

Stakeholder Meeting Summary

October 23, 2024 | 2:00 p.m.

Glennie United Methodist Church
3264 S. State Rd.
Glennie, MI 48737

Attendees

- Curtis Township
 - Alcona County
 - Office of State Senator Hoytenga
 - Huron Pines
 - Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR)
 - Consumers Energy (2)
 - Public Sector Consultants (PSC) (2)
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Welcome and Introductions

Participants shared their names, affiliations, and roles. Facilitators reviewed the agenda and shared the meeting objective: to deliver the group’s top priorities for community prosperity under each of the three scenarios for the river hydro facilities.

Review Vision for the Community’s Prosperity

Elizabeth Riggs from PSC reviewed a vision statement for the community’s prosperity. The group edited the statement so that it felt accurate and relevant to the community. The final vision statement is, “We are a thriving community with deep roots, welcoming visitors to enjoy our four-season attractions.”

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Middle Au Sable River Group: Alcona

Scenario Planning

The group reviewed the key actions identified in meeting three and continued to identify actions to move the community toward its priorities under each of the three scenarios. They also identified what people or organizations would be needed to move those actions forward.

Scenario One: Consumers Continues Operating the Dams

Priority One: Expand Current Recreation and Increase Public Access to the River and Lake

Prioritized key actions or activities that support this opportunity	What would it take to make it happen? Is there a role Consumers Energy could play? What is the role? If not, who are the main actors needed to move forward?
1. Expand trails, including ORV, multiuse, horse, and water trails. Explore the possibility of pursuing water trail designation.	Approval from Manistee-Muskegon-Au Sable Coordination (MMAC) Team, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), and DNR. Investment from Consumers. Build a friends group to assist with maintenance.
2. Improve the fishery by adding a bubbler and coarse woody debris.	Consumers could add a bubbler to the pond. The DNR and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) could add coarse woody debris.
3. Inventory access points, plan for improving existing points and filling gaps.	Identify and secure funding for the inventory. Huron Pines could do the inventory. USFS, DNR, and Michigan Trails & Greenways Alliance would also be involved.
4. Explore grants to increase boating and kayaking opportunities.	Team effort—led locally, Huron Pines can assist. Planning help from the Michigan Office of Rural Prosperity.

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Priority Two: Maintain a Healthy River Corridor

Prioritized key actions or activities that support this opportunity	What would it take to make it happen? Is there a role Consumers Energy could play? What is the role? If not, who are the main actors needed to move forward?
1. Continue or expand Habitat Improvement Account.	Consumers with planning assistance from the Office of Rural Prosperity.
2. Create a river management and stewardship organization.	Need a lead organizer.
3. Monitor water quality, sediment, erosion, invasive, and threatened/endangered species.	Resource agencies and Huron Pines would be involved.

Priority Three: Continue Consumers' Habitat Improvement Account

Prioritized key actions or activities that support this opportunity	What would it take to make it happen? Is there a role Consumers Energy could play? What is the role? If not, who are the main actors needed to move forward?
1. Expand Habitat Improvement Account by adding fish loss as a result of factors other than entrainment to the calculation.	Consumers, MMAC, FERC would be involved.
2. Expand Habitat Improvement Account calculation to include species other than fish.	Identify supplemental grant opportunities.

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Priority Four: Continue Dam Safety Measures and Community’s Relationship with Consumers

Prioritized key actions or activities that support this opportunity	What would it take to make it happen? Is there a role Consumers Energy could play? What is the role? If not, who are the main actors needed to move forward?
1. Maintain current safety practices.	Consumers; continue to apply for safety grants and loans.
2. Increased communication with Alcona Park.	Consumers Hydro Land Management attend Alcona Park board meetings periodically and as invited.
3. Maintain transparency about operations with the public.	Consumers communicates information about dam operations or events to the public.

Scenario Two: Dams Are Sold to a New Owner

Participants noted that the priorities from Scenario One are also priorities under this scenario.

Priority One: Maintain Dam Safety into the Future

Prioritized key actions or activities that support this opportunity	What would it take to make it happen? Is there a role Consumers Energy could play? What is the role? If not, who are the main actors needed to move forward?
1. Implement a bond or other surety for the new owner’s responsibility for safe operation and eventual removal of the dam.	Consumers negotiation with the new owner.
2. Build funding for dam maintenance and upgrades into the power purchase agreement.	Consumers negotiation with the new owner.

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Priority Two: Build a Working Relationship with the New Dam Owner

Prioritized key actions or activities that support this opportunity	What would it take to make it happen? Is there a role Consumers Energy could play? What is the role? If not, who are the main actors needed to move forward?
1. Maintain lease agreements through the next license period.	Consumers negotiation with new owner; Curtis Township to have the option to participate in negotiations related to Alcona Park.
2. Open lines of communication between the new owner and community.	Attend local government meetings periodically to update community about dam operations; create Alcona Dam Facebook page.

Scenario Three: Dams are Removed and the River Is Restored

Priority One: Increase Year-Round Recreation, Shifting to More Land- and River-Based Activities

Prioritized key actions or activities that support this opportunity	What would it take to make it happen? Is there a role Consumers Energy could play? What is the role? If not, who are the main actors needed to move forward?
1. Build hiking and biking trails in the bottomlands.	Consumers, MMAC, and FERC are involved.
2. Transition snowmobile trails to include ORVs, link to regional trail network.	Consumers, MMAC, and FERC are involved.
3. Create recreation management plan.	Consumers, MMAC, and FERC are involved.
4. Increase ADA-compliant access points.	Consumers, MMAC, and FERC are involved.

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Priority Two: Create and Build on Opportunities that Preserve or Increase Unique Habitat and Wildlife

Prioritized key actions or activities that support this opportunity	What would it take to make it happen? Is there a role Consumers Energy could play? What is the role? If not, who are the main actors needed to move forward?
1. Develop a land management plan covering wildlife habitat, threatened/endangered species.	Consumers, MMAC, and FERC as part of decommissioning plan and local conservation groups.
2. Expand river area designated as Wild and Scenic.	USFS and Consumers.
3. Restore wetlands, oxbows, and floodplain in bottomlands.	Consumers, MMAC, and FERC as part of decommissioning plan and local conservation groups.
4. Remove/treat invasive plant species and restore historical plant communities.	

Priority Three: Restore the Cold-Water Fishery

Prioritized key actions or activities that support this opportunity	What would it take to make it happen? Is there a role Consumers Energy could play? What is the role? If not, who are the main actors needed to move forward?
1. Plantings at the river edge; habitat structure and stream modification.	Consumers, MMAC, FERC, and local conservation groups.
2. Monitor fish communities and channel morphology before and after dam removal.	Consumers, MMAC, FERC, local conservation groups, outside researchers, and universities.
3. Research and stewardship opportunities for people in the community.	Consumers, MMAC, FERC, and local conservation groups.

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Priority Four: Pursue Economic Diversification and the Potential for New Industries and Businesses

Prioritized key actions or activities that support this opportunity	What would it take to make it happen? Is there a role Consumers Energy could play? What is the role? If not, who are the main actors needed to move forward?
1. Develop a marketing plan for the area as a recreation destination.	Consumers, Alcona community, Northeast Michigan Council of Governments, with funding from the Office of Rural Prosperity.
2. Develop vision for repurposing the dam structures.	Potential buyer of the powerhouse, Consumers, DNR Natural Rivers; need a feasibility study.
3. Research developing an Au Sable River Council made up of counties, local NGOs, etc.	Consumers, local conservation NGOs, DNR, USFS, Alcona County. Potential for members to be appointed by governor.

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Address Outstanding Questions and Concerns

Angela Thompkins from Consumers Energy thanked participants for their work. She stated that this is not the last meeting of the prosperity group; the group will meet again to flesh out a plan when the decision is made. She reiterated that the community's concerns have been escalated to Consumers leadership and potential buyers throughout this process and that the community's concerns about selling with regards to safety and financial viability have been taken into account.

The group had the opportunity to ask questions. Consumers Energy will hold a community meeting after the decision about the dams has been made, in the first or second quarter of 2025.

Next Steps

Elizabeth outlined next steps for the group. PSC will share the final notes with the group and give them time to make sure their priorities are reflected. Consumers is working to develop a plan to ensure that the prosperity groups are informed of the decision before the general public, and to inform all communities at the same time. Once a decision is made, the group will reconvene to determine a way forward. PSC and Consumers appreciate the group's work and hope everyone continues to be involved.