

## **ALCONA CD: Forestry Management Success: Battling Invasive & Creating Public Awareness**

*Content submitted by Andrew Beebe*

Alcona Conservation District initiated a partnership to demonstrate how forest management practices can restore lowland hardwood communities degraded by various forest pests. The township of Oscoda owns a 10 acre park on the banks of the AuSable River named River Bank Park. River Bank Park has been largely unmanaged aside from a failed attempt in the early 90's by the previous landowner to fill the bayou intersecting the park and develop the land. The park was once home to a mixture of lowland hardwood trees, a significant proportion of which were Ash. The park began losing its Ash trees due to Emerald Ash Boar (EAB) approximately 5 years ago. The resulting increase in sunlight reaching the understory led to the spread of invasive species which took over the understory in large parts.

Last fall the Alcona CD approached the township of Oscoda with a plan to restore the park and create a management plan under the guidance of the Alcona CD forester, Andrew Beebe. The township agreed to fund \$2,500 for the project. The management plan entails felling many of the large and dangerous ash trees, managing invasive species through a number of treatment methods and planting native trees, shrubs, wildflowers and forbs, while also providing the township with the expertise to eventually manage the park themselves.

To Date many trees have been removed and utilized for firewood via a permitting process administered by the District Forester. Approximately 30 trees have been planted in cleared areas with many more to come next spring. Through partnerships with Huron Pines and the Nature Conservancy, herbicidal treatments have begun and more mechanical and herbicidal treatments will follow. The public has also been engaged through public meetings and press coverage explaining the project and welcoming comment and volunteers. The public education and outreach has resulted in a number public volunteers working on the rehabilitation project.

The success of the partnership with Oscoda Township aided in Alcona CD securing a grant through the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to fund additional restoration projects in the county. Additional projects include rehabilitation of the Black River Park, in Black River, MI through the planting of 37 large hardwood and conifer trees. The Black River Park is almost entirely forested with Ash trees and EAB is present within park boundaries. The forest management plan for this park includes planting a variety of tree species, most notably disease resistant American elm. Beebe will also work with the township to determine if treating some of the seemingly healthy Ash trees is a viable option.

In addition to more formal forest management plans, Alcona CD and FAP forester Beebe is working with the staff at Old Orchard Park (one of Michigan's largest campgrounds) to construct an interpretive hiking trail, native gardens, native light/noise barriers, and several mushroom cultivation demo sites. The overall goal of this project is to reach campers whom visit the Oscoda area from large urban centers. Many of these visitors have little understanding of the role forests play in their lives and the ecosystem at large. The project is in its beginning stages which include developing interpretive signage discussing plant ID, forest communities, wildlife habitat, and the importance of forest health in everyone's daily lives.

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