Huron River Report

Published quarterly by the Huron River Watershed Council **FALL 2013**

feature story

200 Years of Michigan Fish

The final installment of a four-part series on Michigan's fisheries

Michigan boasts 11,000 lakes, 36,000 miles of streams and rivers, and is surrounded by the largest freshwater lakes on Earth. Over the past two hundred years European settlers and their descendants have done much to alter these natural systems and the creatures that inhabit them. This article is the last in a four-part series that examines how humans have changed – and are still changing – fish diversity and abundance in Michigan through greed and stewardship, ignorance and intention.

The previous three issues looked at how commercial and recreational fishing changed the Great Lakes region in the 1880s and 1890s, how scientists began researching and managing fish populations in the 1930s, and how invasive species changed the Great Lakes fish community in the 1960s. This article revisits these topics from a modern perspective to provide a better understanding of current fish management challenges and strategies.

The changing face of stream management

Modern stocking

From the 19th century, when brown trout and rainbow trout were first introduced, to the mid-20th century, when the Coho and Chinook salmon were stocked to control alewives, fish stocking has shaped and defined Michigan's fisheries. Fisheries managers' primary purpose in stocking fish has always been to meet commercial fishing and recreational fishing demands without altering the ecosystem's overall integrity. However, over the years there have been many changes to what species and size of fish are stocked in an attempt to meet these demands. The Michigan Department of Natural Resources

Recent sampling indicates that the beautiful lake trout may be making a comeback. credit: US Fish and Wildlife Service

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A Paddler's Journey • *Ron Sell's 2013 river expedition*

A little over 20 years ago, Joan Martin (HRWC Adopt-A-Stream emeritus) had the wonderful idea of getting a bunch of people together and paddling the whole length of the Huron River. After a year of planning, getting dozens of people involved and communities on board, Joan's idea grew into *RIVERFEST*, a nine day celebration of the river from start to finish. The expedition was fun, enlightening and a great experience for all – forming bonds and networks that continue today.

It seemed like time to do the trip again, to see what has changed over 20 years. Armed with HRWC's new *Paddler's Companion* guide book, we could see how close we have come to making a true water trail. We would do it in 5 days without the fanfare or agenda, just for fun and adventure.

For this trip, we were a small and select group of paddlers. Paul and Joanne Lang from Ohio, Marty Cooperman from Cleveland, Steve

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Laura's Stream of Consciousness

River Hero

This year I was awarded the National River Hero award. This year also happens to be the 15 year anniversary of my tenure at HRWC. Early on, my son Abe came in to my office, saw me at my desk and asked, "Mom, how do you save the river through typing?" I have to admit I didn't have a great answer – all I wanted to do was run out and get on the water immediately.

We've all been there, right?…. making flyers, monitoring for bugs or flow, picking up the phone and making calls to decision makers, writing grants…it doesn't always feel like it makes a difference.

But this award and my15 year anniversary have me looking back, and I can see that it does make a difference. It's definitely made a difference at HRWC. We have achieved great things including phosphorus reductions, the Dexter Dam removal, land and natural area protection, and strong community engagement and stewardship!

While I am so moved and proud of this honor, more than anything, this award is a reflection of OUR work. The work of HRWC staff and board, our local governments, citizen scientists, enlightened business leaders, planners and environmental consultants, donors, recreational enthusiasts, and partner nonprofits. Altogether, this award is an affirmation that OUR WORK WORKS!

Laura Rubin, Executive Director

Ultimately, you are reading this because you share a deep belief in clean water and a clean river, and we work really hard to make it happen! Thank you for your hard work, confidence and friendship.

Stormwater, Asset Management, and Wastewater Program

As you've read in past newsletters, Green Infrastructure is receiving greater emphasis at all scales (site, community, and landscape) of land use management and planning. As with other infrastructure, in addition to setting goals for future projects, it is important to start with an inventory of existing natural features and other green infrastructure along with a strategy for maintaining it.

To help communities spur this along, the State of Michigan passed new legislation establishing grants for asset management plan development, stormwater plan development, sewage collection and treatment plan development, and state-funded loans to construct projects identified in the asset management plans. An asset management plan requires a local unit of government to identify, map, and assess the condition of the wastewater and stormwater systems. This includes the level of service, criticality, maintenance strategies, and long-term funding.

HRWC encourages watershed local governments to apply for these unique, one-time grant funds to conduct a thorough inventory of all infrastructure and identify future threats and needs. This planning can avoid future spills, flooding, and sewer back-ups, while also identifying future funding sources. More information is at: http://www.michigan.gov/deq/0,4561,7-135-3307_3515_4143-294952--,00.html

Local artists encouraged people to consider their stormdrains. credit: J. Wolf

Stormdrain Art, June 2013

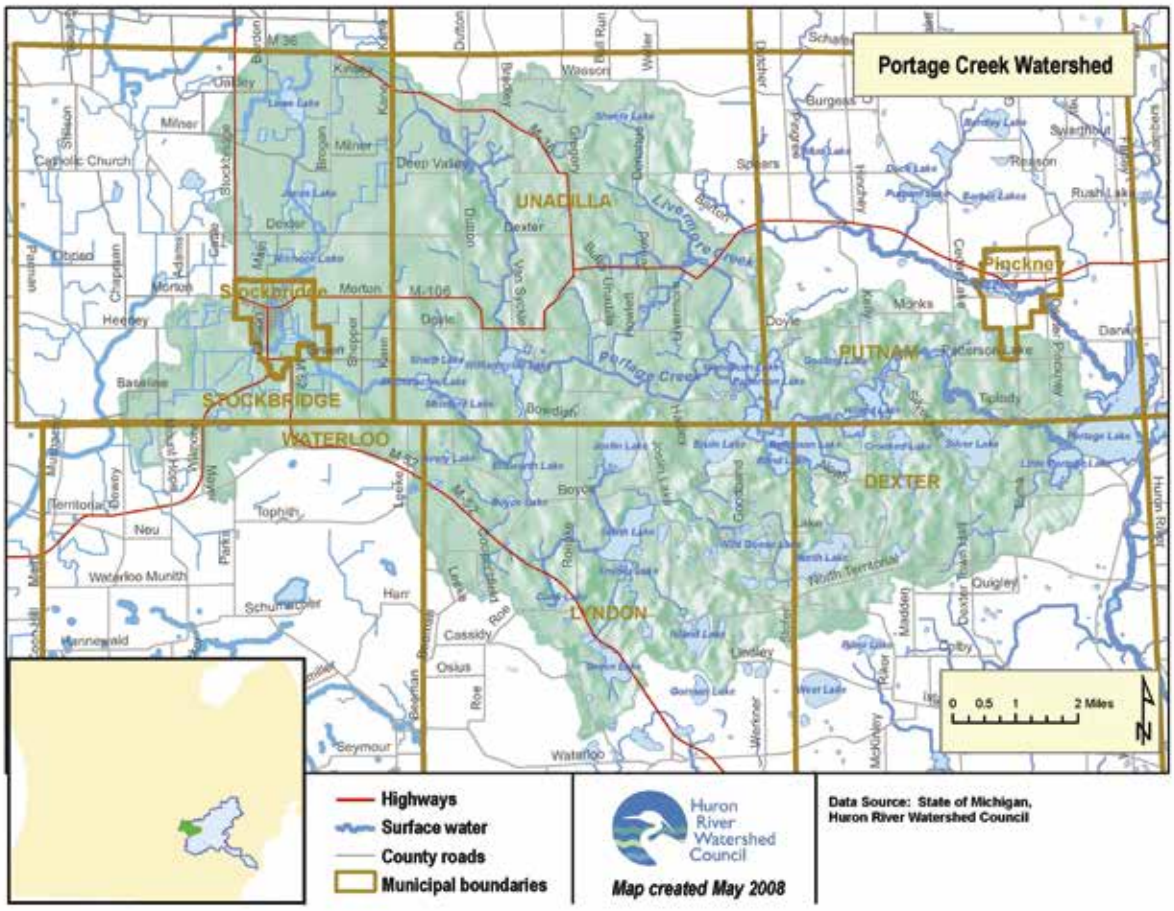
This summer, working to expand our adopt-a-stormdrain program, HRWC partnered with the City of Ann Arbor's Mayor's Green Fair, along with local artist David Zinn and the Ann Arbor Public Art Commission. Our stormdrain chalk art event was exciting and educational! Fair participants enjoyed looking on while dozens of youth (in age as well as in heart) decorated downtown stormdrains.

Drawings and messages revolved around the stormdrain's direct connection to Huron River. If you would like to get involved in this program, take a look at www.hrwc.org/volunteer/adoptastormdrain.

– Laura Rubin

Protection for Portage Creek

Communities work to keep high-quality creek healthy



Thanks to funding from MDEQ under the Clean Water Act, HRWC has begun work with communities within the Portage Creek watershed (see map) to implement parts of the Portage Creek Watershed Management Plan adopted two years ago. This work will address two major objectives of the plan:

- Improve local ordinances and policies in order to accommodate development and protect the creek's health
- Launch an education campaign to increase awareness about the creek and promote water-friendly residential practices

Local Planning

Dexter and Lyndon townships have already held Green Infrastructure design workshops. HRWC has submitted a related plan and map to both townships describing the extent and value of their green infrastructure – the forests, wetlands, lakes, streams and other open areas that clean the air, filter polluted runoff, replenish drinking water supplies, provide habitat for fish and wildlife, and maintain quality of life. These materials lay out options for planning for development in concert with, not in opposition to, that vital infrastructure. Similar green infrastructure workshops will occur this fall in Stockbridge Village and Unadilla Township. HRWC is talking with Dexter and Lyndon Townships about improving ordinance language to help protect the creek as development occurs.

Education Campaign

HRWC will also direct an education campaign to residents who live along Portage Creek and the creekshed's tributaries and lakeshores. Materials will promote river-friendly home practices, teaching homeowners to minimize stormwater runoff, prevent erosion, maintain healthy lawns and gardens, and use natural shorelines or streambank buffers to protect water quality. To inform the effort, HRWC surveyed those residents earlier this summer seeking their opinions about the creekshed's water resources and what they might do to help. The survey results will shape the educational campaign. Near completion of the project, HRWC will survey residents again to measure the impacts of the campaign in changing attitudes and behaviors.

The Portage Creek Watershed Plan is the only one in the Huron watershed that the MDEQ designated as one focusing on "protection" – preventing future impacts from degrading a high quality, mostly natural creekshed – as opposed to "mitigation" – cleaning up waters already impacted from agricultural and development practices. Its communities and residents recognize their unique situation and want to keep Portage Creek beautiful and healthy while avoiding the high cost of remediation in the future.

– Kris Olsson

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(DNR) once stocked trout as fry (1875-1920), then as fingerlings (1920-1950), and then as legal-sized (large enough to keep while fishing) adults (1950-1960). Currently, the DNR stocks fingerlings or very close to legal size, depending on the situation.

Brook trout were once stocked very extensively (about 16 million fry per year from 1910-1920), but in 2012, only 100,000 brook trout were stocked. On the other hand, rainbow trout were stocked more extensively in 2012 than any other time in Michigan's history with about 3.2 million near-legals planted. The stocking of other game fish species similarly has fluctuated over time as determined by fisheries science, management needs, and the current values of the DNR and other stakeholder groups.

In the past, stocking was seen as a panacea. It is now used more judiciously, and usually in cases where aquatic habitat supports growth and survival of a desired species, but for some reason reproduction is insufficient to maintain desired abundance. Fisheries scientists are also now concerned more with survival of stocked fish rather than how many they can stock.

Stream improvement and watershed management

In the 1930s, the DNR founded the Institute of Fisheries Research in Ann Arbor. Institute researchers created a diverse range of fish sampling and fishery management techniques including "stream improvement", which involved building structures in the stream to enhance fish populations. The success of these projects was often mixed, when they were assessed at all. Fish often used the artificial stream habitat, but it was difficult to determine if the habitat improvements were increasing fish populations or simply concentrating the existing fish around the structures.

Over time, DNR attitudes towards stream improvement projects changed. In a 1989 memo that marked a shift in stream improvement theory, Dave Borgeson Sr., former Assistant Chief of the DNR Fisheries Division, placed a moratorium on any new Division involvement with "traditional instream habitat improvement work." He believed that these structures were expensive to build, expensive to maintain and oftentimes, not maintained at all. In addition, Borgeson stated, "Their benefits are rarely demonstrated." Instead of stream improvement work, Borgeson urged the division to address broader watershed concerns, such as road crossings, culverts, ORV trails, and farming practices. "We can accomplish more in the long run by using our knowledge of the resource and our analysis of what it needs than we can by work projects."

Under this perspective of stream improvement, the Fisheries Division adopted a more cooperative approach focusing on working with private landowners, conservation districts, and non-governmental organizations. Currently, the Division often uses its expertise in helping these groups plan projects and acts in a support position in implementing them, but it will not take the lead in paying for or building these projects.

Instead, the Fisheries Division began to focus on a watershed approach. The first watershed level report, which focused on the Huron River watershed, was issued in 1995. The Division has completed 18 watershed assessments since then, covering most of the major watersheds across the state. The purpose of the assessments is to describe the characteristics of the watersheds and their biological community, to identify and solve problems within the aquatic system and fisheries of the watersheds, and to provide an organized long-term reference for agencies and citizens.

The struggling Great Lakes

Invasive species everywhere

In the past two hundred years, more than 140 new non-native species have colonized the Great Lakes and its tributaries. These include fish (round goby, tubenose goby), crustaceans (spiny water flea, rusty crayfish), mollusks (zebra mussel, quagga mussel), plants (eurasian water milfoil, phragmites, purple loosestrife), and even a virus (Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia- VHS). Some new species seem to have had little effect, but many have interfered with the ecosystem's normal processes through fast growth and rapid reproduction (e.g. phragmites), high dispersal ability (e.g. zebra mussel), competitive ability (e.g. round goby), and outright fish death (e.g. VHS).

Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia (VHS) is a dangerous fish disease that originated in northern Canada and traveled to the Great Lakes Region in 2005. While this gizzard shad shows outward symptoms, not all infected fish do. credit: M. Faisal, Michigan State University

VHS is a recent threat. It appeared in the Great Lakes basin in 2005 and is believed to have originated from the maritime region of Canada. VHS causes hemorrhaging in fishes' liver, swim bladder, spleen, and intestines, and the fish eventually

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die from organ failure. Large fish kills have occurred in freshwater drum, muskellunge, and yellow perch. Smallmouth bass, crappie, and bluegill kills have also been confirmed. To date, removing the virus once it has spread has been impossible. Limiting the transfer of fish between water bodies and teaching anglers to clean boating equipment will reduce VHS spread. This is an issue that affects the Great Lakes and inland lakes. VHS has even been found in the Huron River watershed – in Baseline Lake in 2009.

What invasive species lie around the corner? Scientists, governments, and the public alike are well aware of the threat posed by several species of Asian carp that are encroaching on the Great Lakes through the Mississippi River system. Yet the political will is lacking to make a permanent barrier by closing the Chicago canal, which connects Lake Michigan to the Mississippi River system. This disagreement over how to manage a known invasive species is a strong indicator of future regulatory conflicts that Great Lakes' communities may face as even newer invasive species enter the Lakes' ecosystem.

2012 - MDNR FISH STOCKING NUMBERS

Species	Number	Average Size (inches)
Walleye	10.0 million	2.5*
Rainbow trout	3.2 million	7.8
Chinook salmon	2.6 million	3.5
Brown trout	2.0 million	6.1
Coho salmon	1.7 million	5.4
Lake Trout	450,000	11.7
Splake	215,000	8.0
Fathead minnow	130,000	1.7
Brook trout	100,000	8.0
Atlantic salmon	90,000	6.6
Muskellunge	28,000	10.2
Channel catfish	13,000	9.0
Bluegill	9,000	4.8
Black crappie	6,000	5.6
Lake sturgeon	6,000	5.3
Pumpkinseed	5,000	3.4
Redear sunfish	3,000	4.0
Yellow perch	2,000	6.4
Hybrid sunfish	2,000	6.7
Northern pike	800	12.3

** Walleye do not grow well in hatcheries and smaller fish are planted than other species.*

Record low populations of forage fish

The Great Lakes fisheries are not doing well. Native forage fish populations are currently near record lows, including cisco, bloater, mottled sculpin, Johnny darter (in near-shore areas), and yellow perch. Even the populations of two non-native forage fish, the alewife and rainbow smelt, are close to record lows. All of these species are extremely important food sources for the larger Great Lake predators. An analysis from 2002-2004 showed that the energy content of alewife was 23% lower than in 1979-1981, meaning that each individual fish is less nutritious for predators.

What is the cause for this major decline in these species? As in all science, causation is difficult to show, but some scientists theorize that the major cause of the decline is zebra mussels and quagga mussels sequestering energy and nutrients that used to support fish. However, other scientists believe that while these mussels do play a role, other factors such as poor reproduction, increased predation by salmon, and alterations to fish habitat are a bigger concern.

Round gobies are also causing problems for forage fish, in particular along the Great Lakes coastline. Round gobies first appeared in the Great Lakes basin in 1997, and in that time are believed to have largely eliminated mottled sculpin and Johnny darter from near-shore areas due to egg predation and aggressive behavior. Round gobies also eat sturgeon eggs and therefore have had a negative impact on sturgeon restoration attempts. Recent evidence shows that predators (in particular burbot and smallmouth bass)

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Some scientists suspect that zebra and quagga mussels are the primary reason for the current collapse of Great Lakes fish populations. credit: US Fish and Wildlife

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are learning to eat round goby, which is promising. If predators consistently recognize gobies as good food, then the worst effects of the round goby will be alleviated.

Low predator populations

Chinook salmon were at record low body weights in 2003, followed by poor growth recorded in 2004; this was certainly related to the reduction in forage fish. In recent years, stocking of Coho and Chinook has been greatly scaled back in order to strike a better balance with the underlying, depleted food web. In 2012, the amount of Chinook and Coho stocked was about half the amount stocked in 1980.

Lake trout have never fully recovered from the sea lamprey; they had disappeared from all of the Great Lakes except for Lake Superior. However, good lamprey controls are in place, keeping the populations down and making it possible for managers to work on helping the lake trout achieve self-sustaining populations. Research on improving sea lamprey control is still ongoing. Michael Wagner from Michigan State University recently published a paper on how scents from dead lampreys actively repel live lamprey. Such pheromones could be used to create "chemical dams" that would block the lamprey from Great Lakes tributaries.

Lake trout has been reintroduced into all of the Great Lakes. Up until the last couple of years, management efforts to establish populations of lake trout have proved futile. However, scientists have recently reported that spawning is occurring in parts of Lake Michigan and Lake Huron and that the wild lake trout fry are surviving and maturing to reproducing adults. Scientists have theorized that alewife predation on lake trout fry has been a major impediment on lake trout reproduction, and it is possible that the record low alewife populations have allowed for lake trout rehabilitation.

The Great Lakes originally contained a vast resource of lake whitefish, which were severely exploited by commercial fishing in the 19th century. Nearly 20 million pounds of whitefish were harvested from the Great Lakes every year from 1830 -1890. The populations have long since dwindled, but a commercial fishery still exists for whitefish today. Harvest reached a modern peak of production in 1993, with 7 million pounds of whitefish caught. In 2004, the fishery hit a modern low in 2004, at 4 million pounds of whitefish. Catches since have averaged around 5 million pounds.

Just like the other species mentioned above, invasive species have likely stressed whitefish populations by depleting the base of the food web. Invasive species also have made whitefish harder to catch, as filamentous algae and zebra and quagga mussels foul and tangle fishing gear. In addition, an increase of water clarity due to zebra mussels has forced the whitefish to deeper waters, outside the reach of fisheries that use trap-nets.

The lake sturgeon recovery

Sturgeon have several known remnant populations and reports have indicated that the population is increasing but far from re-established. The sturgeon is still listed as "very rare," "endangered," or "threatened" depending on the exact wording used by various state and federal agencies. There is strong interest in restoring lake sturgeon and many actions are underway. Substantial portions of the sturgeon's historical spawning habitats have been blocked by dams; passage specially designed for sturgeon has been put in on the Manistique River and Menominee River. In the St. Clair River, managers have installed artificial rock reefs to provide spawning habitat and refuge areas. Sturgeon are beginning to use these, and harvest restrictions are now providing protection for long-lived adults

This steelhead plunged into the Red Cedar River during a stocking event in April of 2013 at Michigan State University. credit: MSU Today

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so they may spawn repeatedly for decades without risk of capture.

Improving Great Lakes management

Lake management plans have been developed by the federal and state governments to address pollutants and stressors on each of the Great Lakes. The focus of these plans is on using a holistic ecosystem approach and meeting the concerns of all involved stakeholders. Priority goals include restoration and protection of fish health and habitat. In addition, the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, started in 2010, is the largest investment in the Great Lakes in twenty years and involves eleven federal agencies. One of the major priorities of this initiative is to prevent the introduction of new invasive species.

Although populations are far from historic peak levels, good management has created a sustainable fishery in the Great Lakes for commercial fisheries. Certainly commercial fishery management has improved over time with better fish population models and more realistic goals.

Dredging, ditching, and draining has reduced coastal wetlands on the lower four Great Lakes by approximately 75% from pre-European settlement. These wetlands are extremely important for young-of-the-year fish growth. Wetlands are also heavily affected by phragmites and purple loosestrife, which are known to affect natural hydrologic cycles in wetlands. However, in 2000, the Great Lakes Wetlands Consortium was started to monitor wetland health and restore wetland habitat. This group provides scientific support for monitoring and finds funding for a variety of management projects. Progress is also occurring on reducing phragmites in Great Lakes wetlands, and projects to reconnect many isolated wetlands to the Great Lakes are enjoying spectacular results. A reconnected wetland within the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge on Lake Erie provided new habitat for millions of fish that moved in and out of the habitat each week.

Conclusions

The fish in the lake and river ecosystems in Michigan and throughout the Great Lakes basin are feeling the stress that has come from 200 years of management and mismanagement. From overfishing in the 19th century, to intentional species introductions and relocations in the 20th century, to the dominance of invasive exotic species at the beginning of the 21st century, there has certainly been a long history of "fishy" social and scientific problems.

The current situation in the Great Lakes is dim, but a myriad of intelligent people from universities, non-profits, environmental businesses, and all varieties of federal and state agencies are working on the problems. Certainly there is hope that wise management can turn things around. Good data collection and scientific analysis, pro-active policies and laws, and better public awareness are all important components in reaching this goal!

– Paul Steen

Special thanks: Jeff Schaeffer from the USGS Great Lakes Science Center and Kevin Wehrly from the DNR Fisheries Division provided many useful suggestions.

The DNR's Huron River Watershed Assessment is available for download at www.hrwc.org/the-watershed/. The primary challenges to the Huron River as described in this report are fragmentation from dams, degradation from non-point pollution, and urban sprawl.

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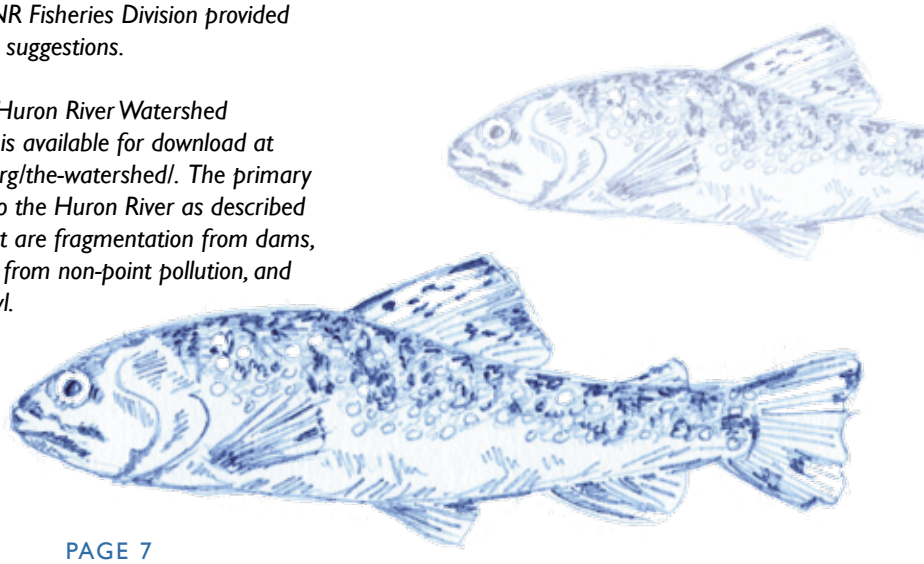

Founded in 1965, the Huron River Watershed Council (HRWC) is southeast Michigan's oldest environmental organization dedicated to river protection. HRWC works to inspire attitudes, behaviors, and economies to protect, rehabilitate, and sustain the Huron River system.

HRWC coordinates programs and volunteer efforts that include pollution prevention, hands-on river monitoring, wetland and floodplain protection, public outreach and education, and natural resources planning.

Individuals, local businesses and more than 40 communities support HRWC's work through voluntary membership.

Huron River Watershed Council

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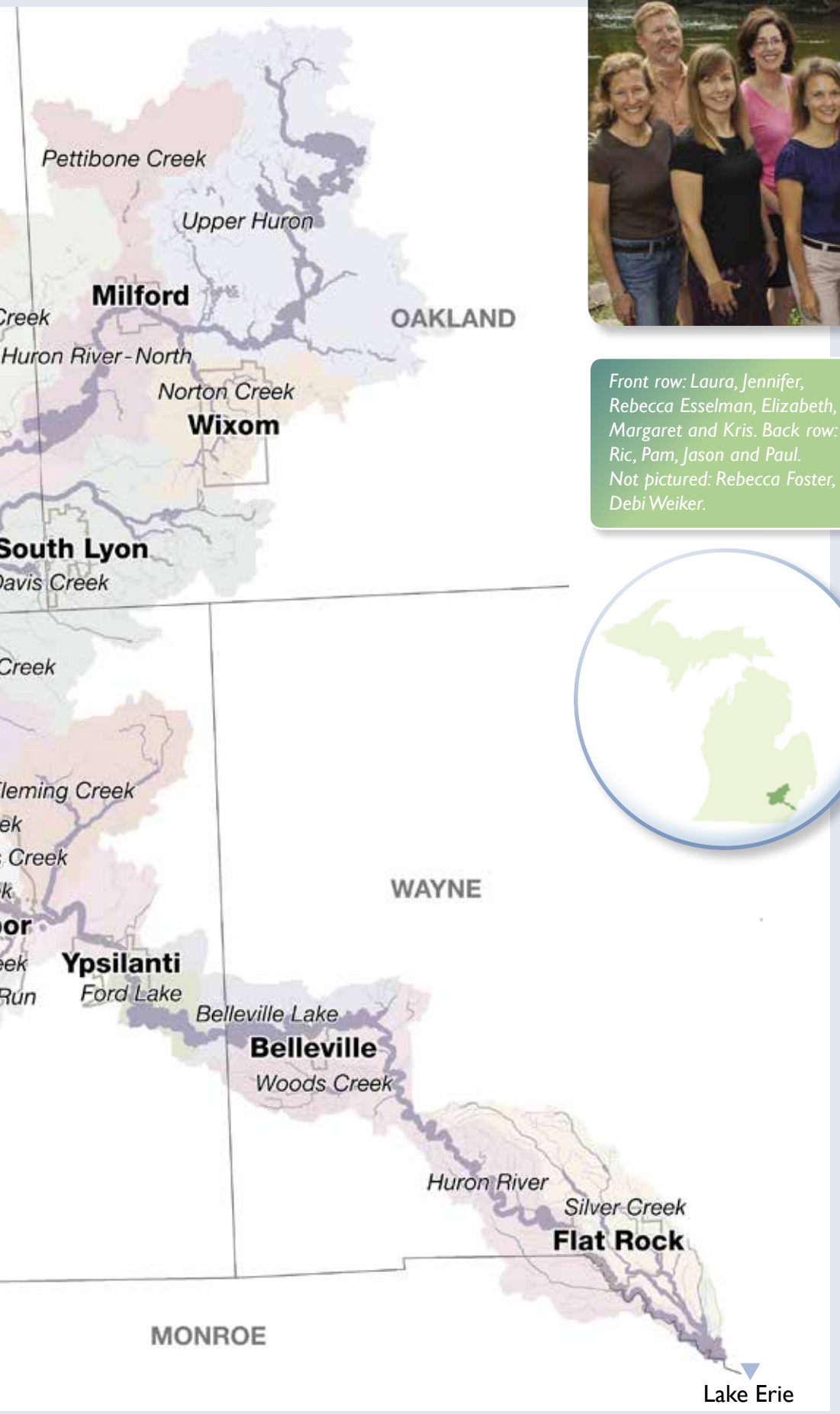
The Huron River Report is published quarterly. Its content is prepared by HRWC staff and does not necessarily reflect the opinion of board members.

New HRR layout: S&J Design Studio

Graphics: Laughing Goat Arts

The Huron River Watershed



Front row: Laura, Jennifer, Rebecca Esselman, Elizabeth, Margaret and Kris. Back row: Ric, Pam, Jason and Paul. Not pictured: Rebecca Foster, Debi Weiker.

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A Paddler's Journey *continued from page 1*

Gilzow of Saline, and Paul Seelbach of Chelsea made up our merry band.

Day 1: Proud Lake to Island Lake Canoe Camp

14.63 mi
4 hrs 29 min paddling
2 portages
Beautiful weather, lots of birds and fishes. Light tail wind makes the 3 mile crossing of Kent Lake a breeze. Two easy portages, nice clean water after the Kent Lake Dam. Canoe camp is very pleasant and secluded. Peaceful camping overnight, but no drinking water available on site.

Day 2: Island Lake Camp to Hudson Mills

22.75 mi
6.5 hrs paddling
1 portage
8am start on the water through one of the nicest stretches of the river. A very pleasant paddle, dodging fallen trees. First, lunch at Huron Meadows, then on to the lakes.

Good paddling karma gives us light breezes across Strawberry, Whitewood and Gallagher Lakes and gets us to Base Line Lake. We stop for second lunch at the University of Michigan Sailing Club. Paul explains how we are leaving the first phase of the river – upland wetland woodland – and entering the section that works its way through the rocky, gravelly glacial moraines.

Mink, muskrat, great blue heron, orioles, catbirds, kingfishers, killdeer, cygnets riding on the back of a swan, owl (barred?), pileated woodpecker. Signs of beaver below Base Line Lake. The eagle that has been hanging out around Bell Road was absent today.

Many carp splashing, suckers along the bottom and small mouth bass. A fisherman at the rapids at Hudson Mills reported catching (and releasing) 27 this day.

Day 3: Hudson Mills to Superior Pond

22.7 miles
6.5 hrs paddling
4 portages
On the water before 8am. Up close and personal look at the tornado damage from March 15, 2012. Some impressive "tornado art" just above Mill Creek. Great blue herons escorting us all the way down the river. Several of us elect to run Delhi Rapids; the rest choose to portage.

I forget how nice the stretch below Delhi is to paddle. Often overlooked, this stretch is mostly natural, high banks on the south and strong, steady current. The drop at the old Osborn Mills site adds some excitement.

Our good paddling karma continues with a tailwind across Barton Pond; two egrets and an osprey inspire us on. Quick stop at the NEW Center to salute the Huron River Watershed Council staff, then on to lunch at the Argo Livery before tackling the Cascades. Be sure to stop and enjoy the Ned Sharples bench in front of the livery–he inspired many of us to paddle, enjoy and protect the river. We run the Cascades with empty boats without incident but all dragged our sterns on the rock on the last drop.

Past the UM Hospital, through the Arboretum and an easy run across Gallup Pond and quick portage over the Geddes Dam put us in Superior Pond. We discuss the history of this forgotten and peaceful stretch of river and end the day at a secret campsite we've nicknamed "Superior Bluffs – a gated community". Laura Rubin joins us for a few hours. We have a lively and very informative discussion on a wide variety of topics, all river-related. Peaceful night, no bugs.

Day 4: Superior Pond to Lower Huron Metropark

16 miles
4.5 hours paddling
3 portages
Up early again and on the water by 8am, a short paddle to our first portage– Peninsula Dam. This portage is pretty straight-forward and fairly easy, but lack of maintenance has led to deterioration of the landings, making it harder than it should be. Back on the water and a fairly fast ride through Ypsilanti. We all remark on the waterfront potential of this town and can envision an active vibrant face to the river with the restaurants, shops and boardwalks.

On to Ford Lake, our weather karma continues with cool temps, overcast skies and no wind – perfect paddling conditions. Here we leave the second phase of the river, leaving behind the glacial moraine features and enter the glacial lake bottom evidenced by the high clay or gravel banks that the river has cut through on its way to present day Lake Erie. Portaging the Ford Lake Dam takes some effort and teamwork of the group but we are soon back on the water headed for Belleville, stopping for lunch at Van Buren Park where Willow Run enters the river.

We eventually arrive at French Landing, tired but not beat. The portage here is difficult, if not impossible, so we use the backup plan – Kay is called

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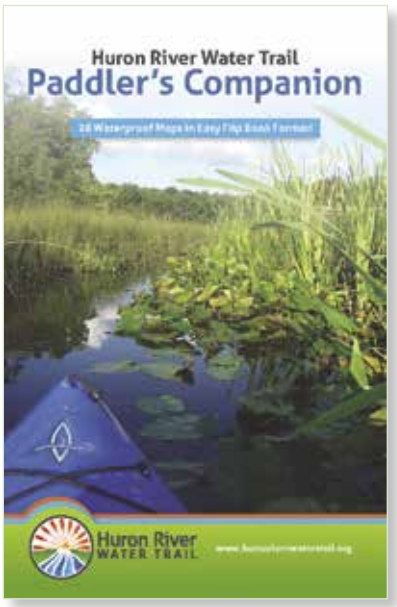
The *Huron River Water Trail Paddler's Companion* is available for $10 at www.hrwc.org.



Detailed color maps for all 104 miles

in and helps us with a car shuttle into Lower Huron Metropark.

A short paddle brings us to the canoe camp. We are all excited by a visitor, an all-white bird that flits and perches around the campground, causing much speculation. We determine it is a white phase (leucistic) kingbird, something none of us has ever seen.

Day 5: Lower Huron Metropark to Lake Erie

27 miles
6.5 hrs paddling
1 portage

After another quiet and peaceful night camping, we're up early for an 8 am start. Mike George arrives to accompany us as far as Oakwoods Metropark, and Jim Pershing, Superintendent for the Park, shows up to bid us a Bon Voyage.

This next stretch is perhaps the best kept secret of the whole river. It's surprisingly remote and mostly natural with few houses or intrusions; the only negative is the constant noise of jet traffic overhead (choose a day with north winds if you can when paddling this stretch, as the jets will be taking off in the other direction). Herons, kingfishers and orioles escort us along the banks. Sycamores, catalpas and redbuds provide the greenery. Future Water Trail mile markers and sign posts will be a welcome addition as landmarks are few and far between. Highway and railroad bridges are soon passed and we enter the backwaters of the Flat Rock impoundment and Oakwoods Metropark, a wonderful stretch of oxbows and bayous.

Our weather karma wanes a little, as the east wind gets funneled down the lake giving us a stiff headwind for the crossing. Mike George waves goodbye and heads for the Nature Center, and we set our sights on the right end of the Flat Rock Dam anticipating the portage and lunch stop ahead. Flat Rock Metals has graciously left the gate unlocked so the portage is surprisingly quick and easy; we move our gear to the bank below the low dam by the covered bridge and enjoy our well-deserved lunch. Ten miles to go.

The current helps us along for the next few miles and the woods gradually give way to more open marsh and wetlands. A few more houses along the banks with some impressive metal breakwalls, and soon the Jefferson St bridge is in view. We pause to collect the group and marvel at the remains of the circa 1800 plank road built from the War of 1812, known as Hull's Trace, visible along the shoreline, and ready ourselves for the last push across the river mouth to Pt. Mouillée. Kay, Klaus and Aileen are there to greet us with our shuttle vehicles awaiting in the parking lot.

Epilogue

Total river miles: 101.8
Total hours paddling: 28
Total portages: 11

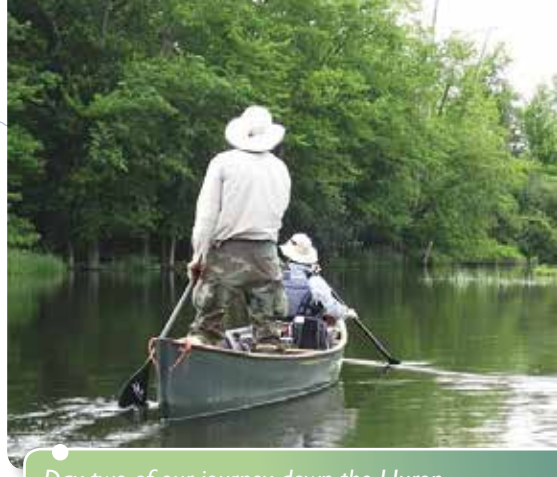
What a great adventure. I couldn't have asked for better paddling companions and our shore support was wonderful. Thanks to all who made this adventure truly special: Laura Rubin and Elizabeth Riggs for help with logistics, Klaus Wolter who helped shuttle cars, and especially Kay Stremler who fed us a feast at the end of Day 2, shuttled cars and provided the motorized portage to Lower Huron.

We started this trip asking what has changed along the river since we last paddled the length with the 1993 Riverfest.

First, the good news – not much has changed. *No big developments, no horrible intrusions. Parklands that dominate the shorelines are intact and mostly natural. Water quality appeared to be good and a wide variety of wildlife greeted us along the banks. Many people were enjoying the water, whether paddling, rowing, walking or biking along trails, bank fishing or just relaxing.*

Now the bad news – not much has changed. *Although there are adequate access sites up and down the river, usable, safe landings and proper portage trails remain few and far between. A notable exception is the Superior Dam portage, a well-designed trail that is a huge improvement over the jungle that used to be there. Yet the Peninsular Portage has deteriorated badly, French Landing can't be portaged safely, and you still have to make special arrangements to get around Flat Rock. Landings at well-used sites such as the Kent Lake Dam, Island Lake, Hudson Mills, and Ford Lake are either haphazard riprap or muddy eroded banks. Campsites are few and far between– currently there are five riverside campgrounds and none at some strategic distances making a trip of more than a few days difficult.*

Would I recommend paddling the entire length of the Huron? Of course – there is a special thrill of paddling a river from a small trout stream all the way to open water. But I suggest that the less adventurous break the trip up over two weekends – first, Proud Lake to Ypsilanti; and then the Lower Huron to Lake Erie – which would avoid many of the present pitfalls and encounters with motorboats. Of course, the river can be experienced through a series of daytrips, as well. The new HRWC Paddler's Companion and ongoing work to build a Water Trail will only make the experience better in the future. What a great resource we have right in our own backyard.



Day two of our journey down the Huron. credit: D. Wolter

To paraphrase our State Motto: If you seek a pleasant river, look about you...

– Ron Sell, Guest Author, Paddler and Owner of Unadilla Boatworks

calendar of events

HRWC Events and Workshops

SEPTEMBER • OCTOBER • NOVEMBER • 2013

Suds on the River

Thursday September 12 • 6 - 9pm

*Join us and celebrate our watershed community and great brewers who make the most of our clean water! This event, hosted by **Mary** and **Bill Kinley** at their home on the river in Dexter, raises much needed funds to do the necessary work to keep our Huron River clean for future generations.*

Tickets available at www.hrwc.org/events/suds/

Paddle Trip

Saturday, September 21 • 10am put-in time

*Join us for our last trip of the year as we say farewell to summer. Experience the quiet waters and fall foliage of the lower Huron River with expert paddlers **Ron Sell**, **Barry Lonik** and HRWC staff. Participate in discussions regarding the river's ecology, history, and unique features.*

Info & Registration: www.hrwc.org/events/summer-events-2013

River Roundup

Saturday, October 12 • 9am and 10:30am start times

Join a small team with your friends and family for a unique activity. Collect a sample of bugs and other creatures (benthic macroinvertebrates) that live in our streams. Like canaries in a coal mine, these creatures tell us about the health of the river. Trained volunteer collectors take you to two stream sites, where you help them search through stones, leaves, and sediment. You won't get wet, but dress to be in the field for a couple hours. Volunteers meet in Ann Arbor and each team surveys two sites. Time commitment is approximately 5-6 hours. Children are welcome to attend with their own adult!

Info & Registration: www.hrwc.org/volunteer/roundup

ID Day

Sunday, October 20 • noon and 2pm start times

Discover what kinds of bugs were found at the River Roundup. Separate them into look-alike groups and then an expert will identify them with you. You record the data and compare the results to previous years. It takes about two hours. Youth are encouraged to attend. Children under age 16 must bring an adult.

Info & Registration: www.hrwc.org/volunteer/id-day

Photo Workshop

Saturday, October 19 • 2 - 6pm
Sunday, October 20 • 8am - noon

*Develop the nature photography skills you've always wanted, and turn your artistic vision of the scenic Huron River into reality. Local professional photographers **Michael Seabrook** and **Marc Akemann** lead the classes. World-renowned photographer and Ann Arbor resident **Howard Bond** will speak at the Sunday workshop. Come prepared to get hands-on experience in the field, and learn basic techniques for taking great nature photos.*

Info & Registration: www.hrwc.org/events/summer-events-2013

Data Presentation

Wednesday, November 20 | 6:30 - 8pm

*Join us to review the data collected and lessons learned from HRWC's 2013 field season. Which creeks are improving from our work and which are losing ground? Which are degrading and why? Presentations by HRWC's **Paul Steen**, **Ric Lawson**, and **Kris Olsson** - with cameos by many of your other favorite HRWC staff and volunteers. Hope to see you there!!*

Please RSVP to Jason: jfrenzel@hrwc.org

Laura Rubin, River Hero!

River Network recognizes her inspirational leadership

Laura Rubin, Executive Director of HRWC, has been recognized as a 2013 River Hero by the River Network, a national association of watershed protection groups.

The award celebrates rivers and watersheds, recognizes victories, and honors those who provide leadership that inspires the work of others and uses innovative strategies and techniques to achieve significant results.

Laura, who recently celebrated 15 years at HRWC's helm, has been instrumental in establishing HRWC's reputation as a regional and national leader in river protection work.

Laura's leadership has helped shape HRWC into an organization that provides a framework for local governments, individuals, non-profits, industries and regulators to partner for the benefit of the Huron River and its watershed. HRWC is known for its outstanding citizen scientist programs like Adopt-A-Stream and the Bioreserve Project, its stormwater and pollution management services for regulated communities, and programs that address natural areas protection, climate resiliency and water efficiency.

Laura and four others were named River Heroes at River Network's River Rally in May. Long-time colleague and friend Matt Naud, Environmental Coordinator for the City of Ann Arbor, traveled to St. Louis to introduce Laura at the presentation of the symbolic River Hero paddle. "[Laura] has enthusiastically led our communities to the river . . . and we are better for it," he said.

Congratulations, Laura!

Laura seining for fish during a recent HRWC staff outing. credit: S. Kinnard

Make A Lasting Difference

Leave your legacy for the Huron River

Imagine a gift that outlives you, touches future generations, and ensures that others will experience and enjoy the beauty of the Huron River. You can join a special group of friends who have included HRWC in their estate plans, whether by will, trust, or life insurance arrangements. Planned gifts to HRWC ensure the continuation of programs designed to accelerate and measure improved water quality throughout the watershed, preserving the health of the Huron River into the future.

We invite you to join HRWC's planned giving program and create your own legacy. Start by getting organized so you can outline your objectives. Initial steps include determining the value of your property, estimating debts, and preparing a list of family members and other beneficiaries. There are a number of questions you should ask yourself, such as: Do I need to make special provisions? How can I pass on my property in the most tax efficient manner? Would a trust best provide for my spouse and/or children?

Planned gifts are popular because of the financial flexibility and tax benefits they provide. Financial and legal experts working with HRWC are available to talk through your questions and concerns. For more information please contact Margaret M. Smith at msmith@hrwc.org or 734-769-5123 ext. 605. Create your legacy on behalf our most valued natural asset, the Huron River.

Get *your* H_2O Hero on!

The 2014 Calendar features inspiring scenes from the watershed by local photographers and helpful tips, all for FREE from HRWC and participating communities.

Go to www.hrwc.org for more information!

HRWC would like to extend our gratitude to everyone that helped protect the Huron River by giving of their time, talent, in-kind contributions and financial resources.

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Protecting the river since 1965

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