

BOARDWALK RECONSTRUCTION SPECIAL PROJECT CAMPAIGN



Case for Support

Grass River Natural Area, Inc (GRNA Inc) seeks **\$400,000 by spring 2018** to reconstruct a highly-used and highly-cherished section of wetland boardwalk. This popular 1/3 mile interpretive loop leads children and adults through one of Michigan's most sensitive wetland environments year-round. By offering an intimate outdoor experience to over 20,000 visitors a year, GRNA Inc supports a growing body of research that says access to nature is imperative to human health and well-being as well as in creating thoughtful environmental stewards. GRNA Inc seeks to offer visitors of all ages and varying abilities a safer, more inviting recreational and educational experience by replacing 30 year-old boardwalk infrastructure with long-lasting, ADA accessible materials. In addition, we seek to remove impediments to stream flow and fish passage by replacing old, dilapidated bridges along Finch Creek. Children and adults from across the country, school children from seven area counties, and local community members all use this scenic boardwalk to connect with the beauty, wildlife and natural wonder found in our 1,492 acre preserve. The overarching project goal therefore is to make this exquisite outdoor experience safer and more accessible to the public and to improve stream habitat and function for resource resiliency.

Located along Antrim County's beautiful Chain of Lakes, Grass River Natural Area (GRNA) is home to a diversity of species, living amid floating sedges and marshy bogs which act as a filter for millions of gallons of surface water flowing into Lake Michigan. With a passion for preserving habitat and water quality and a belief in the inherent value of wilderness, a group of community advocates founded GRNA in 1969. They believed in the importance of engaging community members in outdoor discovery and environmental education. Now, after forty-eight years of leading educational programs, we recognize the boardwalk as our most effective tool in facilitating meaningful relationships with the natural world. And, our esteemed visitor center, The Grass River Center, serves as the perfect conduit to 1.5 miles of boardwalk and 6.0 miles of forested trails - the ultimate outdoor classroom. As a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, GRNA Inc is responsible for financing, preserving and managing this natural treasure and is committed to providing a safe and inspiring visitor experience.

Unfortunately, the current condition of GRNA's wetland boardwalk is not safe and does not meet our community's needs. In fact in a 2016 Community Impact Survey, 150 individuals cited boardwalk reconstruction as the #1 park improvement needed to more effectively meet our mission. Presently, the boardwalk introduces public safety risks that are becoming worse as each season passes. Therefore GRNA Inc aims to replace .25 miles of boardwalk with a modern, minimally invasive design that has a long lifespan and allows for easier lifetime maintenance. In order to meet our mission to "...conserve and protect our watershed and provide opportunities that increase knowledge and appreciation...", GRNA Inc must provide safe infrastructure on which the public can recreate and explore. To be an effective role model for stewardship and outdoor education, we must protect the integrity of our water resources. To propel forward the research and discoveries realized by countless students, researchers, and environmental organizations, it is essential that this precious resource be accessible to all.

While there are many land protection organizations in Michigan, there are only a few that include education as an integral part of their mission and that offer the visitor an intimate, recreational experience in a sensitive wetland environment. In addition, there are few that exhibit 48 years of leadership in trail maintenance, conservation practices, and experiential education. As seasoned natural resource managers and environmental educators, GRNA Inc prides itself in taking a strategic approach to best meet the needs of the land we manage and the community we serve. With the support of 150 dedicated volunteers and a professional, highly-trained staff, Grass River Natural Area, Inc. ensures a safe, engaging recreational destination for all. Through our trail network and year-round programs, we offer enriching hands-on field experiences to over 20,000 visitors annually. For this reason, our visitors leave with an increased appreciation for the beauty of our region and the important role preservation plays in water resource conservation.

By supporting GRNA Inc.'s Boardwalk Reconstruction Special Project Campaign, you will help to provide:

- 1) a safe and intimate environment for individuals to recreate and explore one of the most sensitive habitat types in Michigan
- 2) an inviting and accessible opportunity for all ages and abilities to engage with nature and learn about wetland ecology through hands-on methods
- 3) stream crossing structures that demonstrate our commitment to natural resource protection

Creating meaningful experiences in nature is the primary way to foster positive, long-term behavioral change. In our quest to foster thoughtful stewards of the planet, our boardwalk is and has always been Grass River Natural Area's most engaging infrastructure. As a passionate group of volunteers, board, and staff, we aim to enhance the outdoor experience for thousands, while encouraging the formation of meaningful, life-changing memories in the wild.



Our mission is to manage the Grass River Natural Area, conserve and protect its watershed, and provide opportunities that increase knowledge, appreciation and community-wide stewardship of the natural environment.