



LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

On the heels of another summer of extreme weather around the world and here in Southeast Michigan, it often feels hopeless to talk about climate change. But it doesn't have to. Humans drive climate change, but we can also drive climate solutions.

HRWC has always worked to reduce threats to the Huron River—stormwater runoff, habitat loss, sediment and nutrient

pollution, bacteria, and chemical contaminants. Climate change is a "threat multiplier." As patterns in precipitation change and air temperatures increase, the threats to river health are amplified. In this report, we share some of our work over

the past year that shows how with your support we are working

to reduce the impacts of climate change.

Protection of natural lands especially forests and wetlands in the watershed and the land along our creeks and streams serves to keep the water cool and captures polluted runoff from storms before it reaches the river. In urban areas, similar outcomes are achieved with green stormwater infrastructure like rain gardens that catch and soak in runoff. Removing dams removes the risk of dam failures and restores habitat allowing aquatic biodiversity to recover in ways that make the ecosystem resilient to the shocks of extreme events like floods and drought.

Climate change multiplies the threats that affect us all. Each of us can make a difference.

We are proud that you are helping us drive the solutions. So much is at stake. Your support of HRWC keeps us learning, evolving, innovating, and implementing solutions that protect the river in the face of climate change. Thank you.

My highest regards,

R object Essel man

Rebecca Esselman Executive Director LENAWEE

Pinckney

Chelsea

Front cover (Heron Rookery at Wildwing Lake, Kensington Metropark) Keith Matz.

Milford

South Lyon

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Lake Erie

Brighton

A major river restoration project like removing a dam is a 'once in a generation opportunity' to make our communities safer, healthier, and more resilient. Dam removal eliminates the risk of dam failure and restores habitat, allowing aquatic biodiversity to recover in ways that make the ecosystem resilient to the shocks of extreme events like floods and drought.

In 2023 the City of Ypsilanti, with support from HRWC, received a \$3.78 million grant from the Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) Dam Risk Reduction program to remove Peninsular Paper Dam. Pen Dam is a high-hazard dam that was recently downgraded to "poor" condition. The high-hazard rating indicates that severe damage and loss of life are likely if the dam were to fail. The EGLE grant is a major milestone in the project. It demonstrates a significant commitment from the state to address a hazardous piece of obsolete infrastructure.

As this project approaches the next phase, our engineers and ecologists are getting ready to safely deconstruct the dam, restore the river, and protect areas downriver during dam removal. In 2024 partners will pursue additional funding to restore the river above Ford Lake and below Superior Dam.



A key element of dam removal is understanding the impact on aquatic life around the dam. This summer HRWC conducted volunteer-based monitoring of threatened and endangered mussels. With newly developed identification tools, HRWC staff, volunteers, and interns practiced mussel monitoring techniques around Pen Dam and throughout the watershed. Protecting this sensitive species is becoming even more critical in the face of climate change's impacts on the river.

Healthy mussel populations found in 3 SPOTS IN THE RIVER: Proud Lake State Recreation Area, Portage Creek in Hell, and Commerce Township



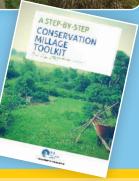
43 species of mussels in Michigan, 31 species listed as threatened, endangered, or species of concern

Amani Tolin, HRWC summer intern, created 25 3D models of mussel shells to help identify mussels in the field.





An HRWC staff member conducting a natural areas assessment.



Forests, wetlands, and prairies filter pollution from stormwater runoff, keep streams running cool and constant, soak up flood waters, sequester carbon pollution, and provide endless hours of recreation and wildlife viewing. The water quality protection provided by natural areas has become even more vital as Michigan experiences changes in precipitation patterns, higher air temperatures, and increasing water temperatures due to climate change.

HRWC works with local governments and their residents to enact land preservation programs and innovative land use policies. Our goal is to protect an additional 23,000 acres of woodlands, wetlands, and other natural and working landscapes.

Last fall residents in three watershed communities took bold steps to boost climate resiliency and protect clean water. Voters in Dexter, Northfield, and Scio townships approved property tax millages to fund land protection. HRWC endorsed and supported the millage campaigns.

Land protection programs, in concert with local government policies, help watershed communities accommodate new population growth while allowing natural areas to keep water clean and cool. HRWC offers policy and technical support directly to local governments, and our Change Makers program empowers residents to engage in the process by teaching them about river-friendly policies and how to get involved in local government decision-making.

Over the last five years, we have grown a corps of residents who have run for and been elected to office, become members of boards and planning commissions, participated in master plan updates, and reviewed and provided comments on local policies. Some of our Change Makers were instrumental in advocating and campaigning for the local land protection millages that passed.

HRWC'S
COMMITMENT TO
OUR WATERSHED
COMMUNITIES



60 YMCA Youth Volunteer Corps campers SEINED, DIP NETTED, and SNORKELED the Huron in Ypsilanti, learning river ecology with HRWC's summer STEM education program.

Stormwater runoff is a threat to the Huron River that has been multiplied by changing precipitation patterns. HRWC's Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI) program includes many projects that use plants and trees to improve the flow of the river and its creeks and reduce streambank erosion and pollutant and phosphorus runoff. GSI catches stormwater runoff, allowing it to slowly soak into the ground. Types of GSI installations include rain gardens, bioretention (medium-scale rain gardens), bioswales (rain gardens that move water), green roofs, porous pavement, rain barrels, and streambank restoration.

HRWC's approach is to develop many small projects to collectively do the same job as larger ones, which can be expensive and harder to find space for in the watershed's urban areas. We have completed many GSI projects in partnership with local governments, community groups, other nonprofits, schools, residents, and businesses.

This summer HRWC focused its efforts on two GSI projects in the Norton Creek watershed in the cities of Wixom and Walled Lake. Norton Creek's stream flow is highly altered resulting in extremely low dissolved oxygen levels that prohibit fish and other wildlife in most of the creek.

HRWC redesigned a drainage area in Gunnar Metalla Park into a bioswale which was seeded with native plants. At the Walled Lake Fire House, we transformed a lawn area into a rain garden. Combined, the two projects are expected to catch and soak in over 400,000 gallons of runoff a year (infiltrating it into the groundwater) and reduce phosphorus runoff by over a pound a year.



HRWC volunteers plant trees in Wixom.



We introduced 150 kids and adults to the CREATURES
OF THE HURON RIVER at the 2023 Parkridge Summerfest
Joe Dulin Community Day celebration.

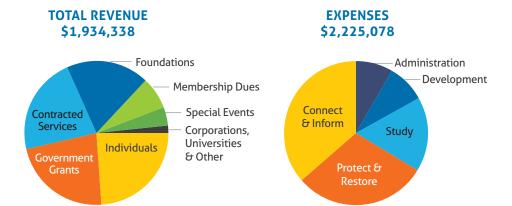
FINANCIAL REPORT

HRWC's upward trend in the growth of our fund balance continues, which helps fuel the expansion of programming and serves as a safety net for our organization. A portion of our fund balance is professionally managed with a minimum of 30% of the portfolio invested in environmental, social, and corporate governance (ESG) funds. Designated ESG funds strive to follow sustainable practices and have evolved to include the principles of health, safety, and corporate responsibility.

HRWC completed another clean annual audit, and we maintain a four out of 4-star rating, awarded by Charity Navigator—demonstrating strong financial health and a commitment to accountability and transparency.

STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES

Fiscal Year April 1, 2022 to March 31, 2023



*Because accounting guidelines require recognition of multi-year grants in the year awarded, there was a large uptick in total revenue in 2022 and a downtick in 2023, but the overall trend is positive.

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THANK YOU TO OUR 2023 HONOREES

VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR



Belinda Friis for steady guidance of HRWC operations

TRAILBLAZER



Kyle Martin for helping HRWC forge a new relationship with the Parkridge Community Center and pilot outdoor education for summer campers

HALL OF FAME



Cheryl Saam for getting many thousands of people outdoors to enjoy nature and the Huron River

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Thank you to EVERYONE who gave their time, efforts and financial resources to make protecting the Huron River and clean water a priority. Head to HRWC.org/AnnualReport for our list of contributors.

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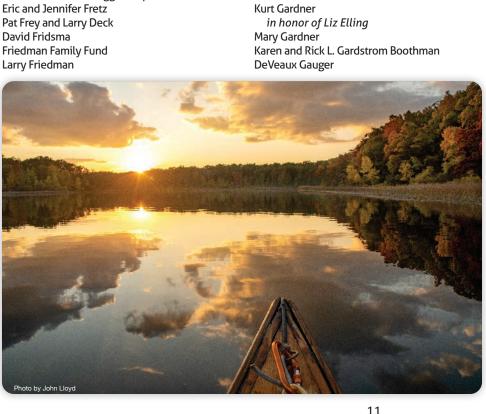
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If your name is misspelled, incorrectly listed, or omitted, please accept our sincere apologies and bring the error to our attention so that we may correct our records. Contact Allie Schneider at aschneider@hrwc.org or (734) 519-0331.

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5,176 VOLUNTEER HOURS

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

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SAVE THE DATE! Our River Givers Gathering is Wednesday, March 6, 2024.