

# GERSTBERGER PINES



**NATURE TRAIL**

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The idea for this trail was conceived in 1993 by the Taylor County Board of Supervisors, and County Forestry Committee Chairman, Herb Bergman, when they purchased this unique 20-acre parcel of land. The project was finally brought to fruition through the hard work of Brad Ruesch, Russell Aszmann, Arlen Albrecht and the Wisconsin Conservation Corp (WCC) work crew.



**W**elcome to the Gerstberger Pines County Park and Nature Trail. The Taylor County Forestry and Recreation Department invites you to hike and learn about the plants, animals, and history of this unique old growth segment of forest. The 3/4 mile interpretive trail will introduce you to some of the treasures this special area has to offer.

Follow the wood chipped trail and numbered posts, but be careful of rocks and roots. Each numbered post has an accompanying script (in this brochure) of information about the unique characteristics at that particular site. This forest has been here since the last glacier over 10,000 years ago. ***Help us to preserve it and its unique environment by staying on the marked trails, not picking flowers, plants or fungi, and to carry out any containers or litter. Thank you for your cooperation.***

## **STATION #1:**

**T**he wealth of Wisconsin's timber resources lured men from all over the world, who dreamed of fortunes and land. Within a lifetime (1880 to 1940), all they left was a fire scarred, cut over landscape. The struggle to make a living and the perceived never ending forest resource lead to this quote published in the Lumberman's Gazette in 1881: "This valuable timber must be cut as fast as possible. It cannot be husbanded and preserved for the future." The value of an old growth forest like Gerstberger Pines has changed in the past 100 years from being strictly monetary to recreational, aesthetic, and environmental.

This parcel of land (originally 80 acres) was bought by Ed Gerstberger in 1892 from Mr. D. VanValm, an agent for the Wisconsin Central Railroad. It has been in the family until Taylor County purchased it in 1993. Why it was not logged off and farmed like much of the surrounding land is a mystery. For whatever reason, we are grateful that this 20 acres was saved for us to learn from and enjoy. Now we can imagine what it was like to be a Native American or an early settler first settling on this great forested land.

***As you proceed on to station #2, note the transition of tree sizes and the overhead canopy.***



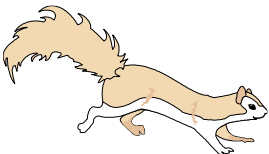
## STATION #2:

**W**e hope you noticed the difference in tree sizes as you entered the forest. The first 10 yards of forest is regrowth; trees that are reclaiming the abandoned field land. These trees are an estimated 20 to 25 years old. They are no doubt offspring of the old Red Oaks seen at this site. Which ones do you think will carry on two hundred years of history? Future generations will say these trees claim to be witnesses to CD players, bungee jumping and the Gulf War. By looking past this post and into the old growth canopy, note the change in tree size, spacing of trees and the majestic look of history. ***Proceed to your left and don't forget to stay on the trail.***



## STATION #3:

**T**he old Red Oaks here are close to 195 years old. They have witnessed events like the Civil War, the first light bulb, radios, and space travel. Oak trees are an important species in the ecology of a woods. They are long lived, provide food for wildlife (acorns) and are the most valuable species of hardwood in Wisconsin's Northwoods. These trees are 55 years past their economic prime. They are probably hollow and riddled with decay. They are valued today for their aesthetics, history and awe.



### **STATION #4:**

**L**ook to the south and see the neighboring woods. This parcel was pastured/grazed up to 15 years ago. It is a practice that is now discouraged as it decreases the quality of the future forest because it destroys all regeneration—regrowth and compacts the soil which is injurious to the existing trees. Observe the small seedlings growth just now emerging. Note the snag laden with woodpecker holes to your right.

### **STATION #5:**

**L**ooking past this post to the west, you'll see a natural windfall and tree stumps that were cut over 65 years ago. The saw logs were probably taken to the Rib Lake Lumber Company (1882 to 1948). Note the Soft Maple with a natural disease gall growth. These "burls" are highly valued by artisans today.

### **STATION #6:**

**H**ave a rest on the Leopold Bench which was built by the Wisconsin Conservation Corps for your convenience. Looking straight ahead past the post, you'll see a tangled pile of branches. This is the top of the Yellow Birch whose "snag" still provides habitat for birds and insects. (A snag is a dead tree that is still standing).





Looking to the right you'll see the first of 11 giant White Pines, and some of the largest Basswood trees in this forest. Now facing the opposite direction of the post, (east) note the aged decomposition of downed trees and branches and the earthen pit-and-mounds. (We'll learn about this at the next station).

### ***STATION #7:***

**L**ook at the uprooted windfall Hemlock. The dirt filled roots will decay leaving a "mound" of dirt with a "pit" (where the roots pulled up) behind it. Just look at the number of such "pit-and-mounds" in this area that were created since the last glacier (10,000 years ago). This exposed dirt makes a good seed bed for new trees. Look at how many trees are growing out of these little mounds.



### ***STATION #8:***

**A**t your lower left you'll see where a fallen tree provided a good seed bed and anchor for three Hemlock's to grow. Since then, the host downed log has decomposed leaving the exposed roots formed to grow around the old log. In 50 years from now, the fallen tree you see in the opposite direction might provide the same natural phenomenon.

## STATION # 9:

**U**ntil recently, the large Yellow Birch (behind the sign) laying on the ground, was a snag with woodpecker holes—now it is habitat for salamanders and insects and then compost. The Pileated Woodpecker makes holes in dead snags for food and shelter. Burrowing insects make a tasty treat. You can see the sign of the Pileated Woodpecker... telltale elongated rectangular holes.



Right of the sign are tall Eastern Hemlock and Yellow Birch. They form a dense canopy that inhibits under story growth. The Eastern Hemlocks grow extremely slow and the largest one (29 inches in diameter), is estimated to be 255 years old and the oldest tree in the park. The filtered sunlight does allow for interesting boreal or northern plants such as the starflower and jack-in-the-pulpit to grow and flourish. As you proceed on the trail, note the tip up to the west, it has great den potential. Also note the log decomposing into humus.



## STATION #10:

**T**he ancient Yellow Birch to your left is growing on a mound as previously described. Yellow Birch lumber is used for cabinet and furniture making. Note the shaggy bark and gall growth unique to this species.

***Now, you can branch to your left for a slightly longer trail experience or take the short cut to the right.***



## STATION #11:

**T**his large dead White Pine is presumed to have been hit by lightning 20 years ago. It will one day add nutrients to the forest floor. Meanwhile, it is a food source and home for woodpeckers and a multitude of insects. ***Please don't destroy the fungi growing on the log right in front of you.*** This is unique to Hemlock and is called Hemlock Shelf.

## STATION #12:

**W**ell over 125 years ago this Red Maple (soft maple) was damaged either by insects or a windfall causing the severe curve in the trunk. Its injury never healed and allowed access to fungi. This tree is decaying and hollow and may soon break off or may serve as a den tree if it remains standing. Note the snag to the left and the telltale trademark hole of the Pileated Woodpecker. On your journey to the next station, sit down on the Leopold Bench and watch for wildlife. You may be lucky and see a deer, squirrel or even a fisher. As you proceed, take notice of the sapsucker drilled Basswood and the grouse drumming logs. There is also an example of a root den tree.



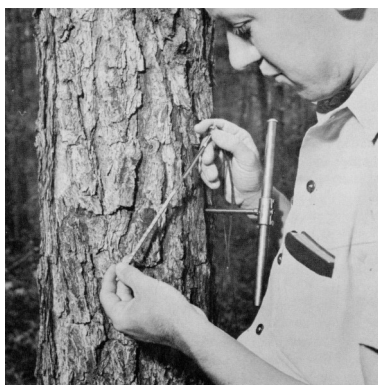
## **STATION #13:**

***(To find this station, you must turn back to the right (north) at the fork in the trail. Note the fresh lightning zipper on the big White Pine at the intersection.)***

**Y**ou are now standing in a “natural regeneration area” of a young forest. This land was used as a farm field up to 30 years ago. (You can age these young White Pines by counting the annual growth branches.) These are the offspring from the 11 giant White Pines located in this park. You should also be made aware that the further north you walk, the younger the pines, exemplifying the gradual progression or reclamation of the forest.

## **STATION #14:**

**H**ave a seat on the Leopold Bench and view the six giant White Pines in your presence and a seventh windfall right behind you. These giants of the forest are 32 to 38 inches in diameter (dbh-diameter at breast height) and approximately 105 feet tall. They were aged from 190 to 205 years old. The largest tree—39”dbh X 105’ tall—would yield approximately 5,000 board feet of lumber, enough to frame out two 1,500 sq. ft. houses. The reasons the logging industry found the White Pine so appealing were that they are easily worked, resilient and strong. These giants of the forest can be seen from miles away by traveling south of this site on County Highway “C”.



The heavy soils of the Rib Lake area made widespread stands of Pine uncommon, unlike the more sandy soils of other areas of Wisconsin. These Pines were scattered through stands of Hemlocks and a variety of mixed hardwoods. This area was one of the latest areas in the state to be logged for its Virgin Pine. In fact, the Village of Rib Lake was founded in 1881 by J.J. Kennedy to support the sawmill and heavy logging industry activity that was taking place within the surrounding area.

The early logging efforts produced some logs that were floated down the narrow Rib River to the mill at Rib Falls or to other mills in the Wausau area. Later, the lumberjacks' harvest was transported to the Rib Lake Lumber Company in the winter by horse drawn sleighs or steam haulers.



As logging increased, camps were established to house the men. Camps were numbered (1-28) and were spread out all over the surrounding forests. The camps consisted of a bathhouse, cook shack, dining quarters, and several bunkhouses. Each camp had its own unique well-loved cooking crew. (If you are interested in more about logging camps, you might be interested in visiting "Camp 28" in Rib Lake. This fine restaurant and motel contains artifacts and pictures of the logging era).

### **STATION #15:**

**T**his large White Ash tree is scarred with horizontal lines. These scars were caused by the Yellow-Bellied Sapsuckers that frequent the area. Further into the woods you will see a large “man-sized cavity” in an old Maple tree. And also in your line of view, you should spot a eutypella canker in a smaller Maple tree. Also note the White Pine that fell from unknown causes, but just imagine the crash!

### **STATION #16:**

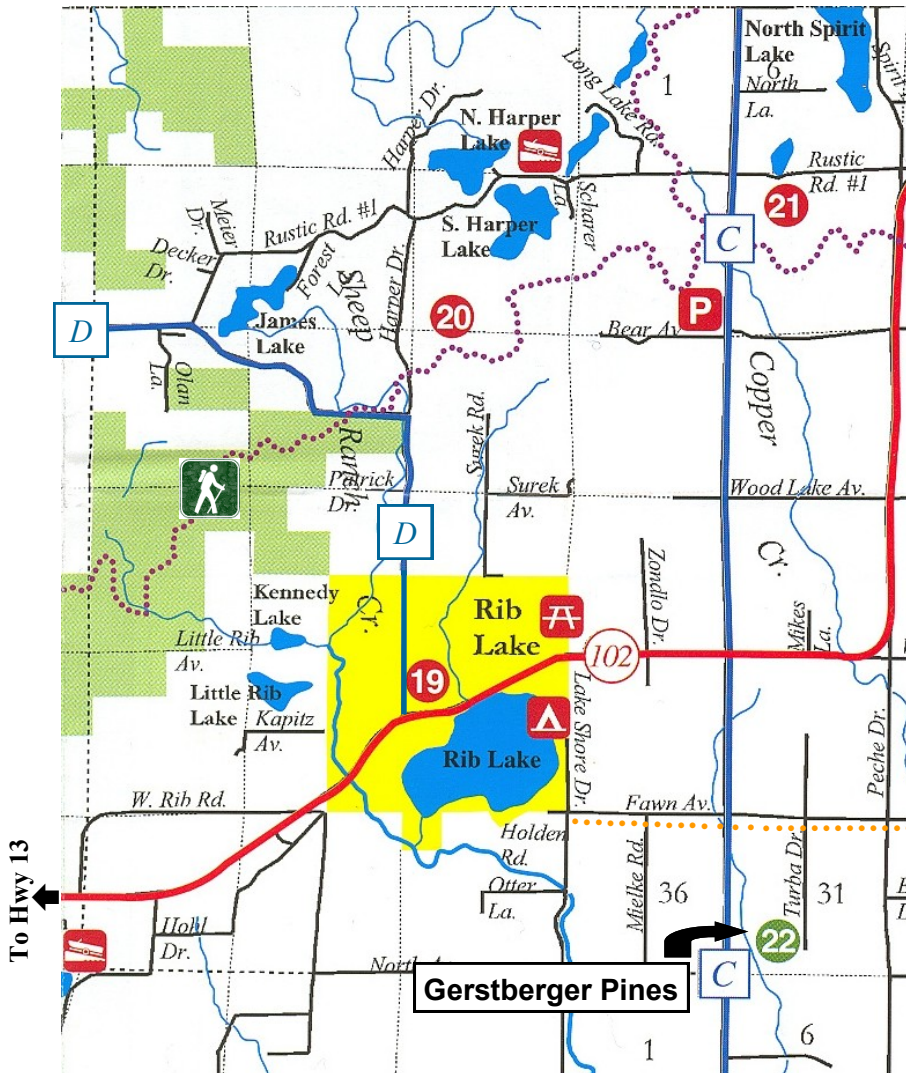
**T**ake a seat on the Leopold Bench. The Hemlock cathedral you experience is what the Native Americans and early white settlers experienced in this area. This is what Ed Gerstberger saw in 1892 when he purchased this land from the Wisconsin Central Railroad. While you’re listening to the birds, think of what the early settlers may have thought as they went about their work falling trees and clearing fields. Think about the value of this and all forests. Think about the diversity this forest offers wildlife and humans. This is truly a special place.



The Taylor County Parks and Forestry Department invites you to visit the “multiple use” managed 17,000 acre County Forest just three miles from here. You will see today’s generation of forestry practices and how it is managed for wildlife, recreation, and timber/fiber production.

***If you don’t plan on keeping this brochure for future reference, please put it back in the entrance brochure holder. In this manner, we save money and paper. We save paper and therefore we preserve more trees to grow into more Gerstberger Pines for future generations.***





= Trail Parking



= Campgrounds



= Hiking/Ice Age National Scenic Trail



Shaded area = Taylor County Forest



= ATV Trails





**For more information on the  
trails of Taylor County, contact  
the Taylor County Tourism Office at:**

**1-715-748-4729**

**or**

**1-888-6TAYLOR**

**(1-888-682-9567)**

**[www.medfordwis.com/mc\\_tour.htm](http://www.medfordwis.com/mc_tour.htm)**