



EMMET COUNTY

Night programming and stunning views of the stars are drawing visitors to a land trust-protected county park in northern Michigan.

## The Draw of Darkness

**A** county park in northern Michigan is becoming a tourist destination for college students looking for a weekend road trip, stargazers from other states and families looking for a fun, affordable outing. In a country where nearly two-thirds of the population can't see the Milky Way in the night sky, visitors are flocking to Headlands International Dark Sky Park for what it doesn't have: light pollution.

The 550-acre park has more than 2 miles of undeveloped Lake Michigan shoreline and many species of rare and endangered plants, but its 2011 Dark Sky Park designation by the International Dark Sky Association ([www.darksky.org](http://www.darksky.org)) and its marketing and programs about the night sky have attracted thousands of visitors, says Emmet County Director of Communications Beth Anne Eckerle. "Once we began sharing the news of our designation and making these efforts to protect the night sky, the number of visitors to the park skyrocketed."

The park's most popular events surround the Perseids meteor showers, lunar eclipses and the "Owl Banding and Star Gazing" event that explains the importance of preserving darkness for the migratory saw-whet owl. Lucky visitors might also glimpse the Northern Lights, says Mary Stewart Adams, the park's program director.

While there have been voluntary measures by businesses and residents to prevent light pollution and promote a dark sky, in 2012 the Michigan legislature passed a bill to prevent light pollution on 21,000 acres of state lands along Michigan's North Coast. Tom Bailey, executive director of Little Traverse Conservancy, advocated for the legislation and says it's the first Dark Sky Preserve statute in the nation.

"When our conservancy helped Emmet County to purchase the Headlands, we had no idea that it would one day become the sixth International Dark Sky Park in the United States and ninth in the world," Bailey says. He notes that the Dark Sky program is attracting a whole new demographic to the parks and preserves and making new friends for conservation. •

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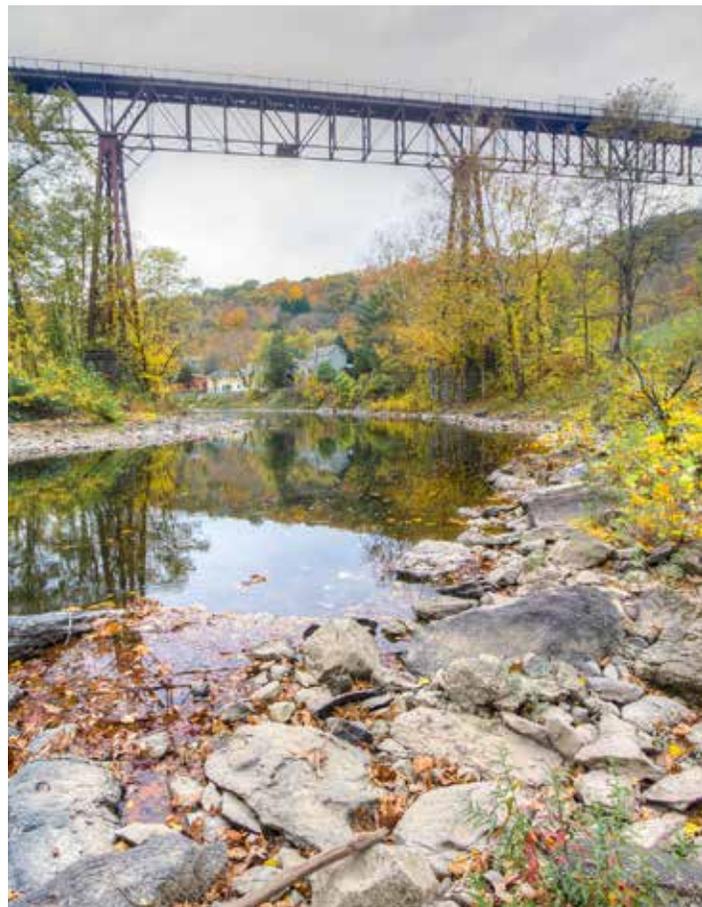
# Rail Trails Spark Economic Growth

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**N**ew York rail trails are increasingly being recognized as an economic development tool, as well as a recreational amenity. Examples abound:

- The City of Kingston in December 2013 was awarded \$2.3 million through state regional economic development grants as well as a \$2 million federal Transportation Enhancement Program grant to position itself as a rail trail hub. The city will connect three rail trails on its outskirts and develop trail-oriented parks and bike- and pedestrian-friendly streets. The Kingston Land Trust facilitated the community planning that developed the vision for this project, known as the Kingston Greenline.
- Wallkill Valley Land Trust, assisted by the Open Space Institute, recently doubled the Wallkill Valley Rail Trail to 24 miles and completed a \$1.5 million renovation on a trestle, linking four towns in southern Ulster County. Every day and in all weather since its 2013 opening, the trestle trail is attracting visitors from near and far, notes Wallkill Valley Land Trust Executive Director Christine DeBoer.
- A proposed 46-mile Harlem Valley Rail Trail east of the Hudson River is gradually coming to fruition with support from Columbia Land Conservancy. Communities looking to complete sections of the trail point to its economic benefits in the village of Millerton. A 10.6-mile section of the trail into the village has brought thousands of cyclists, helping to fill vacant storefronts and increase retail and hotel activity.

Numerous land trusts, communities and trail advocates are working to fill in and connect sections of rail trail throughout the state. The Land Trust Alliance has supported land trust efforts to plan trails and engage stakeholders through the New York State Conservation Partnership Program and New York's Environmental Protection Fund. •



This restored railway trestle in Rosendale, New York, a project of the Wallkill Valley Land Trust, is now a popular biking and walking trail linking four towns.

JOHN FISCHER PHOTOGRAPHY, WWW.NOROADUNTURNEED.COM

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# More Land, Less Fill

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**A**merica's burgeoning landfills represent a growing threat to air, water and soil quality for future generations.

To counteract Americans' throwaway habits, a growing number of towns and cities are adopting a system called "pay-as-you-throw" (PAYT), in which towns and cities charge residents according to how much waste they create. This makes people aware of the cost of their garbage, so they throw away less—and reduce, reuse and recycle more.

In the most effective PAYT programs, people cover the cost of trash collection and disposal by buying special garbage bags

marked with the seal of their city or town. The more bags they use, the more they pay.

"PAYT is behavioral economics at work, and the results are amazing," says former Portland, Maine, mayor George Campbell, adding, "Paying for each bag of trash makes people change their ways pretty quickly."

PAYT bag programs cut trash volume by almost 50% on average, double or triple recycling rates and save towns and cities money, according to WasteZero, a company that helps municipalities reduce waste (<http://wastezero.com>). What's the connection to land conservation? Cutting the amount of trash extends the life of landfills, reducing pressure to create new landfills on undeveloped spaces.

For more information on PAYT, see [www.epa.gov/solidwaste/conserve/tools/payt/index.htm](http://www.epa.gov/solidwaste/conserve/tools/payt/index.htm). •

## Cash for Forestland Restoration



STEPHEN JOSEPH

The \$24.5 million purchase of Buckeye Forest was funded in part by its potential to generate income from the voluntary carbon credit market.

The carbon credit market is helping The Conservation Fund increase the pace of forest conservation and restoration in California. “It’s been a game changer,” Chris Kelly, the Fund’s California program director, says of the evolving market.

In June 2013, the Fund announced the largest conservation transaction in Sonoma County history: the \$24.5 million purchase of 19,600 acres of cutover redwood/Douglas fir timberland slated for development.

Seeing the success of other Conservation Fund projects and their potential to bring in carbon credit revenues through the Climate Action Reserve’s voluntary carbon credit market ([www.climateactionreserve.org](http://www.climateactionreserve.org)), the California State Coastal Conservancy made a \$10 million grant to protect the forest and share in its future carbon credit revenues. With help from private donors and the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District, the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation and Sonoma Land Trust, The Conservation Fund completed the purchase and now manages the land as part of 75,000 acres of contiguous redwood forest. Kelly anticipates the forest’s annual revenue from carbon credit sales and light-touch timber harvests will not only cover the costs of its management and restoration, but also generate funding for other conservation projects.

Credits are calculated and sold annually based on a complex and rigorous audit of the forest’s carbon storing capacity by independent auditors. While the development of forest carbon credit projects provides a new source of income for owners of forestland, the upfront costs and long-term commitments it requires may be most appropriate for larger tracts of long-lived trees, Kelly notes.

He also cautions that the carbon market depends on buyer interest and, like any market, values will fluctuate. “It’s still a bumpy road, but it gains stability every day,” Kelly says. “We think ultimately this is going to be a successful model.” •

## Hummingbirds Versus Helicopters

In a March blog post on the Children and Nature Network, Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods*, takes on the delicate discussion of how to keep kids safe while allowing them freedom to explore nature.

In a society where moms and dads can be labeled as hovering “helicopter parents” yet criticized for any lack of parental oversight, parents who want to let their children explore nature may struggle to find the right balance. Louv suggests some approaches for easing parental anxiety and helping children build their own relationship with nature. Among his suggestions:

- Be more “hummingbird” than “helicopter.” Observe children from a distance, but only swoop in when a serious safety issue arises.

- Plan family outdoor activities. These days it takes more of an organized effort to get children outdoors than in the past, Louv notes.
- Get to know neighbors and coordinate supervision when kids are playing outdoors. (Having a neighbor on a porch or out gardening makes a trusted adult accessible when children are playing nearby.)
- Educate yourself and your children on outdoor safety, urban wildlife and how to recognize potentially dangerous or threatening behaviors by other humans.

To view the blog, see [blog.childrenandnature.org/2014/03/10/seven-actions-parents-can-take-to-increase-outdoor-safety](http://blog.childrenandnature.org/2014/03/10/seven-actions-parents-can-take-to-increase-outdoor-safety). •

# Canoe “Classrooms” Tour U.S. Cities

Just as bookmobiles make their way into underserved neighborhoods to expand access to public library materials, Canoemobile’s mission is to bring environmental “literacy” to urban youth in cities across America by helping them experience local rivers and waterways.

The program, founded by Minneapolis-based Wilderness Inquiry, features a roving fleet of six 24-foot canoes and a crew of environmental educators. Canoemobile partners with local school districts and local, federal and state government agencies in each city that expand on Canoemobile’s water-based education with land-based lessons in history, archaeology and literature.

Canoemobile ([www.wildernessinquiry.org/programs/canoemobile](http://www.wildernessinquiry.org/programs/canoemobile)) will visit schoolchildren in 20 cities this summer and fall.

On being a Wilderness Inquiry guide Ron Griswell writes in Audrey Peterman’s blog, “2013 - 365 Parks in 365 Days” (11/19/13) on [legacyontheland.com](http://legacyontheland.com): “It’s especially important for African-American youth to see a similar face, like mine....When these students of color see me, they realize they can join in these amazing outdoor activities. Nature is not race specific; it is for everyone.” •



Middle school students and their supervisors from the Bronx enjoy a Canoemobile excursion on the Harlem River.



In February the Wilderness Land Trust purchased the Painter Mine on the banks of the Salmon River in Idaho with plans to restore the property over two years and then transfer it to become part of the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness.

## Restoring the “Wild” in Wilderness Boundaries

The acreage of privately held lands within federally designated wilderness boundaries in the lower 48 states has decreased by more than half—from 400,000 acres in 1992 to about 180,000, according to a draft report by the Wilderness Land Trust. The data indicate that federal agencies, supported by conservation organizations, continue to acquire land to complete congressionally designated wilderness areas.

The Wilderness Land Trust (WLT) specializes in buying private lands to fill gaps within wilderness boundaries. Often this involves cleaning up a property before selling it to the federal government. The land trust has the flexibility to take out loans and to purchase remediation properties for less than the resale value of restored land. Private entities can also take on the risk of purchasing properties in need of remediation more easily than a federal agency can, notes WLT President Reid Haughey.

Haughey estimates that in WLT’s 22-year history, it has restored about 50 properties for inclusion within surrounding federal wilderness areas. The simplest cleanup was a volunteer day to gather and haul junk off a property. More complex projects have cost hundreds of thousands of dollars, some involving sealing off mine openings, tearing out roads and removing mine waste, structures and man-made ponds.

A thorough prepurchase assessment is key before deciding to buy and clean up a property, Haughey notes. Many private lands within wilderness boundaries have former mines that are notorious for physical hazards as well as environmental contaminants. “We don’t avoid risk, but we are careful to manage it,” he says. 🌿