



East Branch of the Two Hearted River before bank restoration. *Photo Courtesy of The Nature Conservancy/Emily Clegg*

# East Branch Sportsman's Club

## Part of the Tree Farm Group Certification

*East Branch Sportsman's Club, Luce County - Michigan* Straddling the East Branch of the Two Hearted River, the East Branch Sportsman's Club spans almost 4,000 acres of land in Michigan's Upper Peninsula (UP). According to Lyle Frost, who served as the president of the club from 2000-2011, it began during the Great Depression as a deer-hunting club.

Families, mainly from the Flint and Saginaw area, saw the eastern UP as a cutover, but recovering, wilderness. Hunting was good until the sixties, he says, but now the land gets used in a wider variety of ways. Today, most members use the area as a vacation and recreation retreat.

“We’re probably one of the worst areas now for deer hunting,” Frost says, “once the snow comes, they’re gone [deer in this area migrate due to snow]. But it’s a fantastic snowmobiling area. Three feet of snow on the ground is a light winter for us.”

The East Branch Club was started in 1937 when a group of tradesmen purchased the property from the Webster Logging Company. It has since grown to be one of the larger clubs of its kind in Michigan. The club is the largest non-industrial, private landowner in the Two Hearted Watershed. However the club works to keep dues low and members are loyal and are often second or third generation of the original owner.

To support the low membership fees, the club relies on timbering to pay the bills. Working with forester Jerry Grossman, they are able to sustainably log the area in a low-impact way. By joining the certified sustainable national Tree Farm System, the club manages timber products and provides a sustainable source of income for future generations.

Grossman Forestry Company started the Grossman Forestry Tree Farm Group to offer this service to landowners in the eastern UP. The American Tree Farm System has established a relatively new program called the American Tree Farm System, Group Certification Process. The benefits of the program includes facilitating the flow of information to landowners, maintaining market access, improving forest management practices, reducing the overall costs of forest certification for landowners, and assuring customers and the public that landowners are practicing sustainable forestry.

The club's plan adopted the practice of select cutting as opposed to clear cutting. This process helps clear ground vegetation and closely grouped trees that can provide an overabundance of fuel to forest fires. It also allows more sunlight to reach the forest floor, which helps smaller plants and underbrush thrive. This, in turn, provides more food to ground dwelling wildlife.



After: New bridge on the East Branch of the Two Hearted River. *Courtesy of The Nature Conservancy/Emily Clegg*

Maintaining wildlife and riparian/fish habitat has become another major goal for The East Branch Club, as they occupy a great deal of territory in the Two Hearted River watershed, one of the most pristine watersheds in the Upper Peninsula. "It's basically one of the last remaining watersheds here that hasn't been industrialized or contaminated by mining," Frost said.

Working with The Nature Conservancy, The East Branch Club has embarked on several projects to improve culverts, stream crossings and sedimentation sites on its property along the Two Hearted River. Much of the work was focused on restoring perched culverts, or, culverts that are raised higher than the level of the river, causing miniature waterfalls that prevent fish from navigating through them.

"[Perched culverts] are a big barrier for fish reproduction," Frost said. Some of the culverts had as high as a 4.5 foot drop on one side. "Fish just can't swim up that," he said.

The Club has also been active in alleviating sedimentation and erosions along their namesake - the East Branch of the Two Hearted River. The banner (top) picture for this story shows the "before" and the photo on this page the "after". By controlling sediment, the Club helps improve habitat for fish.

The Club continues to focus on providing recreational opportunities for its members along with sustainable habitat restoration on both stream restoration and forestry. A long term plan with a forester is an important guide and has kept the club focused on long-term economic and sustainable goals.

### **More Information**

Eastern UP Tree Farm Certification:

[http://www.grossmanforestry.com/index.php?page=Tree\\_Farm\\_Group](http://www.grossmanforestry.com/index.php?page=Tree_Farm_Group)