



Huron River Report

Published quarterly by the Huron River Watershed Council

SUMMER 2017



feature story

Swimming in Plastic

Microplastics are found throughout the Huron River

Plastic is a part of life for 21st century humans. A typical person touches a plastic product several times every minute: children's toys are made from it; food is stored in it; clothing contains plastic materials; and those are just a few examples. But what happens when these plastic items begin to break down? Unfortunately, much of it reaches our waterways. Of course, the plastics found in water are small enough to avoid notice without specialized equipment, but tiny plastic pieces have infiltrated lakes, rivers, and wetlands. Researching the impact of these microplastics on humans and the aquatic environment is becoming a major focus of study in the environmental community.

Big impacts of tiny particles

Microplastics are defined as any pieces of plastic less than 5 millimeters in diameter. Five millimeters is about half of the width of an adult pinky fingernail,

but microplastics are often smaller and can be invisible to the naked eye. Plastic is a non-biodegradable product and never really goes away; rather, it gets broken down to smaller and smaller pieces over time. Outside, degraded plastics are easily picked up by rain and end up in waterways. Activities inside the home can cause plastics to enter the waterways through the waste water treatment process. Examples from both scenarios include fibers from synthetic textiles like fleece and exercise clothes (polyester and wicking fabric), fishing line, pieces of plastic bottles, foam from cups and takeout containers, plastic films from plastic wrap and wrappers, and soap and cosmetic microbeads.

Microbeads in soap were the first well-publicized microplastic problem in the Great Lakes, and steps were taken to stop this pollution. The federal Microbead-Free Waters

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Microscopic photo of various plastic bits. credit: S. Mason, SUNY Fredonia



Invested in the Huron • Impacts of federal funding cuts

Back in March, the Trump administration proposed cuts of more than 30 percent to the US EPA budget. While the outcomes of the final budget for FY 2017-18 are unclear as of the writing of this article, one can expect reductions to agency staff, monitoring and enforcement, and grants and loans to local programs. As a result, HRWC is reviewing the

successes of all federally-funded HRWC projects since the mid-1990s. To date, HRWC has received five million federal dollars to improve water quality and quantity in the watershed. In addition, HRWC has matched each of these projects in the range of 10 to 50 percent. Finally, all major counties in the watershed (Oakland, Livingston, Washtenaw and

Wayne) and many local municipalities have also received federal funding to improve and restore the watershed, and their future efforts are also in jeopardy.

Successful projects

Federal funds helped provide structure and manpower to HRWC's

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INSIDE: UPCOMING EVENTS AND WORKSHOPS *Trail Towns getting connected*
Swift Run rain garden program | RiverUp! looks to add several overnight camping facilities





Laura's Stream of Consciousness



H. Buffman

There is a lot of upheaval and unease in the environmental non-profit community, and we feel it daily. Threats to the EPA, federal pass-through grants, and climate related initiatives and funding are very real. On the one hand, the Trump administration's budget cuts are not approved yet by the legislature, and the EPA has not always been a supportive and responsive agency, anyway. But the Clean Water Act (CWA) continues to be the strongest piece of federal legislation we have in meeting our mission. Threats to the CWA will reduce statewide enforcement of non-point source issues, reduce the breadth of the definition of "waters"

of the US, reduce MDEQ staffing, and reduce a robust grant program (see cover article).

Given these uncertainties and the potential for substantial reductions in funds, resources, and laws, HRWC staff continue to work diligently at the local and regional level to enact policies and projects that inspire people to protect and restore the watershed. We must shore up our local protections and support strong leadership to protect the watershed. As a result, many of our staff, volunteers, and board members have been expressing their support of clean water, science, and climate this spring at marches in Michigan

and Washington, DC. Below are a sampling of a few.

Late-breaking news

On April 30th, Congress passed a 6-month omnibus bill that continues the clean water and great lakes protections at approximately the same levels as last year. Thanks for your calls and letters of support to your representatives. This is promising news for future funding.

— Laura Rubin
HRWC Executive Director



Clockwise from upper left: Ally and Ric Lawson at the March for Science in Ann Arbor (credit J. Fike); Xavier and Iris Esselman at the Science March; Iris and Rebecca Esselman at the Climate March in Ann Arbor; UM Diag March for Science; Ingrid Moran at the Climate March in Washington, DC; view of the capital; Ally Lawson ready to march; Kris Olsson and Dave Moran at the Climate March in Washington, in DC; Allea Burton with Ingrid and Annika Moran in DC. credit: HRWC

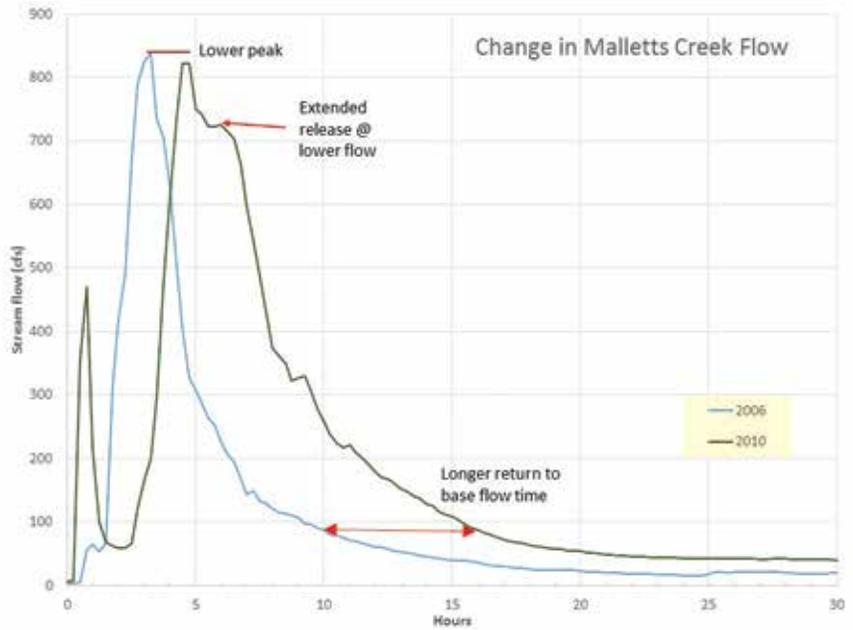


monitoring programs, which are now a model for the state and country. With federal funds, HRWC established and implemented a model information and education communications strategy. HRWC brought stakeholders together to establish watershed management plans with clear goals for protection and restoration, and to leverage future grant funds for implementation. In many cases, federal funds launched core HRWC programs, established statewide programs, and set priorities and standards for future work.

More recently, federal funds have been directed to larger scale implementation and advocacy projects. Policy measures such as ordinances for wetlands, vegetated buffers, and stormwater have been crafted and passed with federal funds. Scio, Dexter, Hamburg, Lyndon, and Unadilla townships have stronger ordinances and rules that improve the Huron River. Updated detention ponds, rain garden implementation, and streambank stabilizations have been realized with federal funds. Mill Creek sees less sediment and nutrient runoff as a result of restoring and stabilizing the banks. The rain falling in Swift Run creekshed will now have more opportunities to infiltrate into the ground, cooling and cleaning it, and reducing downstream flooding.

Highlight on Malletts Creek

Malletts Creek is an urban creek in Washtenaw County (City of Ann Arbor and Pittsfield Township). Because impervious surfaces cover nearly half of its watershed, rains cause large surges of water that erode the banks and contribute large deposits of sediment and phosphorus to the river. Over the last 10 years, several EPA-funded grants have allowed local partners to build green infrastructure and detention ponds to detain and infiltrate rain, and to educate the public about the importance of reducing phosphorus fertilizer, landscaping with native plants, and installing rain gardens. All told, EPA funds totaled \$4 million to improve Malletts Creek with an additional \$6.7 million in EPA low interest loans. HRWC, Washtenaw County, and the City of Ann Arbor also contributed local funds.



Malletts Creek flow from before (2006) and after (2010) restoration in Mary Beth Doyle Park. credit: HRWC

Given the threat to future EPA funds, HRWC recently pulled all of the data on Malletts Creek to see if these efforts have made a difference. They did! Consistently, the data shows evidence of improvement across most parameters measured.

The aquatic insect data show a statistically significant increase in the number of insect families living in Malletts Creek. Aquatic insects spend their lives exposed to a variety of creek conditions such as flow, habitat, and chemical conditions; an increase in insect families means that these parameters are becoming more hospitable to aquatic life. The hydrology of Malletts Creek has improved in important ways. Overall, the creek has become less flashy. Peak flows are down, and flows return to base flow over a much longer time period (see graph). Water chemistry has also improved. Average total phosphorus concentrations have shown a steady decline. In fact, 2016 levels were below the regional target at 0.045 mg/l. Sediment and bacteria levels have also declined significantly in Malletts Creek.

Sustaining HRWC

Twenty years ago, federal funds comprised half or more of HRWC's annual budget. Noting this funding

vulnerability, HRWC set out to diversify revenues and has realized this goal. Currently, less than one-quarter of HRWC's budget comes from federal funds.

While the future of the EPA and federal funding has yet to be decided, these funds have been instrumental in building watershed management planning and implementation efforts in the watershed and in identifying priorities and needs. At the same time, as HRWC reflects on these successes, preparations to replace these funds are underway. As a local non-profit, HRWC will rely more on local members, foundations, businesses, and major donors to help realize the mission.

In response to these threats, HRWC's Standing Strong for Clean Water Campaign alerts our members to strategic actions to engage in such as letter writing and calling elected officials. This campaign is collecting success stories throughout the Huron to present to state and federal representatives and officials to show the real, positive impacts of federal funding. HRWC will also promote these success stories to engage the public in realizing the benefits of federal funding for clean and abundant water.

—Laura Rubin

Act of 2015 bans the manufacture of all rinse-off cosmetics that have intentionally-added microbeads by July 1, 2017; and the sale of these cosmetics will be banned as of January 1, 2018. Microbeads are not the only problem. There are a whole variety of microplastics in the environment. Sherri Mason, Professor of Chemistry at SUNY Fredonia, stated in a recent interview that “You’re not going to find a body of water anywhere without them.”

Pervasive, even in the Huron

The Huron River system certainly has a high concentration of microplastics. A 2016 USGS research article alerted HRWC staff to the severity of the microplastic problem in this region. The authors sampled and analyzed 29 major river tributaries to the Great Lakes, selected to cover a range of upstream land use and differing magnitudes of wastewater. Sadly, the Huron River was reported to have the highest concentration of microplastics of all the rivers in the study.

The USGS study poured water samples through a series of different-sized filters to collect microplastics for examination. Seventy-two percent of the microplastics were less than 1 millimeter, and the majority of these were tiny textile fibers, sourced from products such as polar fleece. Every time fleece and other synthetic clothes are washed, hundreds of fibers slough off. It is possible that waste water treatment plants are not able to capture the microplastics, but the

USGS authors did not find a statistical relationship between the amount of waste water effluent and microplastic concentrations. Those plastics that are filtered out by the treatment plants get added to wastewater sludge that is often spread on land as fertilizer. While the authors could not concretely nail down a specific source for microplastic pollution, they hypothesized that rain could pick up the plastics from the distributed wastewater sludge, washing them into creeks and rivers.

Much is yet unknown

Scientific research on microplastics is in the early stages, and there are still a lot of concerns. The study above clearly shows that the plastic pieces are ubiquitous across our freshwater environments, begging the question of how and to what extent do these plastic pieces detract from the health of humans, fish, and other biological communities. Studies have found that the particles are ingested by invertebrates, turtles, mammals, and fish. In some cases, the plastic causes physical obstruction of the digestive system and nutritional deprivation. On the chemical side, biological communities could be threatened by the bioaccumulation of endocrine disruptors and other harmful chemicals associated with plastics. Further study is needed to understand the extent of the problem.

Steps to take right now

A serious question which needs to be answered is how society should begin

to remedy the microplastic problem. Following are a few first steps.

1) Reduce plastic use as much as possible. Recycling, a standard practice for many, is not enough because recycled garbage ends up in a landfill or in the environment eventually. Plastic never really goes away, it just gets chopped up into smaller pieces and perhaps repurposed into something else, which itself will eventually end up in a landfill or in the environment. Reducing the use of plastic in the first place is something everyone can strive to do. For example, at the grocers, select foods that are minimally packaged, and skip the bags in the fresh produce aisle.

2) Citizens can share their concerns with companies that make fleece clothing and request that they research how to make products that are more resistant to sloughing in the washing machine. According to Austin Baldwin, author of the aforementioned USGS article, Patagonia has shown some interest in exploring how their products contribute to microplastics pollution. Consumer pressure would be extremely helpful in encouraging them to proceed with their studies. Learn more here: www.patagonia.com/environmentalism

3) Scientific studies are needed to learn more about how and where microplastics get into the water. Is it a wastewater treatment plant filtration problem, run-off from wastewater treatment sludge, or something else?

The discovery of microplastics and their effects is still in its infancy. The issue came into the spotlight by the mid-2000s because of the discovery of microbeads in the Great Lakes. It is clear that microplastics are affecting local rivers and lakes and are entering the food chain as evidenced in fish tissue samples. Scientists are still investigating sources, abundance, and biological effects, and there is not much information on control,

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Results from a net-tow sample in Milwaukee's Kinnickinnic River, containing large plastic pieces, microplastics, and organic debris to be sorted and counted in the lab.

credit: A. Baldwin, USGS

Inset: microscopic photo of microplastic fibers, the most common type of microplastic in the Huron River.

credit: S. Mason, SUNY Fredonia



Kick Toxic Sealcoats to the Curb

Safer alternatives protect families and water resources



As the weather warms, homeowners and businesses turn to outdoor projects. While asphalt pavement sealing is a common practice on driveways and parking lots, many of the most common sealant products are toxic, with significant human health impacts and negative consequences for rivers and lakes. Sealant products with coal tar or steam cracked petroleum bases have very high levels of chemicals called polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs). Communities all over the U.S. are taking action to prohibit toxic sealcoats.

With HRWC's encouragement, many Huron River communities have already banned the use of these products. For residents of Van Buren, Hamburg, Scio, Pittsfield and Ann Arbor townships, and the cities of Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti and Dexter, it is illegal to apply high-PAH sealers, including coal tar. The Village of Wolverine Lake is also pursuing an ordinance.

People planning to sealcoat in these communities should ask for the company's proof of registration with the local government, or request confirmation that the contractor is applying an asphalt-based product. Avoid contractors from outside the area, as they may be unaware of or unable to comply with local regulations.

For areas where high-PAH sealcoating is not prohibited, please choose a company that will apply the safer alternative (asphalt-based sealcoat) or better yet, forego sealcoating altogether. Meijer does not sealcoat their parking lots, finding the best value in simply repaving as needed. Personal decisions make a

big difference in the overall health of the environment and exposure to toxins.

For a current list of communities with sealcoat regulations, a list of vendors that will apply asphalt-based sealcoats, tips for identifying safer sealant products, and more detail about issues associated with high-PAH sealants visit www.hrwc.org/coaltar.

— Rebecca Esselman

Microplastics *continued from page 4*

mitigation, and management. However, the research currently available does clearly point to microplastics as a serious long-term issue, with real impacts on biologic communities. HRWC will continue to follow microplastics research and do whatever it can to protect the Huron River system from this evolving threat.

—Paul Steen

SOURCES

Baldwin, Austin, et al. 2016. *Plastic debris in 29 Great Lakes Tributaries: Relations to Watershed Attributes and Hydrology. Environmental Science Technology, 50, 10377-10385.*

GoErie.com: www.goerie.com/news/20161011/microplastics-in-great-lakes-tributaries-raise-health-concerns

HURON RIVER



Protect The River For Future Generations.

The Huron River didn't become the cleanest urban river in Michigan by accident. It happened because of generous and forward-thinking people (like you!) who know that when we preserve today's natural resources, we protect the river for future generations to enjoy.

It's easier than you think.

- Make a tribute gift through your will
- Convert life insurance into a high-impact gift
- Save on taxes by giving appreciated securities



Huron River Watershed Council

Discover your legacy gift at hrwc.org
 Margaret Smith | 734-769-5123, ext. 605 | msmith@hrwc.org



New Rain Gardens in Swift Run!

Green Infrastructure to improve neighborhood, creek, and the Huron

Swift Run residents receiving Environmental Excellence awards from Washtenaw County (L-R): Monica Milla, Harry Sheehan (WRC), Renee Ringholz, Michael Zeidler, Dagny Haner, Gwynne Fisher, Lindsey Messing, and Janis Eckstein.

credit: Washtenaw County Water Resource Commissioner



will be held September 30. Details will be posted on HRWC's website.

HRWC will continue to monitor Swift Run for flow and nutrients to measure the impact of these green infrastructure projects.

Neighbors receive awards for their efforts

As part of this effort to improve the neighborhood and creek, Washtenaw County recently recognized the significant efforts by a group of residents from this Swift Run neighborhood. The county awarded seven residents with Environmental Excellence awards for becoming Master Rain Gardeners and for encouraging their neighbors to get involved. Way to go Mitchell neighbors!

For final plans and an updated project schedule, visit www.hrwc.org/swiftrun.

— Ric Lawson and Stevi Kosloskey

For several years now, HRWC, the City of Ann Arbor, and Washtenaw County have partnered to work with residents and businesses in the Mitchell neighborhood within Ann Arbor's Swift Run creekshed to design rain gardens as an innovative approach to capture and treat stormwater. Now, the designs are complete and construction and planting is about to begin.

In 2014, the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency awarded a grant to HRWC to install and study the effects of new "Green Infrastructure" practices in a target neighborhood. The goal of the project is to improve water quality in Swift Run as it flows through a neighborhood with no pre-existing stormwater treatment. The creek is currently impacted by unnaturally flashy flows, high nutrient and bacteria levels, and major erosion. The plan is to add many small green stormwater practices, including the rain gardens, throughout the neighborhood, as opposed to a single detention pond. The practices are known collectively as "Green Infrastructure" because they utilize the natural filtering provided by deep-rooted native plants.

Neighborhood ready for change

The project partners have worked extensively with residents to prepare them for the upcoming changes. At the launch of the project and at several points during the design development, the project team

hosted neighborhood meetings and went door-to-door to get input on the designs to address individual concerns. Homeowners were also offered free residential assessments to give them expert advice on managing stormwater at home. Several residents became master rain gardeners, too.

The final project plan includes a number of residential rain gardens constructed and planted by homeowners on their private property, a large rain garden in Ann Arbor's Redwood Park, and 35 small rain gardens within the public right-of-way along three residential streets. All told, this distributed stormwater treatment will capture and treat 148,000 cubic feet of road, roof, and driveway runoff from a 1-inch storm. Most of that runoff will infiltrate into groundwater—slowing the flow to Swift Run.

Plans for construction and maintenance

HRWC is hiring a contractor to dig the depressions for rain gardens between the curbs and sidewalks. The contractor will plant a mix of thirsty native plants that will flower throughout the summer, which will beautify the neighborhood while providing habitat for pollinators (see box). Construction will take place this summer and fall. The contractor will be primarily responsible for maintenance, but residents and volunteers will participate to ensure the new gardens get a good start. The project ribbon-cutting celebration



Pollinators

Rain gardens provide habitat and a food source for pollinators. When moving from plant to plant searching for high-energy nectar or protein-rich pollen to eat, pollinators are dusted by the pollen. When they move to the next flower, they fertilize the plant, allowing the plant to reproduce, leading to seed and fruit formation. Pollinators are important to the food web for many species, including humans.

Well-known pollinators include butterflies and bees. However, many other creatures are pollinators, such as birds and amphibians. According to the National Wildlife Federation, "Pollinators worldwide are in decline. Habitat loss, invasive species, parasites, and pesticides are largely to blame." Rain gardens not only look pretty and capture stormwater runoff, they also serve as habitat for pollinators.



Stewardship Awards

Recipients honored for their hard work on behalf of the Huron

Each year at HRWC’s annual meeting in April, we honor a few individuals who have worked tirelessly to protect and improve the Huron River watershed. We thank each of them for their dedication!

Janet Kahan Volunteer of the Year

Janet began volunteering with HRWC’s River Roundup and Stonefly Searches in 1995. Upon her retirement from AAPS, she notes, “I was looking for a way to become more connected to my own local community again. Jason Frenzel matched me up with the Streamside School Outreach program, and I’ve had a lot of fun with it.” Quickly taking a leadership role with the late Dave Wilson, Janet has made the program increasingly available to additional volunteers, which has led to drastic increases in our program delivery. Through Janet’s leadership and the work of dozens and dozens of “her volunteers”, we routinely reach upwards of 1,000 students per year at a dozen schools.

“We are so very fortunate to work with Janet —her science expertise, leadership as a teacher of kids and adults, life experiences including family and community life in Ann Arbor, her wide network of contacts. She’s respected everywhere!”

Kathie Weinmann (HRWC volunteer)

Sally Rutzky Herb Munzel Achievement Award

Sally is one of HRWC’s crack “plant experts,” performing field assessments of forests, wetlands, and prairies for the Bioreserve Project since 2012. Realizing the impact local government planning has on the Huron and its natural areas, Sally joined Lyndon Township’s Planning Commission in 2012. She has led the township in creating a Green Infrastructure plan (which is now part of their Master Plan), including setback requirements from waterways in its zoning ordinance,

and in fighting against a huge sand pit that would have leveled the county’s highest hill and gouged out over 100 football fields-worth of forest and wetland right next to Park Lyndon South.

“Every local government needs leaders like Sally to ensure their community is safeguarding their clean water and the special woodlands and wetlands.”

Kris Olsson (HRWC Staff)

Wendy Schultz Extraordinary Partner Award

Wendy has been a tremendous support to the Water Quality Monitoring Program since she became the manager at the City of Ann Arbor’s water laboratory. On behalf of the city, Wendy and her staff donate their time to analyze water samples collected by volunteers from streams all across Washtenaw County. Not only has Wendy done a great job managing the lab and provided HRWC with trustworthy results, but she has also helped to improve the sampling program. Over the years, Wendy has gone beyond the call of duty to provide volunteers with a “home” at the lab and improve the reliability of sample collection and processing. Wendy and her staff are always willing to take on extra sample analysis for targeted studies and new methodologies. She donated sample bottles and chemicals needed to run new tests, provided advice and recommendations for work with other laboratories, and makes herself available to help solve problems or develop new or improved procedures.

“Every time I drop off samples at the lab I have been greeted by Wendy or other lab staff and made to feel welcome. They always answer my questions in a friendly way and make me feel like our samples are important.”

Larry Scheer (HRWC volunteer)



(L-R) Janet Kahan, Melissa Damaschke, John Erb, Sally Rutzky, and Wendy Schultz at the annual Stewardship Awards. credit: HRWC

Erb Family Foundation Big Splash Award

Since 2009, the Erb Family Foundation has made a “splash” on the watershed councils of Southeast Michigan and Great Lakes protection groups. A primary goal of the Foundation (and the family) is to make sure future generations can swim in the Great Lakes, with an understanding that the health of the rivers feeding the Great Lakes is where it is all starts. But what sets the Erb Family Foundation apart from other funders is that from the beginning, they’ve understood that the health of the watershed councils protecting these rivers is important. The Erb Family Foundation invests in the organizational capacity of HRWC.

They strongly value the rivers and lakes in Southeast Michigan due to their long family history of vacationing in Bayfield, Ontario on Lake Huron. John Erb, the President of the Foundation, is the 3rd generation of the family enjoying the vacation home in Bayfield. In terms of the Foundation work, John says, “We still have a long way to go on improving our rivers and lakes in Southeast Michigan, but I am optimistic and positive about our direction”.

—Jason Frenzel, Ric Lawson, Kris Olsson, and Laura Rubin

Founded in 1965, the Huron River Watershed Council (HRWC) protects and restores the river for healthy, vibrant communities.

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.



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The Huron River Watershed



For additional, detailed maps please go to: www.hrwc.org/the-watershed/maps



Anne Savage Photography

Front row: Rebecca F, Rebecca E., Jennifer, Elizabeth and Margaret.
 Middle row: Pam, Laura, Kris, Paul, Anita and Stevi.
 Back Row: Jason and Ric.

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HRWC Events and Workshops

JUNE • JULY • AUGUST • 2017

Water Quality Monitoring Mid-Season Training

Saturday, June 24, 1–2:30pm, NEW Center, Ann Arbor

Did you miss our introductory classroom training in March? Attend on June 24 and you can join us mid-season to help measure the quality of local rivers and streams this summer! Collect water samples, measure stream flow and sample runoff from rain storms. Stream sites are in Washtenaw, Livingston and Wayne counties. We have a strong need for volunteers to work downriver and upstream of Ann Arbor. Additional hands-on training will occur in the field during the first week of sampling.

Registration: www.hrwc.org/volunteer/water-sampling

HRWC Board Meeting

Thursday, July 20, 5:30pm, NEW Center, Ann Arbor

Contact: Laura at lrubin@hrwc.org

Baseline Lake Swim

Sunday, July 9, 8:30am from the UM Sailing Club in Dexter

Join us for our annual open water swim. The Huron River flows through and connects the Chain of Lakes—nine kettle lakes in Livingston and Washtenaw counties that were formed by receding glaciers. Baseline is one of these kettle lakes. Jump in!

Details: www.hrwc.org/events

Huron River Day Celebration

Sunday, July 9, noon–4pm at Gallup Park, Ann Arbor

Discount canoe and kayak rentals, children's activities, live animal programs, river exhibits, music, food, fishing, stand up paddleboarding and much more. Ride your bike and receive a coupon for a free boat rental. Sponsored by DTE Energy Foundation.

Details: www.a2gov.org/hrd

River Cleanup

Sunday, August 19, 7am, Milford and Hudson Mills

Help us collect and remove tons (literally!) of trash from the river.

Details: www.hrwc.org/volunteer/river-cleanups

Stop by the HRWC Booth at these community events!

- The Ann Arbor Mayor's Green Fair, June 9, downtown Ann Arbor
- Dexter Daze, August 11-12, downtown Dexter

Capture your appreciation for the Huron this summer by connecting and sharing it with us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram—use #huronriver to mark your posts!

SAVE THE DATE!

Details in the next issue of the
Huron River Report.



Suds on the River

September 14

Leader and Collector Training

September 24

Ypsi Fall River Day

September 24

Big Foot, Small Print Run

September 30
Independence Lake

River Roundup

October 14

Bug ID Day

October 29



Low Impact Camping on the Water Trail

The 104-mile Huron River National Water Trail needs more overnight rest stops for weary paddlers. While many Water Trail users enjoy the river for day trips, a significant percentage of users plan multi-day trips and camp overnight. At present, just four canoe campgrounds operate along the trail that are exclusively accessed from the river. Large sections of the trail lack such accommodations. A few strategically placed sites are needed to support users who take multi-day trips.

HRWC, with support from REI, is working to provide safe, low-impact campsites on the water trail. In partnership with Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Department, HRWC is identifying one or two viable locations between Hudson Mills Metropark (approx. mile 87) and Lower Huron Metropark (approx. mile 25.3). The Appalachian Mountain Club serves as a resource to the project, drawing on its experience developing and maintaining low-impact tent platforms on the Appalachian Trail.

Once sites are selected and platforms built in 2017 or 2018, details will be shared with paddlers via www.huronriverwatertrail.org.



Low-maintenance, low-impact tent platforms like this one on the Connecticut River Paddlers' Trail will be coming to the HRWT. credit: AMC

Sustaining Trail Towns

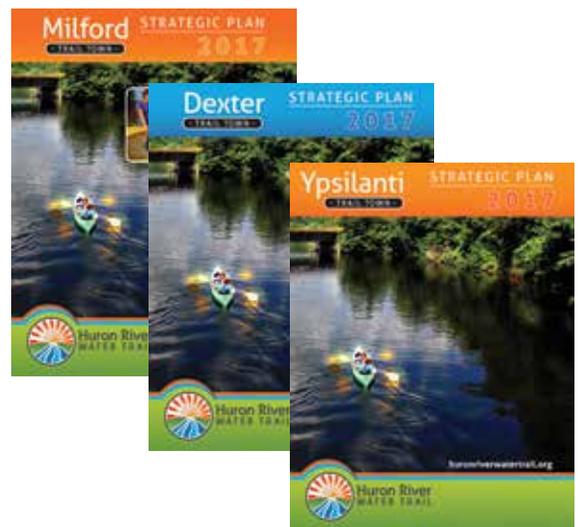
Trail Towns embrace the idea that communities near trails—whether a rail trail, hiking trail, or water trail—are uniquely situated to capture the economic benefits of trail-based tourism. A Trail Town is a destination along a long-distance trail where “trail users can venture off the trail to enjoy the scenery, services, and heritage of the nearby community with its own character and charm... In such a town, the trail is an integral and important part of the community.” RiverUp! introduced the trail town concept to the five largest towns on the water trail in 2012 and continues to support its development in Milford, Dexter, Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti, and Flat Rock.

Past and current funding from the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan allowed HRWC to develop the Trail Town teams. This year, RiverUp! is working with the planners at Carlisle|Wortman & Associates to transition the teams to sustainability by incorporating Trail Town-specific plans in their Parks and Recreation Plans and similar documents. The teams seek to complete and adopt Trail Town Strategic Plans that provide a blueprint for business and community leaders to take advantage of the economic opportunity that paddles, walks, or bikes into town.

The goal of these plans will be to position the Trail Towns to achieve success through broad-based community support, fundraising success, and execution of priority projects. The objectives are to:

1. Set up the Trail Towns for long-term success with prioritized, actionable strategic plans;
2. Build strong Trail Town teams with active involvement from municipal, business, and civic representatives;
3. Increase recreation infrastructure and programming with Trail Town Strategic Plans with a focus on diversity and inclusiveness (e.g., ability, age, socioeconomic, culture);
4. Improve and maintain the Huron River Water Trail infrastructure as befitting a National Water Trail and in cooperation with partners, including signs, boat lockers, and access points; and
5. Increase awareness and usage of the Huron River Water Trail and its five Trail Towns to residents and visitors.

— Elizabeth Riggs



Trail Town Strategic Plans include actionable activities for long-term success. credit: HRWC

Trails in the Watershed

A shining example of Michigan as the Trail State!

The establishment of the Huron River National Water Trail positions the watershed to benefit from river restoration efforts, as well as the economic impact on trail towns from visitors who come from around the state and country to experience the beauty and attractions along the great river that awaits them. In addition, the water trail flows near many land-based trails, all of which are contributing to Michigan's identity as the number one Trail State. Indeed, Governor Rick Snyder, in his 21st Century Infrastructure Report (November, 2016) emphasized connected trails, both on land and water, as a recommendation for enhancing Michiganders' quality of life and to build strong communities for the future.

Many of these land-based trails are receiving extra attention right now due to two major trail initiatives that criss-cross the state, running right through the Huron River watershed. The Iron Belle Trail, Governor Snyder's initiative to connect trails from

Belle Isle State Park at Detroit to the Wisconsin border at Ironwood in the Upper Peninsula, together with the Great Lake to Lake Trail, running east-west, connecting Lake Huron at Port Huron to Lake Michigan at South Haven, include approximately 88 miles of nonmotorized trail in the Huron River watershed, of which 64 miles already exist. Progress on the 24 miles remaining along both of these cross-state routes is gaining momentum!

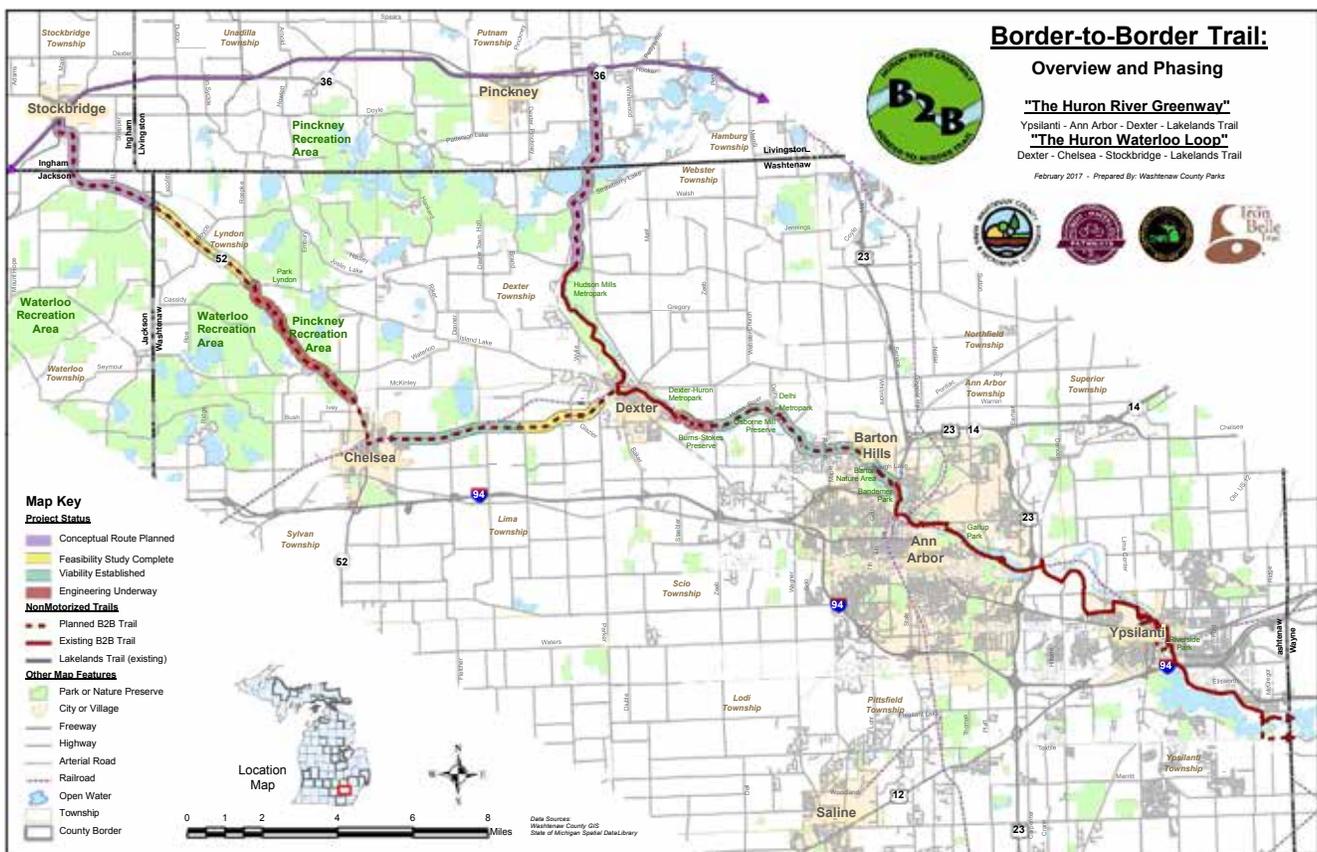
Near completion

At the northeast end of the watershed, the 5.45 mile Michigan Airline Trail railroad property - connecting Wixom, Walled Lake, and Commerce Townships - was formally acquired in February, 2017 by the inter-jurisdictional Michigan Airline Railway Management Council, and grants were submitted for development soon after. The trail is a critical link between the West Bloomfield Trail, the Huron Valley Trail (South Lyon to Wixom), and the

I-275 Metro Trail to the south (Wixom to the Lower Huron Metroparks in Huron Township). The development grants will set plans in motion for trail surfacing, trailhead development, and rail depot restoration. Although news of the development grant won't come until the end of 2017, the Michigan Department of Transportation is moving ahead this year accepting bids for the 2018 construction of a bicycle/pedestrian bridge over M-5. The bridge, designed to be an icon for the region, will assure safe passage through this heavily congested area.

Trail enthusiasts have long awaited the connection of the Island Lake Recreation Area to the Lakelands Trail, and engineering is underway to close the gap. Bicyclists will traverse through the Recreation Area to the Fieldcrest Pathway along US 23 heading south to the Lakelands Trail. The extension of the existing Fieldcrest Pathway south to M-36 and the segment going west to join with the Lakelands Trail is also under

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Trails in the Watershed *continued from previous page*

route design. These two projects are expected to be constructed in the next two years. The above projects will complete the gaps in the Great Lake to Lake Trail within the watershed. Elsewhere, other Great Lake to Lake Trail segments are in various stages of development, with a deadline of 2019 for this major trail artery to open to the public.

The Iron Belle Trail joins the Great Lake to Lake Trail at the Lakelands Trail at Hamburg Township. The approximately 6 miles from the Lakelands Trail to get to the existing portion of the Border to Border Trail is currently under rigorous study for an exact route as obstacles present themselves, including narrow road rights of way, wetlands, and the river. Another major gap of approximately 8.5 miles in the Border to Border Trail from Dexter to Ann Arbor is a challenging effort to navigate with active rail crossings, the river, and heavy traffic congestion.

Farther south along the Border to Border Trail, a preliminary engineering study to further Iron Belle Trail efforts to link the southern end of the Border to Border Trail at Grove and Rawsonville Rd. to Belleville and on to the northern end of the Lower Huron Metropark Trail will soon begin with grant funding from the Department of Natural Resources. This critical 3 mile gap closure in the Iron Belle Trail will link the system into the Downriver Linked Greenways route all the way to Lake Erie Metropark. It's time for the world to see the "emerald necklace" of trails linking the four beautiful metroparks: Lower Huron, Oakwood, Willow and Lake Erie!

New trails in the works

At the same time as these two state trail initiatives are underway, another major nonmotorized trail effort in the Huron River watershed is the Huron Waterloo Pathway Initiative. Linking Dexter, Chelsea, and Stockbridge, this 44 mile "Loop" trail uses the Lakelands Trail between Pinckney and Stockbridge, an abandoned interurban rail corridor between Chelsea and Dexter, and a combination of state land and M-52 right of way between Chelsea

and Stockbridge. A conditional commitment of \$1.8 million from the Michigan Department of Transportation has already been secured for Phase 1, 4.7 miles of trail from M-52 and Werkner Rd. to North Territorial Road, and design engineering is happening right now. The group continues to fundraise for local match so that construction can happen this year.

Mountain biking trails

In this same area, a new set of expertly designed mountain bike trails are taking shape. Known as the DTE Energy Foundation Trail (in recognition of their generous underwriting), the trail will feature a 5-loop, 25 mile system, twisting, turning, sloping and climbing through scenic Waterloo Recreation Area and connecting to the Potawatomi mountain bike trail system. The first 5 mile loop, designed as an easy flowing beginner trail, was completed last June, and the second 5 mile loop

construction is underway. For more about this project, see <http://dtetrail.org/the-trail/see-the-trail/>.

As you can see, there will be plenty of new trail development over the next few years in the Huron River watershed. Not only will this mix of recreation, fitness, and nature increase quality of life for current residents, it will be a boon to the area for new businesses and jobs, and serve as a magnet for new residents, including young professionals and retirees with leisure time and resources. Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance is in the trenches along with many state and local officials and citizen partnerships to make it all happen!

—Nancy Krupiarz, Executive Director,
Michigan Trails and Greenways
Alliance

Nancy has been working on Michigan trails for 20 years. After a very successful tenure, Nancy retires on June 1st when Bob Wilson takes the reins.

Join us to raise a glass to celebrate the Huron River

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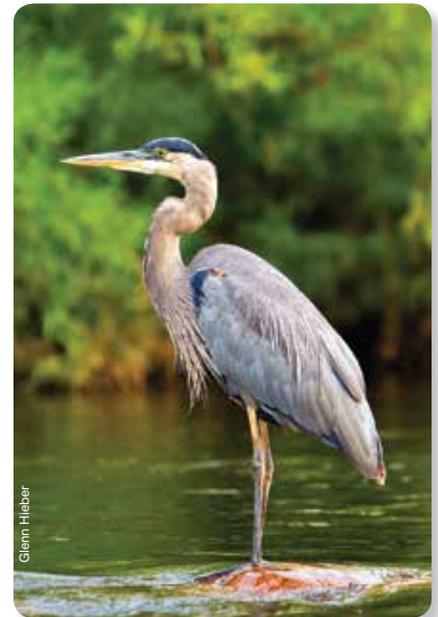
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