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# A dam good Pellston story

Maple River fork once site of power, hopes and dreams

by **Richard A. Wiles**

First published in the April 2019 issue of the Mackinac Journal

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# A dam good Pellston story

Maple River fork once site of power, hopes and dreams

By Richard A. Wiles

**B**eginning in late August of 2018, demolition of the dam on Emmet County's Maple River had commenced. The dam had created the 150-acre Lake Kathleen, just south of Pellston, Michigan. The original earthen and concrete structure had been re-created by Ken McLaughlin (owner of the nearby Dam Site Inn) in 1967. Prior to that, various wooden, earthen, and concrete structures had been built to harness the water power of the Maple River.

The first dam on the Maple River was constructed in 1884 by a settler from Elkhart, Indiana named Christian Bontrager. His dam was the second one constructed in Emmet County, the first being on the Bear River in the early 1860s. Bontrager and others who came with him from Indiana were Mennonites. They were a communal group who were in need of cheap land to build up new farms. In order to do so they worked together, shared their resources, and practiced their common religious convictions.



The May 28, 1884, *Petoskey Record* contains a small mention of Bontrager having a dam built on the Maple River to facilitate a grist mill. Bontrager owned the mill for only one season, closing it due to winter weather in January of 1885. The mill site was then sold to fellow Elkhart Mennonite neighbors, the Dillman brothers, in April of 1885. Jacob and Henry both had moved to Maple River Township to farm.

According to the extensive research conducted by Maurice Eby (a master Emmet County historian) of Brutus, Michigan, Maple River Township resident Jacob Shafer operated the sawmill on the east branch of the Maple River from 1885 through 1888. Pellston resident John Wachtel had interest in the operation after that until 1900 when John Greiner took over ownership. Eby, in his book "The Great Lumbering Era of Emmet County," stated, "Christian



Re-creation of Bontrager's first wooden dam on the east branch of Maple River, May 1884

Bontrager bought the land at the fork of the Maple River and built the first dam and water powered sawmill in 1884. The Dillman brothers bought this mill and were running it in April 1885. They were done by 1888 and Jacob Shafer made shingles at this site from 1892-1897.”

The next owner of the Maple River property was George Greiner, a German immigrant who also farmed 80 acres to the west of the river. Greiner and his wife, Rosine, rebuilt a sawmill at the site of the Maple River dam in the fall of 1900. They sold the property to Nicholas Sage, who later sold to Col. Charles Bogardus in 1903.



Shingle mill

Bogardus was a Civil War hero and an elected politician in his home state of Illinois. Bogardus was also the son-in-law of Henry Pells,



and both were prominent businessmen in Paxton, Illinois, south of Chicago. In 1886, upon the death of his

father-in-law, Bogardus' wife, Hannah, and her brother, Edgar, inherited the vast parcels of land that surrounded Pell's Village —Pellston.

The village of Pellston had been named by an agent of the Grand Rapids & Indiana Railroad in 1882, in honor of Mr. Pells. Though Pells owned close to 27,000 acres of timbered land, he was mostly interested in seeing it developed for agricultural purposes, not as a focus for a lumbering business. His dream of creating a “Little Chicago” in northern Michigan died with him.

## 4 - Maple River dam

In November of 1899, after her brother's death, Hannah Pells Bogardus became the sole owner of all the properties in northern Michigan. She asked her husband to come north and visit the area. Colonel Bogardus spent the summer of 1900 inspecting the Pells' properties, and in the fall of 1900, founded the first mill in the Pellston area, a shingle mill. That was followed by a planing mill, a large sawmill and various lathe mills.

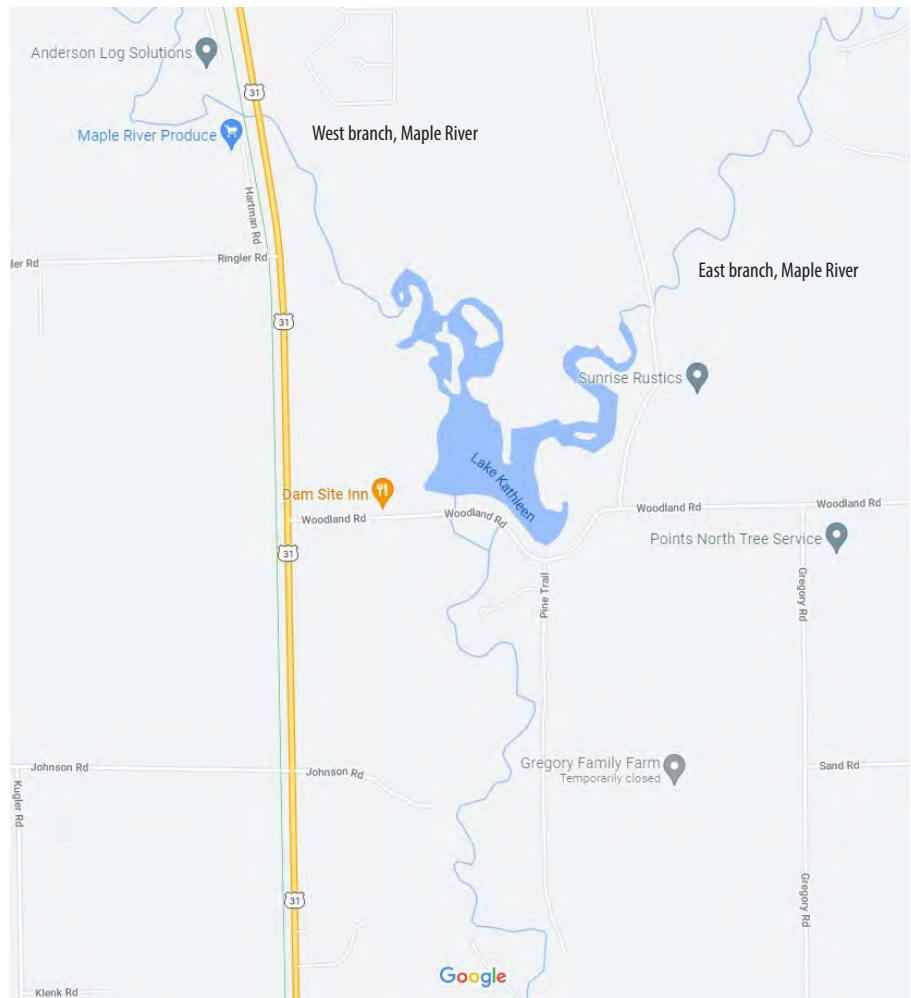


Charles Bogardus

Besides the Bogardus mill on the east side of Pellston on the Maple River, a lumber mill was created in 1903 by Willis Jackson and Thomas

Tindle. The Tindle & Jackson mill was located on the Maple River to the west of Pellston. Bogardus sold the land to the New York-based businessman in order to help finance his vision of becoming a lumber baron. Bogardus was well on his way to fulfilling that dream. For several years in the early 1900s, the small town of Pellston, Michigan, shipped out millions of feet of lumber which included white pine, cedar poles, railroad ties and shingles. It was reported that between the Bogardus enterprise and the Tindle & Jackson mill, the payroll in Pellston was over \$1,000 per day in 1905.

Meanwhile, back in 1903, Bogardus had purchased George Greiner's seven acres on the Maple River for \$400. Greiner had used the property at the fork of the two branches of the river as a sawmill. Bogardus had a plan: con-



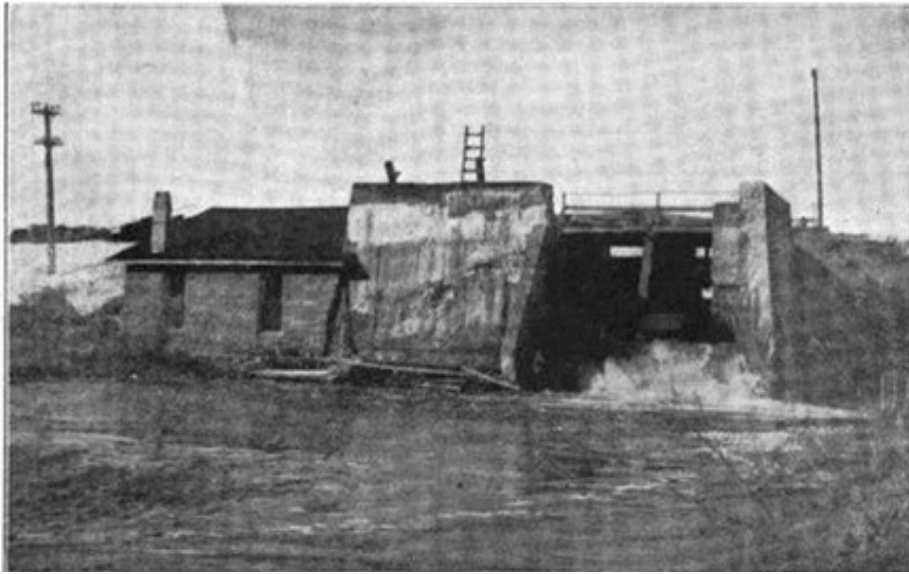
struct a new dam on the two branches and construct a hydro-electric power plant at the same spot. He wanted to produce electricity for Pellston's residents and industrial concerns. Bogardus also believed his dam and power plant would be able to supply electricity to many small towns and hamlets in northern Emmet County.

The *Pellston Journal's* December 14, 1904, edition carried a story about the Pellston Electric Company being incorporated by Charles Bogardus, Erwin C. Bogardus, Archibald Buttars-treasurer and Frank E. Hatch. Hatch was an attorney and was to act as vice-president and manager of the new company. The *Petoskey Record* noted in its

WOODLAND section of the newspaper on April 26, 1905, that, "Joe Kulp was obliged to desert his bachelor quarters and go boarding with his brother Sam, on account of the electric company intending to occupy the building." To help facilitate the new Pellston Electric Company's success in bringing electrical power to the northern sections of Emmet County, the state of Michigan on May 2, 1905, passed a special act of incorporation.

The previously constructed George Greiner dam, as well as the Bontrager dam, the Dillan brothers and Shafer dam, were all placed upon the east branch of the Maple River. Charles Bogardus decided his Pellston Electric

## Maple River dam - 5



PELLSTON, MICH. The downstream wall (bulkhead) of an open turbine penstock fell out into tail race in February, 1912. The bulkhead was badly designed and constructed. It had no reinforcing steel in it and the concrete was mixed of gravel and sand taken out of an old river bed. The plant was then in receiver's hands and has since been sold to the Cheboygan, Michigan, Light and Power Company and will be repaired this spring.

Company hydro-electric dam would harness the power of both branches, so he had it constructed at the fork. The new dam on the Maple River called for a reconfiguration of Woodland Road. It now would pass over the concrete, low-head dam.

The Pellston Electric Light Company decided not to wait for their hydro-electric dam and generating room to be fully completed before producing electricity to the Pellston and Mackinaw City areas. The first generator was set up using a steam-powered turbine in the Jackson & Tindle Pellston plant. The generator was built by the Bullock Electrical Manufacturing Company of Cincinnati, Ohio, (a division of Allis-Chalmers Manufacturing Corporation of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 1901). The three-phase, alternating current, horizontal shaft generator was capable of producing 288 kilowatts

of power (280,000 watts), enough to send electricity to Pellston for lighting and the use of electric motors.

In order to create electricity, a generator needs to spin. At a small hydro-electric plant like the one constructed on Woodland Road during 1905 and 1906, the power-generating building was set to the west side of the dam. The new power dam was made of concrete and placed between two dirt-filled embankments. That original narrow strip of land contained Woodland Road leading to and over the dam via a bridge over the spillway. The water from the mill pond created behind this structure was forced to enter a tube or shaft that carried the water to a horizontal turbine causing it to spin. This turbine was connected to another horizontal shaft that spun the Bullock generator. (dynamo).

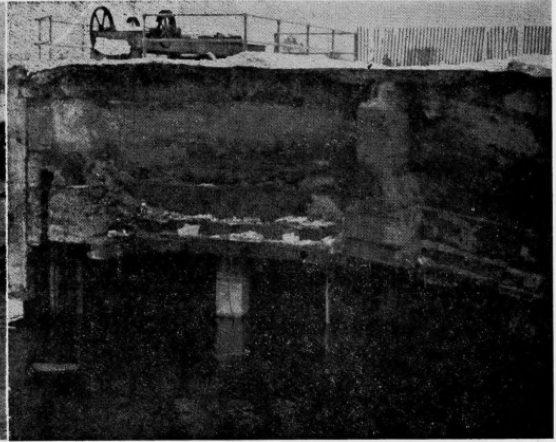
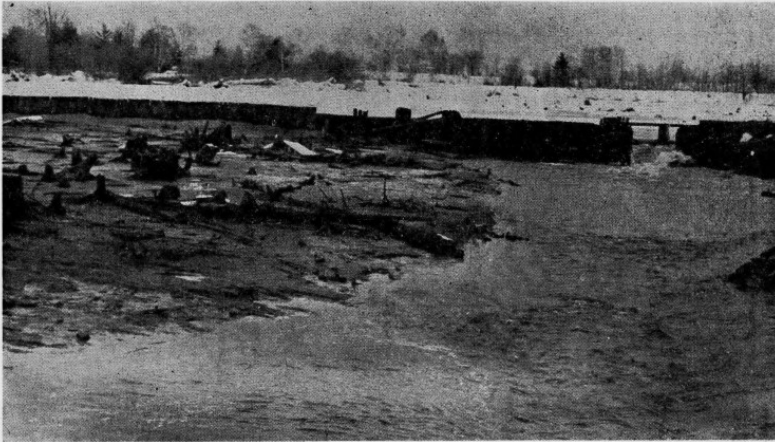
The January 6, 1906, edition of *Engineering World* contained a short notice that the Pellston Electric Company would be extending its transmission lines from Mackinaw City southward to Petoskey. The purpose was to, "furnish electricity for lighting and power to all the cities between." The March 6, 1906, *Pellston Journal* announced that the powerhouse building had been constructed and fitted with an electric generator. The September 13, 1906, *Pellston Journal* stated that the Pellston Dam on Woodland Road would be completed within 30 days.

Unfortunately for Pellston Electric, Petoskey city fathers decided to totally update their electrical lighting and power system rather than buy into the Woodland/Pellston hydro-dam project. By the year 1910, Petoskey had changed all of its electrical grid into AC power and had in place a General Electric 400 kilowatt hydro-electric generator on the Bear River, twice the size of Pellston Electric's hydro-generator.

During 1906, Bogardus' dream of building a railroad from Pellston to the Great Lakes shipping port of Cheboygan came to an end. Work on the new railroad had only progressed as far east as Douglas Lake and that had only been grading work. Money was an issue. Bogardus had run out of it. He had over-extended himself in too many new projects centered in the Pellston area and could no longer pay for them. From 1906 on, Bogardus was in constant divestment of his properties. The Cheboygan Southern Railroad was the first of such divestments. By January of 1907, the one Bogardus company still solvent and

## 6 - Maple River dam

# 50 Children Miss Death Plunge in School Bus



— Wayne Kemp Photo, Review Engraving

Fifty Pellston school children had a narrow brush with death when the Consumer Power Co. dam washed out across the Maple River a few minutes after they had passed in a bus. The dirt dam, evidently undermined by water for some time, caved and a wall of water 15 feet above normal level roared down the river. It was almost 100 feet wide. Force of the water snapped some trees, piled up huge sand banks downstream, carried a few fish into the trees and swept away the Gregory bridge three quarters of a mile away before its force was spent. A telephone cable which went through the dam was broken. THE UPSTREAM pond was almost drained and the river was divided in two parts at the washout. In the photo above, which was taken by Wayne Kemp from the road, the pond can be seen at the left. The tiny dam in the background was built around 1900 and is normally under water. At the right is the cement dam which remained standing. Water now runs on both sides of it. The washout was about 100 feet across and dirt, prior to the washout, was under the road from the snow fence level (right) clear to the bottom of the stream bed. LESS THAN HALF an hour before the washout last Thursday an Emmet road commission plow crossed the bridge. A Pellston school bus followed about 10 minutes before the mishap and driver Roy Emerson said he felt the road sway but thought the bus was slipping on ice. Walter O. Dow, Emmet Road Engineer-Manager, said an investigation was underway to determine responsibility for rebuilding the road, whether it is Consumer's or the county's.

thriving was the Pellston Light & Power Company. Though not supplying power to the city of Petoskey, it was supplying most of the electrical needs of northern Emmet County.

However, the numerous notes that Mr. Bogardus took out to finance his many operations had come due. He could not repay them. The Bogardus Land & Lumber Company, the Pellston Sawmill Company, the Pellston Planing Mill Company and the Pellston Light & Power Company were all thrown into receivership. One of the many historical myths over the years in Emmet County was that Bogardus entered bankruptcy due to the over-harvesting of the area's timber forests. That was not the case. Bogardus sunk too much borrowed money into the defunct Cheboygan & Southwestern Railroad.

By 1912, the Cheboygan Light & Power Company was in ownership of the Maple River dam and the Pellston Electric Company. A catastrophic event at the Maple River hydro-dam had taken



place in February of 1912. The water turbine was damaged when part of the concrete structure collapsed. It had not been reinforced with steel rods when it was constructed. The January 1913 issue of the *Water Power Chronicle* contained several notes regarding the Pellston Light & Power dam on the Maple River.

Meanwhile, in March of 1923, the Cheboygan Light & Power Company

(now the owner of the former Pellston Electric Company's hydro-dam) name was abandoned, and the Michigan Public Service Company name took its place. By 1927, the Michigan Public Service Company had incorporated and consolidated seven more utility companies in western and northwestern Michigan.

The Maple River hydro-electric dam continued to generate power through-

out the 1920s and 1930s. The 1937 publication, "A Land-Classification Survey of Maple River Township, Emmet County, Michigan" by William W. Lewis (for the Michigan Academy of Science, University of Michigan) stated, "The water-power development, which lies at the confluence of the eastern and western branches of the Maple River, consists of a dam and a hydroelectric plant. It is the property of the Michigan Public Service Company. The small private recreational area (log building) is owned by a hunting and fishing club."

In the fall of 1947, Emmet County dedicated a new county park at the site of the Maple River dam. Robert S. Lincoln, the 1935 through 1955 county agricultural agent was honored for his work. He had been instrumental in helping Emmet County participate in the Top O' Michigan rural electrification of northern Michigan.

In July of 1950 the Michigan Public Service Company sold its interests to Consumers Power Company of Jackson, Michigan. At the time of the sale, the dam was still producing electricity for the grid. It is not yet known if the dam was generating power on the day of November 12, 1951, when its catastrophic failure took place. The road over the spillway that day had just carried the Pellston Public School bus before the failure took place. Roy Emerson, the driver, and 51 students were on board the bus when it gave way around 9 a.m. Brutus resident Ken Parkey stated that they all felt a swaying of the bus as they passed over the earthen spot next to the spillway which later gave way.



Woodland Road culverts 1952-1967

The Emmet County Road Commission did not rebuild the dam. They decided to place three culverts in the Maple River and build Woodland Road over top of the culverts. The flowing Maple River situation remained in place until 1967 when the owners of the property, Ken and Kathleen McLaughlin, decided to re-create the old earthen and concrete dam structure, which they did. The new dam lasted until August of 2018. Lake Kathleen was the name given to the new reservoir created behind the concrete spillway.

Eventually, Lake Kathleen and the Maple River dam were both in the ownership of Harbor Springs, Michigan, resident Paxon Offield. From August 29, 1997 through 2017, the Maple River dam and Lake Kathleen were noted in the Emmet County plat books as under the ownership of the Blue Maple River Company (Offield). In 2014, a dam inspection uncovered seepage along the downstream "toe" of the earthen

embankment (dike). It was noted that the width of the embankment was over 100 feet which added to a higher safety aspect of structure. The slopes of the dike were quite stable, measuring over 1,200 feet in length. A 2015 inspection of the concrete spillway outfall showed it to be in poor condition and the raceway also showed significant concrete deterioration.

Offield decided in 2012 to work with the Conservation Resource Alliance (branch office in Traverse City, Michigan) to come up with a future plan for the Maple River dam. He subsequently decided that the best option would be the total removal of the 1906 structure, both the earth and concrete. It would mean the end of Lake Kathleen and the restoration of the Maple River to a totally free-flowing, cold-water stream. The river has a watershed of some 160 square miles of northern Emmet and Cheboygan counties.

## 8 - Maple River dam



Lake Kathleen draining

In January of 2017, Harbor Springs summer residents Rick and Lotsie Holton took over possession of the Lake Kathleen property. They decided to follow up with “Packy” Offield’s decision to have the dike removed. In June of 2017, the Conservation Resource Alliance held a public meeting at the University of Michigan’s Biological Station on Douglas Lake concerning the decision to remove the dam. At the meeting, the public was informed about how Lake Kathleen would be drained down slowly over a period of four months (beginning in May of 2018). According the CRA officials at the meeting, the more slowly the lake could be drained, the less likely the sediment behind the dam structure would be left in place and not be washed down the Maple River. The Maple River below the dam and spillway as of 2018 showed definite signs of impact from the two washouts that occurred in 1951 and again in 1953.

Environmental studies conducted on the removal of the dam have all con-



cluded that the level of the Maple River will not increase, nor will Douglas Lake, the source of the eastern branch of the Maple River. Once the dam structure was deconstructed, the Conservation Resource Alliance planned to do prep work on the old lakebed and also restoration work on the shorelines of the two river branches. It is estimated that within one to two years after the lake is totally drained, natural grasses, sedges and other types of plant species native to the area will recolonize the former Lake Kathleen. By the year 2030, shrubs and small trees will be growing along the banks of the river’s two branches. 🌿

Richard A. Wiles is a retired history and reading instructor at Petoskey High

School and a former Spring Arbor University class instructor in research. He has written five White Paper research projects for the Petoskey Public Library involving historical events in the area, including the crash of the B-52 Air Force bombing trainer into Little Traverse Bay in 1971.

Wiles holds a Bachelor’s degree in history from the University of Toledo, a Master’s degree in reading development-psychology from Michigan State University and an Educational Specialist degree in community leadership from Central Michigan University.

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**PELLSTON: A Dam Good Story—AFTERWORD**

**December 25, 2018**



**Lake Kathleen-Pellston Dam August 2018-Woodland Road**

**“A DAM GOOD STORY”-The History of the Pellston Dam**



**A Petoskey District Library White Paper Album**

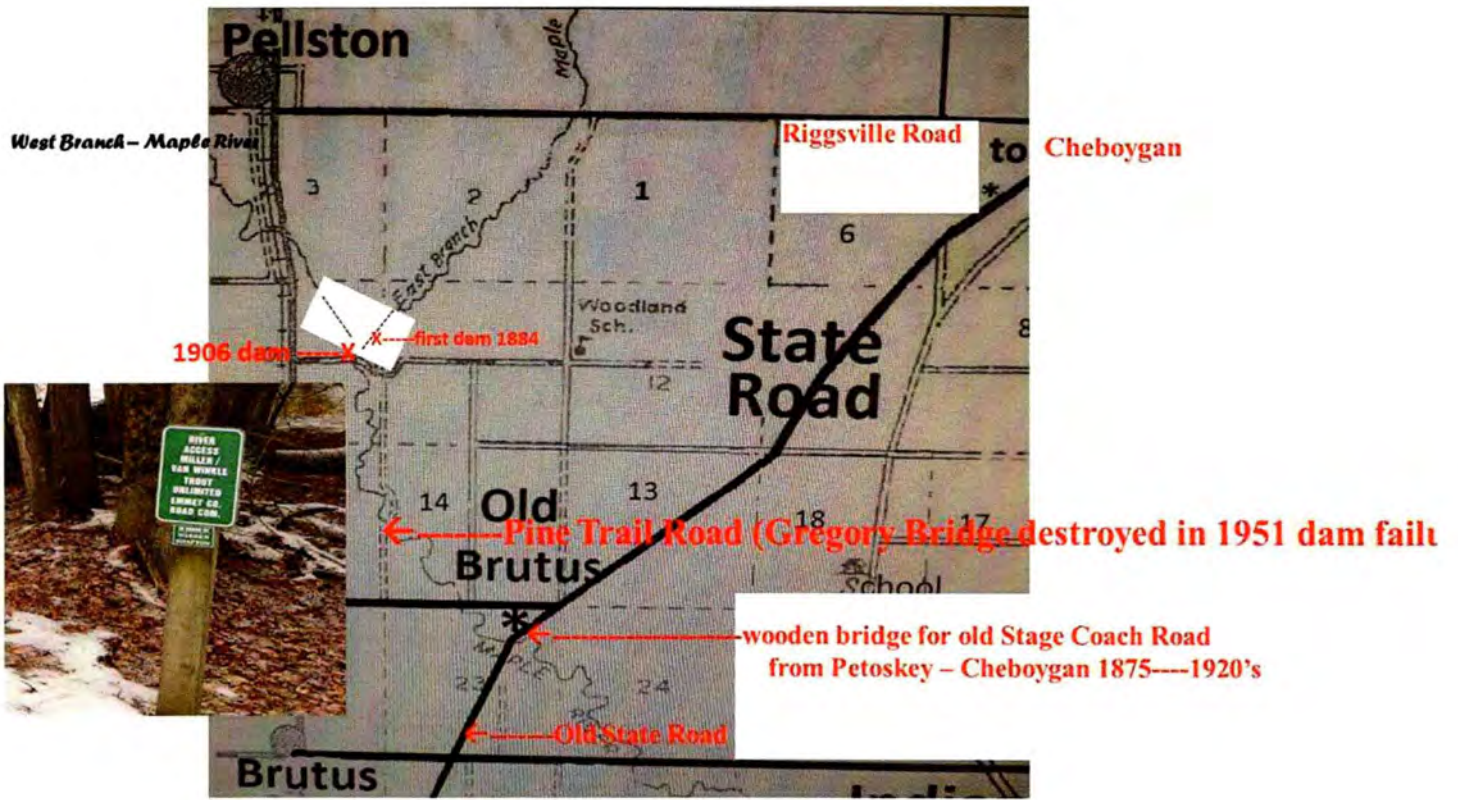
**Richard A. Wiles**

**Maurice “Moe” Eby**

**Charles L. Wilson**



A Dam Good Story



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Rick Holton



Lake Kathleen-May 2018



Lake Kathleen-September 2018



**A Dam Good Story**

**AUGUST 2018**





A Dam Good Story



A Dam Good Story



















August 30, 2018



The Maple River watershed is approximately 168 square miles in area and is heavily influenced by glacial deposits. Catchments for the East and West Branches of the Maple River have large amounts of coarse textured glacial till.

The catchment for the main stem Maple River also has coarse textured material in the form of lacustrine sand and gravel. The prevalence of this larger (coarse) material in the underlying geology promotes groundwater movement and keeps the river cold and suitable for trout.

A Dam Good Story







A Dam Good Story





**October 25, 2018**















November 10, 2018

A Dam Good Story



A Dam Good Story







December 15, 2018





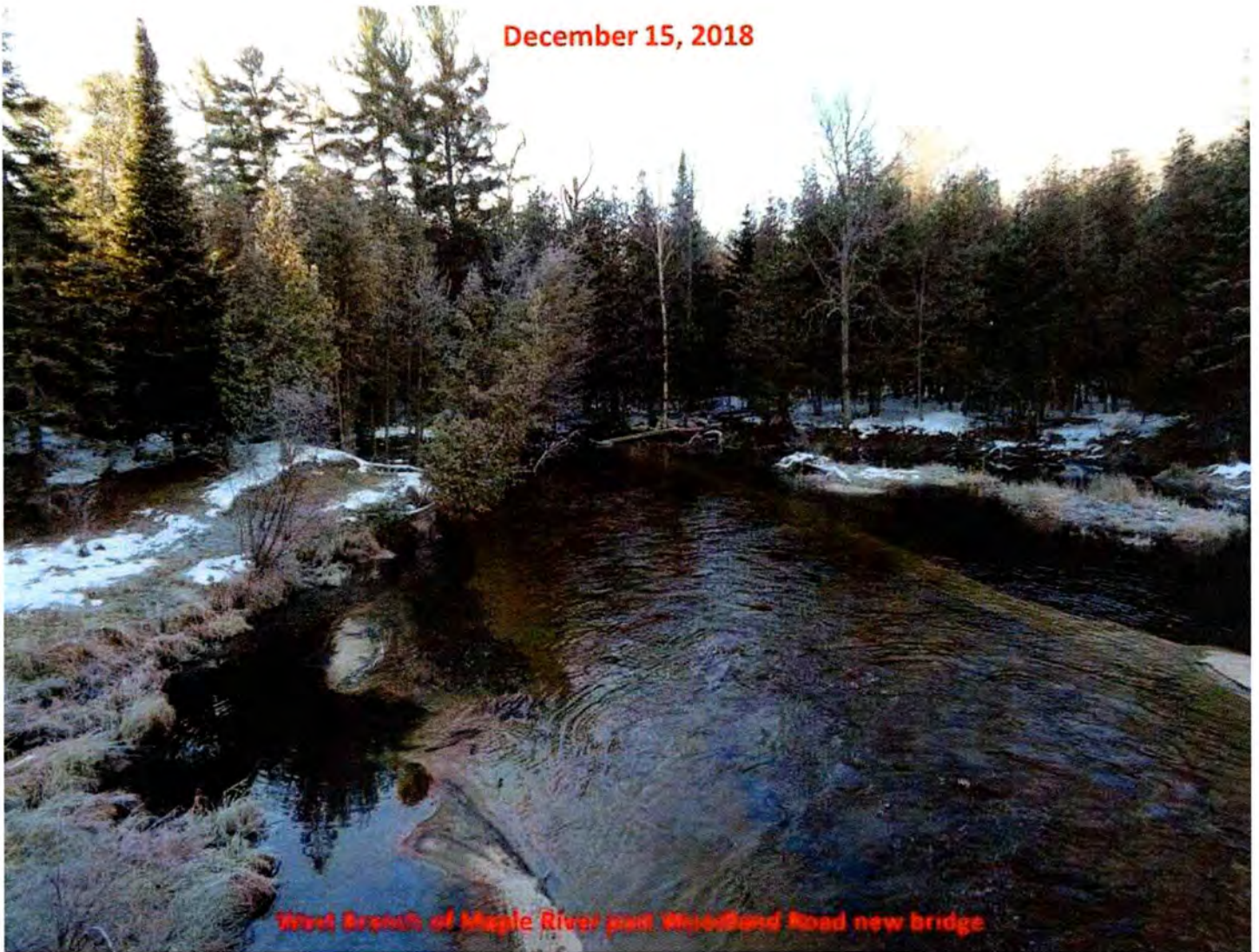








December 15, 2018



West Branch of Maple River past Windland Road new bridge



















**A Dam Good Story**



A Dam Good Story



December 20, 2018



Brutus-Burt Lake Road bridge



**Brutus-Burt Lake Road bridge**

**December 20, 2018**

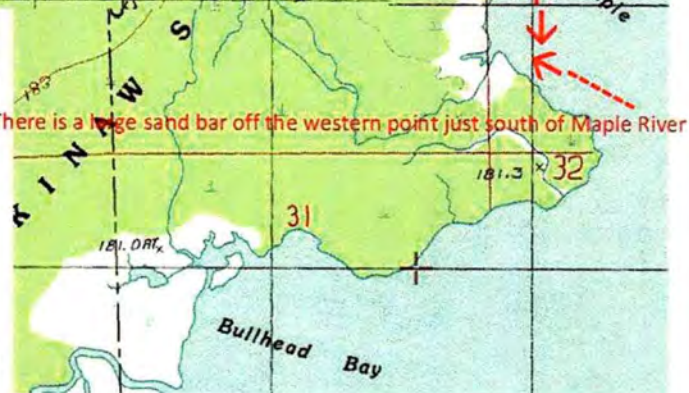
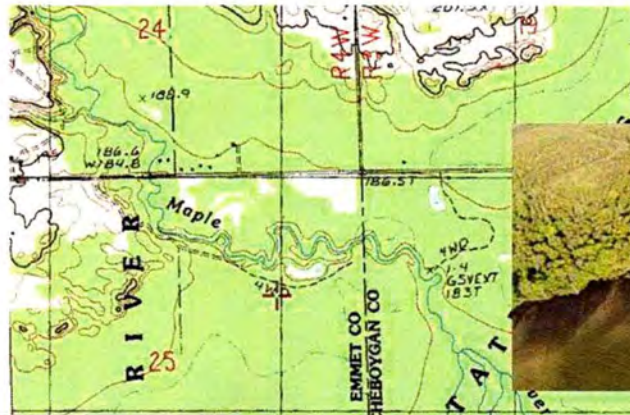


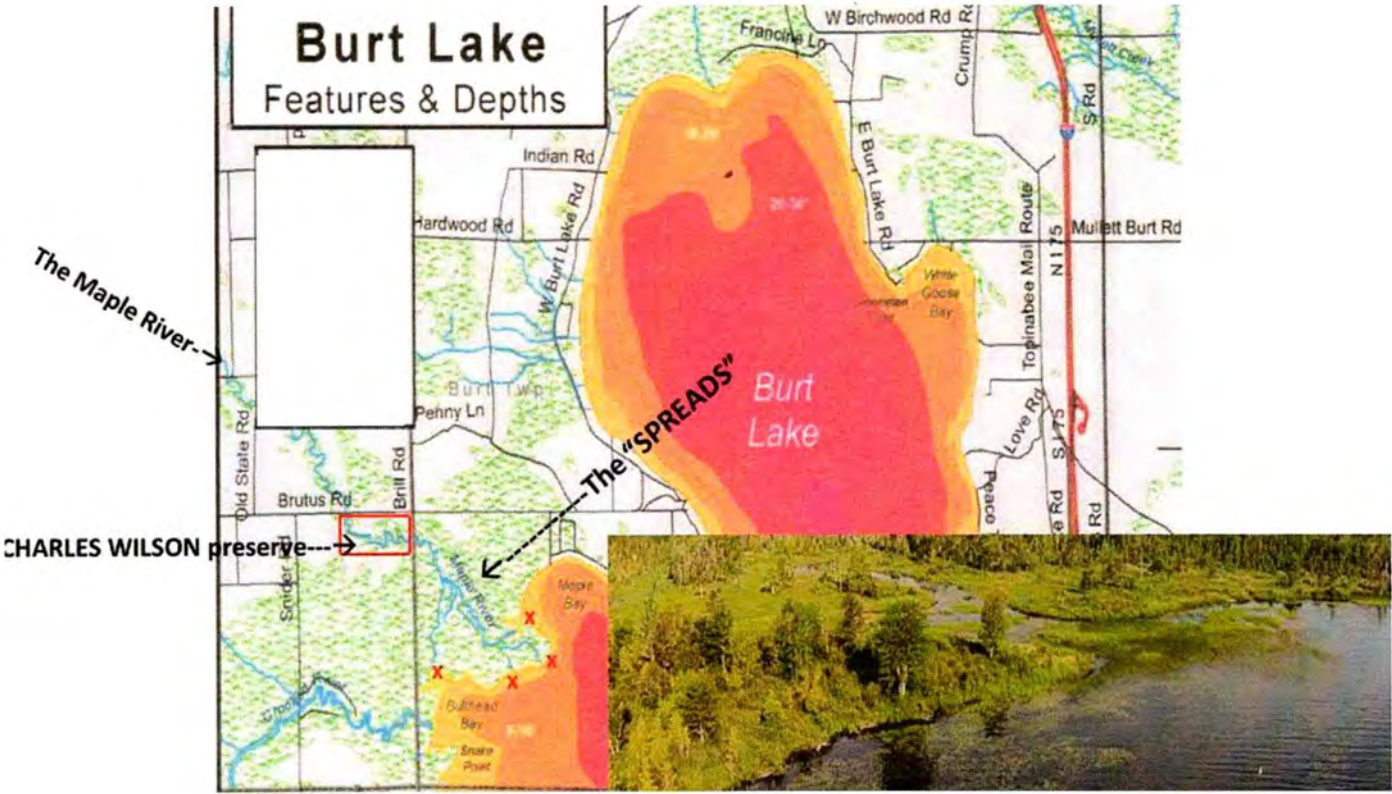


# A Dam Good Story

Google Maps

1985

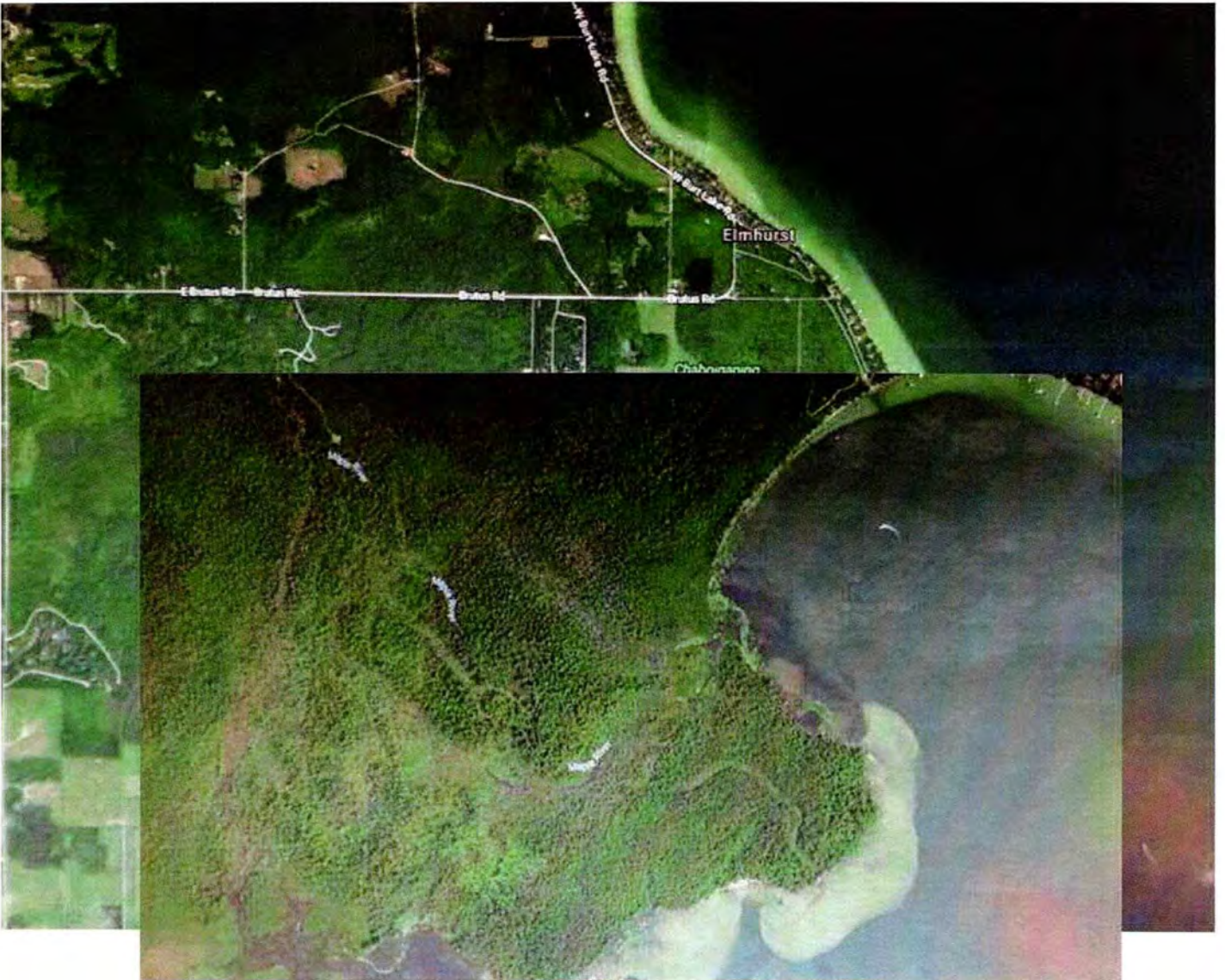






***In December 2016, Charles Wilson donated a conservation easement to Little Traverse Conservancy to ensure the long-term protection of his 153-acre property that lies along nearly 4,500 feet of Emmet County's Maple River. This is the longest stretch of the Maple River in private ownership that has been protected to date through Little Traverse Conservancy***

***"The Maple is special because abundant groundwater gives rise to a cold stream habitat, perfect for brook, rainbow and brown trout. In addition, very little of the land encompassing the river has been developed and much of it remains in a natural state."***



A Dam Good Story











Three out of four dams on the Boardman River are gone — the Brown Bridge Dam near Mayfield leveled in 2012, the Boardman Dam at Cass Road near Keystone Road felled in 2017 and the Sabin Dam east of Cass Road demolished this year. Union Street Dam in downtown Traverse City is the fourth, and the last piece of the dams puzzle.

The work is part of the Boardman River Dams Ecosystem Restoration Project, an effort to reconnect the still separated Boardman River and restore it to a more natural state.

June 1, 2018 BOARDMAN RIVER

# ROILING THE WATERS



Record-Eagle/Jen-Michael Stump

The Boardman River flows through its original course through the former Keystone Pond following the removal of the Boardman Dam.

In addition to the sediment (silt and sand) released from the washout, several dump truck loads of sand were reportedly placed in the river at that location in an attempt to stop the flow.

Michigan Dept. of Natural Resources 2014-178, Maple River  
SFR  
Status of the Fishery Resource Report

A 1967 survey downstream of Brutus Road following dam reconstruction found a fish community similar to previous surveys, but indicated that the stream bottom was covered with sand with depths of 6 inches to 4 feet

**AVID Maple River fly fisherman---December 2018 statement:**



The Maple has had a huge problem with silt, sand, marl, and loam (sediment in general) all the years we've known it as our home river.

The removal of the dam would eventually allow the river to flush itself out. The river running clear in a narrow channel rather than through an impoundment, should result in cleaner gravel bars (what spawning trout want) after the initial flood of silt resulting from the removal.

Silt deposits on the banks should result in heavy vegetation in a season or two. The cedars and hemlock should move in soon after, resulting in greater shading of the river and a drop in mean temperatures which would favor trout (and grayling).

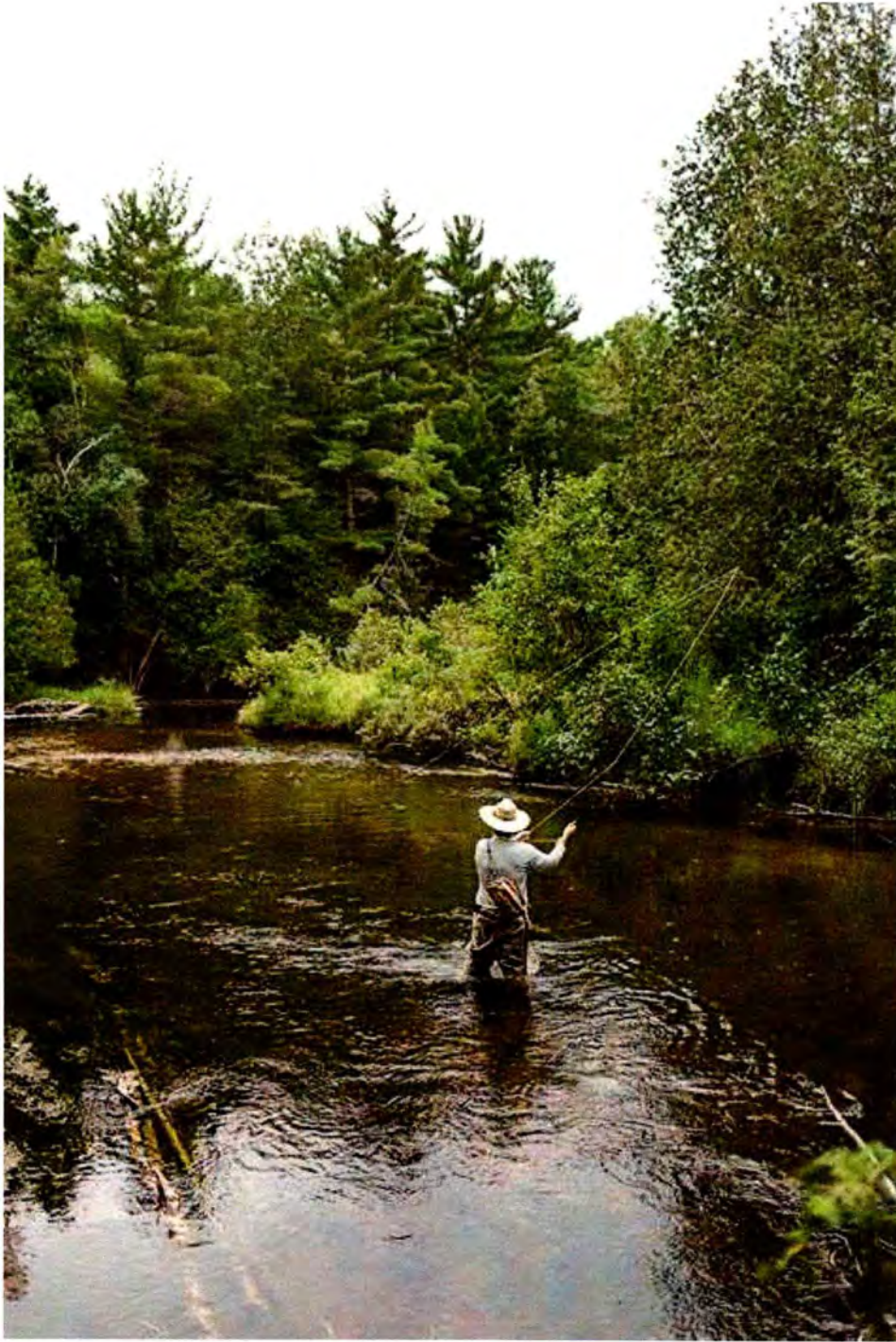
**Although brook, brown, and rainbow trout are all part of the fish community in the Maple River, it is dominated by brown trout; up to 94% numerically at the Brutus Road site.**

A Dam Good Story

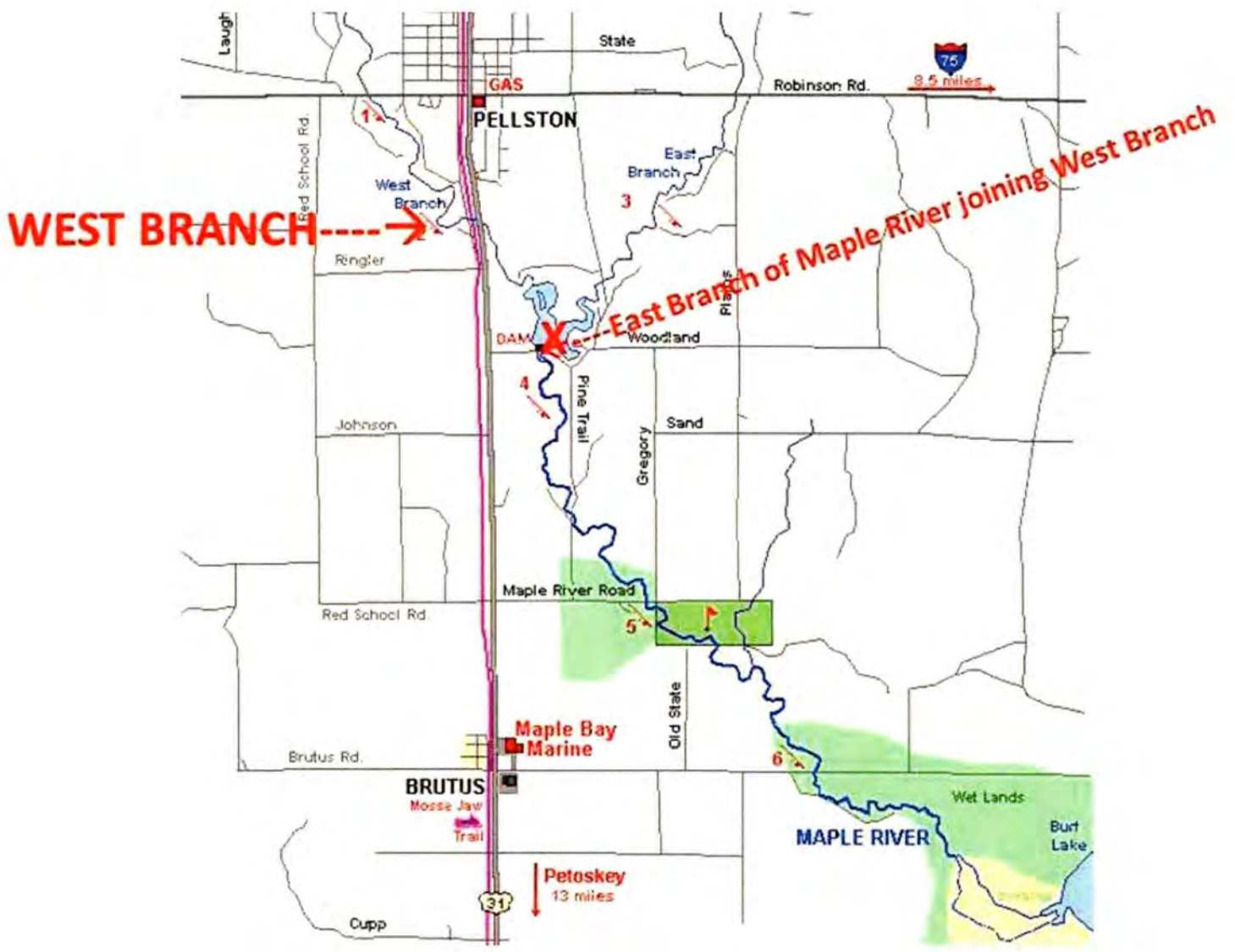


Michigan Dept. of Natural Resources 2014-178, Maple River  
SFR  
Status of the Fishery Resource Report

The Maple River supports a good population of lake run fish, both brown and rainbow trout (steelhead). These fish live a portion of their lives in Burt Lake and will return to the Maple River at different times for feeding, thermal refuge, or spawning. The abundance of lake-run fish in the Maple River dispels the myth that the shallow water at the river's mouth (in the spreads) prevents access for migratory fish returning to the Maple River. In fact, maintenance of the sand traps that were installed just upstream at Brutus Road as a part of 1975's Maple River Sediment Control Project was discontinued in the late 1990s.



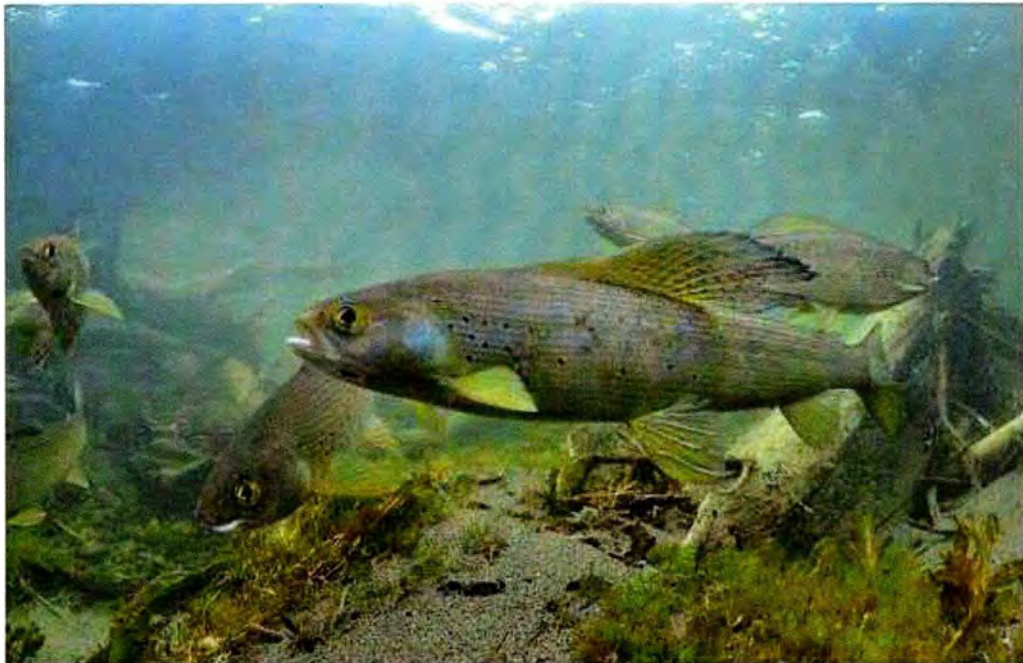




**These Michigan rivers might get the long-lost Arctic grayling**

**2018**

Parts of Jordan, Boardman and Maple rivers will receive habitat evaluations to see whether the fish could thrive there



Eggs will be evaluated at the Oden State Fish Hatchery in Emmet County, where the broodstock will be developed and tested to make sure the new fish is free of pathogens that could harm Michigan waters.

Woodland Road was Mennonite Country in the 1880's+----Now it is AMISH COUNTRY





A Dam Good Story





A Dam Good Story





