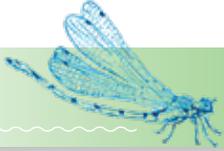




# Huron River Report

Published by the Huron River Watershed Council

SPRING 2021



feature story

## Protecting Wildlife Allies

### Limiting tick populations by preserving habitat for predators

Lyme disease, carried by deer ticks, is spreading at an alarming rate across Michigan. What was once a "New England problem" is now a widespread Midwestern problem. Changes in climate, deer management, the transportation of ticks by humans over large distances, and tick predator habitat loss are the causes. Unfortunately, these contributing factors are expected to worsen and Lyme disease will become a common health risk in the Huron River watershed. For some, it is already.

Fortunately, there are lots of things we can do to protect ourselves from ticks. Experts recommend tucking long pants into boots or high socks, spraying pants and shoes with DEET or permethrin, and thoroughly checking ourselves and our pets for ticks daily.

Protecting our "tick destroyer" animal allies and their habitats can also reduce the risks of infection. Understanding why requires understanding the tick life cycle. Larval ticks are born uninfected. They typically attach to small rodents like mice for their first meal. They engorge themselves, fall off and mature. Now possibly infected with Lyme acquired from this first host, they can bite a human and spread the disease. Ticks need three meals to reproduce, and humans are only at risk of catching Lyme from a tick that has already bitten an infected host.

The good news is ticks and tick hosts have many natural predators. These species either eat ticks themselves or affect the ecosystem in ways that indirectly limit tick

*continued on page 4*



*Foxes are fond of eating a favorite host to the common deer tick: mice!*  
credit: D. Brown

## Protecting the Middle Huron

### Top ten recommendations set to achieve healthy water

One of HRWC's primary programs over the decades has been writing and facilitating the implementation of watershed management plans (WMPs). These WMPs set goals and recommendations to maintain and restore water quality across a particular land and water area. No individuals or organization can do this alone, as watersheds pay no heed to political boundaries. WMPs are

developed with the input of multiple agencies, communities, organizations, and individuals. Only by working together can these groups implement WMPs and achieve success.

In November 2020, after three years of data collection and analysis, stakeholder meetings, and report writing, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Michigan's Department of Environment, Great

Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) approved the WMP for the Middle Huron River, section 2. This area is composed of the Huron River from Barton Pond to the confluence of Huron River and Fleming Creek, and the land area draining water into the Huron through this section, including Allens, Fleming, Malletts, Millers, Swift Run, and

*continued on page 5*

● **INSIDE: UPCOMING EVENTS AND WORKSHOPS** Stewardship Awards | Erb Family Foundation supports Great Lakes region | HRWC collaborations with other water quality agencies maximizes impact





# Rebecca's Stream of Consciousness

Since our last newsletter, much has transpired. We saw the approval and distribution of a vaccine for COVID-19, moving us into a new phase of a global pandemic that has wreaked havoc on our nation, our work, and our personal lives. A historic election took place and the federal administration changed hands and began the formidable work of rebuilding trust and bridging divides. And here in the Huron we have seen some really positive forward momentum, too. Here are a few highlights from my perspective.

## PFAS

Last summer we reported that the State of Michigan adopted regulations limiting seven PFAS chemicals in municipal drinking water. While a success by itself, we noted it was only the beginning of many actions that must take place to keep Michiganders safe from these chemicals in our waterways. In December, there was another regulatory victory; those same seven PFAS chemicals are now regulated in groundwater cleanup rules that match the drinking water standards. The rules will apply to areas where PFAS has contaminated aquifers.

## Climate

This winter, the University of Michigan President's Commission on Carbon Neutrality released its recommendations on how the University will become Carbon Neutral. Recommendations include electrification of the University's fleet, purchasing power from 100% renewable energy sources, and other strategies to reduce Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions. Since many of these carbon neutrality efforts will take time, the University will need to offset much of its GHG footprint in the meantime. Offset recommendations include purchasing natural areas that would otherwise be converted to development, thus preserving the carbon sequestration

capacity, and managing existing University-owned natural lands to improve the sequestration capacity. This provides an opportunity for the University to make offset investments locally in a way that achieves multiple additional benefits such as public space and, of course, clean water.

## Funding for the Environment

2021 has already brought increases in funding. Congress reauthorized and increased Great Lakes Restoration Initiative funding, bringing critical dollars to the region for freshwater protection and restoration. In addition, the State announced a new funding source for watershed groups like HRWC. Whitmer's MI Clean Water program will invest \$500 million to rebuild water infrastructure. Finally, the passing of Proposal 1 in November will ensure the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund can grow and support land acquisition and access throughout our state.

## The Election

There was a collective sigh of relief in the environmental movement when the Biden/Harris administration took office. As I watched the President make appointments, my hope grew. From environmental stalwarts like Gina McCarthy and John Kerry, to exciting new faces to the national stage like former Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm as Energy Secretary and North Carolina's Michael Regan for head of the EPA, there is a strong, diverse team that can chart an ambitious course on climate change and protections for our air, land, and water. Within the first week, the President issued an Action Plan for the Climate Crisis charting an ambitious course towards a cleaner energy future. Further, this plan is built on the pillars of environmental justice, job creation, and building environmentally sustainable infrastructure.



We have a lot of recovery to do, as we lost a lot of ground. At final count, the Trump administration rolled back more than 100 environmental rules. But I am thrilled by the team Biden/Harris have assembled and feel, for once in too a long a time, that the future looks bright.

Amid the swirl of national, state and local change, HRWC finds the levers available to move our mission forward. This March, we are trying something new. We are taking our River Givers event virtual. While I am hopeful that we can get back to some in-person meetings and gatherings in the near future, we are not there yet. We have put our energy into coming up with an engaging set of talks on a unique platform. Join us and let's stay connected until we can meet again. Please see Events and Workshops (page 8) to learn more.

— Rebecca Esselman  
HRWC Executive Director

 @natureiswater



# Erb Family Foundation

## Increasing Collaboration for Healthy Great Lakes



Fred A. and Barbara M.  
Erb Family Foundation

Fred and Barbara Erb were strongly influenced by their desire to create a better world for future generations. Having spent her childhood summers on the shores of Lake Huron, Barbara developed a love and respect for the Great Lakes. It was her wish that her grandchildren's grandchildren would be able to swim in the clean waters of the Great Lakes.

As the Erb Family Foundation celebrates 10 years of supporting the arts and environment across Southeast Michigan, HRWC celebrates its vision and philosophy to achieve Fred and Barbara's wishes.

Everything we do—from maintaining our homes to washing our laundry, planting native plants to cleaning out stormdrains – everything we do in our homes and on our land impacts our streams, rivers, and lakes.

This is not a problem that one city or one watershed organization can solve. Every citizen has an impact, and the power to make a difference. The Erb Family Foundation encourages partnerships with schools, municipalities, businesses, and environmental organizations. They

encourage us to tackle problems together, with our neighbors and our legislators, so that we may share resources and ideas to advance efforts for achieving a clean and healthy environment.

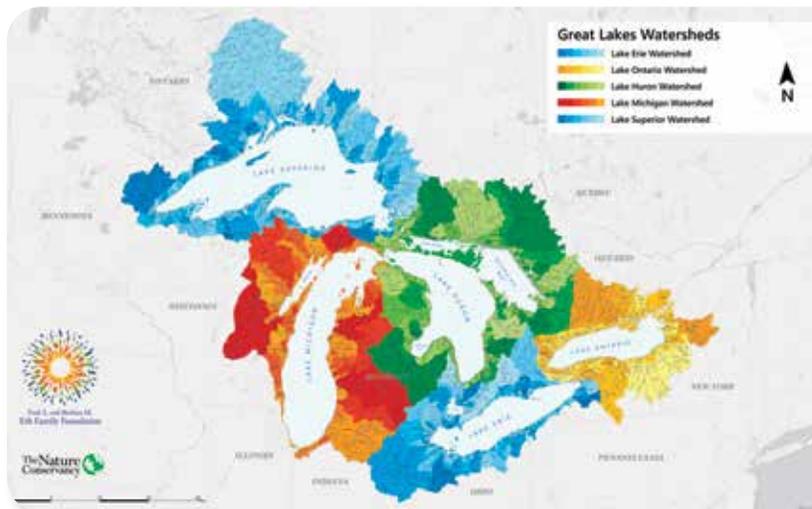
Neil Hawkins, president, describes the Erb Family Foundation "as a funder that encourages experimentation and supports innovative approaches to maintaining a healthy Great Lakes ecosystem. This approach has proven that there is power in numbers. Collaborative work will better position each organization to make a bigger impact."

Cheers to the Erb Family Foundation for 10 years of success,

and thank you for trusting HRWC to be a partner in achieving Fred and Barbara's mission!

To learn more about HRWC partnerships supported by the Erb Family Foundation, please read "Crossing Watershed Boundaries" in this issue of the *Huron River Report*.

—Wendy Palms



## Welcome, Eric! • DTE Foundation Environmental Fellow

In September 2020, HRWC welcomed Eric Robinson to the team. Eric is contributing to our watershed management planning efforts and new green stormwater infrastructure program. He will also be a part of our 2021 field data collection team and participate in the planning for the removal of Peninsular Dam.

Beginning a new job in the middle of a pandemic is no small feat, but Eric has proven up to the challenge. So far, Eric has co-created a project concept and written a grant proposal, delivered virtual trainings to future rain gardeners, developed and explored green infrastructure project strategies, made a short film, and even planned HRWC's staff holiday social event (*Jeopardy*, if you were curious).

Eric holds a Bachelor of Science in environmental science with a concentration in hydrology from Eastern Michigan University. He also worked on stormwater projects for the City of Ann Arbor and is a certified Master Rain Gardener. We first met Eric when he volunteered for HRWC in 2015. In 2017, he spent a summer on our field data collection team, where he was highly regarded by both staff and fellow interns for his competency and leadership.

Eric is with us on a two-year fellowship with generous support from the DTE Foundation, which aims to launch promising recent graduates into fruitful careers in natural resource management and the environment.

—Rebecca Esselman





## Protecting Wildlife Allies *continued from cover*

populations. Here are a few of our allies in the watershed.

### Opossums

In southeastern Michigan, perhaps our greatest friend in the fight against ticks is the opossum. Often maligned for their appearance, many people mistakenly consider them a nuisance rodent. Opossums rarely cause problems for homeowners, but they are savvy and opportunistic eaters.

### Amazing marsupials

Opossums are diligent self-groomers and excel at removing ticks from themselves. One opossum will kill around 90 percent of the ticks that attempt to attach to their body, which amounts to a whopping average of 5,000 ticks in a typical season. Particularly in suburban and exurban environments—where Lyme disease is spreading rapidly—opossums serve as a front line against rampant tick populations.

While opossums are opportunistic foragers, they are known to feast on small rodents. If the host animal is covered in ticks, for the opossum it's a bonus treat—like sprinkles on ice cream.

### Foxes, coyotes, snakes, and raptors

Wild mice are top hosts for ticks, and research suggests that a major factor in the spread of tick-borne diseases is the loss of natural mouse predators. If mice populations were kept in check, uninfected larval ticks would either find other uninfected hosts or die without finding their first meal. Larger snakes, foxes, coyotes, and raptors eat mice, thus breaking the cycle of infection. In natural areas where these predators are protected, the number of infected ticks can be reduced by around 80%.

### Frogs, Toads, and Fowl

Ticks thrive in moist, grassy wetland areas. Frogs and toads are bug eating experts, with a penchant for devouring any insect they encounter—including ticks.

Fowl make excellent neighborhood “tick defense” systems. Ducks and chickens constantly peck away at insects, eating whatever they find.

For people living in places that raise chickens or ducks, these birds can significantly reduce the risk of picking up a tick in the backyard or garden.

Wild turkeys also reduce tick populations substantially, and turkey populations are thriving thanks to decades of dedication from conservation and game organizations.

### Protect habitat, wildlife allies, and people

We clearly have a lot of animal friends in the fight against ticks and Lyme disease. In the Huron River watershed, one of the most important things we can do is protect the habitat of these vital predators in our ecosystem. Protecting large tracts of natural land for predators is especially important.

Conserving or restoring wetlands provides more room for frogs and toads. Healthy grasslands are excellent hunting grounds for hawks and snakes. Allowing mature forests to grow will encourage owls to stay close by.

Opossums are very adaptable, but they still need wetlands, woods, or natural spaces to get away from people and stay safe from their own predators. In urban and suburban areas, large brush piles can provide daytime resting areas for these nocturnal friends.

Habitat restoration is important, too. Invasive barberry plants provide great nesting areas for mice, who are able to tuck safely within the thorny branches—protected from predators. Removing these plants has been shown to decrease mouse populations, thus slowing the spread of ticks.

While you take the necessary steps to keep ticks off yourself, kids, and pets, also consider supporting local conservation efforts and land conservancies that protect vital, disappearing habitat for wildlife. Please let others know about the benefits of our allies, especially opossums, who could use a public relations boost.

—Daniel A. Brown



## Tick Tips!

### Before you go outside

- Know where ticks hitch a ride (wooded brushy areas with high grass and leaf litter) and walk in the center of trails.
- Treat clothing and gear with permethrin (apply only to clothing, never to your skin).
- Use insect repellents that contain 20% or more DEET on exposed skin. Concentrations of more than 30% DEET should not be used on children under 2 years of age.
- Wear light-colored clothing and long pants tucked into your socks.

### Do a tick check after each outing

- Check your clothing for ticks (lint rollers are a great tool for quick checks).
- Examine your gear and pets carefully for ticks. Consider treating dogs ahead of time with preventatives available through your veterinarian.
- Shower within 2 hours and check your body for ticks.

### Tick attached?

- Stay calm. If your child has a tick, a five minute distraction like a good story or video helps.
- Use tweezers or your fingers to grip the tick, applying slow, even pressure; it can take up to three minutes for the tick to back out.
- Do not twist the tick. Do not use Vaseline or the tip of a hot match to attempt to make a tick back out.
- Preserve the tick in a small jar with some alcohol. Keep it in case you need to ID it later.
- Wash the bite area and your hands thoroughly with soap and water.
- If it is possible the tick was attached for more than 18 hours, seek care from a medical professional right away—and bring the preserved tick to your appointment!
- Watch for symptoms. Contact your doctor if you have a fever, rash, body aches, or fatigue.
- For ID help and more tips, go to the MDHHS website: [michigan.gov/lyme](http://michigan.gov/lyme)



Traver creeksheds. Nearly all the City of Ann Arbor is contained in these creeksheds, as well as parts of Ann Arbor, Salem, Superior, and Pittsfield townships. The area is fully contained in Washtenaw County.

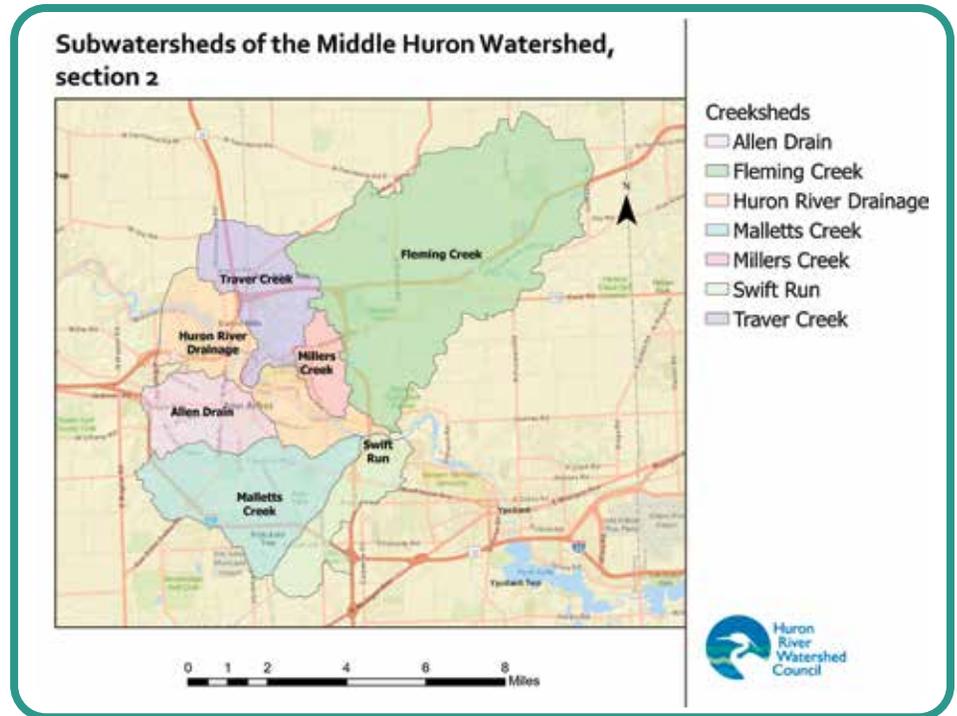
To prepare the recommended actions to achieve the goals for the WMP, HRWC and stakeholder organizations for the region compiled a list of best management practices (BMPs) that would address the priority impairments of the region and be most feasibly implemented. The following list is not comprehensive but includes ten BMPs determined to be of the highest priority. To see all recommendations and data, check out the full WMP at [www.hrwc.org/WMPmiddlehuron2](http://www.hrwc.org/WMPmiddlehuron2).

**1. Implement a Green Stormwater Infrastructure strategy and program.**

HRWC developed a process to incorporate available geographic, aerial, and other remotely collected information to identify opportunities for Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI) projects to capture and infiltrate stormwater. A number of GSI projects and programs already exist in the watershed, but there are many more opportunities. A watershed-wide program, or a program within each municipality, is needed to incorporate GSI retrofit designs along key roads, publicly owned properties, and large business properties. Municipalities should also commit to installing GSI during major street replacements.

**2. Targeted stream channel restoration.** Over the past two summers, HRWC has conducted extensive stream surveying using the Bank Assessment for Non-Point Source Consequences of Sediment (BANCS) methodology (see box, page 9) to identify badly eroding channel sections in need of restoration. HRWC located eight channel sections that are experiencing extremely fast erosion and need to be stabilized within the next several years to prevent excess sedimentation and habitat impacts downstream.

**3. Enforce restrictions of new discharge permits.** A total maximum daily load (TMDL) plan from EGLE concludes there is still excess



phosphorus entering Ford and Belleville Lakes, and it sets targets for limits on discharge permits. It is imperative to the success of all the phosphorus reduction activities going forward that no new sources be added to counteract these nutrient reduction efforts. HRWC and partner agencies commit to participate fully in public response to new permit applications. In this public response, the partners will request that EGLE uphold the goals of the TMDL by rejecting any new source permits.

**4. Implement stormwater management plans.** Municipalities in the watershed, along with the Washtenaw County Water Resources Commissioner, Washtenaw County Road Commission, Ann Arbor Public Schools, and the University of Michigan all have stormwater plans that direct them on how to control and manage the quality and quantity of stormwater flowing through and out of their systems. These stormwater systems require inspections and maintenance. The municipalities need to enforce rules, standards, and ordinances for stormwater management on new and existing developments.

**5. Implement the Public Education Plan.** Governments and nonprofit leaders need help from everyone to achieve clean water in our waterways. Watershed partners have developed a Public Education Plan that includes 22 activities and strategies to address nine stormwater topics; it serves as guide for what organizations should highlight when teaching the public how their actions impact water quality.

**6. Conduct bacterial source identification, remediation, and education.** Bacterial pathogens following heavy rainstorms are a known issue in this watershed region. By utilizing targeted water sampling, genetic analyses, and canine source detection (bacteria-sniffing dogs!), HRWC and partners will be able to determine the presence and sources of bacteria in the watershed, targeting them for elimination. Furthermore, it is important to teach citizens how their actions (or lack thereof) related to septic system maintenance and pet waste disposal can affect water quality.

*continued on page 9*

# The Huron River Watershed

## MISSION

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

## VISION

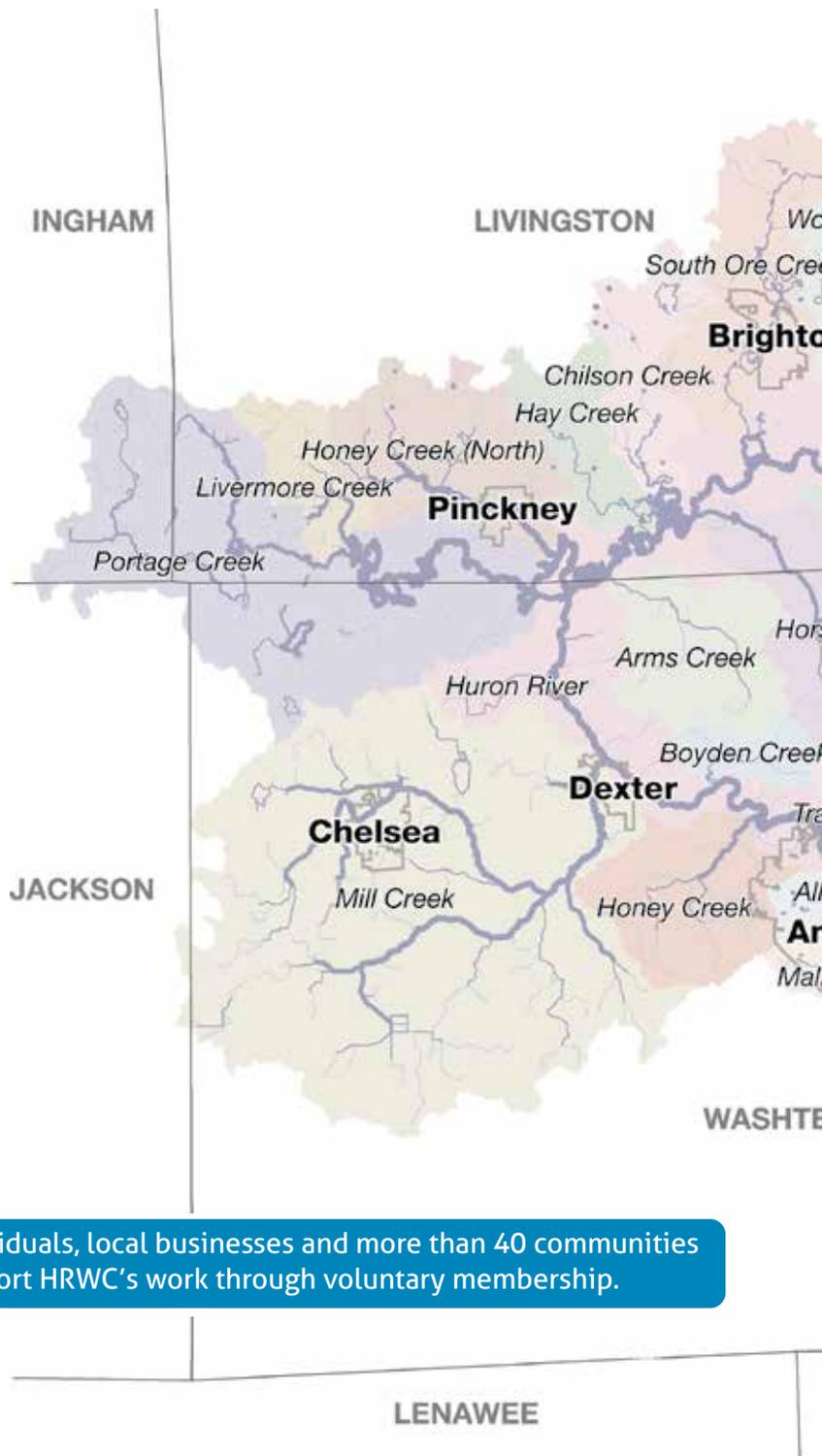
We envision a future of clean and plentiful water for people and nature where citizens and government are effective and courageous champions for the Huron River and its watershed.

## 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.



## HRWC BOARD OF DIRECTORS

### Executive Committee

Mary Bajcz  
Chris Benedict (Vice Chair)  
Janis Bobrin  
Paul Cousins  
Matthew LaFleur (Treasurer)  
Dick Norton (Chair)  
Diane O'Connell  
Evan Pratt  
Steven Wright

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Mandy Grewal  
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Molly Maciejewski  
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Jason Morgan  
Erica Perry  
Sharon Popp  
Peter Schappach  
Matt Stuk  
Mike Teichner\*  
Curt Wolf  
Lisa Wozniak

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

Visit [www.hrwc.org](http://www.hrwc.org) for detailed maps, monitoring data and creekshed status updates.



\*Community-designated alternate representative



Spring is a great time to plant natives. Check out our *Take Action* webpage for places to find plants. Pictured here are easy-to-grow New England Asters (purple) and Brown-eyed Susans (yellow). credit: HRWC

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# HRWC Events and Workshops

MARCH • APRIL • MAY • 2021

## Chemistry and Flow Monitoring Return Volunteer Reorientation Webinar

Saturday, March 20, 1 - 2pm

*Due to our continued COVID-19 precautions, participation in this year's Chemistry and Flow Monitoring program will be limited to return volunteers. Watch for an email with sign-up details. During the webinar, HRWC staff will introduce COVID-19 monitoring protocols, discuss plans for 2021, and provide a reorientation to program monitoring procedures. For more information: Andrea Paine, [apaine@hrwc.org](mailto:apaine@hrwc.org)*

## River Roundup

Saturday, April 17

*Watch for an email! It is likely that our COVID-19 precautions will still be in place, making our 2021 Spring bug hunt invitation-only. To limit exposure, we will ask experienced volunteers to join us and to meet at outdoor sites (instead of carpooling), wear masks, and maintain social distance. New volunteers may sign up for email announcements and will be happily invited to join, once we open events to the public again.*

New volunteer sign-up: [www.hrwc.org/volunteer/sign-up/](http://www.hrwc.org/volunteer/sign-up/)

## HRWC Board of Directors Meeting

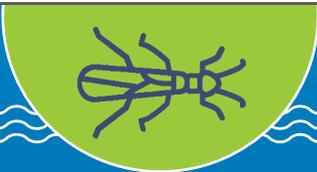
Thursday, April 22, 5:30 - 7:30pm, online

Contact: Rebecca Esselman, [resselman@hrwc.org](mailto:resselman@hrwc.org)

## Huron River Day Every Day in May!

*A new month-long event format is planned this year featuring self-guided nature walks, recommended river trips, and informational exhibits at riverside parks in Dexter, Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti. There will be opportunities to have fun and engage in ways that provide for safe social distancing throughout the month of May. Sponsored by DTE Energy Foundation.*

Details: [www.a2gov.org/hrd](http://www.a2gov.org/hrd)



## River Givers Goes Virtual!

**In March HRWC celebrates YOU, the volunteers and supporters who are committed to the Huron River and who make our river restoration and protection work possible! Join us for TED-style presentations about the watershed and all that we've accomplished together.**

HRWC staff will give short (15-minute) Snap-Talks every Thursday in March on key topics:

- Climate Change and the Huron: What we stand to lose and how we win
- Rejuvenation, Revitalization, and Stewardship along the Huron River Water Trail
- What is a Healthy River?
- Insects Tell A Story: What we learn from Stonefly Search and River Roundups

Tired of Zoom calls? We've got a surprise for you—a brand new virtual gathering space! Thanks to the generosity of Saganworks we will host our month-long River Givers celebration in a 3D learning environment that you can move through and explore using your web browser. Snap-Talks will post on Thursdays for you to enjoy on demand. We'll miss seeing you in person, sharing stories and laughs, but our virtual gathering space will connect us to each other and the river.



**Stay tuned to your in-box for River Givers updates or head to [hrwc.org/rivergivers](http://hrwc.org/rivergivers) on March 1.**



**7. Develop a best practice strategy for de-icing.** The river and tributaries in the watershed have consistently high conductivity levels, which have been shown to be highly correlated with chloride (Cl-) and sodium (Na+) levels and negatively correlated with biodiversity. Much of this can be traced back to winter use of road salt. There needs to be a concerted effort to develop and test de-icing procedures that will minimize impact to aquatic ecosystems.

**8. Develop detention pond evaluation, maintenance, and retrofit procedures.** Since the development of modern stormwater management guidelines, municipalities have built dozens of stormwater detention ponds throughout the watershed. Unfortunately, anecdotal evidence and pond surveys suggest that very few are getting the maintenance they need. Unmaintained detention ponds get clogged with sediment and lose their ability to treat the stormwater they capture. The WMP calls for an aerial survey of these ponds, followed by a strategy to continue maintenance to improve overall function.

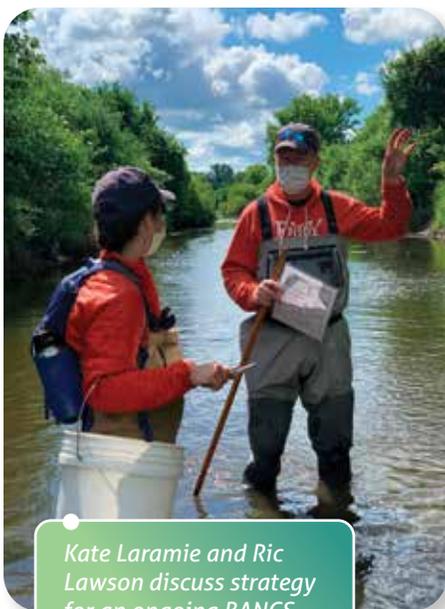
**9. Implement creekshed plans.** The Malletts Creek Strategy and the Millers Creek Sediment Accumulation Study are specific targets for this BMP. Millers and Malletts creeks

have been sources of sediment and flashy flows for decades, and these creeks in particular need continued management and restoration. In Millers Creek, a 2013 sediment study recommended several activities to reduce polluted runoff rushing into the creek after storms. While partners have completed some of these activities, there is more to do. Similarly, many projects have been conducted in the Malletts creekshed in the last ten years, resulting in noticeable improvements to the creek's water quality. The WMP recommends continued action in Malletts and Millers Creeks to keep up the strong momentum developed here.

**10. Natural areas protection.** Preserving natural areas is of utmost importance. The ecosystem services they provide moderate water flow, filter polluted runoff before it reaches waterways, and protect habitat for a wide range of plant and animal species. Land protection programs include the City of Ann Arbor's Greenbelt program, Scio, Ann Arbor, and Webster townships' land preservation programs, and Washtenaw County's Natural Areas Protection Program. All of these programs are funded through land protection millages levied on property taxes, and they must continue. Other laws and policies can protect natural areas as well, like natural features protection ordinances and regional planning to direct development away from important natural areas.

**A goal to implement ten BMPs over the next ten years.** Implementing these WMP project activities over the next ten years will result in the elimination or significant reduction in water impairments that currently compromise the watershed. Improving ecosystems is not easy. It takes concerted effort over a long period of time. These WMPs, developed with community partners, provide a road map to achieving the restorations and protections needed for the watershed as a whole.

—Paul Steen and Ric Lawson



Kate Laramie and Ric Lawson discuss strategy for an ongoing BANCS assessment. credit: HRWC



**HRWC's New Rapid Streambank Assessment**

With the help of Michigan's EGLE, HRWC integrated a rapid assessment tool to inventory streambanks and find those with the highest erosion rates.

Eroding banks are a consequence of poor development practices that discharge stormwater runoff directly to streams, changing their hydrology (especially peak flow rates) and ripping away parts of the streambanks and sometimes streambeds.

To implement the BANCS (Bank Assessment for Non-Point Source Consequences of Sediment) protocols, HRWC staff and summer interns walk the streams in the watershed and make quick observations and measures. Collected data are translated to numeric values and input into a regional model for estimating erosion rates. The team assesses streambanks for height, angle, surface coverage, and root depth. Each metric is indexed to the size of the stream drainage area. HRWC staff can revisit problematic streambanks and collect more detailed survey data.

These ongoing surveys generate more accurate erosion rate estimates that will be used to create recommended stream restoration strategies, such as woody debris management or natural toe (beginning point of a streambank) protection. The final results are incorporated into watershed management plans.

photo: 2019 Assessment Field Crew credit: HRWC



# Crossing Watershed Boundaries

## HRWC collaborates with Southeast Michigan river groups

Watershed and river groups throughout the U.S. provide similar programming and face similar challenges. Michigan has a number of incredible grassroots watershed organizations. HRWC has engaged with them in various ways for many years. Recently HRWC's collaborations with the watershed groups in Southeast Michigan has become more formal, more frequent, and more exciting. Following are examples of how these groups accomplish more by joining together and focusing on their regional impacts.



*The Huron River Water Trail was featured in a series of live segments on Fox2News in 2019, where HRWC's Daniel A. Brown talked about the Water Trail and paddling safety.*  
credit: C. Robar

### Earned Media

For the past three years, the Erb Family Foundation has funded a landmark project that enhances the communications and media relations activities of four area watershed groups: HRWC, Friends of the Rouge (FOTR), the Clinton River Watershed Council (CRWC) and Friends of the Detroit River (FODR). These groups now work together as a coordinated and cohesive news bureau to highlight the environmental and recreational use of area rivers.

In 2020, Near Perfect Media and Robar PR helped these river groups publish more than 200 stories with a reach of 523 million readers. Joint pitches for National Canoe Day, #natureisopen, river cleanups, STEM training, and bug hunts made the stories even stronger for local media coverage. The public relations team

promoted special events kicking off new projects like the Fort Street Bridge Interpretative Park, the Clinton River handicapped kayak launch, and the Iron Belle Trail. They also helped coordinate media for the 50th anniversary of the Rouge River "Burn." Together, staff from the river groups built skills through a series of communications workshops on social media, media relations, crisis planning, and virtual events. During leadership transitions and major environmental challenges, the public relations team continues to work together to prepare the necessary materials for key stakeholders.

### Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

These watershed groups, along with the River Raisin Watershed Council, launched a project last fall to advance values of anti-racism, justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in their organizations. Also funded by the Erb Family Foundation, the groups gathered in a series of virtual trainings on topics related to these values, engaging over 60 staff, board members, and volunteers. Led by Ypsilanti-based consultant, Morgain MacDonald, the trainings challenged participants to examine the ways in which microaggressions, cultural gatekeeping, and implicit bias are perpetuated on individual and organizational levels. Furthermore, the watershed groups learned strategies for more thoughtful and equitable communication, engagement, and program implementation. Participating in the training series as a collective helped facilitate shared understanding on the topics covered and cross-council relationship building.

With varying degrees of prior engagement on these topics, the groups had the opportunity to take additional steps to advance DEI. Along with the CRWC and FOTR, HRWC elected to complete an organizational audit to assess its existing progress on DEI and identify areas of improvement. The audit provides a guide and benchmark as HRWC continues advancing DEI.



*A rain garden installation at Salem Township Hall.*  
credit: Friends of the Rouge

### Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI)

GSI practices, such as rain gardens and bioswales, use plants to help infiltrate stormwater into the ground. Since GSI is one of the best ways to improve water quality, installing GSI throughout the watersheds will maximize benefits derived from this approach. Recognizing the need to "scale up" GSI implementation, several watershed groups are co-developing a program to achieve this goal. The collaborative is considering how GSI products (like rain gardens and native plants) and services (like training, consultations, and maintenance) could be jointly developed and locally delivered. A market analysis and business plan are underway to set the program up for success. Additionally, this year HRWC is developing a residential rain garden program in Livingston County and will co-deliver Master Rain Gardener courses and provide in-field assistance. This work is possible with funding from the Great Lakes Water Authority, the Livingston Watershed Advisory Group, and HRWC's Innovators Fund.

These three efforts have brought HRWC closer than ever to the other watershed groups in the region. Staff are learning lessons from each other and identifying ways to make greater impact together. After all, water is a life-giving resource for everyone!

—Pam Labadie, Ric Lawson, and Andrea Paine



# Volunteer Spotlight • Stewardship Awards



credit: G. Heiber

This year HRWC is recognizing two longtime supporters for their amazing work on our ongoing programs.

## Joel Panozzo: Big Splash

Many in the Ann Arbor area know Joel as the former co-owner of the Lunch Room and Detroit Street Filling Station. Joel and his former business partner, Phillis Engelbert, brought a strong justice and community ethic to their restaurants (Phillis continues to run both businesses). Joel has even testified at Capitol Hill in both Lansing and Washington, DC, on the topics of fair wages and ending sexual harassment in the food industry.

It is no surprise that Joel has been a longtime supporter of HRWC. After a couple of years donating food to Suds on the River, HRWC's annual fundraiser, Joel became a regular volunteer for the event. Using his restaurant and event planning background, he assisted in the kitchen with then-head chef Misty Callies. Joel was delighted to take on the lead position when Misty stepped down. "I have catered many weddings and events, but I would say the location of Suds is what makes it truly special. Yes, Suds is a fundraising event for the crucial activities of HRWC, but what kept me coming back is that Suds is a celebration of the river itself. The event's changing location every year would be considered a nightmare for any party planner, but it turned the event into a fresh and true celebration of our community gem."

When asked recently why Joel got involved in Suds, he noted "I personally have used the Huron River as a place of healing, time and time again. I want this gem to be clean and accessible for generations to come."

*The Huron River is a special place for Joel and he is honored to help protect this precious resource.*  
credit: J. Isaacson



## Andrea Kline: HRWC Hall of Fame

HRWC staff were heartbroken when we lost one of our family, Andrea Kline, this past year. Andrea, as well as her husband Paul Evanoff, have been supporters since the early 1990s. Paul notes that, "Andrea will be remembered as a person that led a very active personal and professional life." She studied and worked on watershed management planning and conservation since the late 1970s. A professional landscape

architect, she worked with numerous notable organizations in southeastern Michigan including The Nature Conservancy, Huron Clinton Metropolitan Authority, Friends of the Detroit River, the Stewardship Network, the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge Alliance, Johnson, Johnson and Roy (now SmithGroup), and Pollack Design Associates.

Andrea's professional work and love for outdoor recreation brought her to River Roundup and the Stonefly Search, where she was a stalwart volunteer, making long-time friendships while supporting HRWC's work. Andrea went on to play a critical role in the RiverUp! program and the development of the Huron River Water Trail. Andrea was often our boots-on-the-ground representative. She coordinated many, often challenging, construction projects that were completed to her high standards of quality. Her works lives on, providing water trail users with safe portages and better access points. Through RiverUp!, Andrea also became an HRWC ambassador, attending community events to present projects and educate the public on the importance of the river. Huron River recreationists will greatly benefit from Andrea's passionate efforts and accomplishments for years to come.



*(Above) Andrea Kline and Connie Rizzolo oversee construction of new benches along the shore of the river. (Below) Andrea managed the installation of this Flook Dam Portage on the Huron River Water Trail in Dexter. credit: HRWC*



—Jason Frenzel



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