**Fact sheet – Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund
grant toward DNR purchase of Black River Ranch property
(May 2021)**

On May 6, 2021, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer signed HB 4469, which appropriates $37.8 million in Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund grants that will support 76 recreation development projects and land acquisitions throughout Michigan. These projects and recommendations were approved in December 2020 by the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund Board.

The Black River Ranch property in Cheboygan and Montmorency counties – consisting of
8,850 acres of pristine forest land, including 14 miles of Black River and Stewart Creek corridor – is one of the properties approved for acquisition funding.

**The question of public access**

The Department of Natural Resources has received reports of some people incorrectly believing that because the acquisition funding has been announced, the property is now under DNR ownership and open to hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreation use. **This is not true**. The property remains under private ownership, and there are a number of steps to go before an offer can be made to the landowner. Also, there is no guarantee that the property will be open to public use, as there is no guarantee that the acquisition will be successful.

**Purchase process**

* The DNR must first secure the remaining funds necessary to pursue property acquisition. The Trust Fund provides about $2.3 million – only a portion of the necessary funding. The DNR also has applied for a $10 million-plus Forest Legacy Program grant, administered by the U.S. Forest Service. If the DNR is awarded these federal funds, they will not be available before Oct. 1, 2022.
* If the DNR gets federal funding, the property will then be evaluated and appraised before an offer can be made to the landowner. In order for the transaction to be completed, it also must be approved by the DNR director at a meeting of the Michigan Natural Resources Commission. The earliest this could happen is late 2022.
* The DNR continues to work with a partner agency, the Little Traverse Conservancy, to pursue acquisition. If successful, the property will become part of the Pigeon River Country State Forest as DNR-managed land open to the public.

**Property features, possibilities**

* If the DNR does complete the acquisition, the department would like to offer extensive outdoor recreation opportunities such as hunting, fishing, trapping, bird watching, wildlife viewing, hiking, mushroom hunting, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing and more.
* The purchase also would protect significant wildlife habitat. Located in the heart of Michigan’s elk range, the property is home to many other species, including white-tailed deer, black bear, ruffed grouse, woodcock, bobcat, coyote, snowshoe hare, bald eagle and merlin.
* Fish species found in lakes on the property include largemouth bass and panfish. The rivers are coldwater trout streams and provide habitat for brook, brown and rainbow trout.