In the state where Trout Unlimited was founded, Michigan TU will work to ensure clean, healthy streams and rivers supporting thriving populations of wild trout and salmon for future generations to enjoy.

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The Traverse City based Adams Chapter of Trout Unlimited will receive a $7,000 Embrace-A-Stream (EAS) grant from TU National to help place large woody debris (LWD) in the new river channel as part of a historic effort to remove three dams on the Boardman River. The Adams Chapter is kicking in $10,000 for this effort, with another $8,000 secured through a fundraiser by the local Rotary Club. Michigan TU has a $52,000 US Fish & Wildlife Service grant proposal in review for the same purpose.

Brown Bridge Dam, located just a few river miles downstream of Ranch Rudolf in East Bay Township, Grand Traverse County is the first of three dams on the Boardman River slated for removal. Constructed in 1921, Brown Bridge produced hydropower continuously until 2005 when Traverse City Light & Power determined it was no-longer economically feasible to produce hydropower on the Boardman River. Boardman and Sabin dams are located approximately 18 river miles downstream of Brown Bridge and are also scheduled for removal, making this the largest multi-dam removal project ever undertaken in Michigan’s history. A fourth dam, Union Street dam, located in downtown Traverse City will be modified but remain in some capacity. The negative effects of dams on rivers, including impacts to habitat continuity, thermal and hydrologic systems, is well documented.

In August of 2011, consultants AMEC Environmental & Infrastructure (Traverse City, MI) in association with Inter-Fluve Inc. (Madison, WI), submitted a draft Concept Design Report for Brown Bridge Dam Removal. The report lays out three approaches: 100% Active Restoration; 100% Passive Restoration; and a Blended Restoration alternative. Project stakeholders dismissed both 100% approaches. The 100% Active Approach deemed too costly ($8.5 million). The 100% Passive Approach ($2.5 million), among other concerns, would allow too much sediment to escape downstream.

This left the Blended Restoration alternative. The stakeholders, which included the owners of the dams, the City of Traverse City and Grand Traverse County, plus biologists from the USF&W Service, the MDNR Fisheries Division, the GT Band of Ottawa & Chippewa Indians, the Grand Traverse Conservation District, and representatives from the Adams Chapter and Michigan TU, reviewed each restoration element, the associated cost and determined the most important elements that needed to be accomplished now. In other words “what must be done now” versus “what could be done later”. Dam removal, sediment control, reconnection to the flood plain, construction of riffle and pool habitat, and invasive species control were deemed “what must be done now”. Unfortunately, wood debris additions, so critical for in-stream habitat, fell into the latter.

That’s when Trout Unlimited stepped up.
Sediment mitigation is one of the Adams Chapter’s greatest concerns. Even with the best sediment control effort, project engineers and common sense tells us there will be a release of sediment downstream. The key questions are how much and how long it will take to flush through the system.

The majority of the sediment is located in the upper 1/3 of the pond in the delta region. Inter-Fluve estimates that 84,000 cubic yards of sand will be mobilized during drawdown and removal of Brown Bridge Dam unless the sand is dealt with where it currently sits. Plans are to dredge a new river channel through the delta area as close to the historic channel as possible to remove the sediment before it has a chance to wash downstream. This will be done before Brown Bridge Pond is lowered any further. Currently the pond is down approximately 9.5 feet from its 33-foot operating level. Any further drawdown before the new channel is formed and in operation, will cause the river to head-cut moving sediment further into the lower pond area.

In concert with dredging a new river channel through the sand delta, contractors will establish a 20 foot-wide floodplain on each side of the new river. Strategic installation of wood debris and other habitat features associated with a healthy, productive trout stream will occur during this phase.

Without the proposed effort by Trout Unlimited, project engineers state that “Large wood inputs will require centuries for suitable conditions for initiation of growth, then maturity and eventual death or channel capture of riparian trees to occur. “ As anglers and stewards of our coldwater fisheries we cannot and will not let this happen.

The removal of Brown Bridge Dam will reclaim around 8,000 feet of “new” river. The preferred restoration alternative has an estimated cost of $400 per tree to purchase, mobilize, and install; for a goal of $320,000 worth of trees added. Working with state forest officials, nearby private landowners, utilizing TU and other volunteers we believe we can obtain, transport, and install the trees for $200 a tree, and will add as many as possible with the funds we raise for the project.

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Depending on the outcome of Michigan TU’s US Fish & Wildlife grant, we might have about $80,000, enough to do the sand delta while equipment is in the area dredging the new river.

In addition to habitat restoration efforts as part of this dam removal project, the Adams Chapter and Michigan TU are also actively involved in discussions on fish passage as a result of the dams being removed. Union Street Dam, located in downtown Traverse City is approximately 1-mile upstream from Grand Traverse Bay, Lake Michigan. Union Street Dam has a fish ladder currently that allows steelhead to migrate upstream to Sabin Dam. Salmon are blocked by an MDNR operated weir that is located below Union Street Dam. Once the dams are removed, without added protections, steelhead will have access to the upper reaches of the river, impacting resident brook and brown trout populations, something the Adams Chapter membership is concerned about. The Chapter will continue to work with stakeholders to protect resident trout populations while ensuring that this critical dam removal project moves forward.

The logging days showed us our northern Michigan river’s are resilient and will recover over time if given the chance….in the short-term, it’s our responsibility to do our very best to give the Boardman River, and the trout that reside within, a fighting chance.

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**Missing Ellen Beyerlein**

A friendly smile, a pretty face, and an aura of enthusiasm characterized long time KVCTU member Ellen Beyerlein. Ellen and her husband, Chuck, were almost always at chapter meetings, banquets and field trips. Ellen especially loved to fish the Muskegon and the Little Muskegon rivers near their second home at Stanwood, Michigan. The Beyerleins had moved to Florida some ten years ago after Chuck’s retirement. She passed away January 10, 2012 at their winter home in Homosassa, Florida.

Ellen, a Purdue University graduate, was energetic; and that energy served KVCTU well. She was also active on the state level having served as the first female chair of Michigan Trout Unlimited in the late nineties. She was the chapter’s State Council Representative prior to and also after holding the State Council Chair position. The Chair was especially time consuming and demanding volunteer position prior to the hiring of a full time Executive Director.

Ellen was the Trout Queen of the Kalkaska National Trout Festival in 1998. She was a member of the Fly Fishing Federation and gave instructional talks to the Fly Girls.

Ellen’s contributions to the sport of fly fishing in Michigan were many and she will be sorely missed.

*by Richard Chamberlin*