



# Huron River Report

Published by the Huron River Watershed Council

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feature story

## Invasive, Non-Native, or Naturalized?

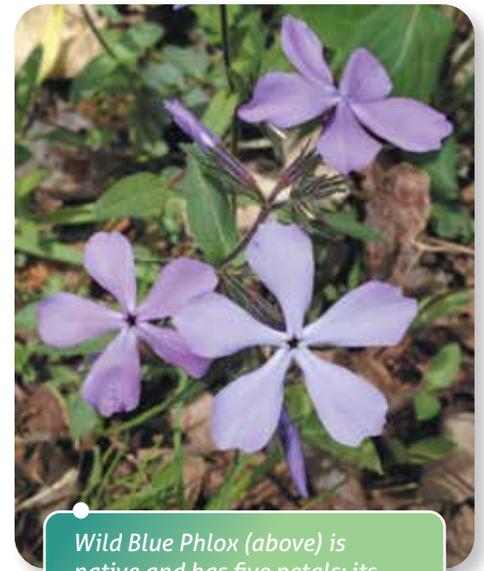
### How we characterize non-native plants and why it matters

As the spring days grow longer and the sun chases away the winter chill, our fields, woodlots, lawns, and gardens come alive with bursting buds, greening trees, and emerging bulbs. We may take a walk in the woods to catch our first glimpse of spring wildflowers. While we're out, we notice shrubby Honeysuckles (*Lonicera* spp.), with their bright green, pointed leaves, emerging in droves throughout the understory. Wandering through our neighborhoods, we look forward to warmer days when our neighbor's house is obscured by the tiny, densely packed leaves of the Privet hedge (*Ligustrum vulgare*). In the back garden, we spot snowy white Lily of the Valley (*Convallaria majalis*) and bright purple Crocuses (*Crocus* spp.) working their way through last season's detritus, and we rejoice that

spring has finally sprung.

While all these plants are common sights in Southeast Michigan and welcome signs of spring's rebirth, none of them are native to the state, or even to the North American continent. But if they are not native, does that mean these plants, common in our woodlots, parks, neighborhoods, and gardens, are bad for the local environment? The answer is – it depends.

In ecology, the "10% rule" postulates that of all species introduced to a region outside of their native range, only 10% will survive to reproduce in their adopted environment. This 10% of non-native survivors are often called "naturalized" plants. Of that 10%, another 10% (or 1% of the original non-native transplants) may thrive



Wild Blue Phlox (above) is native and has five petals; its doppelgänger, Dames Rocket, is invasive and has just four petals per flower. credit: B. Gajewski

continued on page 4

## Land Protection and Climate Millages

### Voters choose conservation and climate action

On November 4 residents in four watershed communities took bold steps to boost climate resiliency and protect clean water. Voters in Scio, Northfield, and Dexter townships approved property tax millages to fund land protection, while Ann Arbor voters approved a millage to fund A<sup>2</sup>ZERO, its "Carbon Neutrality Plan." HRWC endorsed and provided support

to all of these millage campaigns.

#### Protecting forests, wetlands, prairies, and farmland

Scio Township renewed their current land protection program again, originally approved by voters in 2004 and first renewed in 2012. Northfield and Dexter townships join existing programs in Ann Arbor, Webster, and

Scio townships, the City of Ann Arbor, and Washtenaw County. Together, with support from HRWC's Natural Areas Assessment and Protection Program (NAAP), these programs have protected over 20,000 acres of forests, wetlands, prairies, and farmland in the watershed over the

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INSIDE: UPCOMING EVENTS AND WORKSHOPS 2023 HRWC Stewardship Awards!  
New rain garden partnerships elevate green infrastructure | HRWC celebrates success and new home





# Rebecca's Stream of Consciousness

**R**ecent events have ignited HRWC's motivation to advocate for a robust environmental policy agenda. Assaults to the health of the river from PFAS, hexavalent chromium and 1,4-dioxane show troubling limitations in the state's ability to protect our waterways under current regulations and enforcement policies. A key federal Supreme Court case —Sackett vs. EPA—has the potential to dramatically weaken the Clean Water Act. Approximately half of Michigan's stream miles have failed to meet water quality standards for E. coli, including in the Huron River watershed. We need to address this bacteria from storm sewer and septic system sources. Our aging water infrastructure such as dams, stormwater and wastewater systems needs to be addressed. Each of these threats requires policy solutions.

Two additional drivers of our emerging policy agenda are our new strategic plan and recent election outcomes. We are committed to making HRWC a policy resource for local governments and enact river-friendly policies at the state level. HRWC will continue our work with local governments. You will see an added emphasis on state-level advocacy to ensure that the Huron watershed, and watersheds throughout the state, have the policies in place to achieve our mission.

For the first time in more than 40 years, Michigan has a progressive majority in the State House and Senate. While we have not yet seen the new state legislature or the Governor's office announce their environmental agenda, we are optimistic. Clean water is a nearly universal and nonpartisan concern among voters; we have a unique opportunity to develop new, remove harmful, and fortify existing legislation that prioritizes a healthy environment and clean water.

## Here are HRWC's top five state-level policy and regulatory priorities for 2023:

- **Contaminant prevention and clean up (also known as "polluter pay" laws)** – HRWC wants stronger incentives for prevention and requirements for cleaning up releases of toxic chemicals to our environment. Further, regulatory agencies need strengthened authority to implement these laws; including additional funding, stronger mandates, support to deny high-risk permits, and the ability to levy higher penalties associated with violations.
- **Stormwater Utilities** – Michigan's water infrastructure is in disrepair and is unable to handle the more extreme events climate change is causing. There is a huge gap between the infrastructure needs of our stormwater systems and the funding available to make those investments. Stormwater utilities are an excellent way to close the funding gap and build a resilient system that protects people, property, and natural resources from the impacts of stormwater.
- **Septic Systems** – Michigan is one of few states that does not have a statewide septic code to ensure that private septic systems are inspected and maintained. As a result, aging septic systems contribute to both nutrient and bacterial contamination of our surface and groundwater.
- **Land protection** – To maintain both a hospitable climate and a healthy river system, we must maintain as much of our remaining natural lands as possible. There are multiple state-level policy actions that would support this; including, easing access to Natural Resources Trust



Fund and State Revolving Loan Fund monies for land protection, adopting statewide setbacks that limit development adjacent to waterways, and adopting ambitious global initiatives like 30 by 30 that aims to protect 30% of the planet from development by 2030.

- **Dam removal and flow management** – Most dams are relics of a past use and are beyond their intended lifespan. By removing these obsolete obstructions, we restore our flowing ecosystems while eliminating both the financial liabilities for dam owners and the safety hazards dams pose to communities. We also need stronger language in Michigan's Lake Level Control Act to allow dam operators more flexibility to manage flow to reduce flood risk and impacts of drought.

State policy can either help or hinder our ability to protect the Huron River. Now is the time to make the changes that will protect our environment for years to come. HRWC is ready to take on this work with our fellow watershed groups, other environmental organizations, our elected officials, and you. Let's get it done!

— Rebecca Esselman  
HRWC Executive Director  
 @natureiswater



# 2023 HRWC Stewardship Awards



credit: G. Hieber

*Celebrating passion and advocacy for the river and our community!*



## Hall of Fame

**Cheryl Saam**

Cheryl Saam is the former recreation supervisor for the City of Ann Arbor Argo and Gallup Parks Canoe Liveries, a role she held for 21 years until her retirement in early January. Under Cheryl's watch, Ann Arbor has long been the largest and busiest livery operation in Michigan, growing from 70 boats when she started to today's fleet of 550 canoes and kayaks with even more stand-up paddle boards and tubes. Her vision has always been to "just get people outdoors, enjoying nature with friends and family." One of Cheryl's biggest challenges was updating an almost unusable and unsafe livery building at Argo. She was also instrumental in the removal of an obsolete concrete structure across the river near the Arboretum that created a dangerous portage.

Cheryl's vision and expertise were a key component in the development of the Huron River Water Trail, and she has ensured steady recreation support for HRWC programs over the years. Cheryl led the planning of an annual family-friendly Huron River Day festival; created river-focused programs that engage more than 500 kids and adults each summer; and she hired, trained, and supervised 120 student workers every season. Thanks to Cheryl, Ann Arbor boasts two universal access docks and many adaptive paddling programs.

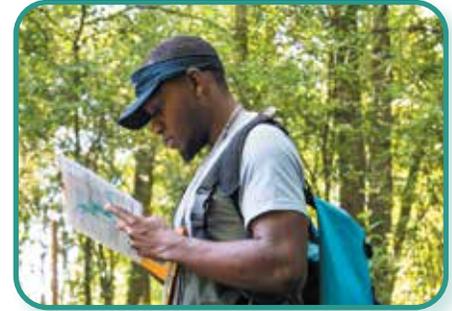


## Volunteer of the Year

**Belinda Friis**

Whether Belinda Friis is engaged in a friendly fishing rivalry on the Huron River or advising HRWC's Board or Finance Committee, she's been sharing her time and talents with HRWC for 10 years.

In early 2013, Belinda was looking for a new adventure. On a crisp day in January, she found HRWC's stonefly search. She says spending time outside on a beautiful snowy day while looking for bugs that help HRWC understand the health of the river was deeply satisfying. "I had the perfect day, and I was helping to keep the river clean. When West Bloomfield Township asked me to join HRWC's board, it was easy to say yes." We are lucky she did! Cheers to Belinda Friis, HRWC Volunteer of the Year.



## Trailblazer Award

**Kyle Martin**

Kyle Martin worked with HRWC in the summer of 2022 as a field intern and STEM Education volunteer, helping to launch HRWC's inaugural summer education program with the Parkridge Community Center in Ypsilanti. Kyle took on a leading role teaching second and third grade students about the Huron River, water quality monitoring, and the joy of exploring outdoor spaces in their local community.

A native of Ypsilanti, Kyle is currently pursuing a bachelor's degree in environmental science at Eastern Michigan University where he is also a captain of the track and field program and a founding member of EMU's Sierra Club. After graduation, Kyle plans to pursue a master's degree and eventually a PhD in wildlife conservation.

## Make a Gift for Ages to Come

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



**Huron River Watershed Council**





## Invasive, Non-Native, or Naturalized? *continued from cover*

to such an extent that they dominant their new home, out competing their native neighbors. These prolific competitors are known as invasive species.

Scientists define invasive species as plants or animals that harm regional ecosystems. While only a small percentage of non-native species go on to become invasive, invasive species can cause irreparable harm to local ecosystems by out competing their native counterparts due to an absence of natural predators or competition for resources. Invasive species can disrupt local ecologies, inhibiting natural succession and breaking down food webs. They can damage regional economies by impacting crop yields and fouling waterbodies; and they have acute impacts on cultural and spiritual connections to regional landscapes, particularly for indigenous peoples.

### Regional impacts

The Great Lakes Region has suffered from numerous invasions of non-native species, imported by humans either intentionally or by accident. Plants like Honeysuckle, Privet, and Autumn Olive are intentionally planted for landscaping and to provide feed for wildlife, but they are aggressive competitors in forests and shrublands, shading out wildflowers and preventing the growth of tree seedlings. Even the lovely Lily of the Valley (the European variety) is invasive, with persistent and durable rhizomes (stems that grow underground) that proliferate through tough soils and out compete native plants in gardens, forests, and even grassy lawns.

But what about the other non-native species that do not become invasive? The term "naturalized" is used in botany to refer to plants that have successfully established and reproduced in a new environment. Naturalized species can become invasive, but most of them integrate into their new home without inflicting ecological harm (remember the 10% rule). Our friendly neighborhood Crocus is a prime example. Native to Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa, Crocuses are common in Michigan where they are

generally regarded as non-aggressive plants and welcome harbingers of springtime in the Great Lakes.

### It's more than just a name

However, determining whether certain naturalized plants should be characterized as invasive or simply naturalized can be challenging. Many naturalized plants have been established in their "new" range for so long that ecosystems have fundamentally shifted and changed over time; local people develop cultural uses, associations, and connections with these plants as if they were a part of the native ecology; or mistake them for native species all together. Plants like Broadleaf plantain (*Plantago major*), used as medicine by indigenous peoples for generations, was introduced to North America by Europeans centuries ago and has since become commonplace in forests, grasslands, and sidewalk cracks across the continent. Queen Ann's Lace (*Daucus carota*), a standard sight in the fields, pastures, and ditches of Southeast Michigan, could also be considered an established member of the Great Lakes plant community or an invasive weed, depending on who you ask.

In the end, the characterization and management of non-native plants comes down to an understanding of both ecological interactions *and* the inherent relationships we have with the plants themselves. Invasive species do not "invade" on their own; plants are not malicious. Many non-native species arrived in new places with humans who had a connection to the plants of their homeland and wanted to bring them along. Some of these immigrant plants have come to threaten native ecosystems, but many have become ubiquitous parts of our local environments and cultures.

As climate change threatens to upend regional ecosystems, our understanding and definition of non-native plants will be challenged even further. Many species will have to move outside of their native ranges to survive. With this migration comes a shift in ecological composition, competition between species, and local extinction of plants and animals unable to move on their own.

*"Our immigrant plant teachers offer a lot of different models for how not to make themselves welcome on a new continent [such as poisoning and crowding out the plants who came before them]. But Plantain is not like that. Its strategy was to be useful, to fit into small places, to coexist with others around the dooryard, to heal wounds. Plantain is so prevalent, so well integrated, that we think of it as native. It has earned the name bestowed by botanists for plants that have become our own. Plantain is not indigenous but 'naturalized.' This is the same term we use for the foreign-born when they become citizens in our country."*

— Dr. Robin Wall Kimmerer  
*Braiding Sweetgrass*



The humble Plantain is now naturalized.  
credit: © Buccaneer at Dreamstime.com

Understanding the inherent relationships between people and plants can help us become better stewards of the land, from managing our local parks to making complex decisions about how to maintain ecosystems and help species survive in a changing world.

So before filling your yard with interesting looking shrubs, we recommend investigating whether a plant is characterized as invasive, native, or otherwise. Learn something about where your plants came from, the relationships that humans have had with them, and how they might interact with the environment where you want to plant them. So while you are out appreciating the spring wildflowers, take a moment to wonder at their names and how they came to live in Michigan.

—Kate Laramie

For native plant tips and resources, go to [HRWC.org/landscaping](http://HRWC.org/landscaping)  
To help prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species, go to [HRWC.org/TAkeActionCommunity](http://HRWC.org/TAkeActionCommunity)



last 20 years.

These programs use a small portion of household property taxes (typically about \$.50 per \$1,000 of taxable value) to either purchase conservation easements or land outright. A conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement between a landowner and another entity (such as a unit of government or a nonprofit land conservancy) that permanently limits the type and amount of development on their private property in exchange for payment. By entering a conservation easement agreement, landowners retain the rights of ownership they currently enjoy such as living on the property, farming, hunting, fishing, timber harvesting or selling the land. Conservation easements that restrict development rights run in perpetuity with the land and forever protect the conservation values identified in the agreement.

Landowners who want to protect their land apply to the program, then a citizen board evaluates the property based on ecological and/or agricultural criteria determined by the municipality.

HRWC's Natural Areas Assessment and Protection program supports property owners and communities by helping them prioritize natural areas to protect. To do this, we use our Bioreserve Map, which ranks natural areas by ecological importance, paired with data from our field assessments to provide more detailed evaluations of specific properties.

### Land protection and watershed health

Natural area protection is vital to watershed health. 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. This is especially important with erratic weather causing more flooding and other impacts. While residential and commercial development has been a constant threat to these important landscapes, climate change exacerbates that threat, as predictions show the Great Lakes will experience exponential human population



Natural areas like this one will be protected, safeguarding clean water for generations to come. credit: J. Lloyd

growth due to climate refugees fleeing sea level rise, fires, and drought. Climate migration will likely worsen the current housing crisis. These land protection programs, in concert with local government policies that direct growth to areas where people can affordably live, work, learn, and play, will help local governments accommodate new growth while allowing forests, wetlands, and prairies to keep water clean and cool. These natural areas will also help protect surrounding areas from floods and drought while soaking up carbon.

### How to get involved

Dexter, Northfield, and Scio townships are all looking for residents to serve on their land preservation boards. Check out their websites to apply.

If you have 10 acres or more of forest, wetland, prairie, or farmland on your property, consider protecting it in perpetuity. Property owners with a conservation easement maintain ownership and rights to all uses besides development. To learn about the value of the forests, wetlands, or prairies on your land, contact us for a field assessment. Go to [HRWC.org/naturalareas](http://HRWC.org/naturalareas).

Get your community to enact a conservation millage! HRWC's Conservation Millage Toolkit provides all the steps. [HRWC.org/millagetoolkit](http://HRWC.org/millagetoolkit).

### City of Ann Arbor voters pass the climate millage

In 2019 Ann Arbor declared a climate emergency and, soon after, created the City's "Carbon Neutrality Plan," named A<sup>2</sup>ZERO, to achieve community-wide carbon neutrality

by 2030. This is a monumental, ambitious, yet necessary task that requires substantial resources. Thankfully, Ann Arbor voters understood the need and the urgency, approving a millage to fund plan implementation. The millage funds will:

- Move the city toward a zero waste, circular economy
- Advance the use of renewable energy
- Provide services to help low-income residents, including seniors, save money and improve comfort, including a net zero energy program for all affordable housing sites
- Support energy efficiency improvements for residents and businesses
- Advance neighborhood and community preparedness for climate change
- Expand walking paths and bike lanes throughout the city
- Expand EV charging access, especially for renters and multi-family developments
- Support "beneficial electrification" of clean electric appliances and heating/cooling
- Promote mixed use neighborhoods, affordable housing, transit hub proximity, and other strategies that make it possible for people to live where they work, learn, and play

Ann Arbor will serve as a model for other local governments, which must make similar commitments if we are to transition to a clean energy economy in time to avoid the worst climate impacts. Washtenaw County is leading the way with the passage of its own plan, which will be a resource for townships, cities, and villages within the county by providing guidance on policies and planning and by bringing communities together to combine efforts for greater effect.

Get your community involved in climate action! Check out HRWC's Change Makers program to learn how to get involved with your local government. Find more information at [HRWC.org/changemakers](http://HRWC.org/changemakers).

—Kris Olsson

The **HURON RIVER WATERSHED COUNCIL** protects and restores the river for healthy and vibrant communities. Our work in science, technical advising and public education is supported by volunteers, individual members, local businesses, and more than 40 communities across Southeast Michigan.

The **HURON RIVER WATERSHED** covers just over 900 square miles (1448 km) and encompasses all the land, creeks and streams that drain into the Huron River, which then drains into Lake Erie. Creeksheds and other land areas that drain directly to the river are shown on the map.



#### MAP KEY

Creeksheds (22) and land areas that drain to the Huron River appear in different shades at right.

— Watershed Boundary

 Trail Towns of the Huron River Water Trail

— Dams



Huron River Watershed Council

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MONROE COUNTY

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## Board of Directors

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## HRWC Staff



credit: K. Paine

Front row, left to right: Paul, Kate, Marisa, Rebecca, Andrea, Allie, Kris, Anita, Heather. Back row, left to right: Wendy, Jennifer, Pam, Jason, Ric, Daniel, Melina.

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## River Givers Open House

Wednesday, March 8, 4-7pm, 117 North First Street, Suite 100, Ann Arbor

Join us for our annual celebration of everyone who works to protect the Huron River. Drop in for a tour of our new headquarters, meet HRWC staff, and enjoy light refreshments. Get updates on key initiatives like our collaboration to build more rain gardens in the watershed or the Huron River Water Trail. Use a microscope in our river-science lab for a look at the bugs that tell us so much about the river's health or learn about our upcoming study of mussels. Network with volunteers and supporters who love the river and learn how you can get involved. Free!

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

## Change Makers Bootcamp

March 15, Wednesday 6-8pm, via Zoom

Learn how to use the power of your voice to support clean water policies in your local government. Free!

Registration (required): [HRWC.org/changemakers](https://hrwc.org/changemakers)

## Chemistry and Flow Monitoring Orientation

Saturday, March 25, 1-2:30pm, Online

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. We have a strong need for volunteers to work in Wayne County. Commitment is two or more hours per month, April through September, depending on availability and interest. Additional hands-on field training will occur in April.

Details and Registration (required): [HRWC.org/chemflow](https://hrwc.org/chemflow)

Contact: [apaine@hrwc.org](mailto:apaine@hrwc.org), (734) 519-0354

## Washtenaw Home, Garden & Lifestyle Show

March 18-19, Saturday 9am-6pm, Sunday 10am-5pm, Farm Council Grounds, 5055 Ann Arbor Saline Road

Get expert advice and resources on rain gardens and natural shorelines! Staff from HRWC and the Washtenaw County Water Resources Commissioner's Office will be at booth C51 sharing tips and answering questions on site selection, plants, layout, installation, and maintenance. Free tickets available.

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

## HRWC Executive Committee Meeting

Thursday, March 16, 5:30pm, 117 North First Street, Suite 100, Ann Arbor

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

## HRWC Board Meeting

Thursday, April 20, 5:30pm, 117 North First Street, Suite 100, Ann Arbor

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

## River Roundup

Saturday, April 29, starts at 9 or 10:30am and lasts 4-5 hours

Join a small team of your friends, family, and other volunteers to collect bugs from streams across the watershed! Meet your team on site at the first of two sampling locations.

Registration (required): [HRWC.org/roundup](https://hrwc.org/roundup)

## Huron River Day

Sunday, May 21, 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 much more. Ride your bike to the event and receive a coupon for a free boat rental. Sponsored by DTE Energy Foundation.

Details: [A2Gov.org/hrd](https://A2Gov.org/hrd)

## Save the date for this year's Suds on the River!

Thursday, September 7, 2023 at Delhi Metropark

#huronriver



credit: G. Poltoratska



# HRWC Open House

*Inviting the community into our new space*

If you have not caught up with us since we moved, we can't wait to show you our new Headquarters for the Huron!

As we continue to watch the impacts of climate change around the world and in our backyard, we know that protecting the Huron river is more important and more urgent every day. From education to advocacy—HRWC stands ready to meet the challenges that continue to arise. We invite you to join this important fight for clean water, which we are tackling from our new home, the Headquarters for the Huron.

### **A more sustainable footprint**

We believe it is important to invest close to home by working with small businesses and local artists to create a low-impact and inspiring workspace. Located on First Street in Ann Arbor, our new location supports sustainable transportation. Our team members and our partners can walk, bike, or bus to work, decreasing our carbon footprint and creating a more inclusive gathering place. Incorporating construction materials like cork flooring, glass tile, and reclaimed barn wood paneling also speaks to HRWC's values for a sustainable future.

### **An onsite lab for analysis and education**

For the first time in HRWC's 58-year history, you can learn about water science in an onsite lab! With a microscopic view of bugs and water samples from the Huron, we are able to mentor anyone who is curious about the river and the environment, ensuring that we will have biologists, chemists, and water warriors who are dedicated to a healthy river for decades to come.

### **Help us celebrate!**

HRWC staff and board are grateful for your support as we begin this new chapter. Please join us on Wednesday March 8 at our Open House. We can't wait to show you the new home that you helped us build. See page 8 for event details.

—Wendy Palms

Please join us on March 8 for a tour of our new home!



HRWC hosted a first look for our capital campaign donors last December.

## *Welcome, Heather and Melina!*



In May, HRWC welcomed Heather Hammond to the team. Heather is assisting the organization with general accounting, office, and administrative tasks. She jumped right in to help coordinate our relocation, complete the organization's year-end financial statements, organize board meetings, and meet essential needs to keep the organization running smoothly. Heather brings 10 years of experience in law firm financial management. She has a BA in English and International Studies from Kalamazoo College, and a master's in professional studies for Law Firm Administration from George Washington University.



In October, HRWC welcomed Melina Pakey-Rodriguez to the team. Melina 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. She contributes to HRWC's community engagement program, watershed mapping, and other projects. She has a BS in Environment & Sustainability from Cornell University with a concentration on environmental justice and natural resource management. Melina is new to Ann Arbor but is quickly acclimating. You may be able to see her perform with the Dexter Community Orchestra—she's a viola player!

—Jennifer Kangas



# Rain Gardens Improve the River!

## HRWC partners develop new program

HRWC recently jumped into rain garden development in a big way. While HRWC has promoted the benefits of rain gardens for years, until 2022 we relied on other partners to lead the charge. Now we are working collaboratively with partners on several initiatives to expand rain gardens across the watershed and Southeast Michigan. This is an exciting step for our organization; while each individual garden is small, collectively rain gardens can have a positive impact on the quality of the Huron River.

### A successful history

In 2005, HRWC partnered with the Washtenaw County Water Resources Commissioner's Office to create the first regional program to help residents in the county build rain gardens. Since then, more than 1,000 rain gardens have been installed. These gardens capture and treat an impressive 90-95% of the roof and driveway runoff from rainstorms. Only the most intense storms will overflow these gardens to the stormwater system. The Friends of the Rouge saw this success and developed their own rain garden program, called RainSmart. They have a goal of building 1,000 rain gardens in the Rouge River watershed. Additional partners in the Clinton River and Detroit River watersheds are joining HRWC to expand the number of rain gardens throughout Southeast Michigan.

### A new collaboration

As HRWC worked with various partners to install rain gardens and other Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI), other watershed groups in Southeast Michigan were working on similar efforts. A rain garden partnership was organically growing among Washtenaw County, HRWC, and the Friends of the Rouge. This partnership grew as staff from other Southeast Michigan organizations discussed a shared desire to increase residential rain gardens in their communities. This meeting-of-the-minds resulted in an expansion of the Washtenaw

Community volunteers planting a rain garden that protects Swift Run Creek. credit: HRWC

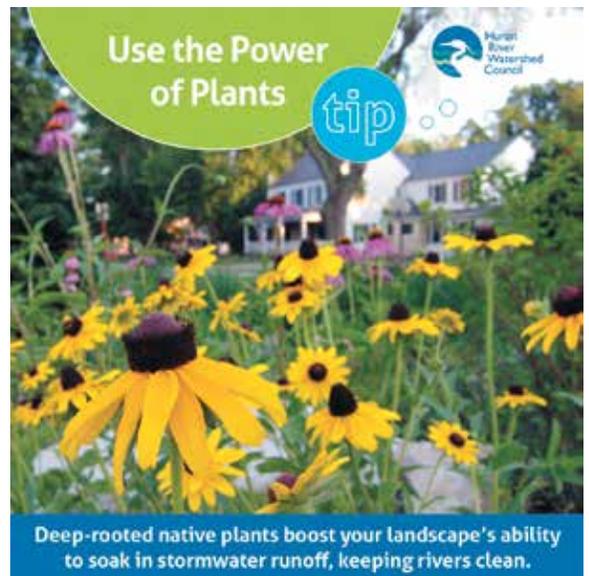


County Master Rain Gardener course beyond the county's border, to be offered online to anyone in Southeast Michigan. Staff from partner organizations helped teach the course and host breakout sessions for residents in their watersheds for one-on-one feedback and support. HRWC staff did onsite assessments and even provided tools and plants to students in our watershed! The live, online course is offered again this year (2023), with in-person tours of rain gardens throughout the region.

In addition to teaching students how to install their own rain gardens, these courses have helped HRWC and partner agencies learn how to best support community members interested in GSI. It is important to be responsive to students and gardeners in areas they identify as most in need of guidance, such as learning basic information about rain gardens, choosing the best site for a garden on their property, garden

design, or finding native plants for sale. The popularity of the rain garden class is encouraging for the Friends of the Rouge, HRWC, Clinton River Watershed Council, Friends of the Detroit River, and the Alliance of Downriver Watersheds as we explore ways to share resources and efforts for growing other GSI strategies

*continued on next page*





## Rain Gardens *continued from previous page*

throughout Southeast Michigan. These watershed groups recently formed an informal collaboration to deliver GSI assessment, design, installation, and maintenance services. The partners compiled a market analysis to evaluate GSI product and service needs and are developing a business plan to sustainably fund the collaboration, which will be implemented over the next few years.

### Michigan provides funds to help

At the end of 2022, HRWC was awarded a grant from the State of Michigan's Nonpoint Source Program to further grow the residential rain garden program beyond Washtenaw County. A priority is working with Washtenaw County staff to build off their highly successful program, focusing on two communities to start. Residents in the cities of Brighton, in Livingston County, and Belleville, in Wayne County, will soon be receiving information about new programming to help them design and install rain gardens on their property. HRWC will be hosting workshops in those communities starting this summer to share the word about rain gardens and encourage participation in local, in-person training courses. HRWC will also provide site assessments, design

advice, and installation assistance along the way to ensure that novice rain gardeners in these areas get the support they need to build a rain garden.

### Planting for deep-rooted partnerships

The biggest threat to the Huron River comes from stormwater runoff. As more land is developed, increasing amounts of runoff from pavement and roofs flow directly into our creeks and waterways. This increased flow carries pollutants and sediments, which damages streambanks and aquatic habitat. The same holds true for other watersheds in the region. Because the solutions to these stormwater runoff issues are the same, it makes sense for watershed groups to work together. By sharing knowledge, resources, and efforts, communities can build GSI more efficiently while learning and working together.

The shared goals for green infrastructure unite us and we look forward to working together to protect our waterways. Stay tuned as our partnership grows.

—Ric Lawson and Anita Daley



## Rain Gardens 101

A rain garden is a sunken garden filled with a mix of deep-rooted native plants and wildflowers designed to collect rain runoff from gutters and hard surfaces around homes and buildings.

Rain gardens are designed to store rainwater for several hours so the water drains slowly into the ground. Most importantly, the runoff skips the gutter and pipe stormwater system and reaches our streams and river via groundwater flow – reducing erosion, filtering pollutants, cooling water temperatures, and preventing stream habitat destruction that occurs when fast-flowing stormwater rushes off impervious surfaces. With increasing storm intensity due to climate change, the added storage and groundwater recharge that rain gardens provide are a critical tool for adaptation and resilience in our built environments.

Because a rain garden uses the power of plants to support our waterways, it is a “Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI)” strategy.

Whether or not you have a rain garden, you can still plant deep-rooted, hearty, beautiful natives! For a chance to look at resources in person, check out the Washtenaw Home, Garden, and Lifestyle show listing on the events page.

Learn more at  
[HRWC.org/landscaping](https://www.hrwc.org/landscaping)

*Clockwise from right: Miller Street rain gardens; planting for a Norton Creek rain garden; DTE Fellow Eric Robinson leads a team for GSI maintenance along Hogback Road. credit: HRWC*





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