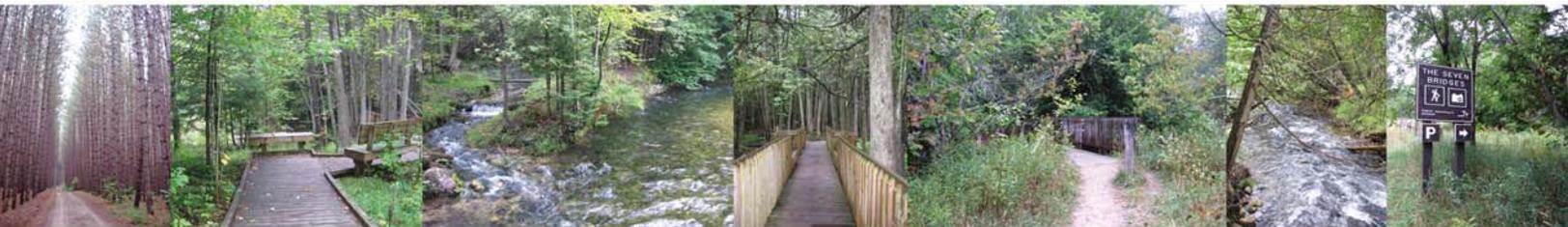


# SEVEN BRIDGES NATURAL AREA MANAGEMENT PLAN SUMMARY

PREPARED FOR:  
GRAND TRAVERSE REGIONAL LAND CONSERVANCY



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## Summary of Seven Bridges Management Plan

The Seven Bridges area is considered by many to be the “jewel” of Kalkaska County. Visitors have for years enjoyed the pristine beauty of the property. A number of wedding ceremonies have been held at the site, and it is a popular subject for artists and photographers. Today the property, owned by the State of Michigan and managed by the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy (GTRLC), is protected in perpetuity while supporting a number of recreational uses.

Seven Bridges is a 314 acre parcel in the Northwest quadrant of Kalkaska County. The Seven Bridges is approximately 7 miles northwest of the Village of Kalkaska located in Clearwater Township. Rapid River, a cold water trout stream, and several small unnamed tributaries run through the property. Approximately 6,300 feet of Rapid River frontage is contained within the Seven Bridges along with rich conifer swamp, northern hardwood forest, and grass/shrub openings.

This management plan for the Seven Bridges is intended to provide guidance towards managing the area consistent with the following goals of the GTRLC and State of Michigan:

- Provide recreational opportunities such as hiking, birding, hunting, fishing, and trapping
- Promote and steward ecological integrity of the land
- Promote and steward the health of Rapid River, its tributaries, and resident fish and wildlife populations
- Promote and steward the health of the forest and resident wildlife populations
- Maintain the rustic character of the area
- Maintain sensitivity to local considerations

This summary provides a brief history of the property that includes ownership issues, past and current use, as well as descriptions of the surrounding properties; form and function of natural features on the property; and the condition of infrastructure existing on the property. The plan recommends management actions to preserve, maintain and protect the property from degradation while encouraging its use.

### Ownership History

The Seven Bridges property was homesteaded by Jacob Rickers in 1868. Jacob and his four sons - Jacob, William, Carl, and Julius - built a prosperous

lumbering business on the site. Remains of the dam for their spill pond can still be seen when crossing the first bridge.

Charles Peschke inherited the land from his uncle Jacob in 1944. Over the years, Peschke's sons and grandsons built, maintained and replaced several rustic bridges crossing over the Rapid River and its tributaries. Oral history suggests that up to seven bridges were maintained on the property, while others recall fewer bridges. It is possible, perhaps likely, that seven bridges existed on the property; however, this number was dictated more by maintenance requirements and happenstance than any need for seven crossings of the Rapid River. The Peschke family generously allowed visitors to enjoy the property. Originally, the seven bridges were used to facilitate travel around the spill pond for the lumber operations; however, when the Peschke family inherited the land, the primary reason for adding and maintaining bridges was to make the area accessible for visitors. Today the remains of several bridges can be seen along the Rapid River and its tributaries, and four modern bridges exist on the property.

In 1994 a rising tax bill forced the Peschke family to sell the property. A partnership purchased the land and slated it for development into 10-acre private estates. The developers never got a chance to finalize their plans. GTRLC board members, Lou Ann Taylor and Virginia Sorenson and their friend Helen Milliken went to Seven Bridges for a picnic lunch. To their surprise, proposed lots had already been marked. Shortly thereafter the GTRLC was able to secure a purchase option from the development partnership. In December 1995 the property was nominated for a grant through the Michigan Natural Resource Trust Fund, and later approved by the legislature. On June 15, 1998, Seven Bridges became property of the State of Michigan. It is owned by the State and jointly managed with the GTRLC.

### ***Natural Features***

Several different habitats containing unique characteristics and qualities exist within Seven Bridges. These habitats differing by vegetation, soil type, hydrology, and topography require different management and conservation practices.

### **Meadow (approximately 21 acres)**

Located in the northeast section of the preserve is an old field meadow. This small area is vastly different from the rest of the mainly forested preserve and provides suitable habitat for plants and animals requiring large open spaces. The open meadow is suitable habitat for a variety of wildlife, including songbirds and game birds. This meadow was cleared and created by past human activities such as farming and homesteading and does show signs of human settlement.

Recommended management practices include habitat management, two-track improvement and well abandonment. Due to the diversity that this habitat provides actions consistent with preserving its current character are recommended. Actions consistent with the set back of shrub and tree encroachment are recommended. These may include manual clearing of progressional upland forest species and other shrubs that may grow in the transition zone. Other management activities that will maintain the habitat quality and prevent the spread of spotted knapweed or other invasive species may be conducted.

### **Red Pine Plantation (approximately 9 acres)**

After following the two-track south out of the meadow and past upland habitat, there is a plantation of red pine (*Pinus resinosa*) along the eastern and southern edge of the Seven Bridges property. Most likely planted for soil stabilization and future harvest, these trees are very close together and no understory exists except for along the two-track. The red pine plantation is in need of thinning. This is particularly problematic because the rows were originally planted too close together. Red pine plantations like this one need to be thinned as they grow in order to promote the health and growth of the remaining trees.

It is recommended in this stand that MDNR consider including this stand for harvest with other nearby stands or implement non-commercial TSI.

### **Northern Hardwood Forest (approximately 162 acres)**

The areas around the meadow, red pine plantation, and floodplain forest are dominated by northern hardwood forest habitat. Comprising the largest portion of the preserve's area, this forest has a diverse flora with several species of trees. Although primarily dominated by sugar maple, this community also contains American beech (*Fagus grandifolia*), quaking aspen (*Populus tremuloides*), smooth sumac, black cherry, and in some small wetter depressions green ash (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica*) and American elm (*Ulmus americana*). Woody shrubs present include mapleleaf viburnum (*Viburnum acerifolium*), alternate-leaf dogwood (*Cornus alternifolia*), and roundleaf juneberry (*Amelanchier sanguinea*). The herbaceous layer in the more open areas of the forest is comprised of bracken fern, goldenrod, asters, blackberry. Wildflower species including white trillium (*Trillium grandiflorum*) and miterwort (*Mitella diphylla*) are found throughout the forest. The northern hardwood forest habitat is found in several locations of the preserve including both elevated property sections west of Valley Road, areas east and south of the meadow, and a large strip east of the root property that contains some wetland pockets.

It is recommended that the northern hardwood forest be managed in accordance with current best management practices and DNR guidelines related to sustainable forests. This includes sustainable harvest, trail

development, wildlife enhancements, and other actions consistent with a northern hardwood forest that will be used mainly for recreational purposes. All actions within this habitat should give special consideration to the aesthetic, interpretive, and cultural uses of the area.

### **Floodplain Forest (approximately 122 acres)**

The topography of the Seven Bridges property slopes towards the Rapid River creating large areas of floodplain forest habitat along its banks. When there was an operating mill on Seven Bridges property, much of the floodplain forest area was incorporated into the mill pond. Because of the mill dam and resulting pond, this forested area is not entirely natural and has been influenced by human activities. This influence is evident by the dam remnants and altered riverbanks still visible today. This floodplain forest is dominated by northern white cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*), but also contains sugar maple, quaking aspen, American beech, tamarack (*Larix laricina*), green ash, eastern white pine, and yellow birch (*Betula alleghaniensis*). The herbaceous layer of this habitat is frequented by bracken fern, club moss (Lycopodiaceae family), sedge (*Carex* sp.), herb-robert (*Geranium robertianum*), common buttercup (*Ranunculus acris*), and tall meadow-rue (*Thalictrum polygamum*). Upland plants like goldenrod, Queen Anne's lace (*Daucus carota*) and mullein (*Verbascus* sp.) also exist in disturbed areas. Within the floodplain forest, there are areas of emergent wetland habitat predominately in small depressions or along river banks. Wetland indicator species such as Common cattail (*Typha latifolia*), marsh-marigold (*Caltha palustris*), cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*), turtlehead (*Chelone glabra*), and a diversity of sedges are found in this habitat type.

The main management concerns in regards to the floodplain forest are areas of bare soil susceptible to erosion. There are several unauthorized trails, created by visitors or anglers, branching off from the main trail or boardwalks. These trails are often on steep slopes in close proximity to the river. Exposing soil in this environment leads to erosion and sedimentation especially around the bridges and boardwalks. It is important that the creation of social trails be discouraged to protect the river and its banks. Simply restricting access to these trails with temporary fencing and warning signs would most likely result in more unauthorized trails. The best solution would be to create new marked walking trails providing access to visitors and anglers to these same locations.

Timber harvest should be considered judiciously in riparian areas to be consistent with concurrent wildlife, fish, and recreational values. In addition, timber harvest in adjacent forest types should consider landscape implications, scenic impacts, and follow recommended best practices for sustainable logging.

## **Rapid River**

This cold water trout stream transverses the length of the Seven Bridges property and is the natural feature that brings many to the property. The Rapid River's channel is braided, that is the channel consists of a network of several small channels separated by temporary islands. The braided channels are confined by banks that appear stable and range from less than 100 feet apart to approximately 500 feet apart. The Rapid River, as it flows through the Seven Bridges, contains several different aquatic environments which provide suitable habitat for fish and macroinvertebrates. Three species of trout can be found in the Rapid River with brown trout (*Salmo trutta*), brook trout (*Salvelinus fontinalis*), and rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) all having reproducing populations present. Other fish that may be found include slimy sculpin (*Cottus cognatus*), mottled sculpin (*Cottus bairdi*), chubs, suckers, dace, minnows, and darters.

The four bridges are all located near the area of the historical mill. Bridges were likely constructed in this area because the hardened banks and dam remnants make this section of the river more stable, and therefore, more suitable for bridges than other areas within Seven Bridges.

## **Infrastructure Features**

Within the Seven Bridges, several different built or manmade structures exist. This infrastructure includes trails, two-tracks, bridges, buildings, and storage sheds. The infrastructure present existed prior to state ownership. The bridges, trails, and two tracks have been maintained and improved to support recreational opportunities. The buildings, serving no useful purpose, have fallen into significant disrepair. These infrastructure components differ by use (or lack thereof), type, and historical significance; therefore each requires different management and conservation practices. Recommended actions include developing new trails as needed and desired by the GTRLC, considering options for providing linked recreational opportunities between Seven Bridges and GTRLC's Root property, preventing erosion on the two tracks, and removing the dilapidated structures. Prior to implementing any major management activity, such as those listed above, it is recommended that important, rare, and endangered species be delineated and mapped in areas affected or disturbed by proposed activity.

## **Natural Resource Quality and Condition**

The resources present at Seven Bridges are very natural despite past human activity. The most unique aspect of the property is the Rapid River and the fish, wildlife, and floodplains it supports. Although, a high quality natural area, no formal quantified ranking or mapping of the natural resources at Seven Bridges has occurred. It is recommended that all streams, plant communities, and natural features are delineated and mapped. Also biological inventories of plant and animal species should be performed to aid in assessing the overall natural resource value as compared to other local,

regional, or state areas. They will also help with future refinement of management goals for the Seven Bridges. This will provide a context to determine how rare the natural features present at Seven Bridges are.