

Beyond the Gates – Grass River Nature Area

The Grass River Nature Area is a 1,500 acre nature preserve surrounding the Grass River, located in the middle of Antrim County about 30 minutes south of Charlevoix. Just south of Bellaire is Lake Bellaire. The Grass River flows out of Lake Bellaire and into Clam Lake. The river itself is very short as it is only 2.5 miles in length and is about 20 yards wide and 5 feet deep, clear and with barely any current. Smaller boats can use the river to go to and from these lakes as a connector. The river winds through this grassland nature area as a slow meandering stream. Although I have not used the trails, there are 7 miles of trails in various shorter loops, many of which are on an elevated boardwalk above wetlands, ferns, and grasslands. There is a nature center there that hosts programs throughout the week including kayaking tours, art programs, naturalist speakers, and family adventures. This is a very low intensity visit so no adventure required.



Paddling the Grass River is stunning and is extremely relaxing, as there is no current and it slowly winds through the grasslands. You can launch a canoe, kayak, or SUP at Fisherman's Paradise Road on the East side of Lake Bellaire and then takeout at the Grass River Area boardwalk which is a 3-mile paddle. Note that if you takeout at the boardwalk, you must carry your boat several hundred yards to the parking area. If you can paddle another 2 miles, you can take out at Clam Lake Road and avoid the haul. Lastly, if you are like me and you bite off way more than your family can chew, you can launch in the town of Bellaire, paddle down the Intermediate River, paddle Lake Bellaire, paddle the Grass River, and then paddle Clam Lake until your wife and kids are about to collapse as the sun is starting to set. You then must find a solo gentleman in a pontoon boat and convince him to haul you, your family, four paddle boards, four life jackets, four paddles, and one cooler to the Clam Lake boat ramp a mile down the lake. Hypothetically speaking, these are things to avoid.

The town of Bellaire is charming, and I recommend stopping at Short's Brewery for pizza and craft beer. The drive home through Bellaire, Central Lake, Ellsworth, and then Marion Center Road is scenic.

[Hiking Trails, Nature Trails, Classes, Programs, Boardwalks | Grass River Natural Area, Bellaire, MI, Antrim County](#)

Enjoy!
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