

Planning for Prosperity in River Hydro Communities

Middle Au Sable River Group: Alcona

Stakeholder Meeting

June 27, 2024, | 10:00 a.m.

Glennie United Methodist Church

3264 South State Road

Glennie, MI

Attendees

- Anglers of the Au Sable
 - Curtis Township
 - Glennie Curtis Township Library
 - Glennie Sportsman Club (2)
 - Heritage House Realty
 - Michigan Department of Natural Resources
 - Senator Hoytenga's Office
 - Trout Unlimited
 - Consumers Energy (2)
 - Public Sector Consultants (2)
-

Welcome and Introductions

Participants shared their names, affiliations, roles, and what a successful outcome of this work group looks like to them.

Review of Previous Work

Elizabeth Riggs from Public Sector Consultants provided a recap of the last convening and the survey results. In the last meeting the group focused on defining the assets of the community surrounding the Alcona dam. Meeting two focuses on identifying the opportunities for those assets under the alternative scenarios of whether the dam is removed or remains in operation. Riggs summarized the feedback survey results. The results will be used in scheduling future meetings and preparing future discussion topics.

Planning for Prosperity in River Hydro Communities

Middle Au Sable River Group: Alcona

Fisheries of the Au Sable

Matt Klungle, fisheries biologist for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR), discussed the fisheries of the Au Sable River, which are of national significance given its high value. However, six dams block fish from their cold-water spawning grounds in Lake Huron, especially sturgeon. If the dams were removed, the fish could reach the lake and the river would cool by a few degrees creating a cold-water system. Klungle highlighted that the return of the cold-water fishery would benefit the ecosystem and recreation opportunities. DNR's preference is the restoration of the cold-water river over protection of warmwater impoundments.

Removing the dams would transform the ways in which people interact with the fishery. Without the impoundments, availability of casual angling along the river likely would decrease while the opportunity for a unique cold-water fishery would bring new anglers. Several other warmwater fisheries are available in the area. Sea lamprey management needs to be considered. Klungle stated that the Au Sable is not treated with lampricides as frequently as other river systems.

The group discussed the current landowners around the dam and pond. The area is majority owned by Consumers Energy with the rest being owned by the U.S. Forest Service. If the dam were to be sold, ownership of Consumer's portion of the land would be transferred with the sale and any current easements with property owners will be maintained. In the event the dams are removed, Klungle believes the area will revegetate quickly. In the event of a decision to remove the dams, more research can be done to determine potential conservation partners for rehabilitating the area. The dissolution of the current Habitat Improvement Account program funded by Consumers Energy is likely in the event of the expiration of the Federal Energy and Regulatory Commission (FERC) license.

Focusing on Opportunities

The assets identified during the April meeting were organized into themes for the purpose of this meeting's activity. Participants identified opportunities for building upon the assets under the scenarios of the dam being relicensed and the dam being decommissioned and removed.

Planning for Prosperity in River Hydro Communities

Middle Au Sable River Group: Alcona

Category	Opportunities if the dam continues operating	Opportunities if the dam is removed, and the river flows freely
Safety and Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued measures of dam safety and the community’s relationship with Consumers Energy. • Development of a relationship and trust with a new owner • Lack of a relationship with a new owner and potential to lose a say in decisions around the land and recreation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased safety and security without a dam
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued existence of the Habitat Improvement Account with Consumers • New owner could bring new business and increase local promotion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic expansion through new recreation opportunities and tourism • Potential for new industry, business, and outfitters • “Heart of the River” • Unique marketability as a cold-water fishery and the closest to Detroit
Recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintenance of a healthy river corridor and current recreation opportunities • Expand upon current recreation opportunities and increase public access to the river 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look for new recreation such as camping, hiking, biking, or ATV trails • Expansion of current recreation such as kayaking, fishing, canoeing

Planning for Prosperity in River Hydro Communities

Middle Au Sable River Group: Alcona

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with Canoe Marathon 	
Land Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curtis Township retains Alcona Park 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities for development of a new shoreline • Expansion of infrastructure • Resolution of property ownership • Curtis Township claims ownership of Alcona Park • Old Farm or historical site designation for the land currently underneath the dam ponds

Wrap up and Next Steps

Rich Castle with Consumers Energy reviewed the map of the ponds and Alcona dam. These maps are important in considering ownership of the land and where values lie from a land perspective. The maps are also important when thinking about the opportunities that could be pursued like trails or river access points. **The next meeting will be held on September 11, 2024, at 10:00 a.m.**