Sharon Boushelle in
memory of Richard Johoske
Jack & Liz Wade in honor of Jeremy Jones
Mary & Brian Hutchins
Gerald & Roberta Werle
Dr. Robert and Donna House
Julie Boushelle
John & Betty Colwell
Bob & Dawn Tupper
Colleen Criner
Mike Kent
Kate Fitch in memory of Ray Fitch
Mark and Tracy Bosworth in support of Troop 944
Ralph and Nancy Rucinski in
memory of Ted Thomas
Merrill Petoskey in memory of Jean Petoskey
Betty Thomas
Kirtland Garden Club in support of
Eagle Scout Candidates
Mike and Kathy Wahl
Duncan and Kathy Lawrence
John and Jeanie Bennick
Roscommon Rotary
Houghton Lake Rotary
Roscommon Area Youth Booster Club
West Branch Kiwanis Club

MGNP Members are published in the Fall newsletter

2015 Gahagan Schedule

Feb. 16-Apr. 16: The Visiting Naturalist at area schools
April 25: Gahagan Preserve and Cabin Clean-up 9am-1pm
April 28-June 10: School Environmental Field Trips
May 20: Roscommon Business Expo CRAF Center 3pm-7pm
May 30: AuSable River Water Quality Collection 10am at
Gates Lodge
June 5-6: Kirtland Warbler Festival, check website for list of
events and times
July 18-19: Riverfest - AuSable River Festival 10am-4pm
Downtown Roscommon
July 21-23: Gahagan Summer Youth Day Camp 9am-Noon
July 23: Family Night Feature 7pm at Gahagan or Roscommon
Library TBD
Sept. 14-Oct. 23: School Environmental Field Trips
Sept. 20: Gahagan Open House & Membership Meeting
1pm-4pm

Board of Directors meet on the 2nd Monday at 7:00 pm.
Everyone is Welcome to attend.

For up-to-date schedule, changes and event details visit
www.GahaganNature.org.

ELF Update

Project ELF is an Environmental Education program offered to local area schools. ELF is based on the inverted pyramid method of reaching out. At a nominal cost (\$250 per year/per school) Gahagan provides eight science kits that contain materials and supplies for five to eight activities which focus on a particular subject. Each kit is presented during a one hour workshop held in the school. During the workshop, the activities within that month's kit are presented to classroom volunteers. The volunteers have time during the workshop to review the teaching guide, network ideas and share classroom successes as well as struggles. Each volunteer then schedules a time during the month to present the activities of their choice in their "assigned" class. Hence, the pyramid. One trainer, many volunteers, hundreds of students.

Kudos to the many volunteers who have enhanced the environmental education of our children!

2014-2015 ELF Schedule

Collins Elementary and Our Lady of the Lake Schools: "Adaptations" theme

Kits: Amazing Insects, Hunter-Hunted, Teeth and Skulls, Beaks and Feet and Feathers, Owls, Thorns and Threats, Frogs and Polliwogs

St. Joseph Catholic School: "Earth and Sky" theme

Kits: Finding Your Way, Erosion, Pebbles and Rocks, Breath of Life, Sound Symphony, Water, Wind and Clouds, Sun Power

Roscommon Elementary: "Designs of Nature" theme

Kits: Spiders and Webs, Variations on a Leaf, Cones, Snow and More, Tracks and Traces, Winter Weeds, Camouflage, Honeybees

OWL PELLETS

Owls, like many other birds, eat their food whole. Since birds do not have teeth, they can't chew their food. Therefore, they use their strong and sharp beaks to rip their prey apart and then swallow large chunks whole. The owl slowly digests its meal by separating the softer materials (such as meat) from the harder material (such as bones). It then regurgitates the

harder material along with indigestible items such as feathers and fur in the form of a pellet.

"Owls: Silent Predators of the Night" is a kit in the adaptations theme. Owl pellet dissection is one of the activities in the Owls kit. The pictures on this page are from Mrs. Lamoureux's third and Ms. Mazza's fifth grade classrooms in Houghton Lake.



(Above) These students take care to gently loosen the contents of their pellet.



(Right) Separating, sorting and counting bones requires teamwork.

(Right) Parent volunteer, Kathy Vander-Molen, observes one group as they work.



(Right) Dissecting an owl pellet is truly a hands-on learning activity.



(Above) The skull and bones from this pellet point to a meal made from a vole.

How to Create a Firewise Property

By Julie Crick

This winter's timber harvest at Marguerite Gahagan Nature Preserve will clean up a portion of the property that was heavily disturbed when fire breaks were created to stop the spread of wildfire that started on an adjacent property. Disturbance like this is a common practice of wildland firefighters to create a 'break' in vegetation with the hopes of interrupting the behavior of a wildland fire.

In a wildland fire situation, vegetation, especially those with resins and oils like pine trees and juniper bushes, as well as down woody debris are considered fuel because the fire is able to move forward as the vegetation and debris burns. To minimize the forward movement, the fuel must be reduced, well-spaced, or eliminated. At Gahagan, the DNR used a plow like apparatus to create a break in the fuel. Creating small breaks in the vegetation around your structures can have the same effect in helping to prevent a wildland fire from causing damage.

A national fire prevention program, called Firewise, promotes both vegetation management and structural guidelines that help to make individual properties and communities more fire safe in the event of a wildfire. Implementing the guidelines helps to lessen fire behavior in vegetation, reduce the ignitability of a structure, and increases the overall safety of firefighters. Most of the guidelines focus on reducing the flammability of both vegetation and structures to prevent hot embers from landing in an area and starting a fire.

Vegetation Management

To lessen the effects of a wildfire as it approaches your property, Firewise recommends that vegetation be managed anywhere from 30 to 100 feet from all structures. The critical distance depends on the characteristics of the surrounding landscape, the prevailing wind direction, and the location of the property in proximity to dense forests. Fire tends to burn hotter and faster uphill and when driven by prevailing winds or surrounding fuel load. Increase the distance from structures according to the presence of these conditions.

Firewise recommends eliminating all ignitable vegetation within 30 feet of a home. Ignitable vegetation includes pine trees, juniper bushes and other trees and shrubs that contain resins and oils. Vegetation that is not removed can be pruned so that the limbs do not touch the ground. Pruning the lower branches to provide spacing under the tree or shrub also helps to prevent leaves and debris from collecting at the base of the vegetation. Leaves and debris will easily ignite if a hot ember lands, which in turn will ignite the tree or shrub. Trees and shrubs in the remaining portions of the property should be well spaced to eliminate the possibil-

ity of fire jumping from tree to tree and eventually heating or igniting the structure. Lastly, trees and shrubs should be removed or pruned so that the branches are not touching the roof of a structure or structural attachments like decks and porches. This is especially important around chimneys and stovepipes.

Structural Guidelines

The number one cause for the loss of structures in a wildfire event is the hot embers that blow out in front of a fire. To reduce the possibility of an ember landing on and igniting a structure, Firewise provides guidelines for roofing material, siding material and structural attachments.

Some roofing materials are more fire resistant than others. Firewise recommends using class A asphalt shingles, metal, slate or clay tiles to lessen the chance of structural ignition. Clearing rain gutters, eaves and roofs of leaves and debris is also important. Embers also have the potential to collect in small nooks and crannies around the outside of a house, making it important to use heat and flame resistant building materials like brick, cement, plaster, stucco and concrete masonry on the outside of structures. Also, be sure that any attachments like porches, decks or fences are made of flame and heat resistant materials, and that they are kept free of leaves and debris that can collect under and around them. Installing metal screening with a 1/8 inch mesh under decks, over exterior attic vents and under-floor vents will also help with prevention.

It pays to take the time to be proactive about wildland fire. In the Roscommon area, wildfires occur every few years. Be sure your property is ready before the next local event!

More detailed information about protecting your property from wildland fire can be found at the Firewise website, www.firewise.org. Michigan State University Extension also maintains a Firewise website with information specific to Michigan at, www.firewise.msu.edu. Julie Crick is an MSU Extension Educator located in Roscommon County and is available to answer questions or provide hard copies of Firewise information. She can be reached 989-275-7179 or by email at crickjul@anr.msu.edu.

Editor's Note: The timber cut and upcoming changes to buffer the preserve's forest and buildings from potential future wildfire threat will serve as an educational tool for the community and school groups about being Firewise - planning to prevent or mitigate fire danger in natural environments.



“Bear Tracks”

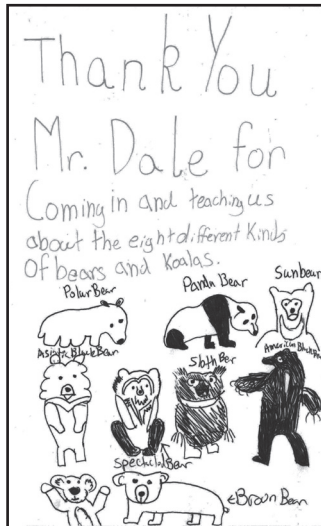
2015 Visiting Naturalist Program



The visiting naturalist program began in 2002 and brings Gahagan’s Education Director and resident Naturalist, Tom Dale, to classrooms across the region. The sessions include a puppet show, pelts and skulls, replicas of scat and tracks, stories, stuffed toys, and many great activities for making classroom visits fun and educational. Sessions are of a length that is appropriate to the age of the students, usually between 50-60 minutes.

The Bear Tracks program, which relies heavily on a Bear Trunk on loan from the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation, visited many of the elementary and middle schools within the adjacent four county area this spring. The main focus of the program is the biology and behavior of the bears of North American.

Each session began with a contest to match the names of the world’s 8 bear species with the proper picture, then place each species on a world map. “When I developed the program, I wouldn’t have been able to correctly name all 8 species, let alone find them on a map, so it was only fair to also give generous clues,” says Tom. Many students were quite good at these contests, and their concluding comments indicated that they really enjoyed the challenge. That all the world’s bears probably originated in Asia was an interesting discovery based on correctly placing all 8 species on their home continents.



Some aspects of the bear story was the subject of a conversation between Scotty the Scottish Blackfaced Lamb, Ruffy the always lost stray dog and Big Buck the knowledgeable white-tailed deer. The story ended happily, but there were some real scary parts, like when the black bear arrived. A mother bear with cubs can be very dangerous, as can any bear.

Students were saddened to learn that seven of the eight living bear species are threatened or endangered. Only the American black bear population is in shape and even it is facing some threats. One of the principle goals of the visiting naturalist program is to impress upon the children the need for responsible stewardship of wild places and wild animals.

Thank you to Roscommon Rotary, Houghton Lake Rotary, Roscommon Area Youth Boosters Club, and West Branch Kiwanis Club for their financial support for the 2015 Visiting Naturalist Program.



Tom with a captive audience of St. Joseph’s students in West Branch.

SPRING CLEAN-UP



Around the first week of April, as the days are getting longer and the temperatures warm, we have the water in the cabin turned on, and we start to tidy up. On Saturday, April 25th from 9AM to 1PM we will endeavor to give the cabin and the trails an all-out cleaning. Windows, walls, floors and furniture are scrubbed, the trails are cleared of brush, trail markers and maps are refurbished, asphalt, decks and roofs are swept, and the garage gets a good broom-out.

Please consider joining in for a few minutes or few hours for this “all hands on deck” effort. There will be snacks, lunch and refreshments for all!



The hare moves like a mirage through the woods;
White on brown, brown on brown,
Changing as his earth changes.
Ears alert, listening.
Faint song of frozen crystal melting,
Of weed leaf rising,
The ears of the hare catch the small songs of spring.

Marguerite Gahagan
Rustle of Spring 4/15/1959

A Force of Nature

It's a proven fact - standing under a tree is one of the most dangerous places to be in a storm. And for a good reason - trees protrude from the earth's surface, making them frequent victims of direct lightning strikes. Some trees escape completely unharmed by a direct hit, some will sustain moderate damage and others will suffer complete devastation.

Since electricity seeks the path of least resistance, a tree provides a preferred path for lightning to reach the ground. In most trees, the area just under the bark layer contains moisture in the form of sap and water. Since water is a better electrical conductor than wood, lightning striking a tree tends to travel just underneath the bark in this moisture rich layer.

Along the path of the strike, sap boils, steam is generated and cells explode in the wood. This of course leads to strips of wood and bark peeling or being blown off the tree. If only one side of the tree shows evidence of a lightning strike, the chances of the tree surviving and eventually closing the wound are good. But when the strike passes completely through the trunk and explodes the wood, the tree cannot survive.

Such was the case one August evening for a roughly 110 year-old white pine alongside the orange trail. The lightning strike launched the top of the tree into the air, sending large branches flying, annihilating the mid-section of the tree. Twisted shards of the destroyed portion of the tree blanketed the ground surrounding the base of the remaining stripped trunk. Changed in an instant.



Kindergarteners from Roscommon Elementary School circa 2005

We considered the tree to be the one of the largest on site. It was frequently a stop for the Roscommon Elementary students on their return to school. It would take three students, joining hands, to reach around its base, craning their necks upward and commenting how they could not see the top. It was magnificent. It is now a monument to the awesome powers of nature and will become the new home to a variety of the preserve's critters. It's remnants a teaching tool for forest succession.



After the lightning strike 2014

Sweet Seats

Wet, slimy and unstable just are not the optimal characteristics of a comfortable seating area. Such was the case at our outdoor classroom area. For fifteen years, hundreds of students have hiked down the orange trail to the gathering area where they would be privy to a lesson, listen to instructions for the next activity, or stop for a breather; taking seat on an upended log. The log ring painted a quaint and charming look from afar, tall logs, short logs staggered and interesting, but on most days, wet and moldy.

Thanks the efforts of Eagle Scout candidate Noah Ekdor, Roscommon Boy Scout troop 944, and Dale Wiltse of NuCraft Metal Products, we now boast a safe and durable outdoor seating area. The aluminum topped circular seating arrangement was designed to seat 30 students and includes 2 additional benches outside the circumference for adults.

Thank-you to the volunteers and donors for making this goal a reality.



A quaint but unstable arrangement. (left)

Fully functional, durable, and slime free. (right)



The work crew from Roscommon Boy Scout Troop 944 strikes a pose. Noah Ekdor is first on the left.

Come Join Us at the Marguerite Gahagan Nature Preserve!

Marguerite Gahagan Nature Preserve operates as a non-profit organization run by volunteers and funded by its members, generous donors and the endowment left by Marguerite. Did you know that it provides environmental education for many of the schools in the surrounding counties? Did you know that the 60-acre preserve is open to the public for hiking, snowshoeing, birding and many other uses? Did you know we have an asphalt and boardwalk trail that is wheelchair friendly? It travels through woods and wetlands and along the beginnings of Tank Creek. Interested in learning and helping? Please join us!

Yes, I/we want to join Marguerite Gahagan Nature preserve. Enclosed is my/our yearly membership.

\$20 ☐ Individual / \$30 ☐ Family / \$50 ☐ Organizational \$_____ Donation

I am making a donation of \$_____ ☐ in memory of, ☐ in honor of _____

Name: _____ Ph: (_____)

Mailing Address: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

E-Mail Address: _____ @ _____

Please make checks to Gahagan Nature Preserve, Inc. and mail to P.O. Box 421, Roscommon, MI 48653

You can also donate, join, or renew your membership on-line at www.GahaganNature.org

New Construction on the Horizon

In June of 2014, Gahagan supporter, Sherwood Boudeman, contacted us about a donation the family wished make to honor their father, Robert M. Boudeman. It was the family's desire to find and fund a dedicated project at the preserve.

Reviewing the 2013 MGNP Five Year Plan, we focused on the ventures that would have the most immediate impact on the users of the preserve. After a few communications, we agreed that an outdoor restroom was the best fit. With the Boudeman contribution and a matching commitment from the preserve's board, we moved forward.

In the early fall, several board members met with Roscommon architect, Tom O'Brien to discuss the design of the building. Along with standard building requirements, we considered the needs of two groups: visitors and elementary students. Combining those requirements with the wish for an outdoor wash station and sink, easy access to the trail, and a location near to (and uphill from) the septic system, we arrived with a notion of what was necessary. After drafting and reviewing, a finalized plan was completed, and Tom produced blueprints.

Soon afterwards, MGNP member Jeff Mellgren (along with his pal John Deere) spent two days clearing and leveling the building site. The restroom will be located just behind the cabin, with a cement walk connecting to the asphalt trail. We anticipate construction to commence when the ground thaws and hope to be completed in time for spring field trips.

Our sincere thanks go to the Boudeman Family.

Gahagan Nature Camp 2015

Be sure to mark your calendar!

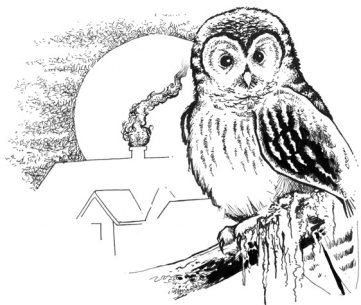
Three days! July 21-23 Each Day 9:00 till Noon

Get outdoors and join us for three mornings of education and FUN. We explore the far reaches of the preserve, investigate the various ecosystems on the property, play games and work on a few projects along the way. Best of all we develop new friendships. Children of membership families attend for \$10. The fee for children of non-membership families is \$20. Participation is open to children in the age range of 7-11 and is limited to the first 24 children who register. You can register by calling Tracy Bosworth at (899) 390-0903 or by contacting Tom Dale at thdale@core.com. MGNP presents "Family Night" during the week of camp. Our program is to be determined, but will be on Thursday, July 23 at 7:00 P.M. Check the website in July for updated information.

Marguerite Gahagan Nature Preserve

P.O. Box 421

Roscommon, MI 48653



SPRING CLEAN UP AT GAHAGAN!

Saturday, April 25, 2015 9:00 A.M. to 1:00 P.M.

Watershed Update

River Day 2015 is May 30!

By Tom Dale

We have a “ton of data” about the health of the AuSable River Watershed. Beginning in September of 2008, a large troop of dedicated river enthusiasts (including many of you) have monitored 300 foot sections of the River’s six main feeder streams for a range of parameters while focusing on benthic (bottom dwelling) macroinvertebrates; mostly insect larvae. We have been sampling twice each year; in June and September. We follow the river day event with an extensive effort to identify and score the collections according to the MiCorp quality assurance model. The results are then posted to the MiCorp online database and then placed in the permanent collection at the AuSable River Center in Roscommon. Over all this time, 12 sampling events, the results have been consistent. Based the parameters we are surveying, the watershed is very healthy.

The project has two major goals that have been our focus from the start: to develop a cadre of river enthu-

siasts that will be on guard to monitor the health of the watershed and to develop a database with baseline data that can be used to assess the health of the watershed for both short-term and long-term monitoring.

The project has reached a sort of tipping point. Over the long-term, the effort is hard work, while the results continue to be very consistent. Over the past few years we have identified only a few macroinvertebrate families that did not appear in earlier collections. Our total taxa (total taxonomic groups) for the entire 7 year project stands at 89. With this in mind and to reduce conflicts with other popular activities, we have decided to cut our collection events to once per year. The June event has been moved to one weekend earlier (from June 6 to May 30 at 10:00 am). The next September event will skip to 2016. Please sign up to help. We need you.