



T H E
HURON RIVER
WATERSHED
COUNCIL
PROTECTING THE RIVER
FOR OVER 30 YEARS

Rapid Ecological Assessment of Natural Areas in the Huron River Watershed

Roadside Survey of Natural Areas

What is the Rapid Ecological Assessment of Natural Areas?

HRWC volunteers are helping identify and assess the remaining natural, undeveloped lands in the watershed. The health of a river is dependent on the health of the land that surrounds it. Natural areas provide a host of "ecological services" that help keep our lands and waters healthy. Natural areas intercept and store rainwater and snowfall. Instead of rushing directly off the ground and into surface water, as it would in developed areas, this water percolates through the soils and down into the ground to replenish groundwater supplies. This groundwater eventually flows into streams, lakes, and wetlands, keeping their water clean, cold, and constant. Forests and prairies provide us with clean air to breathe. Wetlands filter pollutants from water as it flows into streams, rivers, and lakes. They also absorb excess water, preventing flooding. They provide habitat for wildlife and plants. And, of course, natural areas give us places to relax, recreate, and enjoy nature.

The Huron is the cleanest urban river in Michigan. This distinction is due mostly to the substantial amount of natural areas that remain throughout the watershed - about 44% of it is open space.

What is this person doing driving around my neighborhood?

Using a computer model, HRWC has mapped 237,000 acres (over 1,700 different sites) of potentially precious natural land that lies within the Huron's watershed. This year, HRWC staff and volunteers are visiting these areas, highlighting those most crucial to the river's health.

The survey has two phases. The first phase is this roadside survey. Volunteers have been driving out and answering general questions about the sites and surrounding areas in order to screen out sites that have undergone development since the computer map was completed; make any major corrections to the computer map; and gather other information about the sites.

What are the next steps?

For the second phase, to begin this spring and continue through the fall (and begin again next spring), volunteers actually will be seeking permission from landowners to walk the grounds some of the areas surveyed this winter, filling out a “field assessment worksheet” as they walk

Volunteers will complete a 4-hour training session that covers the ecology of the watershed, some basic ecological concepts, and detailed instructions about how to fill out the worksheet. The intrepid volunteers will team up and visit the sites, armed with a manual that will provide pictures of the kinds of plants and other features they will need to be able to identify in order to complete the worksheet. A background in field ecology and plant identification is helpful to volunteer, but is not necessary.

The goals of the assessment are to:

- Identify high-quality natural areas as candidates for a more detailed, “professional” inventory
- Set priorities about which natural areas to target for protection, and
- Contribute to land-use planning efforts at the township and county level

Where do I go with more questions or to get involved?

Contact Kris Olsson at (734) 769-5123, x 16, or kolsson@hrwc.org if you have questions.

More information about the Bioreserve Project is at www.hrwc.org/text/bioreserve.htm

The first training session for the rapid field assessment will be March 24, 1 – 5pm, at the NEW Center, 1100, N. Main, in Ann Arbor. An indoor training presentation will be followed by a visit to Barton Park to conduct a group field assessment.