As we near HRWC’s 50th anniversary, I am reminded of the immense history of the river—how long it’s been flowing by, transporting water and sediment downstream, and how long it will continue to do so.

What we see now, is not what it’s been like or what it may look like in the future. This used to be a meandering river that was used primarily for navigation, drinking water, and waste disposal. There were explorers, the beaver and mink trappers, the loggers, all using the river for transportation. When the railroads penetrated the region, Mills developed along the river (cider, woolen, saw, grain, paper). The Huron was exploited for water-powered manufacturing with 17 dams built on the river. The watershed landscape changed dramatically as a result of the clearing of the land and filling in of wetlands for farming.

In addition, industry was drawn here for the plentiful supply of water for the use and disposal of waste and for the abundance of metals and gravel. Automotive plants, paper mills and tanneries made the banks of the Huron home. This region grew on the base of plentiful natural resources and industrialization flourished.

This use and depletion of these resources came to a head in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. We saw the horror of our actions on the natural world. The Cuyahoga river in Ohio caught on fire in 1969, a fish kill by Rotenone in 1973 caused 400 tons of fish to die in Ford and Belleville Lakes, swimming restrictions were common, and the negative effects of chemicals and polluted air and water quality became evident.

We responded. We knew the beauty and ecology of the river was there waiting to recover. We spoke out, attended Earth Day rallies, protested, and wrote letters. We passed sweeping legislation, we started recycling, composting, and using alternative transportation and energy, we began protecting land, and building an ethic of sustainability. We valued the protection of natural resources while building a strong economy.

And now we’re seeing the affects. Water quality is improving in the Huron.

- Phosphorus levels in Ford Lake are substantially reduced, as are the size and duration of algae blooms. There has been a decrease of 6.3 tons of phosphorus kept out of Ford Lake each year, less polluting industries and less discharging to the river!
- 8,000 acres of land are protected (wetland, floodplain, natural areas).
- Stronger local and regional regulations are passed on stormwater, riparian buffers, and more money is invested in pollution prevention, water infrastructure, restoration, and natural resource protection.
- In Ann Arbor’s Malletts Creek, volunteers discovered greater diversity of insect life since monitoring began in 1993—a direct result of nine years of restoration efforts
- Two years of watershed planning and two more years of public education and land use planning on Portage Creek has boosted the insect family count to twenty, making Portage Creek one of the of the best places in the watershed.
Together we are engaging in and creating new and old ways of thinking about river problems.

In the last year we’ve seen tremendous interest and vitality in the watershed. Breweries are opening up and down the river, our livers are the most heavily used in the state, the economic impact of the Huron River Water Trail is $33 million annually in Washtenaw County alone, two new fly fishing stores have opened in the last five years, kayaking, stand-up paddle boards, and tubing have exploded on the river, the City of Dexter has seen resurgence of riverfront interest and activity since removing the Mill Pond Dam and the rebuilding of the Mill Pond Park, our trail towns are investing millions in clean-up and reuse of contaminated or old properties along the river from DTE in Ann Arbor, to DAPCO in Dexter, to Water Street in Ypsilanti, and our parks departments are investing over $27 million in parks improvements along the river.

What’s going on? A River Renaissance. Together, we are defining what the future of this river looks like.

Thank you for your help in making this all happen. We couldn’t do our work without your volunteering, donating, and stewardship.

For the river,

Laura Rubin,
Executive Director

Photo: M. Akemann

Cover Photo: A. Savage
Getting the interest and investment for a healthy and clean river takes a lot of work. This past year HRWC made tremendous progress in engaging citizens, governments, and businesses in protecting and restoring the river and watershed.

Program Success

Through leading the Michigan Clean Waters Corps for the State of Michigan, HRWC has built and trained a network of lake and stream monitoring volunteers who collect water quality data across Michigan. In 2013-14, 15 stream monitoring groups and 225 lake groups participated. HRWC worked with DEQ and DNR to establish a new monitoring parameter, the Road/Stream Crossing Inventory, in which groups assess ways in which road crossings impact the quality and flow of a stream. HRWC and its partners also piloted Score the Shore, a monitoring parameter in which lake residents score the quality of the natural areas along the lakeshore.

HRWC and a team of researchers and public health managers studied a new method for detecting failed septic systems to reduce pollutants entering the Huron River and yield a cost-effective approach for county health departments to monitor and rectify problem septic systems. The three year study tested the use of color, infrared and thermal aerial photography to predict the functional status of septic systems. The intent was to use the information to help homeowners correct failing septic systems (or extend the life of those functioning well) by providing specific recommendations and information on proper operation and maintenance. Saving money and improving water quality were the main drivers of this project. The project determined that using aerial image analysis to identify at-risk properties is a viable approach when coupled with strong supporting data such as installation permit records and/or time-of-sale inspections and recommendations. The method requires refinement, including improved supporting data and more information on how failing systems are revealed by impacts to surrounding property.
In Portage Creek, HRWC focused efforts on educating shoreline property owners and working with three communities to strengthen policies that protect and enhance water quality. The project team produced and distributed “Waterfront Wisdom” to shoreline homeowners, created a series of tips web pages at hrwc.org and ran public service advertisements in The Sun Times on best practices for creating and maintaining a beautiful and healthy waterfront. Vegetated buffers along creeks, wetlands, and lakes are one of the most effective ways to maintain water quality as development occurs because native trees, shrubs and deep-rooted plants soak up polluted runoff coming from roads, rooftops and lawns. Lyndon, Dexter, and Unadilla townships are considering provisions that will require new building to be set back from the creek and its lakes and that protect riparian buffers.

HRWC partnered with communities in the watershed to establish conservation priorities through green infrastructure planning, determine ordinance and policy improvements to enhance and maintain that green infrastructure, and help organizations protect high priority natural areas. So far, HRWC has held 6 green infrastructure workshops and provided recommendations to municipalities for their master plans. The green infrastructure maps resulting from these workshops will inform the townships as they make decisions about the location and design of new development.

On the stormwater front, HRWC, working with partner organizations in Washtenaw County, developed an inventory and map of Green Infrastructure projects for the county. The map shows individual projects by type including bioretention, pervious paving, green roofs, native restoration and residential rain gardens. Each point on the map includes a link to a fact sheet complete with contact information for the project owner.
Adapting to climate change

Through its Climate Resilient Communities project HRWC aims to equip stakeholders in the watershed with the information they need to make good decisions about adapting to climate change impacts. The stakeholders review various climate scenarios, discuss best practices and case studies on adaptation strategies and gain commitments for action. The project strives to create “climate-resilient communities” that know how to reduce their vulnerability and risk associated with current and forecasted conditions.

In the last year, participants defined the following adaptation strategies:

The **Water Infrastructure** team advocated for and succeeded in securing precipitation frequency data that reflects the best available climatic information. Precipitation frequency curves establish the severity, duration and probability of occurrence of storm events and form the basis of many decisions such as storm drain sizing and definition of floodplains. The team also established a list of “no-regrets” actions that if pursued would create resiliency to climate change.

The **In-Stream Flows** team established a network of dam operators to better coordinate the management of flows in the river in anticipation of more extreme flow conditions. The network facilitates improved day-to-day management of individual dams, the river as a whole and improves readiness for flood conditions and drought.

The **Natural Infrastructure** team investigated how key tree species in the watershed are expected to be impacted by changing temperature and precipitation regimes. Understanding if future conditions are expected to be favorable or unfavorable to various species will give insights as to how natural communities may change. This has implications for acquisition, management and restoration of natural lands. A primer on climate impacts and resiliency strategies for tree species of the Huron River watershed was produced.
By sparking a river renaissance, the Huron River is becoming the “Main Street” of our river towns where residents and tourists recreate, live, gather, commute, do business and treasure their riverfront locations. And we can measure our progress towards that goal.

HRWC enhanced river-based recreation opportunities via the Huron River Water Trail, by promoting river-friendly business opportunities, and by engaging new and diverse partners and funders in the revitalization of the river corridor. In the 2 years since RiverUp! launched:

- $28 million invested in 22 riverfront parks and recreation projects by partners that leverages the nearly $1 million raised by the RiverUp! campaign
- DTE Energy Broadway property is much closer to full remediation and becoming an asset
- 24 trail events from paddle trips to walks from clean-ups to road races
- Two access improvement projects complete and another eight in the pipeline
- 35 active business partners in the five Trail Towns and their connected river sections
- 80% of Paddler’s Companions sold and a second edition in development
- 20 new partner and funding organizations
- 50% of Water Trail way-finding signs installed along 104 river miles
- One Economic Development Director (Flat Rock) with 25% of job duties
Statement of Activities

HURON RIVER WATERSHED COUNCIL

STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES

Fiscal Year April 1, 2013 to March 31, 2014

**REVENUE**

- Membership Dues .................. $144,733  11%
- Government Grants .................  240,096  19%
- Contracted Services ................  263,122  21%
- Foundation and Corporate Grants .  524,031  41%
- Contributions .....................  47,134  4%
- Other ..........................  58,712  5%

**TOTAL REVENUES .................. 1,277,828  100%**

**EXPENSES**

- Program Service Costs
  - Watershed Planning & Management . . .  411,121  33%
  - Education ..........................  215,047  17%
  - Stewardship .......................  386,911  31%
  - Management & General .............  84,174  7%
  - Fundraising .......................  133,817  11%

**TOTAL EXPENSES .................. 1,231,070  100%**

**CHANGE IN NET ASSETS** ..............  46,758

Net Assets, beginning of year ...........  525,551
Net Assets, end of year ................  572,309
Volunteers, members, and donors for FY 2013-14

What we could never do alone, we accomplish working together with our dedicated volunteers and donors. It is through their efforts that HRWC’s stewardship work has gained so much attention and acclaim. THANK YOU for making our programs possible.

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We strive daily to be the ultimate “river thinkers.” Our passion, educational training and professional experience strengthen HRWC efforts. And with the support of many partners, including our members, donors and volunteers, we lead the initiatives, implement the programs and advance the shared vision of a healthy, thriving Huron River.

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