

Greg
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Townline Creek Flooding State Wildlife Management Area

Michigan is one of the most heavily forested states in the union with over fifty-five percent of it covered in trees held by the state, corporations and private individuals.¹ The forested areas of the state continue to grow at a rate higher than any other state.² These forests along with all other natural resources are owned by the residents of the state and held in trust to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR).³ The DNR has a hard job of maintaining some level of pristine wilderness for the residents of the state while still helping the state by using the land wisely for profit. Most of Michigan's timber lands are conserved in an utilitarian way much like what Gifford Pinchot, the United States of Americas first Chief Forester, prescribed with his conservationist ideas. This utilitarian manner means that the woods are like a crop that is sustainably harvested in Michigan. This crop of timber is estimated to be worth nine-billion dollars a year and bring in the state close to two-hundred million dollars in tax revenue.⁴ Despite of this or maybe because of this the DNR has set aside areas that are not to be harvested and left for the people of the state to enjoy. These areas while managed, modified, open to hunting, trapping, and fishing are as close to John Muir's goals of preservation as possible in American society. Managed areas like the Townline Creek Flooding State Wildlife Management Area are the best way to combine both of these men's goals and have a multitude of advantages to the state and its residents. These advantages are both economical as well as environmental.

Townline Creek Flooding State Wildlife Management Area is a small area of managed land that straddles the Clare-Roscommon county line just off of Old-27. It is one of the 77 Wildlife Management areas and 110 other areas that are protected and managed by the DNR.⁵

The management area is also part of the Roscommon State Forest. The area is an outwash plain formed by the glaciers receding in the area.⁶ The area contains much in the way of wildlife, from deer, turkeys, waterfowl and other small game. Sightings of black bear, cougars, bobcats, bald eagles and ospreys have been reported in recent times.⁷ Part of the area has been flooded by the DNR for the purpose of fishing and habits for waterfowl. Much of the water in the area is controlled by the large colony of beavers and the hydrological works they build such as dams and lodges. The whole of the management area is in the Muskegon watershed draining out to Lake Michigan.⁸ To entice hunters to the area the DNR plants two fields of rye that both attract deer and other game.⁹ The DNR also put in a small canal that connects the new flood plain and an old pond/bog. A few fire roads intersect the area to provide access for both recreation and for fire control and law enforcement. All the animals and water attract people for the purpose of outdoor activities but the Roscommon State Forest high yield of lumber and oil attract companies as well. The areas that surround the Townline Creek area are logged regularly both through clear cutting of various sections and through selective harvesting of prime timber. Oil wells dot the landscape about two miles from this controlled area.

It was not until recent times that the area has been heavily touched or affected by humans. The area did have a small Native American population with three villages and other remnants in the area.¹⁰ It was not until 1836 that the county was granted to America via a treaty.¹¹ The post-Civil War period is when the woods of the county started to be logged and in 1878 small railroads were put in.¹² After failed attempts at farming due to poor soil, the state took back the land due to failure to pay property taxes and made much of it into state forest like it currently is now.¹³ After a large amount of fires in the early 1900's fire roads were put into the area and the

Civilian Conservation Corps started the processes of reforesting the area in the forties.¹⁴ It was at this time that two oil and natural gas reservoirs were found in the county, but it was not until the 1980's that companies started to take advantage of them.¹⁵ A look at maps from the late 1950's and early 1960's show a completely different picture than a map from more recent times. The whole of the county was taken up by massive swamps, hills and lakes.¹⁶ One major road 27(now called Old 27) some sets of train tracks, one airport and one large city were in the whole of the county. Very little in economic work was seen except for some gravel pits and logging.¹⁷ Now the area as a whole is still very rural but has many roads including freeways, five airports and twenty one populated places.¹⁸ According to the US census bureau 5916 people lived in the county as a whole in 1950¹⁹, and in 2010 the county had 24,449 residents.²⁰ This population growth while small in comparison to the whole of the state and the nation caused much in change to the ecology of the local areas. This is due to the fact that the area had to be improved to help out humans that chose to inhabit the area. Most of this development is near roadways and places of work.

Part of sustainability is the affordability and economics of a managed area. An area like the Townline Creek Flooding State Wildlife Management Area takes little in the way of money and manpower to maintain. The initial start-up work involved just flooding out part of the area, the building of the canal, planting of the rye field and the emplacement of a sign. Before that would have been research and approval of the project. Now that all of that is done periodic maintenance of roads and ensuring that trash and other refuse of humans are removed. The Michigan Department of Natural Resources has a budget of 334,195,800 dollars of this a little over 13 million which goes wildlife management and 1.8 million that goes to forest management.

²¹ With the about 200 million from tax revenue from the timber industry and all the tax revenue from other natural resources that the DNR is in charge of the department as a whole cost the Michigan taxpayer no money in theory. The reason that this is not true is that the federal government does give money to the DNR and thus cost all taxpayers money.²² This federal funding comes from three bills as stated in Michigan Wildlife Action Plan's executive summary:

“In 1937, the U.S. Congress passed the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act (commonly known as the Pittman–Robertson Act) to support States' wildlife restoration efforts. In 1950, the U.S. Congress adopted companion funding under the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act (commonly known as the Dingle–Johnson Act) to support sport fish restoration. In 1984, the Wallop–Breaux Amendment enhanced this earlier action. For nearly 40 years, these programs, along with State hunting and fishing license revenues, provided the primary financial support for wildlife conservation and restoration in Michigan.”²³

Much of the non-federal funding for DNR ran state forest and recreational areas come from optional ten dollar license plate fees that allow entrance to state parks.²⁴ The whole of the Townline Creek Flooding State Wildlife Management Area is paid for by revenues paid on hunting licensees the allowing of hunting and fur harvesting helps to keep the area up and no real cost to the non-outdoorsy tax payer.²⁵ The fact that only those who use the woods for recreational purposes means that these areas can be kept up with no backlash from uninterested taxpayers. In the current economic times this means that the Townline Creek Flooding State Wildlife Management Area and areas like it can survive as no matter what cuts are made in the budget. This is less of a concern now that the Governor of Michigan plans to increase the budget of the DNR.²⁶

These managed areas have a variety of useful features both environmentally and economically. With worldwide deforestation leading to a loss of twenty percent of forest cover in the Twentieth century something needs to be done to keep this from getting worse.²⁷ One thing

that can be done is the continued care and buildup of wildlife areas such as Townline Creek Flooding State Wildlife Management Area which can serve as an anchor of forested areas. Michigan is one state that has the ability to keep up the levels of growth of its forested areas. This is due to the recent trends of populations in the state. After the increase in population in the nineties the state has lost people.²⁸ Michigan is the only state to have a drop in its population, and this net loss of population trend looks like it will continue to happen in the state.²⁹ With the loss of people the state has less of a need for new building and land development and thus can continue to regrow its forest and use them wisely as a cash crop. Due to the fact that the soils of Roscommon country are recommended for the use of forest land and not agriculture it is a great place to keep this up.³⁰ That being said small managed areas immune to logging dispersed throughout the region can help to keep the negative effect of logging down to a minimum. Logging helps to raise levels of erosion due to the fact that the root systems that keep dirt in place are gone and all the heavy trucks that go through the areas being logged turn everything into a sand pit.³¹ While not stopping all the erosion small managed areas can keep some dirt in place. Also forested areas help to turn carbon-dioxide (CO₂) into oxygen (O₂) as modern logging creates lots of CO₂ the woods that do not get logged can turn the CO₂ into food for itself and oxygen for us and other life forms. Another advantage of these areas is the help that they give to animals. One of these helpers is hunting, and trapping. While it may not sound like a helper the harvesting of animals to keep them at a population level that is sustainable. If hunters did not take certain big game such as deer right before winter the populations would be too high and many of the animals would starve to death in the lean winter months. Also many charities have

been created to take donated deer meat and give it to needy families which help more humans to not starve to death over the winter.

In the end managed areas like Townline Creek Flooding State Wildlife Management Area are the best way to combine the visions of both Gifford Pinchot and John Muir. These areas help to keep nature alive and around while still giving humans a way to use nature for its own economic ends. Preservations John Muir's vision of humans leaving nature totally alone is unrealistic, due in part to the fact that humans are part of nature and that the advantages of using nature to further human life is a natural part to life. Pinchot's vision of using nature as a sustainable crop is realistic, but leaves much to be desired as some level of less than molested wilderness is a worthwhile goal for humankind. These managed areas are the best way to let people enjoy nature, get the most ecological advantage from woodlands and still maintain high profits and jobs from forest related industry.