

Hartwick Pines has largest old growth forest in the Lower Peninsula

By MATT MARKEY and JEFF BASTING

GRAYLING, Mich. — Shortly after 8 on a gorgeous summer morning, in a grove of trees just north of this haven for trout fishermen, warblers rule the airwaves and woodpeckers off in the distance provide the beat for those rhythmic songs.

The chamber they fill with music is a sacred forest, one never touched by man's crosscut saw. Some of the trees here were stretching out and reaching for the sunlight when the Pilgrims aboard the Mayflower arrived in Plymouth, Mass., in 1620.

This is Hartwick Pines, the largest stand of "old growth" forest in Michigan's Lower Peninsula. Here, white pines, red pines, and hemlocks ladder their way 160 feet to the sky.

As an 8-year-old kid so many years ago, I was not all that interested in a bunch of old trees. We were headed to a cottage on a nearby lake, where swimming and fishing were at the top of the menu, but my father insisted we see Hartwick Pines first.

He found a lesson in every place we visited or vacationed, and here we got educated in the value of trees. These were living, breathing giants, and a testament to the natural wonders that occur when human interference is kept to a minimum.

Hartwick Pines has stayed with me all of these years, because my dad loved trees and he marveled at their strength, their resilience, and their beauty. He made sure we realized it is so rare to walk among some of the Creator's best work, surrounded by trees that were 150 years old when this country was founded.

As the story goes, the Salling, Hanson, & Co. logging firm was working in this area in 1893 when an economic downturn forced it to suspend operations. When business picked up again, it was likely more profitable to move to a larger section of forest in the area, so a grove of approximately 85 acres survived.

A terrible gale in 1940 known as the Armistice Day Storm brought hurricane-force winds and leveled 37 acres of the old growth forest. The same storm also sank several freighters in Lake Michigan.

Just under 50 acres of old growth forest were left standing following that disastrous event. There are approximately 24,000 trees in the Hartwick Pines old growth grove today, but not all are "old growth" trees. Lightning and wind claim a few of the old trees each year, and they are replaced with a mixture of hardwoods and pines.

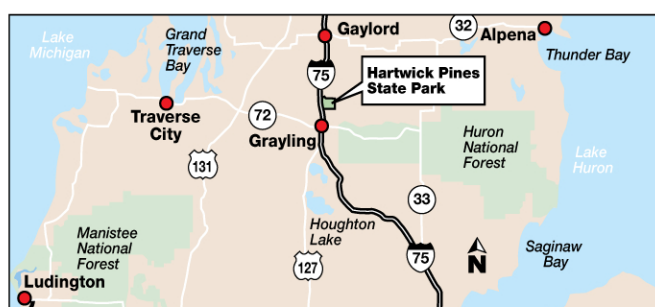
A large hemlock near the parking lot was recently damaged by a storm and had to be removed. Its stump showed 365 annual rings. The most famous tree at Hartwick Pines — The Monarch — lost its crown in a 1992 storm and then died four years later. It was 155 feet tall when healthy, with a circumference of 12 feet and an estimated age of 325 years.

The grove of old trees is part of Hartwick Pines State Park, about four hours north of Toledo.

The park is named for Maj. Edward E. Hartwick, who grew up in Grayling, fought in the Spanish-American War alongside future President Theodore Roosevelt, then returned to Michigan and started the Hartwick Lumber Co. in Detroit. Mr. Hartwick re-enlisted in the Army at the start of World War I and died of meningitis while in France.

In memory of her late husband, Karen Hartwick purchased the 8,236-acre tract in 1927 and donated it to the state for a park with the provision that the tall pines never be logged.

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If you go: For reservations and rates for Hartwick Pines State Park call 989-348-7068 or go to www.michigan.gov/hartwickpines

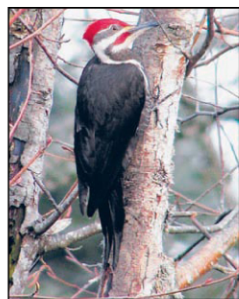
THE OUTDOORS PAGE



Still standing tall

MNR/CRAIG KASMER

Hartwick Pines is a mystical, cathedral-like place, and one of Michigan's last stands of majestic old growth pine forest.



NOEL LEE

Pileated woodpecker



LEV FRID

Pine marten



WIKIMEDIA

Porcupine

Old growth forests are home to unique species such as the pileated woodpecker, pine marten, and the porcupine, as well as a variety of wood warblers, squirrels, and deer.

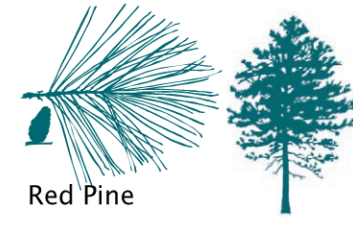
Branch and cone of 3 major trees



Eastern Hemlock



Eastern White Pine



Red Pine

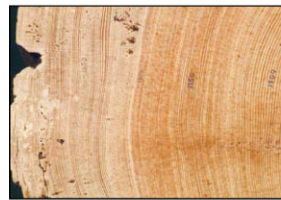
Hartwick Pines State Park old growth forest is dominated by three types of trees: eastern hemlock, white pine, and red pine. The trees are between 360-410 years old, unlike secondary forests which are 40-100 years old. The largest trees are 150-160 feet tall and have trunk diameters of 3-4 feet.



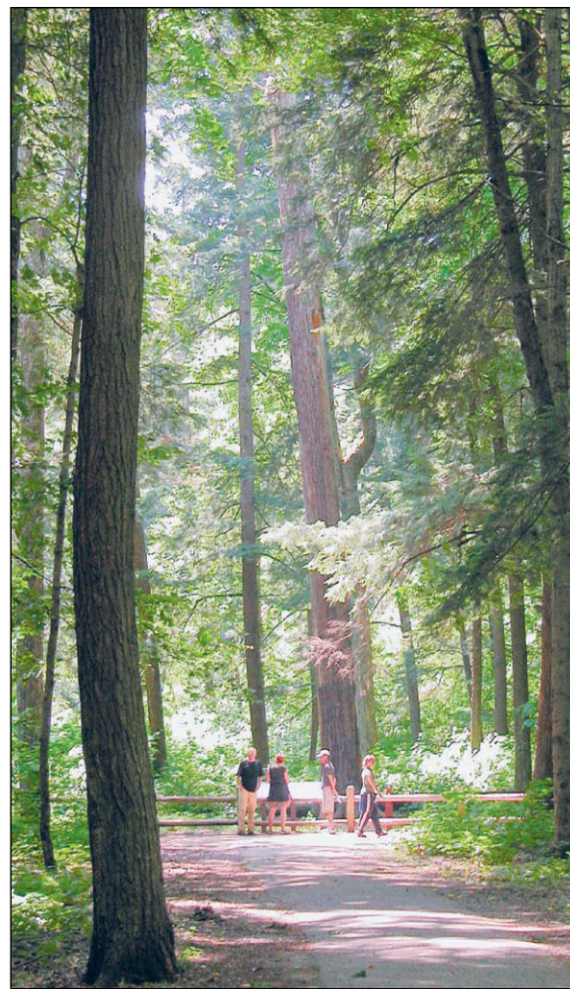
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Holes in the canopy and decaying stumps are common features in old growth forests.

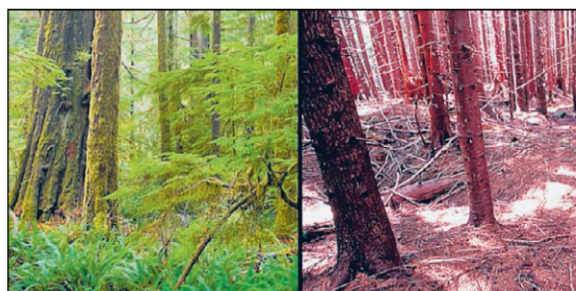


Rings of a white pine tell how old it is and types of weather it endured. Rings that are close together indicate a drought or crowded conditions. More widely spaced rings indicate good growth with plenty of moisture and sunlight.



HARTWICK PINES STATE PARK

Root systems of old growth trees are fairly shallow and near the surface. They are easily damaged if walked on. The park requires visitors to stay on designated trails.



T J WATT

Old growth forests have holes in the canopy from downed trees that allow sunlight to penetrate to the ground floor for undergrowth to occur. Secondary forests are planted tighter and have one level canopy. Little sunlight penetrates, leaving a sparse undergrowth.



THE BLADE/MATT MARKEY

Another feature of old growth forests is called pit and mound topography. That is where the tree is blown over, root ball and all, leaving a hole in the ground where it was uprooted. The mound is created by the deteriorating uprooted root ball and timber.