



Huron River Report

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feature story

The Bald Eagle

A powerful symbol of conservation action

As one of the most recognizable birds in the world and America's national bird, the bald eagle hardly needs an introduction. However, there are many misconceptions surrounding this iconic flyer and much to learn for all.

Is the bald eagle really bald?

The term "bald" is used in reference to an old English definition meaning "white" as opposed to meaning "hairless." In fact, the scientific name for the bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) translates as "white-headed eagle." Juvenile bald eagles actually start their lives with mostly brown feathers, with some white mottled patches, and with dark beaks

and eyes. Somewhere between four and seven years of age, juveniles mature; their head and tail feathers transition to white and their beaks and eyes transition to bright yellow.

What is a bald eagle?

Bald eagles are birds of prey, or "raptors," that use their talons to grab their prey and their sharp, hooked beaks to tear away parts of their food. While most populations eat fish, bald eagles can be found throughout North America and their diet is dependent upon locally available prey.

Known to mate for life, bald eagles

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An eagle perched above its nesting site along the Huron River. credit: J. Lloyd

How to Stop Loving our Lakes to Death

Monitoring and management is key

Michigan is the land of 11,000 lakes. Indeed, our state is nearly overflowing with lakes, and as Michiganders we should be proud of this and at every possible opportunity remind Minnesotans that Michigan has more lakes. This wealth of freshwater is an invaluable resource both from a human and a natural perspective. Lakes are wonderful places to live, boat, fish, and play. They become cherished and important places where people spend their lives and learn to appreciate nature. Lakes become

peoples' homes, and residents take pride in them. At the same time, lakes are homes to all sorts of fish, birds, frogs, and insects, which rely on the ecosystems for protection, reproduction, and food.

Yet with great resources comes great responsibility. A common phrase you will hear from a freshwater scientist is that "Michiganders are loving their lakes to death." With so many human activities on lakes, and with so much development along lakeshores, lakes are far from the pristine locations

we may imagine when gazing at a photograph of a loon swimming at sunset. The lake in that idyllic photo may be overgrown with invasive plants, it may be full of algae, or there might be so many seawalls along the shoreline that the loon can't even find a place to lay her eggs. For lakes to continue to thrive, humans need to recognize their own impact and wisely manage lakes to support human activities and ecosystem functions.

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INSIDE: UPCOMING EVENTS AND WORKSHOPS *Making Behavior Change Durable*
Master Rain Gardener Training | Digital Data Collection | The John Langs Fund | Matt Lafluer, Volunteer Spotlight





Rebecca's Stream of Consciousness

H RWC completes a strategic plan every five years. This fall we took stock and envisioned our future. Our plan for 2022-2027 is built on a unique foundation. We are two years into a global pandemic that has changed the way we work. Climate change weighed heavy on our minds five years ago. Today, it is clear that nothing is more urgent. There is no mission success without stopping this runaway train. Finally, racial and environmental injustices compel us to be an active part of the solutions.

Our 5-year vision:

In 2027, the Huron River Watershed Council will have built on its existing strengths in watershed science and education by deepening connections with watershed communities, advocating for equitable policies, implementing programs that advance communities' visions for the Huron River, and protecting the river's ecological health by aggressively addressing the most pressing threats.

To achieve this vision, we will have a new emphasis on climate change, grow our capacity to advocate for water-friendly policies at local and state levels, expand our reach by engaging youth, and increase investments in communities we have historically underserved.

We will continue to serve as a trusted resource on water issues for Huron River residents, keep the fingers on

the pulse of the river system through our monitoring work, implement best practices for water quality and river health, and encourage all residents, towns, cities and visitors to be river stewards.

In order to accomplish our vision, we recognize the need for a stronger organization. HRWC is committed to diversifying our staff and board to better represent the diversity of people who depend on clean water and healthy ecosystems. We will increase and diversify revenues to ensure our long-term sustainability and increase our impact. We will foster an organizational culture that is inclusive, embodies our core values, and prioritizes work/life balance.

I am honored to share our vision for the future and how we plan to get there. The hearts and minds of the amazing staff and board here at HRWC come through in the ambition of the vision, the righteousness of the core values, and the focus and impact inherent in the goals. A strategic plan is a light on the horizon that guides us. It supports priorities and investments. It allows each of us to envision success and find our role in achieving it. Once formalized, the strategic plan will be made available on our website and I encourage you to find your place in there, too. Now, let's roll up our sleeves and get to work!

— Rebecca Esselman
HRWC Executive Director
 @natureiswater



Staff, board members, volunteers, partner agencies, and stakeholders developed a vision statement centered on

HRWC's Core Values:

- Act with Integrity
- Foster Community and Collaboration
- Continuously Learn, Grow, and Innovate
- Inspire Environmental Leadership
- Advocate for Healthy Ecosystems and Communities
- Promote Equity, Inclusion, and Environmental Justice

Stay tuned to your email for updates on HRWC's full Strategic Plan.



Make a Gift for Ages to Come

Contact Wendy Palms about your planned gift to HRWC:
wpalms@hrwc.org, (734) 769-5123





John Langs, “The Riverman”

A profound appreciation for the Huron River

Having lived 25 years of his life on the “Mighty Huron”, as John Langs liked to call it, he was passionate about water and wilderness. He was drawn to the constant movement of the water. He was fascinated by the many species thriving above and below the surface. He intuitively understood that the health of the ecosystem is vitally important. John knew this and acted on it long before climate change became the concern it is today.

John and his son Henry participated in HRWC’s Stonefly Searches. Henry recollects, “Dad really cared about the river. We went out in the middle of winter to check for stonefly populations in the stream. We would turn the rocks over and over. They were hard to find, but dad would say, if we find some, that’s all that matters.”

John loved to explore with Ruth, his wife. Together, they identified

many different turtles—maps, painteds, snapping, and Blanding’s. They explored gar habitats. They watched incredible birds, including bald eagles, hooded mergansers, coots, trumpeter swans, and kingfishers. “My love of the river came from John’s adventurous spirit,” Ruth shared.

John was a do-er and a person of service. He served on HRWC’s board for 12 years and was constantly teaching others about the value of our wild spaces with his infectious love of nature. This is what the John Langs River Fund represents. We are grateful to those who continue to support this fund in the spirit of John Langs, The Riverman. He would be thrilled to know that we will continue to take good care of our fresh water and wild habitats for generations.

—Wendy Palms



The John Langs Fund continues John’s legacy of river protection. credit: R. Langs

Members Make Our Work Possible

Sustaining members help HRWC go paperless!



Today your membership is more important than ever. It’s a valuable source of funding for our programs and a celebration among friends who care about clean water. Maintaining a healthy river is not a one-time event, but ongoing work.

Membership gifts benefit all watershed residents—human, animal, and plants. Over the years, membership dollars have supported our work with state and local officials to address PFAS contamination in the river, educate the community about the health risks of PFAS, and establish drinking water standards for these toxic chemicals. Members make this work possible now and for years to come.

Maximize your impact by going paperless! Sign up online as a sustaining member. It’s quick and easy and helps us reduce paper reminders. You can become a sustaining member with monthly, quarterly, or yearly contributions. Head to HRWC.org/membership to sign up or call Allie Schneider at (734) 519-0331.

—Allie Schneider



The Bald Eagle *continued from cover*



An eagle soars over Maple Road near Wagner, never far from the Huron River.
credit: J. Lloyd

are very social birds, but not always in the way you would expect; they are notoriously aggressive food thieves, regularly stealing food from other eagles, osprey, and even otters!

Even though bald eagles are very well-known and recognizable, they can sometimes be confused with other birds (particularly at their juvenile stage) such as the golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), which does not nest in Michigan but is of similar size and coloring and is often sighted during migratory seasons. The other is the turkey vulture (*Cathartes aura*), a scavenger with a distinctively wide wingspan that is a common sight in Southeast Michigan.

It might surprise some folks to learn that, like the turkey vulture, the bald eagle is also a scavenger. Here in Michigan, you will find bald eagles hunting near rivers and lakes, but I have seen just as many eagles (especially juveniles in the lower peninsula) cleaning up roadkill along our highways. It is common to see turkey vultures and crows waiting for opportunities to pluck scraps once an eagle has gotten its fill. These fellow

scavengers are wise to wait, because the force of a bald eagle's grip can exceed 300-400 pounds per square inch, more than four times that of a strong human hand! People tend to concern themselves with animals biting them, but I often remind folks that the feet are the "business end" when it comes to raptors.

Bald eagles: back from the brink!

In the 1960s, it was discovered that a popular insecticide called DDT had devastating impacts on many populations of wildlife. For eagles, their consumption of fish contaminated with DDT was causing the birds to lay eggs with shells that were abnormally thin. When adult birds would sit on their nests, they would crush their own eggs. This caused bald eagle populations to plummet. At one point, there were only around 400 nesting pairs in the lower 48 states. However, thanks to legislation that banned the use of DDT and protections afforded to bald eagles by the Endangered

Species Act, the species has made a spectacular recovery. Today, we have an estimated 800 nesting pairs in Michigan alone!

The rebound of bald eagles is undoubtedly one of our greatest success stories in conservation and helps highlight that when we work together to change our behaviors, we can protect wildlife. However, there are still challenges facing bald eagle populations today, including the continued use of lead ammunition in upland game hunting. As frequent scavengers, eagles can consume the lead shot in animal carcasses left behind by hunters, and it only takes a small amount of lead to kill an eagle or another scavenger. Given such concerns, it is extremely important to take note that we protect the bald eagle and many other species by protecting their habitats. By protecting habitats from pollutants and fragmentation, we also protect a long list of wildlife that may not necessarily be on an endangered species list.

Today, we are fortunate to have the opportunity to see these amazing hunters of the sky in the wild. I see bald eagles hunting along the Huron River regularly and encourage you to keep an eye out for them. Remember, never look for birds while driving, and if you're going for a swim, perhaps consider not carrying a fish on your belly like an otter!

—David Clipner

*Director of Education & Wildlife
Leslie Science and Nature Center
Ann Arbor Hands-On Museum*

Stop Loving Our Lakes to Death *continued from cover*

Invasive aquatic plants

Consider the management of aquatic plants, one of the dominant lake management problems for Michigan lake riparians. Rooted aquatic plants are a natural and essential part of a lake, just as grasses, shrubs and trees are a natural part of the land. However, sometimes a lake is invaded by an aquatic plant species that is not native to the region. Some of these exotic invasives, like Eurasian milfoil

and starry stonewort (a macroalgae), can be extremely disruptive to the lake's ecosystem and recreational activities. These invasive plants can "take over" a lake by crowding out beneficial native species, and they can negatively affect fish populations and human recreation. Lakes with extensive invasive plant coverage are not enjoyable for boating or swimming, as they get tangled in motors and legs. Studies have shown

that invasive plants in lakes can reduce property values by about 13%.^{1,2} Starry stonewort forms a thick mat that makes a barrier on the bottom of the lake, preventing or reducing fishes' ability to create spawning nests. Fish are forced to go to suboptimal locations to spawn, diminishing their reproductive effectiveness and opening predation

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Stop Loving Our Lakes to Death *continued from previous page*

opportunities on themselves or their eggs/young.³

An ounce of prevention

Many lake communities use herbicide treatments to control the quantity of invasive plants on their lake, yet these are not simple management decisions to make, as treatments are costly and often need to be repeated annually since the roots of the plants are not affected. The use of herbicides is often contentious and can turn neighbors against each other. Mechanical harvesting is costly as well. The process is slow and labor intensive, and as some plants spread by fragmentation, harvesting can make an infestation of invasive plants worse in the long term.

The best management technique for dealing with invasive plants is to never get infested in the first place. This is where monitoring comes in, and a concept called Early Detection and Rapid Response. Lakes need to be monitored for exotic invasive plants so that they can be identified when their populations are still very small, and then most quickly and cheaply eliminated with targeted removal. Often, invasive plants first show up at a lake's public boat ramp after they are transferred from another body of water. Watching public access points for these plants could have huge benefits in the long run. Preventing the spread of invasive plants could save lake residents hundreds of thousands of dollars in herbicide costs. Volunteer monitors are key to this process. Continually monitoring and treating the invasive

plants as they first pop up is time consuming and requires persistence and dedication, but it can keep the invasive populations at low, manageable levels. The alternative is to wait until the invasives expand to cover large areas of the lake, after which control will be very expensive.

As seen in the prior example, the first step to good lake management is good lake monitoring. Monitoring gives an understanding of lake ecosystem dynamics and information that guides people to make sound lake-management decisions.⁴ Monitoring a lake can involve considering its temperature (throughout the water column) and tracking color, transparency, dissolved oxygen levels, nutrient levels, plants, fish, and habitat both in the water and along the lakeshore. Every lake is unique. It is subject to different factors, both human-induced, like lakeshore development and upland pollution, and natural factors, like water sourcing, geology, and riparian habitat.

Lake management resources

The Cooperative Lakes Monitoring Program (CLMP) is a statewide monitoring program that has been operational since 1974. HRWC has helped run it since 2004 as a part of a core team of university, government, and non-profit scientists. The CLMP relies on the efforts of volunteers, most of whom are lakeshore property owners or residents. Program leaders provide equipment and training, and volunteers conduct the needed monitoring on their lake throughout

the late spring and summer.

Volunteers can "opt in" to monitor an entire ecosystem, or select certain ecological parameters to measure such as water transparency, phosphorus, chlorophyll, dissolved oxygen and temperature, lakeshore habitat, and aquatic invasive plants. Some volunteers even elect to conduct full aquatic plant surveys. It's the volunteers' choice, and the job can be as simple as taking measurements a couple of times a month from May through September, or a highly intensive survey taking tens of hours during the summer season.

If you live on or have regular access to a lake that you worry is being "loved to death," consider volunteering your time to be a CLMP lake monitor and give back to the lake that you love so much! It needs your help. The more information that you can collect on your lake, the more informed your community's lake management decisions will be and thus the more effective.

As you volunteer, you will learn other ways to be a good lake steward, such as the impact of fertilizers on lake water quality and the value of a natural shoreline to all the lake's inhabitants. You will gain confidence in and understanding of lake science, and learn how to share your new-found knowledge with your neighbors. So, what are you waiting for? Sign up to be a lake monitoring volunteer now! Sign up at: micorps.net/lake-monitoring/become-a-volunteer/

—Paul Steen



Bruce Lichliter, a volunteer on Big Glen Lake, collects a chlorophyll-a sample. credit: MiCorps

References

¹Liao, F.H.; Wilhelm, F.M.; Solomon, M. The Effects of Ambient Water Quality and Eurasian Watermilfoil on Lakefront Property Values in the Coeur d'Alene Area of Northern Idaho, USA. *Sustainability* 2016, 8, 44. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su8010044>

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³ Pullman, G.D, and Crawford, G. 2010. A Decade of Starry Stonewort in Michigan. *Lakeline*. <https://www.nalms.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/30-2-9.pdf>

⁴USGS, <https://www.usgs.gov/centers/upper-midwest-water-science-center/science/lake-monitoring-and-research>

The Huron River Watershed

MISSION

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

5-YEAR VISION

In 2027, the Huron River Watershed Council will have built on its existing strengths in watershed science and education by deepening connections with watershed communities, advocating for equitable policies, implementing programs that advance communities' visions for the Huron River, and protecting the river's ecological health through aggressively addressing the most pressing threats.

CORE VALUES

- Act with Integrity
- Foster Community and Collaboration
- Continuously Learn, Grow, and Innovate
- Inspire Environmental Leadership
- Advocate for Healthy Ecosystems and Communities
- Promote Equity, Inclusion, and Environmental Justice

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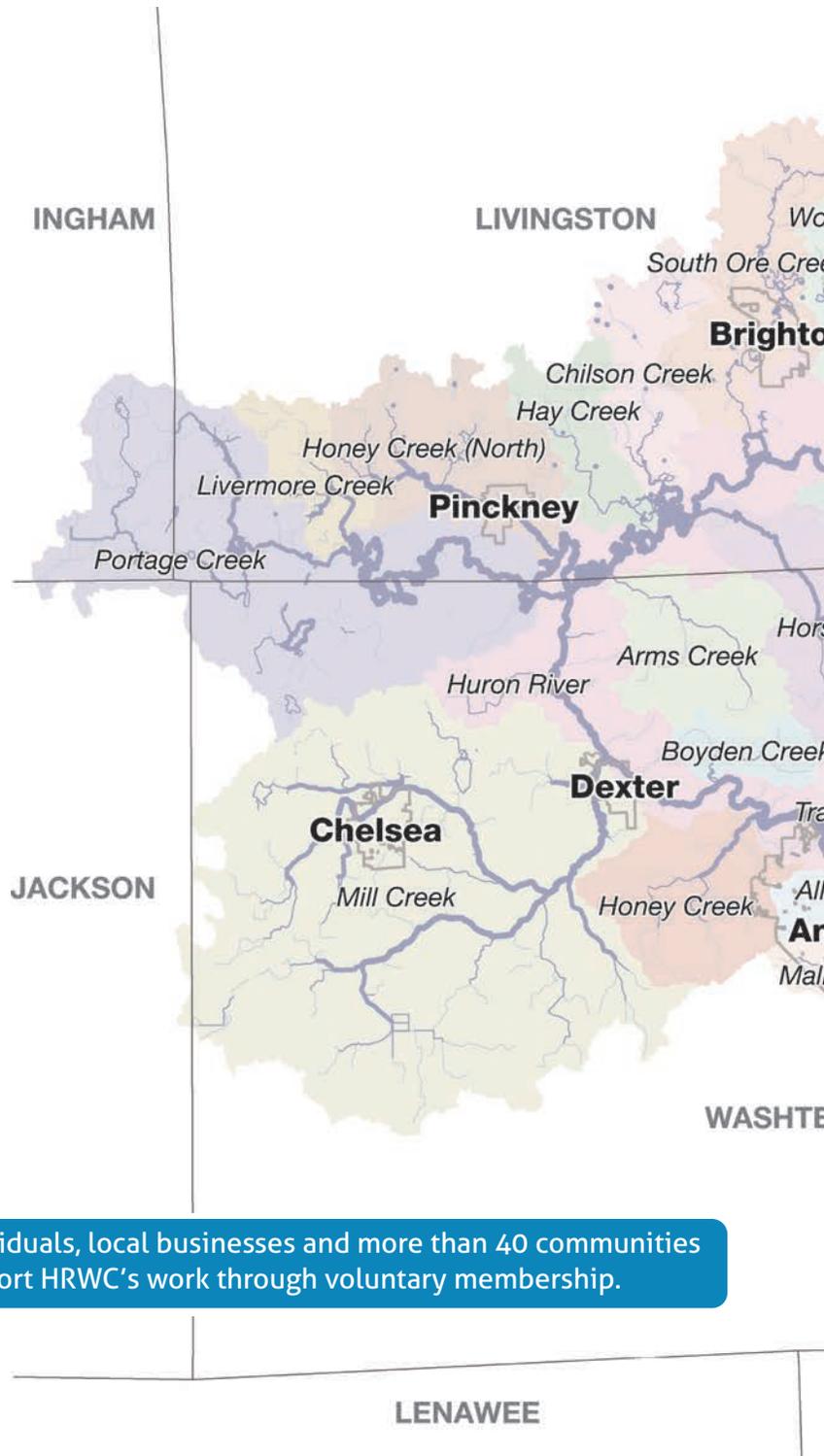
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*Community-designated alternate representative

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

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





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HRWC.org



calendar
of events

HRWC Events and Workshops

MARCH • APRIL • MAY • 2022

Virtual Master Rain Gardener Training Program

Thursdays, March 3 – April 7 (5 weeks), 10am–noon; register by February 28

Cost: \$145 (scholarships available)

This winter, design your own home rain garden with support from Michigan's top rain garden design educators! This weekly virtual course includes one-on-one feedback from expert instructors, small group breakout Q&A community building sessions, as well as inspiring in-person rain garden tours across southeastern Michigan.

Hosting partners: Clinton River Watershed Council, Friends of the Detroit River, Friends of the Rouge, Huron River Watershed Council, River Raisin Watershed Council, Washtenaw County Water Resources Commissioner

Sponsors: Pure Oakland Water, Washtenaw County Water Resources Commissioner.

Register by February 28: therouge.org/mrg

Virtual Chemistry and Flow Monitoring Orientation

Saturday, March 19, 1–2pm

Help measure the quality of local rivers and streams this spring and summer! Collect water samples AND measure stream flow in Washtenaw and Wayne counties. Commitment is two to four hours per month, April through September, depending on availability and interest. We have a strong need for volunteers to work downriver. Additional hands-on training will occur in the field during the first week of sampling. Learn more at HRWC.org/chemflow

Registration required: HRWC.org/volunteer/chemflow

Washtenaw Home, Garden & Lifestyle Show

March 19 and 20, Saturday 9am–6pm, Sunday 10am–5pm

Farm Council Grounds, 5055 Ann Arbor Saline Road, Ann Arbor

Stop by Booth C51 to ask the experts about native plants, rain gardens and natural shorelines! Staff from HRWC and the Washtenaw County Water Resources Commissioner's Office will be on site to share some "deep-rooted" tips and resources on rain garden site and plant selection, layout, installation, and maintenance. You can take home some native plant seeds. FREE tickets available.

Contact: plabadie@hrwc.org, (734) 519-0342

HRWC Executive Committee Meeting

Thursday, March 24, 5:30pm

Contact: resselman@hrwc.org, (734) 519-0326

HRWC Board Meeting

Thursday, April 21, 5:30pm

Contact: resselman@hrwc.org, (734) 519-0326

River Roundup

Saturday, April 23, NEW Center and throughout the watershed

Watch for an email! While we are hoping that our spring bug hunt will be open to the public, COVID-19 precautions may require this event to be invitation only in order to limit the number of attendees interacting in person. In that case, we will only ask experienced volunteers to join us. New volunteers, please continue to sign up for email announcements so that we can invite you to join this and future events if/when it is safe to do so!

New volunteer signup: HRWC.org/volunteer/sign-up/

Huron River Day

Sunday, May 15, noon–4pm, Gallup Park, 3000 Fuller Road, Ann Arbor

Discount canoe and kayak rentals, children's activities, live animal programs, river exhibits, music, food, fishing, and fun! Ride your bike to the event and receive a coupon for a free boat rental. Sponsored by DTE Energy Foundation.

Details: a2gov.org/hrd

River Givers Gathering and Annual Stewardship Awards

Sunday, May 22, 1–3pm, Ypsilanti Freight House

A celebration of you, the volunteers and donors who work to protect the Huron River, and all that we accomplish together. Join us for live music, science, door prizes and fun for all ages. Free!

Contact: aschneider@hrwc.org, (734) 519-0331

#huronriver



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Digital Data Collection

Upgrading our monitoring programs

When the pandemic hit just prior to the launch of the 2020 field season, HRWC staff scrambled to find ways to advance monitoring programs while maintaining safety amidst COVID-19 uncertainties. Staff explored new methods that enabled volunteers and staff to use smartphones to digitally collect data, replacing the decades-old practice of using paper and shared clipboards, and thus minimizing person-to-person interactions and equipment exchanges.

Following research on different tools, ArcGIS Survey123, a geospatial data collection tool, was selected for testing by staff and volunteer field interns during the summer's streambank erosion assessments. Given HRWC's prior use of ArcGIS products, Survey123 was adopted at no added cost to the organization and integrated seamlessly into existing maps and geolocated data.

During the testing phase, staff found that the new digital data collection forms improved the efficiency and accuracy of HRWC's data collection and analysis. The transition to digital data forms sped up data processing time, minimized data processing errors, improved the accuracy of geolocated field data, and reduced paper use. Plus, as it was designed for crowd-sourced data collection, the smartphone interface was easy for volunteers and interns to use.

The success of the 2020 digital data collection testing inspired staff

During the 2021 field season, we achieved the following:

- **4 HRWC monitoring programs digitized their data collection process!**
- **168 hours of manual data entry saved!**
- **453 multipart data records collected digitally in the field!**

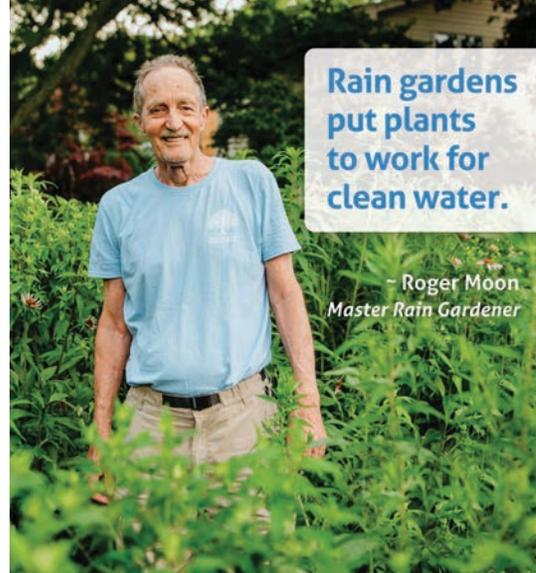
to expand the implementation of digital forms in 2021. In addition to the Streambank Erosion Assessments, HRWC adopted digital data forms for its Chemistry and Flow Monitoring, Natural Areas Assessment, and Green Stormwater Infrastructure Assessment programs. To support the transition to Survey123, monitoring staff developed training videos to educate volunteers and interns on the new procedures.

Throughout the transition to digital data collection, HRWC has prioritized volunteer feedback on the new system. Across programs, HRWC volunteers and interns responded positively to the changes, stating that digital forms are easy to use and efficient. Volunteers also provided valuable feedback on monitoring protocols, trainings, and digital form design which has been used to improve procedures for the 2022 field season. As HRWC continues to utilize digital data collection for four monitoring programs, the identification of additional programs to transition to these new technologies continues to be a priority.

—Andrea Paine



Volunteers Robert Ayotte and Sally Rutzky use Survey123 to collect data for the Natural Areas Assessment Program. credit: K. Smith



Rain gardens put plants to work for clean water.

— Roger Moon
Master Rain Gardener

Rain gardens allow up to 30% more water to soak into the ground than conventional turf grass lawns. They can absorb so much water that you can direct downspouts and diverters from surfaces like rooftops and sidewalks straight into a rain garden, thus preventing polluted water from reaching nearby stormdrains.



Plan your rain garden this spring!
Enroll in virtual master rain gardener training—see HRWC Events and Workshops, page 8.

Learn more! Head to **HRWC.org/landscaping** for more rain garden benefits, tips and helpful resources, including a downloadable info sheet on native plants.



Making Behavior Change Durable

Neighborhoods gear up to catch plastic, one household at a time

A few years ago, when microplastics in our waterways hit the news, HRWC gave away 400 Cora Balls, which are laundry devices designed to catch microplastic fibers in washing machines. It was clear that our community was interested in learning more about keeping microplastics out of the Huron River. However, we did not know what specific actions people would be most interested in trying and if those actions were durable.

Upon investigation, we did not see any behavior change studies around the country regarding actions that people can take to 'catch the plastic' in laundry rooms. Thankfully, HRWC received a behavior change research grant from the Erb Family Foundation, allowing us to research which actions people are most likely to take to reduce or capture plastic microfibers in the laundry cycle, and what barriers might prevent them from taking action. HRWC provided participants from two neighborhoods with tools that removed barriers to specific actions. HRWC is using this research to determine how plausible these actions are on a wider scale, and we will design messaging based on participants' feedback.

Choosing actions, making them easy to adopt

There are many sources of microplastic pollution. The U.S. Geological Survey did a study in 2015 of the Great Lakes, which included

the Huron River, and found that the number one source of microplastic pollution comes from microfibers. By addressing plastic fibers for our behavior change project, we focused on the biggest component of microplastic pollution in our watershed.

There are several ways we can all reduce microplastic fibers from entering our waterways. For this project, we interviewed program staff at other organizations and conducted four virtual focus groups in October of 2020 to find out which actions participants were most likely to take. We found that most were drawn to using Cora Balls, installing filters on their washing machines, and buying clothing made with natural fibers.

Working with Action Research, a leading community-based social marketing consulting group, we selected 708 households from two neighborhoods in Ann Arbor and went door to door to find out if the neighbors were interested in getting a free Cora Ball, a Shopper's Guide to buying clothes made with natural fibers, and/or a free washing machine filter with installation. Overall, the 174 households that responded to the survey were interested in the microplastic fiber issue and what they could do to reduce their impact. Of those, 147 requested a Cora Ball, 76 stated they would be interested in a filter if it were free or at low cost, and an additional 45 stated they would be interested in a filter only if it were



Evelyn and Rosalia, HRWC interns, conducting neighborhood surveys, summer 2021. In response, 147 Cora Balls were delivered as requested! credit: HRWC

free. To make it easy for households to take action, we delivered the Cora Balls, had 22 Filtrol filters installed by a professional contractor (at no cost to the household), and gave 160 Shopper's Guides to the neighbors who expressed interest.

Feedback and results

Last November and December we surveyed those who received the Cora Balls, Shopper's Guides, and filters to find out if they found them useful; if they were, or were not, easy to use; and if they shared information about the tools with others, such as

continued on next page



Leave No Trace

Through the Erb Family Foundation behavior change grant, HRWC engaged the nationally recognized Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics (LNT) to conduct surveys regarding the Huron River Water Trail use and to assess the entire length of the trail. The information we learned through the study will help us improve stewardship of the water trail and lower visitation impacts on the health of the river system.

Overall, LNT found the water trail to be in excellent condition but noted opportunities to improve stewardship communications. Their findings will guide HRWC's management of the trail in years to come and inform collaborative efforts with water trail partners. For more information about the study, contact dbrown@hrwc.org.



Making Behavior Change Durable *continued from previous page*

friends and family. Most of the Cora Ball recipients are using the devices, and more than half are seeing debris collected from the wash cycles. Seventy five percent say they are easy to use, and more than half talked to friends and family about it, with 75% of them recommending the product. On a scale of one to ten, the Shopper's Guide received a 7.2 rating for usefulness among Cora Ball recipients, and a lower rating from filter recipients because they already knew the information, already purchase natural fibers, or will continue to purchase synthetics such as fleece and athletic wear. Those who got filters had incredibly positive feedback. They said the filters are easy to use, they saw results after just a few washes, and many have recommended the filters to friends and family.

Next steps

The behavior change grant provided valuable funding for community-based social market research that is uncommon among smaller nonprofits like HRWC. By investing time and resources in behavior research at a community level, our outreach can lead to more actions that protect the watershed and each other.

This project taught us valuable lessons. Residents stated they believed a lot of people would be interested in using a Cora Ball or installing a washing machine filter. They also recognize that many people are not aware that microplastics are a problem and that there are simple actions that can help. We need to keep educating people about microplastic pollution in our waterways. Providing laundry devices to households exposed participants

to straightforward, effective solutions, and most participants were willing to share this information with others—which is key for these solutions to catch-on at a broader scale.

We now have strong recommendations for specific ways to get the word out about how to reduce microplastic pollution from synthetic fibers using the tools we tested. To check out the report and learn more about how you can catch the plastic, go to HRWC.org/microplastics.



—Anita Daley

Volunteer Spotlight • Matt Lafleur



credit: G. Hieber



credit: M. Lafleur

Matt Lafleur has deep roots to the river! HRWC's brand new board chair is a husband, father, fisherman, hunter, kayaker, forager, gardener, beekeeper, and lifelong resident of the watershed. Matt was raised in South Rockwood, where he and his wife Becky also raised their own sons. Recently retired, Matt was the Senior Airfield Operations Manager at Detroit Metro Airport, managing animal habitat, wetlands, and environmental quality monitoring.

Joining the HRWC board in 2011, Matt reflected at the time, "I want the local community to take ownership of the resources in Southeast Michigan and understand that they can make a difference in the health of the river and the environment." He certainly embodies this sentiment in many ways; Matt brought his kids to HRWC's benthic monitoring events, is a Water Trail Ambassador, and serves on the Suds Host Committee. He also shares his connection to nature with local gardening and fishing clubs and helps HRWC coordinate river cleanups.

Matt became board chair in 2021. He hopes to grow HRWC's impact, noting, "Education is our most important work." Matt is passionate about getting outdoors with kids—he loves getting his hands dirty, hunting for frogs and snakes and teaching children about growing their own food. Matt invites you to join him in spreading HRWC's impact in your community, getting to know all areas of the river, and says, "Visit the downriver section of the watershed for a beautiful paddle from Lower Huron or Willow Metropark, or experience the fun of fishing for steelhead, small mouth bass, or walleye."

—Wendy Palms & Jason Frenzel



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Photo: Dan Johnston Photography

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