

Haehnle Sanctuary News



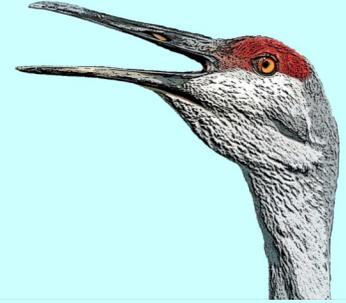
Phyllis Haehnle Memorial Sanctuary

Owned By Michigan Audubon

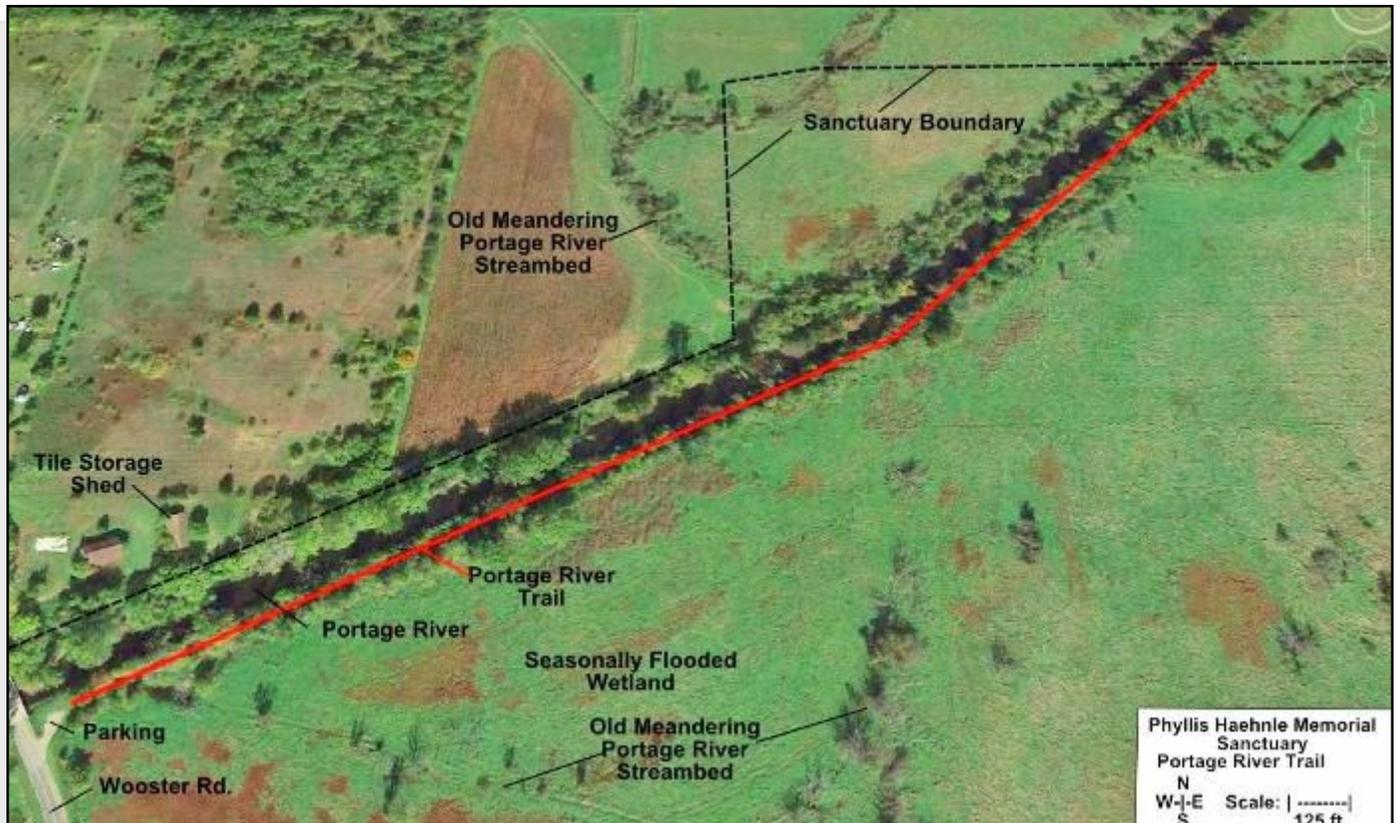
Maintained and Operated by The Jackson Audubon Society

Preserving and Protecting our Natural World

Spring 2017



Following The Portage River Trail



Most visitors to the Haehnle Sanctuary are familiar with the walking trails that begin at the Seymour Road parking lot. They pass through grasslands, along a prairie fen, stop at an overlook of Eagle Lake and through oak woods.

Less known is the Portage River Trail that begins at Wooster Road just south of the Portage River bridge. It follows the south streambank of the river eastward for little more than a half mile. Built on top of spoil dredged from the river,

it provides an elevated view of a restored seasonally flooded wetland to the south and the river to the north.

While walking the one-mile roundtrip, one will have a chance to see a variety of wildlife and pass over land with a rich history.

Prior to European settlement, the Portage River was part of a shortcut some used to cross the Lower Peninsula instead of following around the long shoreline of the Great Lakes.

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Following the Portage Trail, (cont'd)



Flooded Wetland South of Trail

It is ably named because Indians and fur trappers (*voyageurs*) could paddle up the Huron River from Lake Erie to present day Stockbridge, make a short "portage" overland into a stream that would take them downstream to the Grand River and eventually to Lake Michigan.

The land of the Indian and *voyageurs* dramatically changed when the wilderness was opened for settlement after the War of 1812. A government surveyor, Joseph Wampler in 1825 described the area south of the Portage as "bad marsh with a 180-link (118 feet) wide stream flowing west". He had difficulty establishing section lines in this wet prairie because there were so few bearing trees to mark survey stakes.

Unlike most townships in Michigan, the boundary between Henrietta and Leoni Townships is a river. Wampler probably decided instead of using the customary straight line separating the two townships, it would be easier to use the meandering Portage River. Bends of the old stream bed can be seen crossing the trail at three locations: just past the Wooster Road gate, 3/10s of a mile further east and near the east end of the trail.

Once surveyed, settlers began purchasing land from the federal government and soon farmland replaced wilderness. Because area along the Portage was too wet for growing crops, farmers mostly grazed their cattle in drier parts and harvested marsh hay.

That changed in 1921-22 when a large steam driven dredge straightened and deepened the Portage. Construction of smaller drainage ditches and networks of drain tile further lower water levels. Some of the most fertile soils in Jackson County were soon growing potatoes, onions, peppermint, sod, and a variety of other crops. A dilapidated wooden shed and tile building used to store crops and equipment can still be seen on private land north of the river.

An interesting story about those buildings was told me by Art Morton. Cap. Haehnle and Henry Smith grew potatoes in muck fields north of the Portage River. They stored about 10,000 bushel in a wooden shed just east of Wooster Rd.

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Following the Portage Trail, (cont'd)

They also stored some in a tile storage shed further east that is still standing. Cap hired a drunk to keep a fire in a pot-belly stove so the potatoes would not freeze in the winter. The drunk started a fire in the stove and then left for Jackson. Fire spread from the stove and burned the wooden storage shed in 1939 or 1940. The large cement pieces near Wooster Rd. are from that storage shed.

Increased flooding, low crop prices, late spring and early fall frosts, and crop damage from wildlife combined to reduce the once flourishing farming and signaled a new era -- one of wetland restoration. Beginning in the 1950s, fallen trees, sediment and other debris clogged the Portage causing increased flooding. By the late 1990s much of the farmland was abandoned. In 2002, Michigan Audubon enrolled 340 acres south of the Portage in the Wetland Restoration Program.

This would not have been possible without the generous gift of 170 acres by Judy Cory in 1986, and for a grant from Ducks Unlimited to purchase 14 acres from other owners in 2001. Drainage ditches were plugged, drain tile broken, shallow ponds dug, and water control structures installed as part of restoration efforts. Later in partnership with a watershed stream bank improvement program, native trees and shrubs were planted along the trail.



Ring-necked Ducks on Portage River



Pied-billed Grebe

The trail provides a good opportunity for viewing wildlife. Some of the best birding is in the Spring when most water areas are still covered with ice. Large numbers of migrant waterfowl, both divers and puddle ducks, flock to the open water created by floodwaters from the river flowing into the wetland.

Pie-billed grebes, sora rails and frogs can often be heard but seldom seen from the trail. Later, migrant and nesting songbirds can be observed in nearby shrubs and trees. As the wetland dries up during summer, great egrets and great blue herons gather in numbers to feast on fish trapped in the remaining small pools of water. Abundant berries and open water in the river attract a surprising number of birds during the winter. This is also when mink and river otter have been seen.

The parking area outside the Wooster Road gate belongs to the Jackson County Road Commission and is a favorite fishing spot. Fishing is prohibited once you pass around the gate and enter the sanctuary. Unfortunately, the parking lot is also a favorite place to dump trash.

Once passed the gate however, one can enjoy a leisure stroll filled with sights and sounds of wildlife and an appreciation of historic events that have affected the present day Portage River Trail.

Ron Hoffman

Where Are The Cranes?!?



“Where are the cranes”, has been a familiar reoccurring question. Anyone hosting at the sanctuary on the weekends, wearing a Haehnle sanctuary nametag, or counting cranes on Monday nights has heard this question posed. On average during the fall of 2016 we only counted a few cranes roosting and on many occasions, none at all. While it would be easy just to answer “too much water in Mud Lake Marsh” it really is a much more complicated question.

Probably the best place to start to answer this troubling question is to look back to 2002 when Haehnle Sanctuary was enrolled in the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Wetland Reserve Program (WRP). In addition to the 340 acres that Michigan Audubon enrolled, local landowners adjoining the sanctuary added over 1,600 acres. This made Jackson County third in the amount of land enrolled in WRP in Michigan, behind Cheboygan and Chippewa counties. These acres bordering the Portage River drain have helped expand the rivers floodplain and improve its ability to retain floodwater and sediment.

Another benefit was to help restore local aquifers and bring groundwater closer to historical levels. Why is this a problem to roosting cranes? Sandhill Cranes roost in six to sixteen inches of water with a hard bottom. In the last few years the open water in Mud Lake Marsh has risen to levels higher than what cranes like for roosting. Remember, they do not like to get their feathers wet. So, these higher water levels have made most of the marsh that we see from the observation hill unsuitable for crane roosting.

Other possible links to lack of cranes usage in the marsh is the increase of dense stands of cattails and shrubs in areas that have been traditional crane roosting habitat.

The cattails not only degrade habitat, large tracts restrict outflow of water to the Portage River, again making higher water levels possible in the marsh. Increased beaver activity that has helped impede outflow of water is another of the pieces of the puzzle. The large rain events that we received in 2016 starting in late August and continuing throughout the fall also helped increase and maintain the unprecedented high water levels.

Will the cranes stop using Jackson County as a staging area in the fall? Not to worry, even though the cranes may not use Haehnle, the surrounding lands have good roosting habitat. High water at Haehnle also means increased crane roosting habitat north of the Portage River, on Dalton Road, and other suitable sites close to the sanctuary. Rachael Pierce, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently released the 2016 Michigan Sandhill Crane Survey Report. It shows that crane numbers in the Jackson County are at normal levels and the Michigan totals, 18,675 in early count and 20,656 from late count show typical fall numbers.

What can be done to make the sanctuary a crane haven again? The sanctuary committee has been considering ways to help make Haehnle Sanctuary a consistent roosting option for cranes. We have identified other possible areas in Mud Lake Marsh to restore to usable roosting habitat. So those visiting the observation hill in the coming months may notice ongoing restoration work in the marsh. Donations toward that effort are gladly accepted. Be assured we have the best interest of the cranes in mind, in addition to making crane viewing at Haehnle a spectacle once again.

Gary Siegrist

Welcome To Our Big Back Yard!

A special message from volunteer Sandy Harkness

Hello! I would like you to leave your vehicle here in the front yard, and walk up the driveway and through the gate with me , Welcome you to our big back yard!!

This is it, this thousand-acre-plus area, with its wonderful mix of eco-systems and really cool inhabitants is, thanks to the Audubon Society, being maintained right here off Seymour Road as a lovely great big backyard for all of us!! Come here at daybreak and watch the light sneak across the ponds, the woods, the river, and the wetlands, poking the sleepy birds, amphibians, and furry critters into their morning activities and noisy wake-up routines.

Come later in the day and the marshes are quieter (unless there are ducks - who find it impossible to be quiet) as the birds feed and the dawn hubbub has subsided. Over 200 different kinds of birds have been observed here.

Come and bring your kids - there's lots to find, paths to explore, count how many kinds of flowers you see,

how many colors you can spot ...and what kind of a bug is THAT!?? Surveys have found more than three hundred species of plants at Haehnle!

Have your dog bring you for a good walk to the lake on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon in the fall, and let him or her introduce you to the hosts who are here to make your visit more pleasant and let you know how the sandhill crane population is doing this year... (besides giving your pooch a good skritch behind the ears...)

Come late in the day and watch the sun slide down into the trees as you share a quiet moment with someone, enjoying this inspiring view, brought to you by the Jackson and Michigan Audubon, who have worked to preserve the sanctuary and enhance it, to provide this lovely great big back yard - and come back again soon !

Editor's note: All dogs must be leashed. Owners are responsible for picking up their dog's droppings.

A Message From The Chair

I recently announced to the Haehnle Sanctuary Committee my retirement as Chair. A new chair will soon be chosen shortly and the transition will be smooth. While I will be stepping aside as Chair, I will not be leaving, as I plan to remain on the Committee and be active in a different capacity.

I have treasured and enjoyed the chair's responsibilities for the last eight plus years. Most of all, I have enjoyed working with our 15-member Board, which is second to none. The enthusiasm and love of our Sanctuary, the willingness to lead and participate in our varied projects, and above all the camaraderie and harmony that exist among our members has made my job so much easier and rewarding.

I thank Ron Hoffman, the previous chair, for establishing the "ground rules" that were so easy to endorse. The committee's character is what allows us to accomplish all that we do to preserve Haehnle as the foremost sanctuary in the Michigan Audubon family of sanctuaries.

In recent memory this includes major, grant or fund-supported projects like the critical land acquisition of the Klee property four years ago, the restoration of a rare fen and associated wetlands, and the development of a new fall roosting habitat for cranes. It also include smaller but equally important projects such as maintaining data bases of birds, butterflies, cranes, and other animals, a newsletter and other out-reach programs and opportunities for the public.

For over 60 years, the Haehnle Sanctuary Committee has sought to restore, create, and maintain a wildlife preserve for Sandhill Cranes and other wild creatures. We have a rich tradition of successful accomplishments by a group of thoughtful, dedicated, and creative individuals. There is no doubt that that tradition will continue.

Lathe Claflin



Haehnle Family Activity Corner

By Robyn Henise

Take a Walk at Haehnle

It is easy to explore nature with your children. Here is a simple activity you can do with your family while walking the nature trail at the main entrance, or on the Portage River trail on Wooster Road.

Go on a sound safari! Bring the family to Haehnle and go on a sound safari. Walk the nature trails and encourage your kids to record everything that they hear.

Have a doodle pad handy so your kids can list and draw pictures of what they hear. Listen for birds, frogs, insects, airplanes, the wind, etc. This activity doesn't end at Haehnle. The pictures they draw can be colored at home.

Get out and enjoy the outdoors!



Click Here To Listen

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x171BHpfT_I



Click Here To Listen

www.youtube.com/watch?v=2kd5c4p8-0M

Sounds To Listen For On Your Walks At Haehnle This Spring



Click Here To Listen

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZX9uODHi0zg>



Click Here To Listen

www.youtube.com/watch?v=kUdeEw2BPtQ



Click Here To Listen

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A6-8pC8o5fw>

(You need to connect to the internet to hear these sounds.)



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Mail To:

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*Thank You,
Your Support is Greatly Appreciated!*



*Phyllis Haehnle Memorial Sanctuary
c/o Jackson Audubon Society
P.O. Box 6453
Jackson, MI 49204*



*Official News Letter
For The
Phyllis Haehnle Memorial Sanctuary*



*Thanks to the following for their
unrestricted donations to the Haehnle Sanctuary:*

*Donations to Jackson Audubon Society for the
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Robert and Nancy Baglans
Mark and Mary Rita Bradke
Ron and Joan Hoffman
James Eder
Heather Allison
Tom and Susan Atkins
Patricia Harris
Gamal M. Abosamra
Bill and Irene Sonnett
Mike French
Gary Siegrist Tours
Tom Hodgson Tours

*Donations to Michigan Audubon for the
Haehnle Sanctuary*

Patty and John Schmidt

*Please Join Us for the
Spring Work Bee*

The spring work bee will be held on April 22 from 9:00 to around 12.

We have a wide variety of tasks so we can accommodate anybody – no experience needed. Light work gloves are useful.

Contact Lathe Claflin (517-522-3949) for more information.