



Huron River Report

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feature
story

In Her Own Words *Kris Olsson's Thirty-one-year tenure at HRWC*

Kris Olsson began her work with HRWC in 1993. This year, Kris will retire from the organization after 31 years as one of HRWC's lead ecologists. HRWC won't be the same without her, but she leaves behind a legacy of extraordinary leadership, dedication, and passion for the protection of nature. Kris's tireless efforts have left a lasting mark on our watershed and on our organization. We dedicate this newsletter issue to Kris and her work.

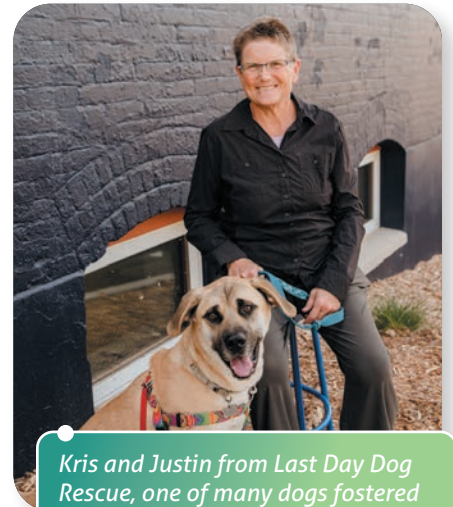
I entered the rickety old building at 415 W. Washington with excitement—the internship announcement seemed like a perfect fit for my interests as well as my newly minted degree in Natural Resources (or, “Environmental Education, Advocacy, and Policy”) from the University of Michigan’s School of Natural Resources. I would be helping HRWC staff (there were three of them in 1993) **advocate** for **policies** to protect groundwater and **educate** residents and businesses about how their drinking water comes from groundwater and how they can help protect it.

Three years later, I became a full-fledged staff member, having

learned 1) the connection between what happens on the land and what happens to the Huron River, 2) the important role the watershed’s 67 local governments play in land use policies, and 3) the need for environment-minded residents to get involved in those local governments.

Over time, I came to realize that the myriad projects I worked on over my 31 years at HRWC have been rooted in those three concepts, with a few addendums (people who know me know I couldn’t limit this to three short statements without caveats and modifications.) I call this the “Unified Theory of Kris at HRWC.”

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Kris and Justin from Last Day Dog Rescue, one of many dogs fostered by Kris. credit: K. Paine

Notes from a Change Maker *Empowering people to influence local decision-making*

HRWC's Change Makers Program empowers community members to become advocates for local policies that protect the environment. The program provides resources, training, and support to individuals interested in running for local office, joining their zoning board, or influencing ordinances that govern land use and development. One such person, Guest Author Kay Stremmer, describes her experience as a Change Maker.

In 2018 I became interested in Webster Township’s land-use policies. I started attending township meetings and was rather overwhelmed by the policies and laws that protect our natural features. So, I jumped at the chance to participate in HRWC’s

Change Makers program led by Kris Olsson. She and co-leader Jason Frenzel gave me many new insights into the connections between woods, wetlands, natural areas, and waterways. They helped me understand how engaged citizens,

such as myself, play a critical role in creating local land use policies.

It seems that everybody knows Kris. Whether at our Township Master Plan visioning session with residents,

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With Gratitude

Four guest authors reflect on working with HRWC's Kris Olsson

• **INSIDE: UPCOMING EVENTS AND WORKSHOPS** Stewardship Awards | What would Kris do?





Rebecca's Stream of Consciousness

I am excited for you to read this edition of the Huron River Report. On the pages that follow, you will learn how one person, with focus, humility and perseverance, can change the world—one watershed at a time. We dedicate this newsletter to Kris Olsson who will retire from HRWC this spring after 31 years of service to our mission. Anyone that knows Kris, knows that she is among the most quietly impactful residents of Washtenaw County. Her decades of work toward a healthy Huron have resulted in real change and enduring programs both within HRWC and beyond.

We asked a few people who have worked with Kris over the years to share how she has created real change, one relationship at a time. Kris has deep roots in our watershed communities. She teaches by doing. She arms people with knowledge that allows them to make informed decisions. She leads from behind, which in my years of working on environmental issues, I've seen to be the most effective. Kris understands that there is power in numbers, and naturally builds the allies and champions in all of us.

It is hard to imagine HRWC without Kris. Her institutional knowledge and broad network are invaluable. Her humor brings levity to our staff meetings. Her willingness to help has brought many new staff members up to speed quickly. Her drive brings focus to our mission. She is our historian, our inspiration and our north star. She will be missed. But Kris's legacy will remain. The foundational programs and initiatives she developed and nurtured over the years will live on. Kris has been working with our growing team to transfer her knowledge and relationships. And in doing so, we are in a great position to provide continuity of service to our local governments, partner organizations and watershed residents that engage with HRWC to protect land, enact

river-friendly policies and become water advocates.

As Kris describes in her own words, her breadth of work at HRWC is united by the overarching goal of protecting the remaining natural lands within our watershed. Land protection and responsible land use planning are essential to protecting water quality and combating Climate Change in our local communities. Many members of our team are poised to carry on this mission.

Kris has been mentor to Kate Laramie, nurturing her interest in the connections between land and water. Kate has worked with Kris for several years, running our natural areas assessment program—learning plant identification, volunteer management and landowner stewardship. Reciprocally, Kate has improved the efficiency of our data collection and report generation with new technology. Together they have evolved this program area to be durable in the face of change. I look forward to seeing it persist under Kate's leadership.

The addition of David Lossing as Government Relations Director increased our capacity to work with local governments. As a former mayor and planning commissioner, David is no stranger to how municipalities work. A grant from the Erb Family Foundation supports the modernization of many of our resources on water-friendly policies. David has been learning from Kris how she engaged with city councils, township boards and planning commissions to ensure that our local governments protect the Huron River. David will carry the baton of policy support to our local governments.

Change Makers creates river champions. It is one of my favorite HRWC programs. The more people that know how to affect change on behalf of the river and natural environment, the more effective we



will be at achieving our mission. Jason Frenzel will continue to run this program along with support from David and others. Andrea Paine leads our community engagement efforts at HRWC and in that role will serve on the team that provides direct support for local governments. Dan Brown will continue to advance HRWC's work on climate change and building climate resilience in the Huron River watershed.

Kris has created a legacy within the organization that will endure long after her retirement. It is the sign of a successful career. I will miss Kris very much and am excited by what the staff at HRWC will do as they carry her work forward in the coming years. There is no replacing someone like Kris so we will not try. Instead, we will honor her by keeping her priorities, our priorities. Because she has it right—rivers are only as healthy as the land in the watershed, and trust-based relationships are the key to getting the work done.

— Rebecca Esselman
HRWC Executive Director



An Unwavering Connection to Nature

Kris Olsson, David Moran establish Watershed Resilience Endowment

This issue of HRR celebrates Kris Olsson's career. But what was the spark that ignited her unwavering connection to the natural world? Kris started her "environmental career" observing carpenter ants scurrying around stately elm trees in her Detroit neighborhood. When her family moved to the suburbs in the 1970s, she loved catching tadpoles and snakes along Rouge River tributaries and in wetlands not yet destroyed by encroaching development. She attributes her life-long passion for nature to watching National Geographic TV specials and "Mutual of Omaha's Wild Kingdom."

For 31 years, HRWC has benefited from her ability to patiently teach us how to keep our natural areas pristine. As she begins the next chapter, Kris and her husband Dave extend their generosity once again by establishing the Watershed Resilience Endowment Fund.

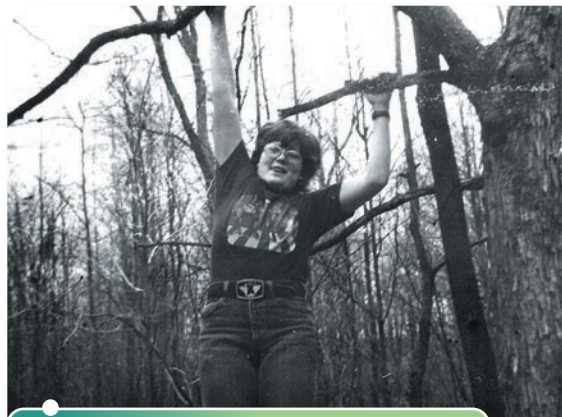
Words cannot express how grateful we are for this remarkable gift. This fund will shine a bright light for water stewards and river champions to follow forever. It ensures that HRWC will always have resources to be effective guardians of the Huron River and its watershed.



We invite you to honor Kris by contributing to the **Watershed Resilience Endowment Fund**.

To make a gift, or for more information scan the QR code or go to [HRWC.org/krislegacy](https://hrwc.org/krislegacy). You may also contact Wendy Palms at wpalms@hrwc.org or (734) 769-5123.

—Wendy Palms



Kris found joy in nature at a young age. Then she turned play into a life-long pursuit to save the planet.
credit: K. Olsson



calendar
of events

HRWC Events and Workshops

MARCH • APRIL • MAY • 2024

River Givers Open House

Wednesday, March 6, 4-7pm
5:30pm remarks and Stewardship Awards
HRWC Offices, 117 N. First Street, Ste 100, Ann Arbor
Details: [HRWC.org/RiverGivers](https://hrwc.org/RiverGivers)

HRWC Finance and Executive Committee Meeting

Thursday, March 21, 5:30pm
HRWC Offices, 117 N. First Street, Ste 100, Ann Arbor

Chemistry and Flow Monitoring Virtual Volunteer Orientation

Saturday, March 23, 1-2:30pm
Online - Registration (required):
[HRWC.org/chemflow](https://hrwc.org/chemflow)

HRWC Board Meeting

Thursday, April 18, 5:30pm
HRWC Offices, 117 N. First Street, Ste 100, Ann Arbor

Spring River Roundup Volunteer Event

Saturday, April 27, starts at 9am; lasts 3 to 4 hours
HRWC Offices, 117 N. First Street, Ste 100, Ann Arbor
Registration (required): [HRWC.org/roundup](https://hrwc.org/roundup)

Save the date for Suds on the River

Thursday, September 12, 2024 at Delhi Metropark!

More Events plus Details: [HRWC.org/calendar](https://hrwc.org/calendar)



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We need to protect the forests, wetlands, and other natural areas in the watershed.

1) To do that, we need to figure out what the “right lands” are to protect to make the most impact on the river. We need to encourage local governments, land conservancies, and other organizations to prioritize their limited resources to protect the most valuable remaining natural lands for watershed health.

2) For the lands we can’t protect by purchasing preserves or conservation easements, we need local governments to enact policies and ordinances to protect the most important lands from development.

3) Finally, we need to recruit people from municipalities across the watershed to become planning commissioners, elected officials, or active allies in watershed protection.

The Natural Areas Assessment Program

The creation of the Natural Areas Assessment and Protection Project in 2000 was the first step towards protecting natural lands across the watershed. Using satellite imagery, we mapped the remaining forests, wetlands and grasslands in the watershed and ran a model that scored each area based on 16 different criteria, such as size, groundwater recharge potential, and vegetation community type. We made the map available to conservation partners, local governments, and sister watershed organizations to guide decision-making towards protecting valuable natural lands in Southeast Michigan.

A few years later came our field assessment program. To gain more insight into the ecological integrity of the remaining natural areas, HRWC recruited and trained volunteers to walk through properties and note the plants, wildlife, and their other ecological characteristics. In the last 15 years, HRWC staff and volunteers have conducted nearly 1000 assessments of forests, wetlands, and grasslands, generating hundreds of ecosystem assessment reports for landowners and partners. The map (Natural Areas of the Huron River Watershed, hrwc.org/maps) and field assessments have provided essential

information and data to our many conservancy and local government partners working on land protection.

Green Infrastructure Workshops

In 2013 HRWC launched Green Infrastructure (GI) workshops aimed at building relationships with local governments and supporting their development of policies that promote land protection across the watershed. Through these workshops, policymakers learn about the importance of land conservation for public and environmental health and are encouraged to (among other policies):

- Develop master plans that include maps of their “Green Infrastructure Network” – a product of the GI workshops that includes HRWC’s Natural Areas map, plus connections drawn between natural areas within local communities;
- Enact ordinances that require proposed development projects to avoid wetlands and woodlands and leave habitat-protecting plant buffers along waterways; and
- Enact land protection policies such as conservation millages to fund conservation easements and preserves.

Since the program’s inception, HRWC has led GI workshops in 18 communities. Three communities have enacted local conservation millages. Numerous local governments incorporate green infrastructure planning policies into their master plans and zoning ordinances.

HRWC’s Change Makers Boot Camps

HRWC’s Change Makers Boot Camps and “advanced” trainings recruit residents to be allies—to give public input on land use planning policies and become the next generation of planning commissioners and elected officials. Since 2017, we have held seven Change Makers Boot Camps in seven municipalities. Numerous residents have become strong

advocates for land protection in their communities and join their local governments as conservation-minded policymakers.

The rest of this issue is about the programs I helped create. For me, pretty much my whole time here has been highlighted by the privilege of working with an incredibly competent, clever, kind, and fun-loving staff as well as partners over the years. This was my dream job from the start of my “little” internship at the (now condemned) 415 W. Washington building to our time at the NEW Center right on the river, to our new Huron River Headquarters here at 117 N. First, “with couches and everything!”

Live Long and Prosper, all!

—Kris Olsson

Kris explores a wetland in Livingston County.
credit: HRWC





Township Board meetings, or talking with volunteers in the watershed, Kris patiently shares her expertise and listens to all. Her efforts over the decades have played a key role in protecting the Huron River and water quality throughout the watershed.

Kris does not include pressure with her guidance. Rather, she is realistic and understands that each community context is somewhat different. She understands our community and environmental landscape. She appreciates small steps towards larger goals.

For three decades at HRWC Kris has been providing customized input and feedback for our community Master Plans and Zoning Ordinances. We also appreciate that Kris proactively provides key information to inform land use decisions,

such as gravel road capacities, impervious surface impacts, and green infrastructure planning. Kris has substantially supported our community efforts to protect natural features including waterways, which in turn supports our community goals to retain rural character and the long-term sustainability of small farms.

In 2018 Kris and Jason revamped and reinvigorated the HRWC Change Makers Program. Through analysis and exploration during the Change Makers Master Plan workshop, I gained critical knowledge that helped prepare me for our own community Master Planning process. The Change Makers program has reached over 100 people directly, and these participants pass on their knowledge and these resources with others, further expanding Kris's impact.

Most recently, Kris has supported our community process to create a citizen-led committee focused on educating and engaging residents about natural features in our Township. She shared the goals and activities of other HRWC-led groups, which helped us define the focus for our newly formed Webster Township Natural Features Committee.

Kris's legacy carries forward in the watershed through the environmental concepts and policies she has shared, as well as in the people she has influenced deeply.

—Kay Stremmler

Huron River Natural River District and Webster Township resident

With Gratitude
Guest author reflections

Calling on the “Dream Team” *Helping Lyndon Township make an important decision*

Local policies governing land use, in concert with land protection programs, help communities accommodate population and infrastructure growth while maintaining natural areas that provide critical ecosystem services and cultural benefits. Since 2005, HRWC has provided policy and technical support to local watershed governments to create Green Infrastructure Plans. Municipalities incorporate their Green Infrastructure map into their land use plans and policies, directing future development in a way that is in concert with their natural infrastructure. Lyndon Township, featured in the following article by Guest Author Sally Rutzky, is in western Washtenaw County and is home to more than 2600 people.

When I was appointed to the Lyndon Township Planning Commission, I knew I needed to be trained from the ground up. I called the Huron River Watershed Council and asked for help. I saw a place for my 'green' point of view and wanted to make a positive contribution to my community. Kris gave me an entire afternoon and a lot to think about.

A little while later, Kris asked if she could hold a Green Infrastructure Workshop for our township. She met with the Planning Commission, the Board of Trustees, and residents. Lyndon Township is 51% state and county parkland, so we were attached to our lakes and woods in some way. We learned about environmental “hubs” (intact natural lands that provide critical ecosystem services to the community)—half of our township was a giant ‘hub’! The result

was a Green Infrastructure map which was displayed on the meeting room wall.

Months passed. In December 2013 the Planning Commission received an application for a special land use permit to develop a sand and gravel mine off M52 between the Waterloo and Pinckney State Recreation Areas and County Park Lyndon South.

I had been volunteering to do (natural areas field) assessments for property owners with Kris, and I asked if she could do a field assessment on the property proposed for the mine. She put together a dream team of volunteers which included Matt Heumann (Washtenaw County naturalist) and Tony Reznicek (University of Michigan botany professor and director of the University Herbarium).

Following the assessment, I took

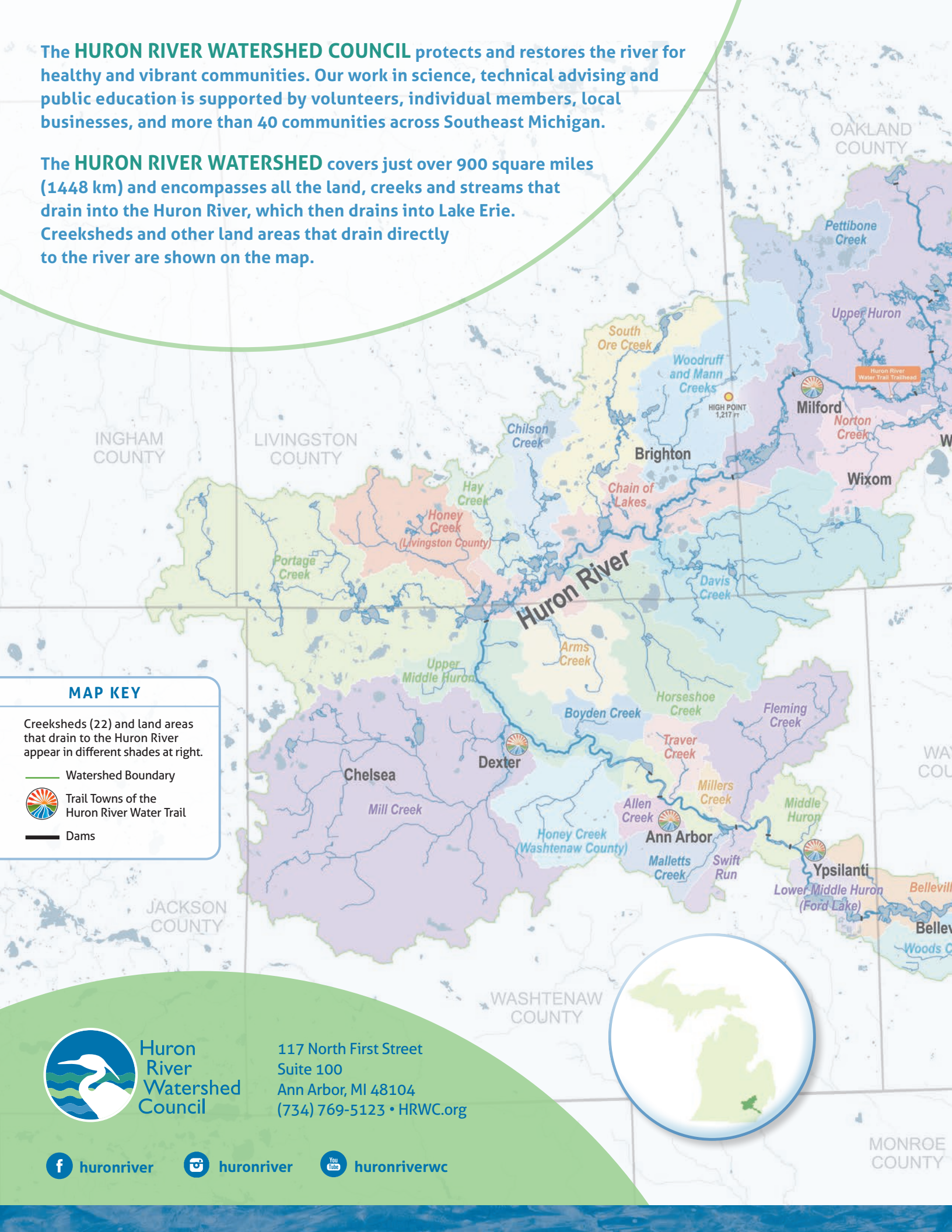
two other Planning Commission members on a site visit. Thanks to our dream team visit, I knew what I was showing them! We came back, tired and thirsty, to the township hall and sat down to rest in the meeting room. There on the wall was the Green Infrastructure map that we developed with Kris in our workshop. We looked to see where we had just been—the property was in the center of a hub created by the parks. It was so clear! We didn't have to say a thing.

Many people testified at two very large public hearings. There were hundreds of e-mails. Lawyers, professors, and engineers made presentations and wrote reports. A lot of work was done by many people. There was no public support for the proposed sand and gravel pit, that

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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



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HRWC Staff



credit: K. Paine

Front row (left to right): Allie, Anita, Maaïke, Melina, Andrea, Kate, Kris, Kelly, Rebecca, Heather.
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was clear. But in my mind, there was this indelible picture of the Green Infrastructure map behind all the discussions. In the end, the State of Michigan got involved, and the property is now part of the Pinckney State Recreation Area. Thank you, Kris.

—Sally Rutzky
Lyndon Township
Planning Commissioner

Kris exploring
a wetland.
credit: HRWC



With Gratitude
Guest author reflections

Protecting the “Right Land”

The power of partnership for effective conservation

HRWC works to protect natural lands from development as our remaining natural areas are critical to the health of our watershed. Forests, wetlands, and prairie ecosystems provide numerous benefits to water quality, including groundwater recharge areas, pollution filtration, erosion control, and surface water retention. We partner with local land conservancies, municipal land protection programs, and other conservation organizations to engage communities and property owners in protecting land via conservation easements and direct purchase of land for preserves. Kris Olsson has been the driving force behind these partnerships for HRWC, as described in the following article by Guest Author Susan Lackey.

In Michigan, land conservation and water quality are inextricably linked. Land well away from rivers and streams can be important to water quality. Sorting those properties out from all the others in our rapidly changing area is frequently a struggle for land conservancies. Fifteen-plus years ago, before the easy availability of GIS (geographic information system) data and analytics software, it was even harder.

In the mid-2000s, Legacy Land Conservancy committed to increased and targeted land protection, with an emphasis on protecting ‘the right lands.’ We were focused on farmland, publicly accessible lands, and land that protected water quality. The first two were pretty simple—soils, size, and adjacency to existing public lands are obvious criteria. But we struggled with how to ramp up our efforts to protect land that had the greatest impact on water quality.

Then, one day, Kris Olsson wandered down the hall at the NEW Center, where we both had offices. She brought along a map and some data, and asked, “Are you interested in this?” *Were we ever!* That first iteration of the Bioreserve Project (now called the Natural Areas Assessment Program) became a starting point for us as we prioritized

our work in the Huron River watershed. Later, we adapted that initial methodology to prioritize our efforts in the River Raisin and Grand River watersheds.

As Kris and her volunteers started to ground truth the study by conducting field assessments of natural lands identified in the initial Bioreserve Project, the Bioreserve Map became even more important to our work. In places like Arms Creek and Portage Creek, it became the tool for deciding where to focus our land protection efforts. In those targeted communities, Legacy and HRWC sent joint mailings to landowners, offering field assessments and information on land management and protection. This opened doors for a more in-depth conversation about conservation, and the importance of a piece of land that might have seemed valuable only to the landowner.

Legacy wasn’t the only conservancy in southeast Michigan to benefit from Kris’s work. A coalition of regional land conservancies, under the umbrella of SEMI-wild, chose the Huron River for their first coordinated land protection efforts, in no small part because of the Bioreserve data and the cooperation of Kris and HRWC. Again, the completion of field assessments and outreach to

landowners helped open doors and begin conversations. Today, some of that same work is helping to guide the Washtenaw County Natural Areas Protection Program in its efforts to maximize the impact of land protection funding.

Under Kris’s guidance, HRWC looked more closely at the relationship between land protection and water quality. Watershed management plans more frequently identified land protection as a desirable tactic to improve water quality, and pinpointed areas where land protection programs should focus our work. These plans are a key to securing funding for the purchase of conservation easements.

Efforts to support farmland protection followed, including a tool kit for communities seeking to maintain their rural heritage. With that came a growing understanding on the part of local officials and landowners that, indeed, farmland protection could be water quality protection.

When Kris first trekked down to Legacy’s office, she brought something else with her: a field guide she was developing that showed key

continued on next page



indicator plant species in our area. I think about her field guide often as a member of the Washtenaw County Natural Areas Technical Advisory Committee. Today, her plant ID skills are awesome. Of course, the field guide has long been replaced by smartphone apps. But in its day, Kris's field guide was portable and targeted—so important when you're wandering around the woods.

Kris has been instrumental in bringing better science to what had long been a land protection effort based on common sense and willing landowners. Those factors

haven't gone away, but now they are bolstered with confidence that these are the right properties for protection.

The largely urbanized Huron River watershed has a limited opportunity to solidify water quality through land protection. Kris's willingness to work with land protection partners encouraged us to set aside our competitive differences and work together. Collectively, we're working to ensure the health of the Huron River and its surrounding lands well into the future. That work will be a lasting legacy for the region, and it wouldn't have happened without

Kris. As she retires from HRWC, I know she'll be missed, but I know she won't stop caring about or working for the health of the river.

—Susan Lackey
Former Executive Director of Legacy Land Conservancy, former President of the Board of Directors at Heart of the Lakes Center for Land Policy, and current member of the Washtenaw County Natural Areas Technical Advisory Committee

With Gratitude
Guest author reflections

Extracurricular Activities

Beyond a career, a life of advocacy and activism

Climate Change is the defining issue of our time. HRWC strongly believes that what we do in the next decade to curb carbon emissions, and the subsequent impacts on our global environment, will define the future of our world. In her tenure at HRWC, Kris Olsson rooted our organization in work that combats Climate Change via land conservation, restoration, and advocacy for climate-forward policies at the local and state levels. For Kris, this goes beyond a career to a life of advocacy and action. Guest Author Mike Garfield of the Ecology Center shares more.



Kris Olsson assesses a lakeshore cattail marsh, avoiding poison sumac (*Toxicodendron vernix*) at Mud Lake Bog. credit: HRWC

I've known Kris Olsson before and after. Before she became Captain Watershed (or staffer at HRWC), we hired Kris for an internship at the Ecology Center, where she worked on our emerging Toxics and Environmental Health Program. This was in the early 1990s, and it was abundantly clear she was brilliant, committed, and effective—as later events would affirm.

Kris left the Ecology Center to start her legendary career at the Huron River Watershed Council, and I was lucky enough to work with Kris and HRWC on a number of major initiatives over the decades, including the establishment of the Washtenaw County Natural Areas Program, the Ann Arbor Greenbelt initiative, major land use campaigns, and more.

And yet, not content that she was doing enough good in the world through her work with HRWC, Kris has spent the last several years converting her "spare time" into becoming one of Washtenaw County's most relentless climate warriors. She took the Al Gore training (about Climate Change communication),

helped start and build the county chapters of the Climate Reality Project and the Citizens' Climate Lobby, chaired the County's Environmental Council, and pushed the County to establish ambitious climate goals and a climate action plan to make these goals a reality.

It's been my great fortune to work with Kris on climate activism through the Ann Arbor Climate Partnership, the campaign to approve Ann Arbor's climate millage and other local efforts. She's as effective, committed, and brilliant as ever, bringing a plain-spoken can-do spirit to everything we do. I'm going to miss Kris at HRWC a lot, but I hope this so-called retirement doesn't also extend to her extracurricular activities.

—Mike Garfield
Director of the Ecology Center since 1993



Kris's Call to Action! • Or "What would Kris do?"

In my 31 years at HRWC, there have been times of great inspiration such as the passage of conservation millages in Washtenaw County and Ann Arbor, Scio, and Webster townships in 2000. But the bulk of the time, it feels like we are toiling away while "Rome burns." The "crisis of the day," as well as the long-term, creeping disasters, have accumulated. In the 1990s, we were fighting to limit the dioxane plume seeping underground through Scio Township (and now into Ann Arbor), finding and stopping illicit sewer connections to the river (a great success story and the reason the Huron is clean enough for the recreational activities we enjoy today). In the 2000s, concern peaked over the continued conversion of farmland, forests, and wetlands into sprawling shopping malls, subdivisions, and big box stores. This was and continues to be a wicked, complicated problem with unclear solutions.

Sounding the alarm

Today, climate change overshadows all that we do and see in our world of watershed protection. This enormous, multi-dimensional problem has crept along over the last half-century. Now, even with its dire consequences evident, we still can't seem to gain traction to avoid catastrophe. The age of the "6th Extinction" is now upon us. Here are some alarming facts to add to your plate of environmental anxiety:

- Over 500 species of land animals are nearly extinct, with most predicted to be gone within twenty years. The same number went extinct over the whole of the last century.
- We are in the grip of an "Insect Apocalypse" with drastic declines of insect populations across the globe¹.
- The number of birds in North America has dropped by 29% (3 billion birds) in the last 50 years².
- Today livestock make up 60%, humans 36%, and wild animals just 4% of total mammal biomass on Earth.

Finding hope through action

Despite the grim news, we can still make a big difference! Here is a countdown of my top six calls to action:

6. Plant trees and native landscapes

Forest and ecosystem restoration is one of the most impactful individual actions we can take to help mitigate climate change. Bonus: trees absorb stormwater, curb air pollution, and cool down urban heat islands.

Through a grant awarded by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, you can get a discount on trees that are good for rivers and streams when you purchase them from the Washtenaw and Oakland County Conservation Districts! HRWC.org/calendar

5. Electrify and weatherize

To meet President Biden's ambitious climate goals, over the next three years residents and businesses must install 14 million more electric appliances than we are at the current rate. The Inflation Reduction Act offers abundant subsidies to help us. Good for the planet AND our bottom line. Rewiring America has all the information you need. rewiringamerica.org

4. Talk to friends and family

Much of the public is woefully unaware of these issues. It's up to us to talk about climate change as part of our regular interactions with friends and family. The Climate Reality Project will train you how to give climate change presentations that work. Join me at their local chapter. climaterealityproject.org

3. Get involved with local government

This is where the action is! Policies that protect forests and wetlands, make our neighborhoods walkable (and/or protect our rural character), and help the U.S. meet its climate goals at the local level. HRWC's Change Makers program will help you get involved. Nearly a dozen folks who took our Change Makers Boot Camp are now elected or appointed local government officials. HRWC.org/changemakers

2. Write to, meet with, and yes, lobby your government officials

Guess what? Politicians need your vote, so they are in fact ready and willing to listen. Those phone calls, letters, and meetings work!

Citizens Climate Lobby will teach you how to build relationships with your elected officials and make them aware that there is a constituency that wants and needs climate action. Join me at their local chapter.

1. Vote!

The Number One action you can take is to vote. Vote in every race, not just the presidential ones. Vote in state-level races. Michigan has passed some of the most progressive climate action legislation in the country largely due to climate groups getting out the vote for pro-climate action candidates. Vote at the local level, too! In Ann Arbor, voters elected a new slate of city council members who supported climate action. As a result, the nationally recognized A²ZERO Plan received the funding it needed to move forward.

I volunteer with the Environmental Voter Project where we remind environmentally minded folks to vote. environmentalvoter.org. Join me!

—Kris Olsson

References:

1. *NY Times*, Book Review, 3/5/2022 *When did you last clean bug splatter off your windshield?*
2. *NY Times*, Science, 9/19/2019 *Bird populations: America and Canada.*



Kris's Super Power is finding a way forward even when the going gets mucky! credit: HRWC

2024 HRWC Stewardship Awards



credit: G. Hieber

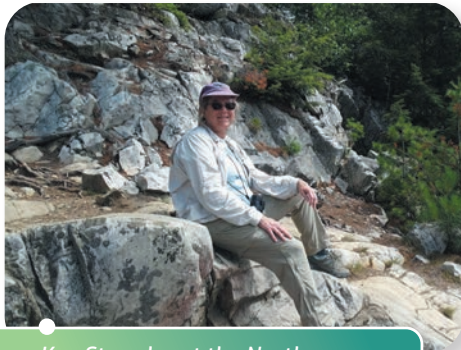
Each year, HRWC is honored to recognize a few special stewards for their outstanding service to the Huron River watershed. We are inspired by and appreciate their efforts in watershed restoration and protection. We look forward to celebrating their many achievements in person at the next HRWC Open House on March 6. We invite you to join us! Please see the back cover for more details.



Alan Heavner at the Huron River in the Proud Lake State Recreation Area. credit: C. Robar

Hall of Fame • Alan Heavner

Alan's mom Stella Heavner started Heavner Canoe & Kayak Rental, at Proud Lake State Recreation Area in Milford in 1953. Alan grew up hiking in the woods and canoeing on the Huron River, working in the family business until 1969 when he took the helm. What drives Alan is his commitment to the principle of "no child left inside." He is passionate about getting people of all ages outside to experience nature and has played a significant role in making it possible for many to paddle the Huron River. Under Alan's leadership, Heavner Canoe was one of the first outfitters to offer Huron River trips to school groups, partnering with the Metroparks, HRWC and others to incorporate river ecology lessons and team-building activities into student outings. Heavner has made affordable, safe, pop-up paddling for community organizations and events a priority. Alan's nephew Bruce and his family have stepped in to transition the business to the next generation of Heavners, carrying on the tradition that started with Stella.



Kay Stremmer at the North Channel (the body of water along the north shore of Lake Huron). credit: R. Sell

Volunteer of the Year • Kay Stremmer

A proud "science geek" growing up in Michigan, Kay became a biological chemist, researching biotechnology medications for cardiovascular and immune system diseases. She connects to the Huron River every day, paddling or walking along it at her riverside home. Kay has volunteered with HRWC's River Round Up, Stonefly Search, Chemistry and Flow Monitoring, and Change Makers programs. Inspired by what she learned at the Change Makers Boot Camp, Kay joined Webster Township's Planning Commission and became the Township's HRWC board representative. As a planning commissioner, Kay has shepherded a multitude of ordinance and master plan improvements. Not satisfied with that, she spearheaded the formation of the Webster Township Natural Features Committee, which will build upon Webster's efforts to protect Arms Creek. "For more than half of my life, I lived in cities where water came out of the tap and went into the pipes. Moving to a more rural area in 2006 was an eye-opening experience for me! And in every year that passes, I understand more about the interconnectedness of woods, wetlands, natural areas and waterways in supporting the rural character of our community."



Rain Garden Program Coordinator Susan Bryan (center) with a group of Master Rain Gardeners. credit: Washtenaw County Water Resources Commissioner's Office

Big Splash • Washtenaw County Rain Garden Program

This year, in a first for HRWC, we recognize an entire program for the positive impact it has had on the river and its people. The Rain Garden Program at the Washtenaw County Water Resources Commissioner's Office started in 2005 with a grant from the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality. Harry Sheehan worked with a few interested homeowners to design and build the first residential rain gardens in the county. Susan Bryan began coordinating the program in 2010 and along with Catie Wytychak who joined in 2013 grew it into what it is today. The program has taught and supported residents in planning, designing and constructing over 2,000 rain gardens, which capture and treat the rain that runs off their roofs and driveways. Beyond the county, Susan teaches others how to start their own rain garden programs. Thus far, 16 new ones have started in Great Lakes states and provinces. And the county program plays a big role in a regional collaboration called the Rain Catchers Collective. "I love that the program has grown into a coalition across Southeast Michigan now," Susan says. "It is so rewarding to see what people are doing in their own yards."



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Wednesday, March 6 • 4-7pm

**Community Open House
and River Givers
Gathering**

**Stewardship Awards
Presented at 5:30pm**

**Explore our
Huron River
Headquarters**

**Learn about
our key
initiatives**

**Meet staff
and supporters**

**Celebrate
extraordinary
volunteers
and partners**

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