

# THE HOWL



FALL 2014

BIANNUAL NEWSLETTER

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YELLOW DOG  
Watershed Preserve



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CELEBRATING 19 YEARS AS A NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION





Volunteer Leader Carla Gregory and Program Coordinator Christy Budnick



Photos from May Stream Monitoring Training held at the Yellow Dog River.



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Watershed Preserve  
WATERKEEPER ALLIANCE  
MEMBER

Our mission is to preserve the Yellow Dog Watershed in its most natural state for the use of the public, now, and for the benefit of future generations since 1995. Our programs include: land preservation, water quality, education & outreach, and the mining campaign. Home to the Yellow Dog RIVERKEEPER ®.

**ON THE COVER:** A group of volunteers monitoring the Clear Creek site this past spring 2014. From left to right: Christy Budnick, Xavier Donajkowski, Steve Caird, and Joshua Roever.

**SAVE THE DATE: ON NOVEMBER 4TH, 2014** our Annual Meeting will be held at Ore Dock Brewing Company in Marquette, MI. Look forward to a merry celebration as we finish off the year and honor those who deserve to be recognized. Hope to see you there!

**YELLOW DOG SEEKING NEW BOARD MEMBER:** The seat will be offered at our annual meeting in November and applicants will be voted on by our membership. Please contact us at (906) 345-9223 to request an application. Our board members are a unique group of caring individuals with many different backgrounds. We are looking for people who desire to give back to the community and the environment.

**BYLAW CHANGE NOTICE:** We are revising our bylaws and changes will be voted on at the annual meeting in November. You may request a copy of the changes in advance of the meeting.

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# THE STATE OF THE WATERSHED

## WATER QUALITY CONDITIONS IN THE YELLOW DOG WATERSHED AFTER TEN YEARS OF BENTHIC MACROINVERTEBRATE MONITORING AND FOUR YEARS OF LAKE INDEPENDENCE MONITORING

Over the past ten years, we have improved our monitoring programs and parameters to better understand the geographic scope and habitat diversity of our lake and stream ecosystems. The results we are sharing with you are supported by long-term trends. New records are carefully checked for quality assurance by our administrative staff before they are analyzed. The map below indicates stream quality based on the collection of macroinvertebrates and the analysis of their habitat. Stream water quality ranges from good to excellent as you will see in the map below. The values are based on total stream quality scores, which are the outcome of our biannual monitoring program. The assessment of Lake Independence, in Big Bay, has been going for four years. Lake monitoring constituents include:

total phosphorus, chlorophyll, clarity, dissolved oxygen and temperature. Measurements and samples are collected following state-wide protocol in the same location in the deepest part of the lake at regular intervals. They are analyzed in a DEQ lab in Lansing. While our lake remains classified as mesotrophic and healthy, we are closely watching fluctuations in total phosphorus which have been variable. The total phosphorus values have indicated no conclusive increasing trend. However, continuing consistent annual monitoring is crucial to determine if an increase is truly occurring. Also, in the new era of production at Lundin Eagle Mine this year, ongoing stream data analysis will be imperative. Stay tuned, results from the Salmon Trout Watershed monitoring will be available in our next newsletter.







Christy Budnick

about our work. Also, we planted cedar trees with the Cedar Tree Institute. Mid-July through September we continued our wetland restoration project by pulling the European swamp thistle and reseeding with native seed mixes in the Yellow Dog Watershed. In September we attended the National Land Conservation Conference in Providence, Rhode Island. In October, we will conduct our Fall 2014 Volunteer Stream Monitoring Program. Finally, we look forward to our Annual Meeting Celebration on November 4th at Ore Dock Brewing Company in Marquette.

# 2014

## A BUSY YEAR FOR YELLOW DOG



Yellow Dog Watershed Preserve

PROJECTS AND EVENTS IN 2014 have been all sorts of fun. In March, we were in Green Bay, WI for the Road & Stream Crossing Workshop put on by the US Forest Service, UW Extension, Wisconsin DNR and The Nature Conservancy. In May, we were at the National River Rally and Waterkeeper Alliance Conference in Pittsburgh, PA. Also, we co-organized a cleanup event for the Dead River in Marquette for World Fish Migration Day with The Nature Conservancy, Superior Watershed Partnership, and Moosewood Nature Center. In June, we completed our spring 2014 Volunteer Stream Monitoring Program for 18 sites in two watersheds. Additionally, we monitored the Yellow Dog Plains for 20 consecutive days to complete our annual Kirtland's Warbler Singing Male Survey. In July, we tabled at the Marquette Blueberry Festival and spoke to the community

**INVADERS** BY ROCHELLE DALE We never really decided on a name for ourselves: Thistle Exterminators, Thistle Destroyers, The Thistle Queens, to name a few. In 2009, former YDWP director, Emily Whittaker, received a grant from the National Forest Foundation to do an invasive plant survey in the McCormick National Wilderness Area where the Yellow Dog River begins and where it flows for its first several miles. To our surprise, we discovered a host of invasives: yellow and orange hawk weed, birdsfoot trefoil, knapweed, and European swamp thistles. Of all these invasives, the swamp thistle was predominant. It spreads rapidly through air and waterways. The seeds come on boots or on truck tires or bird's beaks. The thistle may grow to a height of over 4 to 8 feet which means the seeds are easily scattered, the plants shade all the smaller vegetation below, and they greedily suck up water with their massive root system, water that native plants may have to do without. This year our project is funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. Current ED, Mindy Otto, received a mini-grant from NFWF to the Central Upper Peninsula Cooperative Weed Management Area (CUPCWMA) with administrative support from Superior Watershed Partnership. Read more at [www.yellowdogwatershed.org](http://www.yellowdogwatershed.org).

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# A RARE SONG

KIRTLAND'S WARBLER ON THE YELLOW DOG PLAINS

By Rochelle Dale

**I**STUFFED MY PICNIC BREAKFAST AND snacks into my pack with the binoculars and camera, grabbed my hiking boots and thermos of coffee and ran to the truck. I was due to meet Nancy and Jeremiah Moran on County Road 510 at 7:00 a.m. to help with the annual Kirtland's Warbler survey on the Yellow Dog Plains. Since the birds like their early morning singing times, it was important not to be late.

The Kirtland's Warbler is a rare little bird – in fact it is on the endangered species list--with a yellow breast, bluish gray back, and a big distinct voice. It has definitive habitat requirements: five to twenty-year old jack pines with abundant ground cover in between, and for some reason it lives mainly in Michigan but has been found as far abroad as Ohio and Canada.

Nancy has been spearheading the survey on the Yellow Dog Plains for the last nine years. She was determined to make the Plains part of the annual Fish and Wildlife's annual bird survey program because about seventeen to twenty years ago, Nancy was positive that while she was out fishing with her husband in the Yellow Dog River, she had seen and heard a Kirtland's. Other people in the area had also claimed to have heard or seen the warbler. The habitat was right, but even so, nothing came of the reports of the bird sighting until 2006 when the survey became official and Nancy found, photographed, and documented the singing male.

As we drove out to the plains, Nancy related her findings of her night time bird survey the night before which lasted until 2:00 a.m. This explained why fourteen year old Jeremiah was already asleep in the back seat. We hadn't been long on the AAA road when we came to major road construction for the Eagle Mine Project, construction so invasive that even though I've lived in this area for twenty-five years, I often couldn't tell where I was, so when we finally approached one of our destination sites, it was a relief to be off the main road where we could hear the wind and the songs of birds.

The Kirtland's sightings in this area

have been sporadic. Nancy photographed the bird in 2006, but in 2007 she heard one but could never spot it. The next one was found in 2009 which was the same year that Plum Creek logging corporation replanted one of its 80 acre parcels specifically for Kirtland's habitat. This is where we first searched the morning of my visit, and even though the five year old Jack Pines seemed perfect habitat, we did not find our prized bird. In fact, Nancy hasn't seen or heard the Kirtland's since 2011.

I asked her if Lundin's mining and road activities were possibly affecting the warbler's habits. She answered me with an honest, "I don't know." She feels that not enough information is known about the bird and its needs in this area which is one reason why these surveys are so important.

I am always impressed by the environmentalists like Wendell Berry who work year after year and manage to maintain a certain amount of enthusiasm and optimism. I want to know what keeps them going, so I asked Nancy what motivates her. It didn't take her long to answer. "The Kirtland's Warblers are here, and it's nice to have beautiful things here in contrast to the mine. There's more to the Plains than logging and mining. It's a special place." By then, Jeremiah was awake and ready to participate. He started doing these surveys when he was

just a child of four or five. "How do you feel about all this?" I asked.

"It's important for people to know what's out here and to get involved. We need to make sure that this little bird's habitat is protected."

So we will continue to survey every year for two weeks in June, and even though we have some very dedicated members like Nancy and Jeremiah who organize the event, we can always use more help. You don't have to be an ornithologist. The Kirtland's song and features are quickly identifiable, and like Nancy said, the Plains are a special place. It feels good just to be out there in the early morning sunshine, mist, or dew, and while I didn't get to hear the Kirtland's song this year, I did listen to the Nashville and Yellow Rumped Warblers, the Hermit Thrush, the Winter Wren, and of course the wind through the Jack Pines.



Kirtland's Warbler by Nancy Moran

**"It's important for people to know what's out here and to get involved. We need to make sure that this little bird's habitat is protected." - Jeremiah Moran, age 14**



Nancy Moran surveying for Kirtland's Warblers on the Yellow Dog Plains. Photo courtesy of Rochelle Dale.



# Watershed Concerns.



Yellow Dog Watershed Preserve

(Above) Suspended sediment in a wetland adjacent to the Northwest Road on the Yellow Dog Plains in the Salmon Trout Watershed on July 19, 2014. This pollution is directly caused by construction of the haul road for Lundin Eagle Mine.

## MARQUETTE COUNTY ROAD COMMISSION IN VIOLATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION ACT

On August 4, 2014 the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) Water Resources Division issued a Violation Notice to the Marquette County Road Commission for an unlawful discharge of sediment and turbid water into a wetland ravine, tributary, and the East Branch Salmon Trout River during the creation of the haul road for Lundin Eagle Mine. The unlawful discharge was created when excavation for the new County Road AAA road corridor reached groundwater level and water began to flow out of the construction site, down slope, and into nearby waterways.



Yellow Dog Watershed Preserve

Groundwater was exposed this July when excavators dug too deep into a hillside for the Lundin Eagle Mine haul road. Water still continues to seep out of the hill. (Photo taken August 6, 2014)

The Yellow Dog Watershed Preserve was informed in late July by an anonymous source that a spring that feeds the East Branch of the Salmon Trout River had been damaged during road construction on County Road AAA. Site visits by our organization continued for several weeks and confirmed the damage had occurred, mitigation had begun, but that the MCRC did not have a formalized plan to control the release. The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality and Michigan Department of Natural Resources were notified of the situation immediately and completed several site visits in July and August.

The Yellow Dog Watershed Preserve sent in a formal complaint letter to MDEQ on August 1, urging the agency to issue a citation for polluting the water. We also urged the agency to require the implementation of a long-term mitigation plan to clean up the site. The EPA has been informed of the incident and we are working with tribal entities and our legal team to discuss future options. Sedimentation at these levels can have serious impacts on fish and other aquatic organisms.

In the Violation Notice, the MDEQ states that they observed the unlawful discharge of sediment and turbid water on July 14, 2014. Improved erosion and sediment control measures were installed at their direction. When the groundwater mixed with rain and sediment after a storm event, the flow

rates increased, the water was polluted, and was not properly contained in violation of Part 301, Part 303, Part 91, and Rule 2190 of Part 31 of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act. The MCRC is directed to remove sediment from selected portions of the wetland and intermittent tributary and monitor the water color for the remainder of the 2014 construction season.

It is unclear what ongoing hydrological impacts can be expected by this. It is also unclear what long-term solution can be adopted that could manage the altered hydrology. YDWP and partners will continue monitoring the waterways and outcomes. **Find more updates at [www.yellowdogwatershed.org](http://www.yellowdogwatershed.org)**

Mike Kantola 906-250-7931  
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## MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ISSUES VIOLATION NOTICE TO PLUM CREEK TIMBER COMPANY

During the week of June 23, 2014, a reconnaissance survey of forest and wetland conditions on the Snowmobile Trail 5 route, by the Yellow Dog RIVERKEEPER® led to a discovery of road construction by Plum Creek Timber Company that did not meet with stated permit conditions

The approved permit allowed for construction at the Mulligan Creek Bridge and included fill and trenching for ditches on either side of the snowmobile trail. Upon visit by the RIVERKEEPER, no permit was on site, no silt fencing was in place, unpermitted culverts were installed, and sedimentation protection best management practices were absent next to this high-quality wetland. Past surveys by the RIVERKEEPER show that this wetland is habitat for the endangered Narrow Leaved Gentian, an extremely rare plant.

The discovery led the RIVERKEEPER to request a site visit by state natural resource agencies. Then, for more information YDWP and Concerned Citizens of Big Bay submitted a Freedom Of Information Act (FOIA) request for the MDEQ reports. On July 29, 2014, MDEQ issued a Violation Notice/Order to Restore the area due to wetland impacts and inadequate soil erosion and sedimentation control. Yellow Dog investigated the area in September, and restoration had not yet occurred.

In January 2013, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency denied the Marquette County Road Commission federal 404 Wetlands-Fill Permits, and halted construction of County Road 595 for Eagle Mine at exactly this location.

# Thank You!

## OUR LOVELY VOLUNTEERS

These folks truly are the magic behind the scenes, taking very little credit and moving us forward into the future. But that is the beauty of it, really. Thankfully, we are made up of a community of resourceful, caring, down-to-earth, fun-loving people who are not afraid of anything. We are proud of you.



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Back view.



Executive Director, Mindy Otto, wearing the new yellow dog t-shirt available in youth large, small, medium, large, x-large, and xx-large. We also have a limited amount of special edition tie-dyed versions and one-color long-sleeved versions by request for \$5 more. Please ask.



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