

# G.R.E.A.T.

Grand River Environmental Action Team



Website: [www.great-mi.org](http://www.great-mi.org)

517.416.4234 Volume 20 Number 3 September 2010

## GREAT Schedules Twentieth Grand River Clean-up

### Ten Reasons Why GREAT Organizes a Grand River Clean-up

1. *The river needs cleaning.* There is trash in the river that is unsightly and unhealthy and it needs to be removed.

2. *It can help change people's behavior.* If trash is allowed to stay in the river, people might not feel guilty about adding to it, but if they see folks working hard to remove trash they might not add trash to the river.

3. *It serves as a good example to the community.* If people know there is a group that is improving the quality of the river they may join us, and this motivation may lead them to pick up trash in their neighborhoods or along our highways.

4. *It brings together people with a concern for the environment.* Although we know there are others who are concerned about the condition of our environment, it is more encouraging to work next to and speak face to face with others who are putting their beliefs into action.

5. *It gives us another reason to walk along the river or to paddle our boats.* In order to collect trash from or by the river, we must go to it. Although it is hard dirty work, at least we experience an intimate connection to the river.

Reasons, Continued on page 2

**Saturday, September 11, 2010  
9 a.m. to 2 p.m.  
Consumers Energy Building**

**Dress for those on river duty: old jeans and shoes(that can be worn in the river, hat, sun block and mosquito repellent**

**In case of bad weather, check for cancellation [www.great-mi.org](http://www.great-mi.org) or call (517) 416-4234**

**Lunch will be provided by GREAT**

**Needed: Drivers willing to transport volunteers to clean-up spots along the river, also sturdy old canoes for transporting tires and junk on the river.**

**Advance questions about clean up, call Jonathan Hoover at (517) 782- 9546 or email [jonh141969@comcast.net](mailto:jonh141969@comcast.net).**



Trash collected naturally at a log jam north of Jackson. Photo by Kathy Kulchinski

Reasons, Continued from page 1

6. *It demonstrates our concern for those who live downstream.* Some of our trash sits on the bottom of the river and stays in our region unless we pull it out, but much more floats downriver into the communities which lay beyond ours. We show them respect when we remove our trash before it reaches their communities.

7. *It helps provide a cleaner habitat for insects, fish, birds and mammals.* Besides humans, many other organisms make the river their home and their source of food. When we remove trash from the river we are reducing the potential for injury or contamination of food sources for our fellow creatures.

8. *It reduces the degradation of the Great Lakes.* Each piece of trash that we remove is one less piece that will eventually find its way to Lake Michigan, and if it is too heavy to float, we have removed an item that will deteriorate over the years and send its little pieces or even its molecules down to the lake.

9. *It helps us become familiar with the overall structure of the river.* As we walk or float down the river to collect trash we gain a better understanding of the depth, width, flow, tributaries, vegetation, riparian inhabitants, bridges, houses, factories, storm water outfalls, etc.

10. *It is fun.* When you experience the positive feelings created by the previous nine reasons, you realize that cleaning up the river is not so bad after all. In addition our rivermaster says, "It is fun in a perverse way in that you never know what you might find." K. Kulchinski

## Betty Desbiens Honored at GREAT's 100<sup>th</sup> Public Paddle Celebration

The coincidence of Betty Desbiens' 90<sup>th</sup> birthday and GREAT's 100<sup>th</sup> public paddle seemed like a good enough reason to celebrate both events at the conclusion of the July paddle outing. Fifty participants in the paddle event from Lions Park in Jackson to the DNR river access park in Maple Grove ate cake and honored one of GREAT's longest standing members. Most people who know Betty are well aware that this energetic ninety-year-old has been one on the community's leading promoters of open spaces and defenders of the environment. During the ceremonies, Betty told of her mother and father's love of open natural spaces in Jackson County, and how she remembered many day trips and picnics to these places during her youth. In addition to serving as GREAT's historian, Betty is on the board of the Dahlem Nature Center (named in honor of her parents John and Mary Dahlem), is a member of the Jackson County Parks Association, and is a founding member of the Jackson Area Outdoor Coalition.



Betty Desbiens addresses paddlers at the conclusion of GREAT's 100<sup>th</sup> public paddle. Photos by Jim Seitz

## JROTC Cadets Learn Paddling Skills at GREAT Activity Day

In the past two years Jackson Intermediate School District's JROTC program has supplied more volunteers for GREAT's annual river clean up than any other organization. In consideration of their efforts and commitment, GREAT's board of directors believed it was appropriate to arrange a special activities day on the water exclusively for the cadets. Despite the students' other pressing concerns with end of the school year activities, about twenty showed up at Lime Lake in June, for paddling and water safety instruction, canoe and kayak races and food. As always, GREAT board members enjoyed the opportunity to interact with these fine students, and looks forward to seeing them this fall at the annual Grand River clean up.



*Jim Seitz instructs JROTC cadets on the proper grip of a canoe paddle. Photo by Kenny Price*



*Charles Colton Curry*

## GREAT Board Member Welcomes Baby

Emily Curry is believed to be the first board member to give birth to a child during her tenure on the board. Emily and husband Chip welcomed Charles Colton Curry into the world on May 13. "Colt" was 8 lbs 4 oz and 21 ½ inches long. The only drawback to "Colt's" birth was that Mom had to miss a GREAT board meeting due to mounting labor pains.

## GREAT Kayak Trailer Sustains Minimal Damage in Read-End Collision

Following a paddle outing at a Great Lakes Paddler's venue, one of GREAT's two boat trailers was involved in an accident. According to Don Nelson, the driver hauling the trailer, "I began to slow down for a car on fire on the shoulder of US-23, when a pickup truck approaching from behind swerved to avoid a direct hit, but still caught the right hand edge of the trailer. When it was clear that there were no personal injuries, Don took out the camera he had along to take photos of the outing, and clicked several pictures of the trailer.

The extent of the damage was not fully revealed until the next day when Jim Seitz unloaded the kayaks from the trailer in order to take it in for repairs. Once the straps were removed from the kayaks, the rear crossbar literally fell off the frame. Apparently the front crossbar was holding the rear crossbar in place because the kayaks were so firmly attached by multiple nylon straps.



*The bent crossbar under the kayak and broken tail light are visible in this photo. Photo by Don Nelson*

The trailer was taken to Mike Trudell's auto repair business in Vandercook Lake, where the broken taillights could be replaced, but Mike had to call in a friend to do the welding repairs necessary. Thanks to Mike and C and L Body Shop's generosity, the repair bill came to only \$100, considerably below the \$250 deductible GREAT would have had to pay on its insurance coverage.

# Eight GREAT Members Paddle Entire

Taking advantage of an opportunity that presents itself only once in a decade, eight local paddlers committed to an adventure and a challenge on the Grand River. It was an adventure because they traveled to where they had never been before and saw things they have never seen before. It was a challenge because none of them had previously spent thirteen consecutive days paddling a small boat, and twelve nights sleeping in a tent away from their familiar comforts. Among those traveling with the group of eighty-seven paddlers were GREAT river master, Kathy Kulchinski; Jim Seitz, Rod Monasmith, Bill Kantor, Beverly Wilson, Monica Day, Larry Luce, and Kevin Williamson.



*Rod Monasmith in foreground, looks unhappy after encountering the first of many log jams on Expedition 2010. Photo by Jim Seitz*

Expedition 2010 was not the sort of experience that a person could just decide the day before to join. In addition to the need to register far in advance, there was also a need to prepare their belongings for camping and to prepare their bodies for the rigors of thirteen consecutive days paddling. Rod Monasmith got himself into better physical condition by paddling as frequently as possible on a lake, and he also bicycled when he had time. Jim Seitz paddled frequently on GREAT related activities including opening passages among the log jams on the Upper Grand River. Kathy Kulchinski tried to paddle two hours a day starting about a month before Expedition 2010. Rod worried about sleeping in a tent all those nights and Jim Seitz said he bought a new softer thicker sleeping pad for his old body.

Day one of Expedition 2010 began at the Michigan Center Dam. Paddlers had gathered there the night before. Opening ceremonies were actually held the day before at the Liberty Mill Pond where representatives

of many communities along the route came to pour water from their portion of the river on the headwaters rock. Rivermaster, Charlie Parmalee, having made the entire trip twice before, warned the participants that the first day would be a “test of tenacity.” Little did Charlie know how severe the test would be, for after paddling most of the day around, through, over and under log jams, participants had to endure a wicked thunderstorm that dropped whole trees and sent limbs and branches flying. By eight o’clock that evening few paddlers had reached their first night’s destination- Youth Haven Ranch in Rives Junction. Surprisingly, and as a testament to their commitment, when paddlers reached the take out, they were very tired but in good spirits. Fortunately the rain ended before the group needed to set up their tents. Few had trouble sleeping.

The next morning began with another disappointment, for the previous evening’s storm had knocked out power to Youth Haven Ranch and it had not been restored. So the hearty breakfast of eggs and sausage planned for the day was changed to cold cereal. But after an enthusiastic address by Charlie Parmalee, paddlers set off determined for their second day. Fortunately from this point on there were few obstacles for the rest of the trip other than the man-made dams which had to be portaged around. Jims Seitz, Rod Monasmith and Beverly Wilson departed first so they could collect water samples in parts of the river that had not been disturbed by paddlers. The river widened and



*Expedition paddlers for the first time did not have to portage around downtown Jackson since the removal of the concrete cap several years ago. Photo by Kenny Price*

the flow increased, and although paddling and steering was still necessary, there was more opportunity to relax

# Grand River in Expedition 2010

and enjoy the scenery. Kathy Kulchinski was surprised by the rural character of the river even when they neared centers of population. Bill Kantor said the group began to see bald eagles and great blue herons by the dozen.

As the trip continued toward Lake Michigan, Expedition 2010 was hosted by groups in towns and cities such as Eaton Rapids, Lansing, Portland, Ionia, Lowell, Ada, Grand Rapids, and Grand Haven. According to Jim Seitz, the farther they went down the Grand River the better the food they were served. At Ionia, the fair was about to open, and the owner of an eatery at the fair invited the paddlers to a free lunch.

By the time the group reached Grand Rapids the rural character of the river changed and the buildings of the city became the shoreline of the river. Perhaps no community more than Grand Rapids has recognized the potential of the Grand for its future. Not only has the city built attractive modern buildings along the river, they have incorporated the river into the designs in order to enhance the appearance of the structure and to bring inhabitants of the buildings into the out-of-doors. At Grand Rapids, GREAT member Bill Kantor was surprised by the arrival of his two grown sons, Aaron from Jackson, and Andy from Kansas City, Kansas. The three paddled together for a day until the boys left the river at Jennison. Monica Day and Larry Luce, both GREAT members, who had been married only shortly before leaving on the Expedition looked upon this first long adventure together as their honeymoon.

With every stop and ceremony held, it was evident that people along the course of the Grand were surprised and pleased by the improvement in the water over the last four decades.

In 1910 an editor for the *Grand Rapids Press* predicted that by 2010 the Grand River would be more of a sewer than a river, but that prediction has turned out to be happily inaccurate. When the Expedition reached the area upstream from Grand Haven it was clear that the river was nearly as big a tourist and recreation attraction as nearby Lake Michigan. Large and small pleasure boats filled the river and there was still plenty of room for a flotilla of canoes and kayaks to pass through on their way to Grand Haven, their destination.

Seven of the eight members from Jackson completed the trip in their boats. Monica Day would have, but she broke her wrist stepping out of her boat at the

launch at Ada and spent a day riding in the Voyageur canoe replica Gabagouche. All were very proud and contented that they had made an uncommon journey in this day-and-age. However all eight recognized that it was not really about the paddling after all, or even about their own accomplishment. Rather it was about the people who had paddled with them, and those who came out to celebrate at each town along the way, and it was about this great Grand River which has been taken back by the people, for the people.



*The Jackson Eight are all smiles at the conclusion of Expedition 2010 in Grand Haven, Michigan. Photo by Jim Seitz*

Beverly K. Wilson sums up her experience in the following quote, “*Grand River Expedition 2010 was a reminder of all that is important in life and what isn’t really necessary: a reconnection with our bodies – how they work and the extent to which we can challenge them; a listening to the whispers of the river about its need to healthily flow and provide homes for wildlife; a fostering of the enthusiasm in small communities to preserve the river for future generations; deep connection with kindred spirits whom we might not have met otherwise; an embracement of intimate stories shared about reasons for participation; a spiritual event; a personal achievement; and great optimism for the future of the Grand River.*”

# Wastewater Challenge: Mostly Met...

One hundred years ago, in 1910, few were concerned about rain and snow melt that was directed to the Grand River. After all, how polluted could rain or snow be? No, the citizens of Jackson had much more serious concerns about what was going into the river than storm water. Residences, businesses, factories and utilities had by then taken up most of



*Old London Bridge with exclusive dwellings that deposited human waste directly into the Thames River.*

the prime riverfront locations, leaving hardly one empty lot in the city along the river and they continued a practice which dated back centuries in European cities. The river was a public sewer. London Bridge for example, as early as William Shakespeare's time, had several stories the city's finest apartments and homes hanging over both sides so the human waste from each residence could fall directly into the Thames and be washed downstream. In Jackson, the first state prison built in 1849 was intentionally set right next to the river in order that human waste would not have to be piped too far to be flushed into the Grand.

However by the mid 1930's, Jackson had had enough of floating human waste and constructed its first sewage treatment plant. But the problem of pollution in the Grand River was not immediately solved, so additional measures were taken in the 1930's which included dredging and straightening the Grand River north of Jackson in order to improve the flow of polluted water out of the city. Also about this time, the infamous cap was built downtown to make the river all but invisible.

As a common nation-wide practice that went

virtually unquestioned until the 1970's, except by environmental visionaries, factories continued to dump industrial waste into the Grand River. When the federal Clean Water Act was passed in 1972, laws prohibiting industrial dumping in all the rivers of the nation began to be enforced. About this time municipalities began to address the separation of waste water sewers and storm water sewers. It has taken forty years, but Jackson is proud to say that all of its waste water sewers and storm water sewers have been separated.

Today the Grand River runs relatively clear through Jackson. Recent monitoring of the river by government agencies and by citizen scientists has turned up a considerable number of aquatic organisms that can only live in relatively pure water. We have a state-of-the-art wastewater treatment plant that has even greater capacity than the city and several surrounding communities use. Industry is now loath to intentionally dump waste products into the river, not only because they could face substantial fines, but because the public and industry itself are rather pleased to have a river which can be admired again. Several businesses have placed picnic tables near the river for their employees.

So, is our river now safe from the all the former assaults we have made on it? Well, most of them, but even in 1910 the river was being degraded by a human activity that is now more apparent since we have eliminated the most odious pollutants. One part of the problem which continues to send pollution into the Grand River is that over the past century we have built



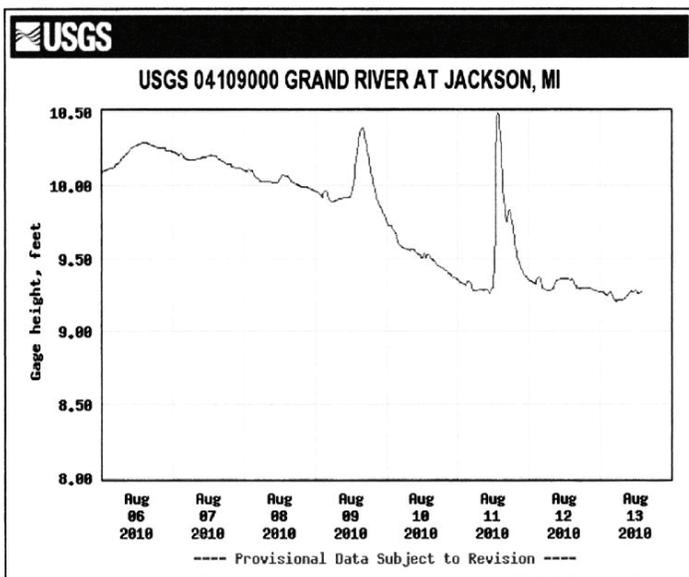
*Storm water outfall in the background mars the scene and delivers pollutants to the Grand River. Photo by Jim Seitz*

# Storm Water Challenge: A Long Way to Go

more and more impervious surfaces in the form of roofs and pavement. When rain falls on impervious surfaces, it can not soak into the ground as it once did in that location, and since we don't want it to hang around as a hindrance to our activities, we send it off . . . to the river and with it goes the soil, trash, salt, oil and gasoline, pet feces, lawn fertilizers and atmospheric pollutants, like mercury. One has only to paddle down the Grand River (as many members of GREAT do) to see large

wet too long. The tiles are basically pipes with holes in the sides that allow standing water in a field to drain off. Once again, nature meant the rain and snow to sit on the land allowing it to percolate back into the ground to recharge aquifers with naturally filtered water. However drainage ditches or tiles in our fields, quickly send the storm water away . . . to the streams and rivers where it carries not only the soil but whatever has been applied to help crops grow such as manure, chemical fertilizers, weed inhibitors, and insecticides.

Is there a solution to the problem of storm water running unchecked to our river? Yes, in fact there are a number of measures that we as individuals, as private sector businesses and municipalities can take as money becomes available, and some of those practices are inexpensive and so obvious that we should ask ourselves, "Why aren't we doing that already?". The philosophy of managing storm water is basically to LEAVE IT WHERE IT FALLS. Of course, we can't leave it on the roofs of our homes and businesses (although there have been some interesting experiments with living roofs) we can do much better at leaving rain and snow water nearer to where they fall than we have been. As for our streets and parking lots, permeable pavement is now available and constantly being



<http://waterdata.usgs.gov>--Two spikes on the graph show how quickly the Grand River in Jackson rises and falls due to the effects of storm water run-off from impervious surfaces.

concentrations of floating debris such as bottles, cups, toys, and building materials, that have been washed into the river, caught on the upstream side of logjams. In addition to the visible refuse that flows into the river are tons of sediment. According to Paul Rentschler, a scientist from ASTI Environmental Corporation, and Director of the Watershed Alliance, estimates of from 18.19-18.24 million pounds of total suspended solids are added to the Upper Grand River annually.

In rural settings we continue to pollute the river in different ways. Our agricultural practices during the past century have certainly increased the production of the food products we need, and at relatively low cost for consumers, but our surface waters like our lakes and rivers have often paid the price. It has been a common practice for farmers to tile fields that stayed



This illustrates one of the devices used to trap floating debris washed into a river by storm water. Photo courtesy of Stormwater Systems, Inc.

improved. Newer communities demand storm water retention ponds in their development plans. This author Storm Water continued on page 8

GREAT Welcomes the following first-time members:

Carol Gildea  
Rob Gresell  
Lonnie & Daniel Bostwick  
Mary Lou Sherman

GREAT now has its largest membership since its inception in 1990 at 149 members.

#### GREAT Newsletter

Published quarterly: March, June, September, December by the Grand River Environmental Team

GREAT

P.O. Box 223

Jackson, MI 49204

grand@great-mi.org

http://www.great-mi.org

Editor: Bryon Ennis (bryon\_ennis@sbcglobal.net)

GREAT is a tax deductible 501c3, non-profit organization.

**\*\*\*\*GREAT will be seeking a newsletter editor in March to replace Bryon Ennis who will step down after six years as editor. Anyone interested in filling this service should contact any GREAT board member.**

### 2010 GREAT Board

Jonathan Hoover, President  
Kenny Price, VP  
Jim Seitz (Past President),  
Membership Secretary  
Kathy Kulchinski, Rivermaster  
Carol Scott, Treasurer  
Pegg Clevenger, Recording Secretary  
Emily Curry, Trustee  
Bryon Ennis, Trustee  
Don Nelson, Trustee  
Lee Kettren, Trustee  
Ben Whiting, Trustee  
Vacant, Trustee

#### Special Assignments:

Louise Hefka, Publicity  
Betty Desbiens, Historian  
Todd Zeller, River Consultant

Storm Water continued from page 7

recently visited Fort Collins, Colorado, the location of many high tech businesses. I could rarely go two blocks without seeing a storm water retention pond, and most of the new large businesses and shopping centers had their own storm water retention ponds. Jackson County Drain Commissioner Geoffrey Snyder has actually had storm water retention and detention regulations in place since his first term in office, 1977. The Drain Commissioner's office however, does not have the authority to insist that Jackson County townships abide by these recommendations if they do not fall under federal M4S regulations. But, according to Snyder, most local township supervisors have been willing to comply because they realize it is the right thing to do.

The storm water management industry is growing in response to the need expressed by cities and towns around the country. Sometimes this is a result of flooding after a precipitation event, particularly in places that have experienced a lot of growth, and with growth the inevitable increases in impermeable surfaces, such as Atlanta, Georgia. In other places the impetus for storm water management products and strategies has arisen because communities surrounding an important body of water have come to realize the degradation of the water body by storm water runoff. The communities surrounding the Chesapeake Bay are such examples. Closer to home, Lansing has committed to building a 2.4 million dollar rain garden that will keep millions of gallons of storm water from reaching the Grand River before it has a chance to percolate down and be filtered naturally.

It is indeed encouraging to see the vast improvement in the Grand River over the last four decades. As Expedition 2010 traveled down the entire length of the Grand River, communities along the way all wanted to celebrate the renewal of the Grand. Based upon what has happened and what has been committed to in those communities, we will continue to see a healthier and more highly valued water resource. GREAT is pleased to be an integral part of this effort.