

# G.R.E.A.T.

Season's Greetings



## Grand River Environmental Action Team

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## GREAT Board Endorses Next Grand River Improvement Plan

**W**ith one year remaining on the current Upper Grand River Implementation Plan (UGRIP) grant, it is already high time for Cecilia Govrik to seek commitments from groups such as GREAT for a new grant proposal. Based upon the enthusiastic response of the board, GREAT is even more eager to participate in the next plan. Govrik who directs the current UGRIP project under the auspices of the Jackson County Conservation District said, "GREAT has been an important participant in the form of volunteer man-hours on river projects and community education." According to Rick Berry, GREAT's volunteer UGRIP coordinator, "Our organization has logged 300 man-hours of work on the current UGRIP project so far. In order to fulfill our original commitment we still have approximately 200 man-hours of work to complete by December 31, 2008."

Whereas the current UGRIP project has been focused on the Portage River, the 2009-2011 will pursue improvement for larger portions of the Upper Grand River Watershed including the City of Jackson. The Portage was originally chosen for special consideration because data compiled by the Michigan DEQ showed that it was the most degraded of all Upper Grand River tributaries. Changes set in motion during the 2006-2008 project on the Portage will begin to physically change the quality of the river, but those changes will take place over a period of years, perhaps decades. Hopefully the Jackson County Conservation District and its UGRIP project partners like GREAT can now apply the understanding gained on the Portage River toward Grand River improvements.

## GREAT Moves In



**A**fter enduring the elements for well over a decade, GREAT's canoes, kayaks and boat trailers will have a safe place out of the rain, snow and harmful ultra violet rays of the sun. GREAT president Jim Seitz and Dahlem Executive Director Brad Whaley have negotiated an agreement for GREAT to use space in a Dahlem building. Jim Seitz said, "We are fortunate to have such a strong collaborative relationship with the Dahlem Environmental Conservancy."

Their generous offer to allow GREAT two large bays in one of their barns for our trailers and other equipment will benefit us in more ways than simply protection of our equipment. For many years past president Chuck McKeown and Rivermaster Todd Zeller have parked GREAT trailers in their yards and found spaces for life vests and clean-up equipment in their garages. This past spring and summer equipment was passed from board member to board member and we had to "round things up" from various locations before every river trip.  
*(continued on page 2, "GREAT Moves in")*



Kathy Kulchinski

## New GREAT Board Member Has Article Published

Kathy Kulchinski, a recent addition to the GREAT Board, has had an article published on [paddling.net](http://paddling.net). The article was inspired by a solo paddle she experienced on the South Branch of the AuSable River during the extremely warm spell of October. The piece includes photos Kathy took from her kayak, a vivid description of the AuSable, and useful information about the boat livery which helped her spot her car at the end of the trip.

Paddling.net is a valuable resource for those of us who enjoy the quiet water sports of kayaking and canoeing. Though you may join for \$25 a year, anyone can go to the website and learn more about recommended trips, paddling schools, boats, equipment, camping and outdoor cooking. You may even be as fortunate as Kathy and have your submission selected for publishing on their website. To read Kathy's article go to [paddling.net<places to paddle<Michigan<AuSable](http://paddling.net/places-to-paddle/Michigan/AuSable).

(“GREAT Moves In” continued from page 1)

In return for the privilege of using Dahlem space, GREAT has promised to help maintain the buildings in which our equipment will be housed. To begin with, professional home builder Rick Shore has offered to help GREAT change several support beams, and straighten existing walls. After these repairs are completed, he will supervise installation of farm gates on the bays of the building in order to provide a degree of security require by our insurance. Cost of materials will be under \$500. Labor is being donated by Rick Shore and GREAT board members.

## Nature Conservancy Identifies Grand River Headwaters for Protection and Restoration

The cover story is “Michigan’s Southern Rivers,” and areas of the Grand River figure prominently in the coverage. Specifically, the Grand River Fen and the Skiff Lake area have become a primary concern of the Nature Conservancy. The largest number of Mitchell’s Satyr butterflies ever counted in the world has recently been identified there. As a result of this discovery, and because of the quality of the land and water, the Nature Conservancy is targeting 7,300 acres of land in Jackson and Hillsdale Counties for protection and restoration. Conservation easements rather than outright purchase of the lands identified, will be the likely strategy the Nature Conservancy uses to limit development.

The *Nature Conservancy in Michigan* is much more than the typical newsletter. It is a magazine with many informative four-color pictures, maps and charts and well-written articles. To read the full article on Michigan’s Southern Rivers, search the web for *Nature Conservancy in Michigan*. On their homepage click on “Read Annual Reports and Newsletters.”

## Riparian Landowners



Do you know who owns this nondescript building and land at the corner of US-127 and Jefferson Road? Answer on page 6

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## 2007 Grand River Clean-up

# Underwhelming Turn-out Foiled by Overwhelming Enthusiasm

In contrast with the large numbers of participants who turned out for GREAT's spring and summer paddle outings, the turn-out for this fall's Grand River clean-up was meager. However, those who did participate in the somewhat difficult and often dirty task of clearing trash and litter from the Grand River and its banks, were remarkable.

Twenty-four volunteers, including four determined youths, hauled mud-filled tires, variously shaped remnants of steel products, and numerous plastic bottles, cups and bags from the Grand River in Jackson. Part of the small group of workers tackled a decades old illegal dump site along the Grand River at Indian Village Mobile Home Community in Michigan Center.

Though the yearly clean-up effort lasts only hours, the planning necessary for its successful execution takes days. GREAT recognizes board member Don Nelson for his leadership in organizing this year's event. The Jackson Public Works Department, and its director Glenn Chinavare once again helped GREAT immensely with removal of collected trash. GREAT also recognizes Indian Village manager, Terry of FH Management, for her enthusiastic support of our efforts. Terry said she was warning all the residents of Indian Village that if she caught anyone dumping trash by the river again, she would fine them.

Jonathan Hoover, Alyce Oosting and Bryon Ennis putt into downtown Jackson with a canoe full of river trash.



### Voices of Youth:

Eighteen year-old Tami Bucholz said her mother Deb's commitment to environmental efforts was probably what originally motivated her to join the Grand River clean-up effort. However Tami said she also enjoys such a worthwhile environmental activity. A science major at JCC, Tami has a good understanding of the factors which contribute to the health or degradation of a river. Asked if she had any suggestions for future river clean-ups, Tami said. "I was disappointed that when we were done with the clean-up, everyone went their own way. I would like to see a potluck held later in the day so volunteers could go clean themselves up, and then have a chance to talk with the others who participated."

Trash piles up at collection points along the Grand River in Jackson and at Indian Village in Michigan Center.



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# Riparian Landowners



## Phil Conley: The Toy House

Little did Phillip Conley know when he offered to drive several Jackson area women to Hudson's in Detroit for Christmas toy shopping, that it would lead to the establishment of a hugely successful business in Jackson. The year was 1947, and Phil had recently returned to Jackson after serving in the U. S. Navy in both the Atlantic and Pacific theaters of war. Conley was somewhat of a rarity in the mid-twentieth century for he had already completed a degree in economics at UM before entering the service. Attuned as he was to economic trends he was among the first to recognize the emergence of a "baby boom and the affect it could have on a future toy market.

Phil was right. The first Toy House at the corner of First and Franklin in Jackson was a huge success. In fact it was so successful that he and his wife Esther had run out of room for merchandise and parking within ten years. If the business was to meet the growing demands of the local market, Conley knew he must find a location with room for a large building and plenty of parking.

As Phil looked around the City of Jackson for the right amount of land at the right price his attention was drawn to a large parcel which had previously been the site of the Hartwick and Woodfield lumber and coal company. The parcel had reverted to the City of Jackson for delinquent taxes, and to many, it seemed most undesirable for a retail business. The parcel was in an old heavy industrial area separated from downtown Jackson by railroad tracks and bounded on the west by the not-so-pure Grand River.

The location did not deter Phil Conley. "I figured with the heavy traffic already flowing on Louis Glick Highway, it was just a quick right turn under the railroad trestle and into our parking lot, so I put up this big sign that could be seen from the other side of the railroad right-of-way.

"The Grand River has not had much of an impact on the business, one way or another," said Phil Conley. "It just happened to be next to a parcel of land that we could afford." "There is a culvert running under our parking lot that empties into the river, but we have never experienced any flooding or caving from that. I guess the river has just been flowing past here for years without us paying much attention to it."

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riparian: Of, on, or relating to the banks of a natural course of water.

## Larry Griffis: Ayers Road

The home Larry Griffis now occupies was originally built by grandparents, John and Clara Ayers, for whom the rural road south of Vandercook Lake was named. Larry and his wife, Lorie, still own the same fifteen acre parcel purchased by his grandparents. Although the land has never been intensively farmed, the Griffis family tried to raise a few cattle, and kept horses there for a period, which the children rode.

As close as this land is to urban and suburban population, there has been little pressure from development right here. “There used to be a few more houses in this neighborhood,” says Griffis. People had small dairy operations, but those houses and farms fell into disrepair and were eventually burned down or bulldozed. Larry credits the low elevation of the land as a possible reason for lack of residential development. “I am in the designated hundred year flood zone here.” When I was still paying a mortgage, I had to purchase very expensive flood insurance. Once we had a flood in our basement and I tried to submit a claim. “I was told that I had an \$800 deductible on my insurance so I decided to forget it.”

Larry says that the wetland south and east of his land was dredged and channeled not so long ago to allow marsh grass to be harvested. But even during the dryness of summer, the land proved too soft to support large



equipment. “The drag must have slipped off the pallet of timbers supporting it. I remember all you could see was the boom of the dredge above the marsh grass. They had to bring in several bulldozers to winch it out. I don’t think they have tried to dredge it since then.”

“It was a great place for me to grow up and for us to raise our family.” Along with fishing and canoeing the Grand River which borders their land, Larry and his entire family, including his wife Lorie, and his daughters and sons, have been avid bow and firearm hunters. It is hard to miss evidence of their hunting passion. Larry and his sons have planted thousands of conifers for deer cover, and deer blinds are placed strategically around the property.

But Larry is not super-protective of his land. “I have had hunters come up through my land after killing a deer out on the marsh. I don’t really mind that, but I wish they would come and knock at my door. Larry and Lorie have been generous and even forgiving toward trespassers. “We have had people come in and fish our pond when we aren’t at home. Once when I had a few head of cattle, someone unhooked the electric fence to fish and forgot to hook it back up. The animals just wandered off and I had to chase them down. I guess that’s when I decided it wasn’t worth trying to raise cattle here.”



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# Great Lakes Paddlers Host GREAT for October Outing on Huron River

Clear blue October skies and temperatures in the 70's drew fifty paddlers from Washtenaw and Jackson Counties to a beautiful outing on the Huron River. Hosts of the event were members of the Great Lakes Paddlers Club of Washtenaw County. After gathering at Jackson Crossing, GREAT participants in the event caravanned to Dexter, Michigan, where our prearranged put-in was the Hudson Mills Metropark, part of an extensive public park system running along much of the Huron River.

The Huron River at the put-in was perfectly clear and cold. Having had many personal experiences with the clarity of Lake Superior, it was natural to make such a comparison. Fortunately all of the participants stayed rightside and avoided a chilly spill. For most of the paddle, one could see the rock and gravel bottom of the Huron, and hundreds of large mussel shells. Water experts tell us that these are signs of a healthy body of water. In addition there was NO LITTER OR TRASH in the water or on the shores.

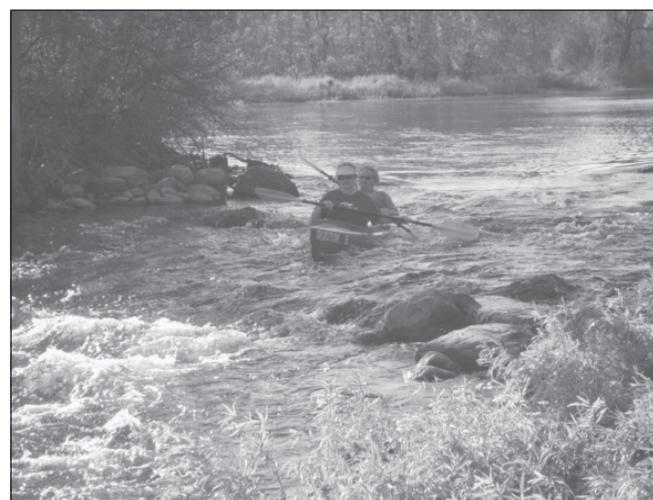
Two hours down river, all paddlers hauled their boats out and were treated to a delicious picnic prepared and served by the GLP. Bill Cooke said, "The food was delicious and there was plenty of it." Bill was enjoying the trip so much, he wished he could have continued on for the last stretch to Delhi Metropark just outside of Ann Arbor, "but my partner in the canoe had to leave."

At the take-out, some members of GREAT's paddling contingent went for cars which had been left at the put-in. Others waited with their boats and fell into cordial conversations with each other and with GLP members who had escorted us down the river. Said Rayneice Prather, "The Huron River was the most beautiful ever. The river had a little current, and even the small rapids were fun. The leaves were falling like rain and the sunshine was perfect."

GREAT members acknowledged the generosity and hospitality shown to us by members of the GLP. We look forward to future collaboration with this group which shares our fondness for southern Michigan's significant rivers and our abiding concern for the environment.



**Voices of Youth:** Twelve-year-old Allie Slough, after her first GREAT outing said, "GREAT is a fun group to be a part of because it teaches you to enjoy life through fresh air and exercise. It helps you to understand environmental issues that you could help solve. Going on the Huron River trip was exciting because my mom and I tried to catch falling leaves from our kayaks before they fell into the river. I would like to go on many more trips with GREAT."



Paddlers enjoy the beautiful day in a relatively calm stretch of the Huron, but their focus turns to the water when they reach the rapids!

**Answer to question on page 2:**  
Michigan water bottler Absopure fills its tanker truck with water from a wellhead here.



## Christmas Trees Real or Artificial?

A recent article in the *Michigan Environmental Council Report* evaluates the case for real or artificial Christmas trees. In recent years there has been an increase in the number of artificial trees sold due in large measure to the improved realistic quality,

low price, and the reduced fire hazard. But the rising concern over increased man-made pollutants in our environment, and problems associated with global trade have caused the Michigan Environmental Council to reexamine the question.

As a result the MEC recommends buying natural trees harvested as near to the customer as possible. The MEC article says, "Trees in Michigan are grown on land that might be developed if it were not being used for agricultural purposes. And your Michigan tree, in addition to supporting local growers and sellers, travels only a few hundred miles at most.

Most artificial trees, by comparison, arrive on ships from thousands of miles away . . . What's more, most artificial trees are made overseas (most in Chinese factories) using polyvinyl chloride (PVC). Some forms of PVC include lead to stabilize the PVC."



Kermit the kayaker greets visitors to the Dahlem Center's Goblin Walk. Entered in Dahlem's scarecrow competition by GREAT, Kermit took fourth place.

## GREAT is Well-represented in Dahlem Water Monitoring Program



Ken Dodge examines data with Ken Johns in a JCC laboratory.

Twelve members of GREAT responded to Dahlem's call for volunteers to monitor streams in the Upper Grand River Watershed. Volunteer water monitors first underwent several hours of training before heading for the water. Randy Hill, coordinator of this effort and also Dahlem's Education Director hopes that with the assistance of dedicated volunteers we will be able to demonstrate the relative health of the various streams in the watershed.

One method used to determine water quality is to take samples from various streams and record the types and numbers of macro invertebrates (visible to the naked eye). Generally, the greater the variety of pollution sensitive macro invertebrates, the healthier is the water. Other data that can also be of value in determining water quality includes levels of dissolved oxygen, water temperature and level of sediment suspended in the water.

According to Ken Dodge, one of the water monitoring volunteers and a retired DNR biologist, "As groups of volunteer water-monitors continue to collect data over the years, we can develop a better understanding of the health of rivers, streams, and lakes. We can also determine whether a body of water is getting better, remaining stable, or becoming more degraded."

If water monitoring sounds interesting or rewarding to you, contact Randy Hill at the Dahlem Nature Conservancy 782-3453.

## GREAT Board Members

Jim Seitz  
President

Bryon Ennis  
Vice President

Todd Zeller  
Rivermaster

Nancy Lapinski  
Membership Secretary

Ken Dodge  
Treasurer

Trustees:  
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Jonathan Hoover  
Kathy Kulchinski  
Don Nelson

Jeff Grund  
Recording Secretary

Jeff Grund  
Accountant

Betty Desbiens  
Historian

Louise Hefka  
Bookkeeper

The GREAT board meets on the second Wednesday of each month, at 7:00 p.m. at the Summit Township Hall, 2121 Ferguson Road. Meetings are open and visitors are welcome. If you would like to have an item placed on the agenda, please notify Nancy Lapinski at 783-3661.

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## **GREAT Annual Meeting**

will be March 19, the place to be determined. A light supper will be provided by GREAT; an outside speaker will be featured.

New members:

John Slough

Scott & Heidi Doman

Joan & John King

## **Grand River Cleanup Sponsors**

GREAT would like to thank the following sponsors for their support of the 2007 Grand River Cleanup:

- Kibby Kobb Market for sandwiches
- Kurpinski Sanitation for portable toilet
- Libra Industries for gloves
- City of Jackson for trash removal

*Printing and mailing costs of GREAT newsletters are sponsored by a generous contribution from the MBTM Company, Nancy and Jack Lapinski, proprietors.*

Great Lakes Paddlers and GREAT members enjoy a beautiful day and autumn color on the Huron River.

