

# News Release

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## THE CONSERVATION FUND

*America's Partner in Conservation*



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## **SCENIC LAND ALONG MICHIGAN'S STURGEON RIVER PROTECTED**

### **Land preserves wildlife habitat, secures four miles of the North Country National Scenic Trail and opens up thousands of acres of public land**

Lansing, MI (February 5, 2009) – Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) recently was awarded a Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund grant to help purchase 681 acres of pristine wilderness along the famed Sturgeon River in Baraga County from The Conservation Fund, a national land and water conservation organization. The acquisition completes a deal that preserves a total of 1,054 acres of former We Energies land in two counties in Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

Federally designated as a Wild and Scenic River, the Sturgeon River possesses remarkable scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic and cultural value. The Sturgeon flows through rugged terrain, creating dramatic gorges, waterfalls and rapids well known to paddlers and nature enthusiasts. Its abundant populations of trout make it a popular destination for anglers. The North Country National Scenic Trail, a 4,600-mile hiking trail that crosses seven northern states, parallels the river for more than four miles.

“This acquisition will protect a special place in the western Upper Peninsula for current and future Michigan citizens and visitors to enjoy for generations,” said Michigan DNR Director Rebecca Humphries. “It also protects critical deer wintering habitat and areas where bald eagles and ospreys nest. Further, it helps reduce land fragmentation across the Upper Peninsula when these large parcels of land go on the market.”

With DNR's purchase, approximately 5.6 miles of waterfront property along the Sturgeon River, including the portion of the river that contains Tibbets Falls, will be preserved. The property also connects with neighboring state lands to form a continuous 30-mile stretch of public land along the river and secures a critical four-mile segment of the North Country National Scenic Trail.

“This was a unique opportunity to advance conservation in the region, and we are honored to partner with the state and We Energies to protect a property with such outstanding benefits for the environment and the public,” said Tom Duffus, Upper Midwest director for The Conservation Fund. “We’re also thrilled about the addition to the North Country National Scenic Trail. Over the years The Conservation Fund has worked to preserve a portion of the trail in northern Wisconsin, and it’s exciting to see more of the trail preserved in Michigan.”

“We deeply appreciate The Conservation Fund for, once again, working with a private landowner to permanently protect lands for the North Country National Scenic Trail. North Country is one of our nation’s premier long-distance foot trails,” said Tom Gilbert, superintendent of the North Country National Scenic Trail. “This partnership project with We Energies and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources will ensure that a four-mile segment of the trail will be available for generations to come.”

“This acquisition provides public access to and ensures the permanent protection of a highly unique and significant corridor for the North Country National Scenic Trail,” said Bruce Matthews, executive director of the North Country Trail Association. “It offers yet another example of public/private partnerships working on behalf of the public interest for today and the future. We’re fortunate at the North Country Trail Association to be supported in our efforts by the vision and foresight of The Conservation Fund, Michigan DNR and We Energies.”

In December 2007, The Conservation Fund acquired 1,054 acres from Wisconsin-based utility We Energies, which has been divesting lands no longer needed for utility operations in the Upper Peninsula. As part of the Wilderness Shores Settlement Agreement, the utility offers to sell the lands to state and federal resource agencies or conservation groups first. More than 2,500 acres have been sold for conservation including the Sturgeon River Gorge.

“We Energies is pleased that The Conservation Fund has completed transfer of ownership for the Sturgeon River parcel to the state of Michigan,” said Rod Miller, principal representative with We Energies. “The transaction accomplishes our goal to place parcels selected by state and federal resource agencies into the hands of those that are able to provide for perpetual protection and preservation.”

The Conservation Fund transferred 373 acres of the We Energies land in Iron County to DNR for inclusion in DNR’s Crystal Falls Forest Management Unit but held the Sturgeon River land in Baraga County until DNR secured funding from the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund to purchase the property. The Sturgeon River land will be added to DNR’s Baraga Forest Management Unit.

The land preserved in Iron County fronts the Hemlock, Paint, Menominee and Brule rivers and provides access to a popular whitewater run as well as 870 acres of state forest lands that previously were difficult to access. These lands also contain ideal nesting habitat for the bald eagle and osprey and wintering yards for white-tailed deer.

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### **About The Conservation Fund**

The Conservation Fund is dedicated to advancing America's land and water legacy. With our partners, we conserve land, train leaders and invest in conservation at home. Since 1985, we have helped protect more than 6 million acres, sustaining wild havens, working lands and vibrant communities. We're a top-ranked conservation organization, effective and efficient.

[conservationfund.org](http://conservationfund.org)

### **About Michigan Department of Natural Resources**

The Department of Natural Resources is committed to the conservation, protection, management, use and enjoyment of Michigan's natural resources for current and future generations.

[michigan.gov/dnr](http://michigan.gov/dnr)

