

Likely removal of Cedar River dam will help brook trout

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Steve Griffin | file photo for the Daily News The Main Branch of the Cedar River, on which a small dam is likely to be removed in the next couple of years, is a favorite of brook trout fans and other conservationists. In this photo taken last May, students from Gladwin High School, assisted by members of Midland's Leon P. Martuch Chapter of Trout Unlimited and others, lug protective screen cones to be placed over young cedar trees which they had planted along the river to provide stream-cooling shade and other ecological benefits.

A trout stream that flows through Clare and Gladwin counties and is home to brook trout, stands a good chance of running freer within a year or two.

An effort to remove a small dam on the Middle Branch of the Cedar River, a Tittabawassee River watershed tributary, is gaining momentum, most recently with the awarding of \$15,000 in funding from the [Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network](#) (WIN).

Coordinating the project would be Huron Pines, a conservation organization headquartered in Gaylord.

Huron Pines's application to the [Saginaw Bay WIN](#), posted on the latter group's webpage, describes the dam as "an obsolete concrete structure that has recently failed," drawing down a four-acre pond impounded by it.

The landowner, listed by the application as [Robert Gingery](#), and area conservation groups and state and federal resource officials have agreed the dam should go, since it presents a three-foot-high barrier to fish passage and has other harmful effects on the stream.

Combined, they've offered \$17,000 in cash and in-kind services toward its removal, and Huron Pines has applied for \$40,000 more through the DNR's Dam Management Grant Program.

Given that the DNR, along with the state [Department of Environmental Quality](#) and the [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#), already supports the plan, approval of that application seems likely.

Other groups supporting the project include Midland's Leon P. Martuch Chapter of Trout Unlimited, which has long had a research and custodial interest in the river.

Taking down the dam would be a solid investment in prime trout habitat.

"Removing this small dam," said Huron Pines's application, "will remove the most significant single source of impairment on the [Middle Branch Cedar](#) River and will reconnect 9.2 upstream miles of aquatic habitat for native brook trout and other aquatic organisms in (the river)."

[Josh Leisen](#), watershed project manager for Huron Pines, said in a voicemail that planning the project and obtaining permits would take place this year, with actual removal of the dam likely in 2018.

A DNR report on the Tittabawassee River watershed said there are 143 dams in the Tittabawassee and its tributaries, including the Cedar. Six of the dams produce hydroelectric power, three are retired hydropower dams, 86 impound waters for

recreation, and the others create farm ponds or are used for irrigation or water supply. Most are small – 110 of them 99 acres or less – and only 10 have heights greater than 20 feet.

The region's first dams stored water to power saw or grist mills, but many of those now serve recreational purposes. Most of the hydroelectric dams were built between 1900 and 1925. Dams built to create wildlife habitats went up in the 1940s, and many dams since then were built mainly to maintain lake levels, often connected with residential development.

The DNR says dams, regardless of their intended use or origin, have major effects on rivers by reducing and changing water flow, warming waters, collecting sediment, blocking fish movement, and creating lake-like habitats.

None of those things favors brook trout, Michigan's state fish, a beautiful state native with specific habitat needs.

Removing dams such as the one on the Middle Branch Cedar does.

Email Midland freelance outdoors writer [Steve Griffin](mailto:griff22450@aol.com) at griff22450@aol.com

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