**Showcasing the DNR: 10 cool things the DNR did this past year**

**By CASEY WARNER and JOHN PEPIN**

**Michigan Department of Natural Resources**

Before 2019 fades completely from sight in the rearview mirror, we wanted to take one more glance back as we move forward at accomplishments over the past year.

With numerous notable achievements to consider, we’ve narrowed the list down to 10 cool things the Michigan Department of Natural Resources was involved with over the past year.

**Isle Royale wolf translocation:** In September, the Michigan DNR aided efforts by the National Park Service to translocate four wolves from the western Upper Peninsula mainland to Isle Royale. The effort increased the island’s wolf population to 17. Wolves at Isle Royale play a key function as predators to moose, which number roughly 2,000 on the archipelago. This large moose population has had negative impacts on island vegetation and other resources. Multiple agencies are involved in the work, with some participants lent to the Isle Royale project from other states. The key aim of the translocation efforts, which began in northeastern Minnesota in 2018 and continued in Ontario last winter, is to restore predation to the 132,000-acre island’s ecosystem. DNR biologists worked to trap the wolves, which were then transported by float plane to the island. The park service hopes to translocate 20-30 wolves to the island over a three- to five-year period.

**Celebrating milestones:** Throughout 2019, the DNR celebrated 100 years of Michigan’s state parks system. Focused on the centennial of the Michigan State Park Commission’s formation in 1919, the celebration included special events, podcasts, historical stories, videos, geocaching and more. It also sparked a partnership with Bob Ross, Inc., on the [Happy Little Trees](https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-350-79133_79205_85747_88869_96703---,00.html) program, a tree-planting effort to help state parks recover from invasive forest pests and diseases that damage or kill trees. During the centennial year, hundreds of trees were planted at state parks around Michigan. In 2019 the DNR also celebrated fire-prevention icon Smokey Bear’s 75th birthday – including creation of the short video “[Wildfires are a Scary Thing](https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=611660049346223)” – and the 100th anniversary Pigeon River Country State Forest, a 106,000-acre forest northeast of Gaylord that’s the largest block of contiguous undeveloped land in Michigan’s Lower Peninsula.

**Battling the fury of the Great Lakes:** High water levels on the Great Lakes took center stage this summer as the DNR partnered with the Ontonagon County Road Commission to battle significant erosion that threatened to destroy County Road 107, the eastern entry road into Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park. The showdown at Michigan’s largest state park was one of many battles against high water around the state. If the road was undermined and forced to close, an 80-mile detour would be necessary to get visitors beyond the washout sections of the road. Prime attractions like the Lake of the Clouds overlook, Union Bay campground and numerous hiking trails potentially would have been blocked. The $651,400 project to stabilize the shoreline, over about a half-mile of the hardest-hit areas, has succeeded in so far preventing further damage in the face of strong snowstorms off Lake Superior. Meanwhile, a search for a long-term solution to the problem is underway. Several expense proposals are being vetted, including a nearly $12 million option of relocating the roadway away from the shoreline.

**Kirtland’s warbler successful recovery:** In October, the DNR celebrated the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s announcement that the Kirtland’s warbler – a small songbird once on the brink of extinction – no longer warrants protection under the Endangered Species Act thanks to decades of work by a diverse group of partners. The species, among the first in the U.S. identified as being at risk of extinction, nests only in young jack pine stands in Michigan, Wisconsin and Ontario. Bird enthusiasts from around the world travel to northern Michigan in hopes of catching sight of the rare warbler, whose populations had dipped perilously low by the 1970s. Long-term efforts by partners such as the Michigan DNR, U.S. Forest Service and conservation groups to ensure the availability of needed jack pine habitat and control threats from competing brown-headed cowbirds led to the species’ steady ascent and eventual recovery. Conservation plans are in place to make sure Kirtland’s warblers continue to thrive.

**Dow Chemical Co. settlement to restore natural resources:** Under an agreement announced in November with federal, state and tribal governments, the Dow Chemical Company will settle an environmental complaint for an estimated $77 million in projects and funding that will restore fish, wildlife and habitats injured when hazardous substances were released in past decades from Dow’s manufacturing facility in Midland. The DNR is one of several entities acting together on behalf of the public as natural resources trustees. Under the settlement, Dow will carry out or fund restoration projects identified in Midland, Bay, Saginaw and nearby counties. These projects include fish spawning and fish passage improvements; restoration of thousands of acres of wetlands and other habitats; creation of multiple public nature areas with nature trails, fishing platforms and one bike trail segment; protection of a green corridor along the Tittabawassee River; and expansion of boating access at the mouth of the Saginaw River. The agreement is subject to public comment and approval in federal court.

**Lifesaving efforts:** Throughout the year, numerous DNR employees, many of them conservation officers, were recognized for their efforts to save lives – from helping get a fisherman who had fallen through the ice out of the water to rescuing a capsized kayaker suffering from hypothermia. Notably, in October Conservation Officer Jeff Ginn was honored with his fourth DNR Lifesaving Award for his actions to resuscitate a man found unresponsive in a Newaygo motel. A few weeks later, Ginn was [featured on CNN’s “Beyond the Call of Duty,”](https://www.cnn.com/videos/us/2019/11/08/michigan-conservation-officers-btc-pkg-young-newday-vpx.cnn/video/playlists/new-day-highlights) a show that highlights inspiring stories about police and first responders who go above and beyond in the performance of their duties. Since conservation officers live in the communities they serve, they often are the first emergency responders to arrive at a scene. Several employees from the DNR Wildlife and Parks and Recreation divisions also received awards for their lifesaving efforts in 2019.

**North Country National Scenic Trail rebuild:** In October, the culmination of a collaborative project to rebuild a section of the North Country National Scenic Trail in Ontonagon County was celebrated. The work was completed with the combined strength of federal, state and local partners. The DNR provided more than a quarter of a million dollars in major grants to the project from the Iron Belle Trail grant program and the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund. The rebuild took place over roughly 2 miles of the route from a trailhead to picturesque O Kun de Kun Falls on the Baltimore River. Previously, this section of the trail was often muddy and difficult to tread. Improvements include several new sections of boardwalk and wetland bridges, along with a raised gravel walking surface. As it does in several other areas, this portion of the North Country Trail doubles as part of the hiking route of Michigan’s signature Iron Belle Trail, which stretches more than 2,000 miles from Belle Isle Park in Detroit to Ironwood in Gogebic County.

**Moving closer to Arctic grayling’s return:** In July, the DNR and its partners got one step closer to bringing Arctic grayling, a native fish that had disappeared from the state by the early 20th century, back to Michigan waters. The ultraviolet water disinfection system at Oden State Fish Hatchery in Emmet County was installed, meaning the facility is ready to welcome juvenile Arctic grayling. The UV system will protect fish from any pathogens that may inadvertently arrive with the grayling. This protection is critical for the long-term process of cultivating Michigan’s Arctic grayling broodstock (mature fish used for breeding), a goal of the Michigan Arctic Grayling Initiative. This project was generously supported through grants and donations by private donors. The first in a series of three year-classes of fish that will make up the founding broodstock for the Arctic grayling effort arrived at the hatchery in August. The juvenile fish will be reared in isolation at Oden and, once cleared by fish health testing, transferred to Marquette State Fish Hatchery to continue maturing.

**Releasing a Canada lynx back to the wild:** A Canada lynx grabbed headlines when it was discovered in mid-March preying on a farmer’s geese in Sanilac County. Because the lynx had been behaving oddly – including being easily approachable – the DNR, in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, worked with a local trapper to capture the lynx to evaluate its health. The female cat, which was thought to be less than a year old, weighed 18 pounds and measured over 4 feet long. The cat was moved 400 miles north to central Schoolcraft County, where it was released by DNR wildlife biologists. Canada lynx are threatened species in Michigan. They are rarely seen, and when they are it’s more likely to be in the Upper Peninsula. About three weeks after the successful release, which was conducted in partnership between the DNR and the Detroit Zoological Society, a relatively approachable Canada lynx was photographed about 100 miles away, along the shoreline of Lake Superior at Whitefish Point in Chippewa County. The animal could not be verified as the lynx released weeks earlier in Schoolcraft County. [**See a video of the release.**](http://links.govdelivery.com/track?type=click&enid=ZWFzPTEmbWFpbGluZ2lkPTIwMTkwNDE1LjQ3MzczMjEmbWVzc2FnZWlkPU1EQi1QUkQtQlVMLTIwMTkwNDE1LjQ3MzczMjEmZGF0YWJhc2VpZD0xMDAxJnNlcmlhbD0xNzM3MDE2NSZlbWFpbGlkPXBlcGluakBtaWNoaWdhbi5nb3YmdXNlcmlkPXBlcGluakBtaWNoaWdhbi5nb3YmZmw9JmV4dHJhPU11bHRpdmFyaWF0ZUlkPSYmJg==&&&102&&&https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=youtu.be&utm_campaign=Lynx+Release&utm_medium=pr&utm_source=govdelivery&v=HZ8XIPlD7Jg)

**Moving and renovating former Ulysses S. Grant home:** In collaboration with the Eastern Market Partnership, the DNR’s Michigan History Center in June embarked on a project to relocate the Detroit home of Julia and Lt. Ulysses S. Grant from the former state fairgrounds to the city’s Eastern Market. There, after renovation, it will become a new resource for residents, schoolchildren and visitors to explore Grant’s life and the impact he made on Detroit while living there, and later as a Civil War general and U.S. president. The Grants moved into the home in 1849 and lived there for a little over a year. The house was moved to the state fairgrounds in 1936, where it was opened to the public for tours for many decades. The fairgrounds hosted its last state fair in 2008, and plans to move the home have been in development for years. Moving, securing and renovating the house for public use are expected to take one to two years.

With the shining prospect of a new year ahead, the DNR is hopeful, anticipating many more achievements to celebrate in the coming months.

But for today, we’re happy to celebrate these successes we’ve had working over the past 12 months to preserve Michigan’s natural resources and recreation opportunities for today and tomorrow.

Check out previous Showcasing the DNR stories in our archive at [Michigan.gov/DNRStories](https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-350-79137_79770_79873_80003---,00.html). To subscribe to upcoming Showcasing articles, sign up for free email delivery at [Michigan.gov/DNR](http://www.Michigan.gov/DNR).