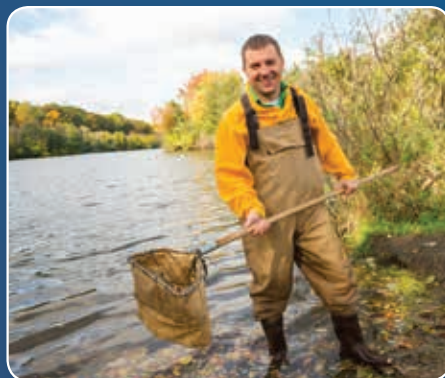


# REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY

2016  
2017



The  
Huron River  
Watershed



125 total years  
of Huron River experience  
on staff



100  
people trained by  
HRWC in  
advanced  
stream  
restoration  
techniques  
across  
Michigan

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## LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

With your help, HRWC works to protect and restore the river for healthy and vibrant communities. We mean “communities” in the broad sense. The community of HRWC donors, volunteers, and partners who work side-by-side with us. The community of intervenors trying to get a better ground water clean-up from Gelman. The fish community that benefits from our habitat restoration efforts in Ypsilanti and the osprey community who discovered the nesting platform built in Ann Arbor. Dexter, Unadilla, Freedom, and Lyndon—the townships that are working with HRWC to strengthen their buffers and setbacks from rivers and streams. Neighborhood communities working on putting in rain gardens and native plants. The recreational community that actively enjoys paddling, angling, boating, or simply walking along the Huron River National Water Trail.

We need all of these communities, either directly or indirectly, engaged in our mission because we face challenging times ahead.

We spent the last decade working to pass new federal legislation, ensure stronger regulations, and advocate for more funding for clean water.

In 2016, that all changed. We became defenders of clean water—**standing strong** to passionately advocate for Great Lakes and Huron River funding, and to defend clean water legislation and regulations.

We continue to stand strong, but we are not content to be on the receiving end of roll-backs and deregulation at federal and state levels. **We are leading the change we want to see**—assuming the mantle and advocating at the local level, collecting and interpreting science, informing action, policy, and outreach, strengthening local laws and regulations, and implementing innovative solutions such as green infrastructure, climate readiness, and real-time monitoring.

Despite the noise and distractions at the federal level, **we remain the strong local voice advancing river protection and clean water.** And we have added urgency.

This past year, HRWC engaged more partners. We are engaging partners from diverse racial, religious, and economic demographics and of all ages. We’re working with these partners for river revitalization and recreation, water resiliency, green infrastructure, and pollution clean-up and prevention.

We, a community of river advocates, can be the change that we want to see for our river and watershed. We can fill the void of leadership at the national level, the deadlock of stalled budgets or underfunded programs and mandates. HRWC is providing the small, local, and effective change. Thank you for engaging your energies, your hours, your dollars, and your know-how with us on our flourishing Huron River.

For the river,



Laura Rubin  
Executive Director



## MISSION

The Huron River Watershed Council protects and restores the river for healthy and vibrant communities.

## VISION

We envision a future of clean and plentiful water for people and nature where citizens and government are effective and courageous champions for the Huron River and its watershed.

## CORE VALUES

We work with a collaborative and inclusive spirit to give all partners the opportunity to become stewards.

We generate science-based, trustworthy information for decision makers to ensure reliable supplies of clean water and resilient natural systems.

We passionately advocate for the health of the river and the lands around it.

### COVER IMAGES

Top: Keith Matz  
Huron Meadows Metropark,  
2016 Watershed Community Calendar

Below (l to r):  
Photo: Laslie Banks  
Photo: Steve Kuzma  
Photo: Janet Kahan

# Together, we protect and restore the Huron River.

*Volunteer  
John Gannon  
leads data  
collection at a  
Spring Roundup.*



Photo: John Lloyd

## We collect and interpret data on the river's health, and champion science and expertise in decision-making. As a result:

- Huron River flows are better managed and flow variation in extreme weather is reduced by dam operators through a coordinated on-line platform and advanced flow monitoring sites;
- Presentations to the public of our comprehensive data set result in an improved understanding and awareness of watershed conditions;
- Watershed stakeholders have a greater appreciation for the economic impact of the Huron River Water Trail and the benefits of allocating resources and prioritizing river restoration and protection;

4.7 inches of rain fell on the watershed, testing the river's carrying capacity. Heavy rainfalls are no longer unusual. River Roundups, our spring and fall bug collections, occurred during flood conditions in four of the past seven years. As a result, we adjusted the program's long-standing approach to sampling. To keep volunteers safe and ensure that they can follow reliable and consistent procedures during high flows, volunteers are sent to more sites and sites located on smaller creeks instead of the main river.



*Volunteer Jana Smith  
catching bugs with students.*

Photo: HRWC

- Residents and local decision-makers have an accurate understanding of the causes of increased eutrophication of Brighton and Ore lakes and strategies for taking action; and
- Problems and hotspots are identified by HRWC volunteers, creek walkers, water trail ambassadors, and monitoring teams, and are remedied by staff and responsible parties.



**15 hotspots**  
identified by HRWC field  
volunteers and remedied

### *Habitat Restoration*

Huron River fish need a helping hand. They face threats including loss of habitat in urban areas, high fishing pressure, and climate extremes. HRWC's fish habitat restoration work offered fish a hand-up by focusing on three areas:


1. Our team cut and anchored trees to the river bank in Ypsilanti to provide the breaks in water flow that fish need to rest. A rock vane was installed to give fish a place to tuck themselves in and stay safe in high flows and strong currents.
2. We worked with dam operators to see if their dams can smooth out some peak flows after heavy rain. Spring flooding happens when the fish are spawning—guarding their nests of eggs against predators. Studies show that when rivers increase in flow by 150 percent over a 12-hour period, 40 percent of nests are washed away and an additional 25 percent are damaged. Huron River stream flow gauges show that some areas of the river face these kind of flow changes.

## PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS:

### *Collecting Comprehensive, Reliable Data*

This past year, more than 600 volunteers monitored the river system's chemistry and flow, assessed habitat, and identified plants and river bugs that are sensitive to changes in the environment. Long-term trends in water quality allow us to identify areas for restoration and protection activities. Short-term dramatic changes highlight a need for investigation or remediation. HRWC volunteers and staff work hard to ensure the quality and reliability of the data collected. In April 2017,

3. We promoted changes in angling habits to further protect adult fish during spring reproduction. To raise awareness of why it is illegal to catch and keep bass during the spring season, we installed 18 catch and release signs, translated into Spanish and Chinese, at 11 locations along the Huron in Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti and distributed public outreach materials to local bait and gear retailers.



**75%** of monitoring sites are “maintaining” or “improving” quality

**We strengthen local laws and regulations, and community capacity to make river-forward policies.**



Photo: John Lloyd

Volunteers Ron Fadoir and Jennifer Schlicht creek walking in Mill Creek.

As a result:

- Management and protection of the river’s riparian zone in Webster Township improved when the township took ownership of administering the Natural Rivers District program;
- Green infrastructure of the watershed is more intact and has stronger protections through local ordinances that protect riparian buffers, high-quality woodlands and wetlands, and floodplains;
- Nine communities prevented pollution by banning toxic coal tar pavement sealants through the passage of local ordinances and the education of homeowners;
- Groups across the country and regionally adopted our tools and strategies; and
- We defended and advocated for current laws, regulations, and resources to protect clean water and the watershed.



**10,000 acres** of land protected since 2010 using HRWC data

**PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS:**

**Natural Areas Planning**

Our work with local communities focused on strengthening protections for natural areas and provided needed information and expertise to decision-makers. This past year, we guided Green Infrastructure planning sessions with Ann Arbor, Webster, and Lyndon townships to develop maps and river-friendly elements in their master plans to ensure that important woodlands, wetlands, and grasslands remain intact as development occurs. Furthermore, we aided Webster and Unadilla townships in creating and adopting surface water protections in their zoning ordinances so that buffers along streams and lakes must remain intact and buildings be set back at least 100 feet from waterways.



Photo: Keith Matz

**Toxic and Carcinogenic Pavement Sealants**

Since 2015, we advocated for the prohibition of coal tar and other pavement sealants that are high in Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbons (PAHs). PAHs have been identified as toxic and carcinogenic with significant consequences for the river and human health. Found in the sediments of our lakes and rivers, they are carried to waterways by air and stormwater runoff when sealcoat is applied and as it wears down over time.

As of last year, nine watershed communities banned the more egregious sealants. Almost 250,000 people in the watershed—37 percent of the total population—are now protected by a coal tar sealant ban. We worked with state legislators and environmental groups on bill introductions to address this pollutant statewide. Finally, we initiated a network of Michigan watershed organizations to spur activity across the state.




**communities committed to reducing toxic pollution from pavement sealers**

**We implement solutions that make a difference and engage local leaders and residents. As a result:**

- Public understanding of non-point source pollution increased in the watershed through mass media and social media outreach;
- A 28-year groundwater contamination clean-up became more transparent and informed by bringing local scientific expertise to the table;
- Concerned citizens seeking to engage and respond to increased threats to water quality had a regional and local resource in HRWC;
- 350 Huron River Water Trail paddlers were outfitted with life jackets for recreational use and raised awareness of paddling safety; and
- 1,500 K-12 students from 19 schools gained hands-on experience in creek and river health and developed STEM skills through our streamside education program.

**PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS:**  
*Groundwater Contamination*

We scored a major victory last December concerning groundwater contamination in Washtenaw County. The Washtenaw County Circuit Court granted our motion—along with those from the City of Ann Arbor and Washtenaw County—to join the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality as co-plaintiffs in the longstanding legal case against Gelman Sciences, the company that polluted the area’s groundwater with 1,4-dioxane. We are now providing a voice for the river, aquatic life, and river recreation in the legal proceedings. We’re also advocating for a detailed commitment that better protects the vulnerable portions of the watershed.



**Improved clean-up and increased transparency of a 28-year contamination of groundwater**




**2.6 million**

  
 visitor days to the Huron River for recreation

*River Revitalization*

Last year marked the fifth successful year of RiverUp!, a private + public campaign to spark a Huron River renaissance led by HRWC. It is a plan for the Huron River’s future—a strategy to realize the goal of a vibrant, robust, and restored river as a destination for residents, visitors, and businesses. Since it began in 2012, RiverUp! has contributed more than \$2 million in private and public investments to restore and protect the Huron River, revitalize community waterfronts, and increase river recreation for all. RiverUp!’s work is leveraged by an additional \$40 million in riverfront improvements by partners over that time.

We completed numerous projects to improve the recreational experience along the river: fixing the Ford Lake Dam portage and providing way-finding signs; installing three unique benches designed for riverside viewing at Ann Arbor’s Barton Nature Area; and constructing five water trail gateway kiosks. We also created riverfront



350 youth and adults outfitted with life jackets to raise awareness of paddling safety



Volunteers Wendy and Ethan Palms at the improved Island Park launch on the Huron River Water Trail.

plans to restore the shoreline at Labo Park in the Village of South Rockwood, improve the Flook Dam portage, and to create a park at the Flat Rock boat launch.

Milford, Dexter, Ypsilanti, and Flat Rock worked with us to identify the assets they have that support the water trail and the growth opportunities. Trail Town Strategic Plans were completed for each town to provide a blueprint for business and community leaders to take advantage of the economic opportunity that water trail users bring.

To quantify the contribution of the Huron River corridor and the National Water Trail to the local economy, we commissioned Grand Valley State University to conduct a first-of-its-kind study to measure the economic impact of the river on local communities. The study focused on Huron River Water Trail activities and the value of natural systems that maintain a healthy, clean river.

### Science, Technology, Engineering, Math

This past year, our education program and activities gave middle, high school, and college students opportunities to learn about river ecology, habitat, and recreation. We offered classroom instruction, field trips, internships, volunteer biological, habitat, and water quality monitoring and a fun interactive river snorkeling program. The Streamside Education program volunteers worked with teachers and 1,500 K-12 students from 19 schools to evaluate the health of local creeks and rivers, immersing them in the scientific process through the study of river ecology. Student interns (24 in 2016 and 17 in 2017) worked side-by-side with staff and experienced volunteers to study and measure stream flow and water chemistry, conduct benthic macroinvertebrate sampling, assess stream habitat and natural areas, and talk with residents about the Huron River at HRWC's outreach booth. We strive to create in each student a life-long interest in science and a foundation for a career in a STEM discipline by exposing them to how scientists think and work and by giving them direct career-related experience.



Photo: Janet Kahan

High school students get an up-close look at the macroinvertebrates that are indicators of water quality.

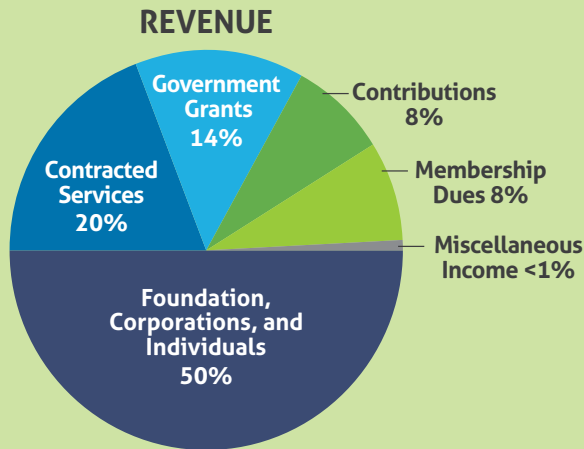


Photo: Janet Kahan

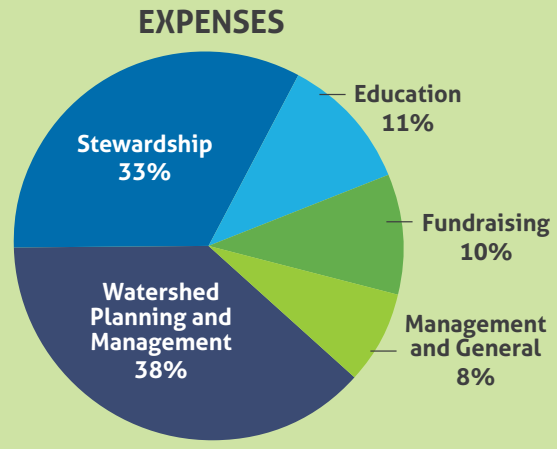
Volunteer Bob Finn explains flow monitoring to a group of high school students at one of HRWC's Streamside Education events.

# Huron River Watershed Council Statement of Activities

Fiscal Year April 1, 2016 to March 31, 2017



TOTAL REVENUES: \$1,636,279



TOTAL EXPENSES: \$1,487,897



HRWC earned a four out of 4-star rating from Charity Navigator for demonstrating strong financial health and commitment to accountability and transparency.

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*This past year HRWC board members Eunice Burns, John Langs and David Wilson passed away. Each was a passionate advocate, and their leadership made the Huron River watershed and HRWC stronger for generations to come.*

**41** Number of local and county member-governments



# Thank You.

*We accomplish together  
what we could never do alone,  
with dedicated donors,  
members, and volunteers.*

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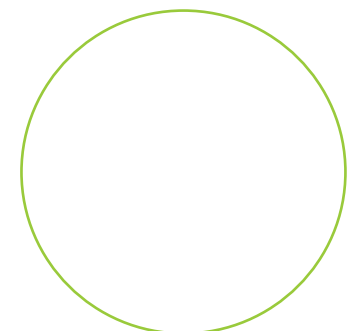
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## SAVE THE DATE!

**THURSDAY, APRIL 26, 2018** • Join us for our **ANNUAL MEETING** and **STEWARDSHIP AWARDS**

**THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2018** • **SUDS ON THE RIVER**

*Raise a glass, enjoy locally-brewed artisan beer and savor delicious food prepared  
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