

Favorite Restoration Project

In 2005, I was living in Michigan's Upper Peninsula and took special pride when the State of Michigan and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) announced that one of the restoration projects for the Green Bay Natural Resource Damage Assessment would be on the Upper Peninsula's Garden Peninsula at the northeast end of Green Bay. It included six miles of shoreline and 574 acres of limestone cliffs, coastal wetlands, and mature northern white cedar. The trustees called it the Garden Bluffs Habitat Preservation, but the Conservancy called it the Haunted Forest Preserve. I vowed to one day discover its exact location and visit.

On September 15, 2020, fate delivered to me the most surprising vindication of my entire career. After listening to Charlie Wooley's inspirational speech on the recorded Zoom meeting just two weeks earlier, about the completion of the Fox River cleanup, I decided I'd finally look up the location of the TNC's Haunted Forest Preserve on Michigan's Garden Peninsula. I'd heard all about it back in 2005 from my clients in the State of Michigan, as well as from the local Marquette office of TNC. Or rather, I'd heard all about how Bruce Baker and his Wisconsin crew continued to spread misery among the co-trustees, refusing to allow any restoration projects outside of Wisconsin. Apparently, the deal only went through after some more bare-knuckle fighting and a Michigan threat to boycott all of Wisconsin's favorite projects. I was grateful to be far away from a career in the Green Bay Field Office trying to win unanimous co-trustee support for projects. But fifteen years was long enough to wait to check out this local victory. Knowing the TNC, it would probably be a gem of a place.

The only map I could find online pointed to the South River Bay on Michigan's Garden Peninsula at the north end of the Bay of Green Bay. That couldn't be right. That was the exact spot that Bill Conlon and I had learned to fish the Great Lakes in the 1960s, the idyllic cove sheltered on all sides by magnificent limestone bluffs, ancient cedar forests, coastal wetlands, and clear, blue water. That did sound like a TNC sort of place, a place the trustees would want to save. Excited now, I called the local TNC office. When they sent me the map, I almost fell off my chair. The Green Bay damage assessment had preserved the six miles surrounding South River Bay. It was the same place I've been fishing, kayaking, paddle boarding, and swimming for over fifty years — maybe the only place I love more than my camp in the Hiawatha National Forest. I spent the rest of the day looking through the hundreds of pictures I've taken there, pictures that include every member of my extended family.