

Adirondack EXPLORER

The place
where river
branches
meet

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by Tim Rowland

*Au Sable Forks looks to manage flood risk,
boost recreation.*

Community advocates believe the confluence of the east and west branches of the Ausable River at Au Sable Forks could be a garden spot and an attractive gateway for people entering the Adirondack Park.

Part of the equation will be a [river restoration project](#) directed by the Ausable River Association designed to make the hamlet less prone to flooding, but also to create a more scenic and usable watercourse the people will want to stop and enjoy.



The confluence of the Ausable River in Au Sable Forks, with the East Branch on the left and West Branch on the right. Tim Rowland photo

“Au Sable Forks is an authentic and historically important town that is in the throes of finding itself again,” said Rebecca Kelly, who with her husband Craig Brashear founded the Tahawus Cultural Center, which has a commanding view of both branches. “The confluence of a river brings a community together; its banks are an important part of recreation, a place for music and for young people to play. We need to make the river enjoyable.”

Below the confluence is Grove Island, a scraggly spit of brush and stones, with a shallow channel of water and cobble on either side. The banks are eroded, forlorn and for the most part inaccessible.

Much of the damage occurred in 2011 as a result of Tropical Storm Irene, and emergency repairs at the time did not take the river’s overhealth into consideration.



At an October information session outlining the project, Gary Henry, AsRA stream restoration manager, said the two shallow channels will be combined to create one deep channel that’s more efficient at moving sediment and ice downstream.

The latter point is important to **Jay Supervisor Matt Stanley**, who looked on a year ago as great blocks of ice riding a swollen river became hung up in water, flooding low-lying homes in the hamlet.

Emergency responders inspect damage caused by flash flooding in Au Sable Forks. Ice jams in the Ausable River brought widespread damage to the community. Explorer file photo by Tim Rowland

“The hope is that when this is finished, ice and debris will flow down the river,” Stanley said. “You’ll be able to see from Jay to Black Brook, so it will look better, and there won’t be all those trees (on Grove Island) for it to get stuck on.”

Ausable River restoration

Stanley said he is a believer in AsRa’s work, having seen its initial project on the East Branch at Upper Jay, which proved effective at mitigating ice-jam flooding. A second project upstream of the 9N bridge in Upper Jay is tentatively slated to be completed in 2023.



Prior project

DREAM MILE: In 2019, the Ausable River Association completed restoration on the “Dream Mile,” to reverse the effects of sedimentation. [READ MORE](#)

Photo by Brendan Wiltse/Ausable River Association.

Supervisor Jon Douglass,

“This is a gateway to the community, and we want to make the (town’s main intersection) more pleasing,” he said. “Not many people realize it, but this area was famous for trout fishing, and we would like to develop more access to the river.”

That would include a river walk and more parklike atmosphere along the river. In October, the town bought and demolished an eyesore property at the intersection, and plans are to extend an existing pocket park toward the planned riverwalk.

Recreational benefits

Across the river from the town of Jay’s jurisdiction in Au Sable Forks, Black Brook Supervisor Jon Douglass is looking forward to the project for a different reason. With higher banks, flooding is not the issue in Black Brook that it is in Jay, so Douglass sees the project as an aesthetic and recreational boon.

Also, Palmer Brook, once a choice trout tributary, will be reconstructed to be more accessible, with a longer reach across a floodplain to the new main channel.

The long-term goal is to complete more than a dozen such projects on the East Branch, transitioning it from its wide, featureless industrial past to a more natural river that’s deeper and narrower, with pools and riffles and floodplains and spillways to accommodate excess water.

Kelley Tucker, AsRA executive director, said there’s an outside shot the Au Sable Forks project could be funded for 2024, but 2025 is more likely.

“We would love for the community to have a beautiful, viable river that doesn’t make people nervous when it floods,” she said. “We want to bring back the health of the river, and help people understand the river itself.”

At the **Tahawus Center, Kelly** — who once lived in the Sudanese capital of Khartoum at the confluence White and Blue Nile — agreed as to the importance of a community’s connection to its waters. “We want to take care of the river so the river takes care of us,” she said. “It is a real privilege to walk along these banks.”



Gary Henry, AsRA stream restoration manager, at an October public informational meeting in Au Sable Forks. Tim Rowland photo

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