

G.R.E.A.T.

Grand River Environmental Action Team



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Clean Up 2010: More Volunteers, More Leaders, More Boats, More Trash than Ever

It isn't that the Grand River is more trashy than ever; it is not. But conditions for the 2010 Grand River clean up were excellent for spotting trash that hadn't been picked up in previous years, namely the river was low and clear. In addition to these conditions were several other important factors, such as people's

up, GREAT board member Kenny Price summarized many other's feelings about the importance of Jon's organizing efforts. "The clean up was a great success because of you. The river got cleaner. The rain stayed away while most of us were on the river. Everyone was happy at the end. No one got hurt. Everyone I heard from is looking forward to next year. All of this success is due to your leadership."

Hoover, himself commenting on this year's clean up said, "Every single [GREAT] board member was present and carried out their assignments. That fact was very gratifying to me." Don Nelson, chair of last year's river clean up estimated that the number of miles of river cleaned on this one day, September 11, doubled from six last year to twelve this year. Jim Sietz, a volunteer group leader remarked, "We really aren't that far from covering the Grand River's course through the



Clean up volunteers don waders and prepare to get started from the downtown amphitheater by the Consumers Energy parking ramp.

generous response to GREAT's internet call for more boats to haul trash, more volunteers willing to get into the river, more experienced group leaders who knew the river, and the extraordinarily organized mobilization plan of GREAT president Jon Hoover, who doubled as the event chairperson.

In a message sent immediately after the clean



An enthusiastic clean up volunteer pushes a boatload of trash from beneath a downtown bridge.

Clean-up, Continued from page 1
entire county.” (Clean Up continues on page 2)

Rivermaster Kathy Kulchinski, also a clean up group leader, believes her group may have set a clean up record. “My group filled their five boats three times each as they walked down the river and off loaded the trash, mostly iron, at bridges they passed under.

Kathy related another especially touching incident that occurred as her group walked their boats down the river. Her son, Casey Wykoff, just a few months out of the Marine Corps, joined with JROTC cadets from the Intermediate School District. The cadets, inspired by Casey’s participation along with them, and had tons of questions about real military life. When one cadet inquired if Casey’s boots were really going to survive their drenching in the river, Casey lifted a foot up out of



A clean-up volunteer adds to the assortment of trash from the Grand River:

Jim Seitz had this to add in praise of his group. “The five canoes cleaning the river on a seven-mile stretch from the Jackson Wastewater Treatment plant to the Maple Grove DNR access site, covered the most distance and the furthest downstream GREAT has ever cleaned in this event. Their canoes were so overloaded with debris they could have tipped over, but due to the careful and precise paddling of the JROTC cadets they did not upset.

One more tribute from group leader Rod Monasmith summarizes the admiration volunteers had for each other. “I was really impressed with the tenacity my team had in extracting almost fully buried tires from the bottom of the river. Then they had to wrestle these tires up the 6 to 10 foot, slippery, muddy river banks. There was no quit with the guys on my team. What a great group of young people. What a great public service.”



JROTC cadets remove a large gas tank they pulled from the bottom of the river.

the water and informed him, “**Dude, these boots have been to Iraq--twice. They can take it.**”

“My crew had seven adults from as far away as Port Huron and Canton”, said GREAT board member Pegg Clevenger. Two of the volunteers from outside of the Jackson area were Carolyn Gildea of Canton, and Rob Gesell from Port Huron. Carolyn explains that she and Rob met at a poker paddle around Harsen’s Island in the Detroit River. “We were talking about kayaking again, and I mentioned to Rob that GREAT had a paddle the following weekend down the Grand River marking their 100th trip. After that we both joined GREAT. As members we felt while enjoying the monthly paddles, it was also important to participate in the clean up as well. For me, the side affect of doing this clean up was a better awareness of the impact our ‘throw away’ mentality has on our environment.”



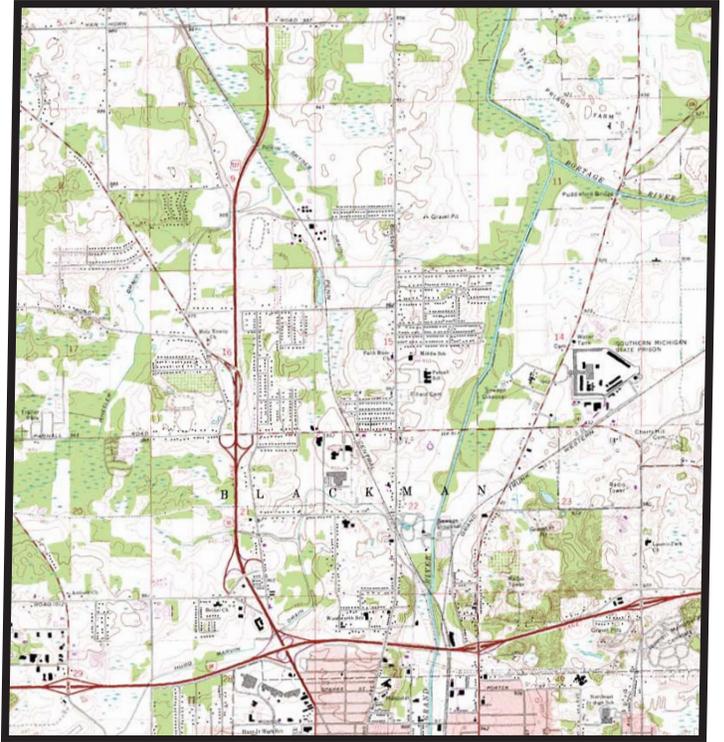
Evidence of their day’s work shows on the shirts of these JROTC cadets as they prepare to enjoy food donated by local businesses.

New Federal “Drug Take-Back” Law Could Reduce Pharmaceutical Residues in Streams and Rivers

Growing concern over the presence of pharmaceuticals in our natural environment have spurred Congress to pass a federal “drug take-back law” that would make it easier for states and private entities to create programs for people to safely dispose of unwanted or out-of-date pharmaceuticals. In the past controlled substances, including prescriptions, could only be turned over to law enforcement agencies. They could not afford to sponsor regular drug disposal hours and locations, so people flushed unwanted prescriptions down their toilets or threw them into the trash. As the world becomes more populous and the use of pharmaceuticals becomes more widespread, the problem seems to be expanding. In just one day of a recent nationwide drug take-back effort in the U.S., 121 tons of unwanted medicine was collected.

A major research effort by United States Geological Survey scientists in 1999-2000 revealed that pharmaceuticals were present throughout the country in samples taken of both land and water. Substances such as hormones and antibiotics administered to livestock passed through the animals’ systems and were spread as manure fertilizer on the land. Such substances found their way into surface water. What was more surprising was the detection of pharmaceuticals used only by humans in rivers and streams. Common medical tests of human waste products have long indicated that many of our drugs and medications pass through our systems not entirely transformed by our bodies. Unfortunately municipal wastewater treatment methods were never designed to remove these types of chemical compounds. According to Jackson Wastewater Facility chemist Mary Leonardson, “While our three-stage waste treatment process can turn raw sewage into clear water, we cannot remove pharmaceuticals.” Though it may seem throwing unwanted pharmaceuticals into the garbage might be a better method of disposal than flushing them down the toilet, it has been shown that these chemicals also leech out of landfills. The least dangerous disposal method currently appears to be organized collection and proper incineration.

Future Bike Path May be Routed Through GREAT Land



The outline on the map above shows location of GREAT land north of Jackson where future bike path may be routed.

Fitness Council representative Scott Tenbrink brought exciting possibilities to the GREAT board at its September meeting. Scott showed maps of a proposed connector for a cross state bicycle/walking path that may use the GREAT land along the Grand River in Blackman Township. Most of the trail leading northeast out of Jackson would follow an abandoned railroad grade, however one section passes too close to state prison facilities, so correction authorities nixed that route. Fortunately, several parcels of land lying on the west bank of the Grand River including GREAT’s land would allow the proposed trail to avoid most of the prison property before it eventually links up to the same abandoned railroad grade east of Jackson.

At this stage Tenbrink was seeking support from GREAT in the form of a letter expressing the board’s willingness to allow a bike trail to pass through our property. The board was unanimous in its support of the project. According to land committee chairperson Jim Seitz, “This trail would enhance public access to our land without obstructing any of the other plans the GREAT board has discussed for this parcel.”

GREAT's River Clearing Volunteers

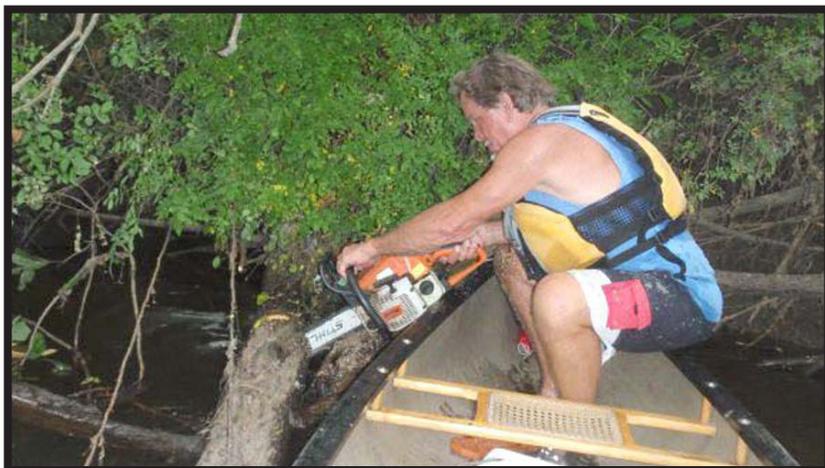
Until the spring of 2009, GREAT's river clearing chain saws hadn't been started for many years. No board member had any experience using them. Nor did they know of any member, other than Todd Zeller who had ever attempted to cut a path for kayaks and canoes through the Upper Grand River's ominous logjams. But a woman with a vision wanted to see the Upper Grand River paddleable through all of Jackson County. That woman was newly elected Rivermaster, Kathy Kulchinski. She announced in the winter of 2009 that she intended to start clearing the river north of Jackson and asked who would join her. An initial crew of four or five volunteers made up of board members and regular members put small boats on the river each Thursday evening that spring and summer, and began working its way north. At first they worked with lopping shears and hand saws, but it soon became apparent they would need power saws to cut a path through the full-sized trees that blocked passage on the river.

During the two full paddle seasons that clearing crews have attempted to maintain a water route through woody debris, they have abided by the guidelines for river clearing promoted by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment. These guidelines recommend that you clear only as much as is necessary for a canoe or kayak to pass through. However, now that GREAT's crews have gained experience cutting through deadfalls and logjams, they have begun to question whether these guidelines are always applicable to the Upper Grand River.

The Pros and Cons of Woody Debris

There is no question among the clearers that there are positive reasons for leaving woody debris in the river. It can help stabilize the river bottom and banks. It does provide habitat and food for fish, crustaceans and insects. It can enhance a river's aesthetic value, and it can reduce localized flooding and erosion while maintaining flow reduction and sediment deposition. It CAN do all these things. Yet, on the Upper Grand River, clearing volunteers have witnessed that it can do all of the opposites too.

Clearing crews have witnessed locations along the Upper Grand where a number of trees have collected at one spot causing the tremendous force of river to scour a deep trench under the log jam. In other locations where the fallen trees have not quite spanned the river, the force of the water is directed toward one of the banks where it undercuts more trees sending them into the river. Woody debris can enhance the esthetic value of rivers, but more often on the Upper Grand it serves as a strainer where floating garbage collects in large unsightly mats. And there may be rivers where woody debris performs a positive function in slowing the current and preventing local flooding, but on the Upper



Grand where dredging and channelizing has lowered the surface of the water far below the surface of the land there is nowhere for floodwaters to spread out. The result is that a larger volume of water caused by rain or snow melt only increases the erosion potential especially when woody debris partially obstructs its flow.

GREAT's Dilemma With Woody Debris

GREAT river clearers may have never questioned the value of the river clearing guidelines if it had not taken on the responsibility for providing a clear path for paddlers in Expedition 2010, a paddle adventure covering the entire length of the Grand River. Prior to this July 2010 event GREAT clearing crews logged hundreds of hours clearing the river between Michigan Center and Onondaga, a distance of nearly twenty miles.

Work Within Established Guidelines

Some stretches of the river required clearing three or four times due to rising or lowering water levels, and floating woody debris re-clogging openings which had been established earlier. All this effort though was of little avail as Expedition paddlers encountered many new obstacles in the Upper Grand during the first leg of the journey.

Should Different Clearing Guidelines Apply to a Channelized River?

According to Jim Sietz, one of the most dedicated of GREAT's river clearing volunteers, "By far the most troublesome section of the Upper Grand River is the part that has been channelized." As the Grand flows north out of downtown Jackson it has shed its natural river features. Although it flows through mostly wooded surroundings, its course is completely man made. Gone are the natural meanderings and floodplains. Instead a straight trench with high wooded banks determines its course. The trees on its banks



naturally reach out over the river, competing with each other for sunlight, and when those trees mature or become diseased or damaged, they invariably fall into the river. But because the river channel is relatively narrow and straight, both ends of a fallen tree become lodged in both banks, so the river cannot dislodge them. Paddling such a river is virtually impossible because the banks are so steep and brushy, obstacles in the river cannot be easily portaged around. GREAT has temporarily solved that problem by cutting paths through the logjams. But with any change in the water level up or down, openings under logs shrink, or new logs surface, blocking the way.

New Thoughts on River Clearing

At this time GREAT provides the only organized effort to keep the Upper Grand paddleable, and it is unlikely it can duplicate the effort made to clear the river this summer for future paddling seasons. Still, GREAT realizes it will be necessary to continue clearing efforts on the Upper Grand forever if it hopes to encourage paddlers. Therefore, slightly more radical clearing procedures may have to be considered. No, the organization is not proposing winching whole trees out with steel cables and mechanized equipment. Along much of the river there is no place to use such methods. Nor will it encourage clear-cut logging along the river banks. What may be part of future clearing efforts is to cut larger openings in the logjams, and to cut smaller pieces. Which will allow them to either float through openings downstream, or to be carried away from the river to a flood plain. It is hoped that such measures will permit openings to remain unclogged longer so that GREAT does not have to continually maintain navigation openings. We have seen what happens to an urban river that is not paddled often. A downward spiral occurs when the river is not maintained. It becomes a local dump site, and a pile of trash at a bridge invites more dumping. The answer seems to be, we must paddle the river to keep it clean.

Rod Monasmith, Jim Seitz, and Bill Kantor, three of GREAT's river-clearing crew work on major obstacles to paddling the Grand.



Grand Adventures Boat Livery Out of Business

Just six months ago this newsletter proudly proclaimed that our area did indeed have a canoe and kayak livery. However recently imposed fees and new regulations have extinguished Russ Bodell's enthusiasm for this business. "It definitely wasn't a lack of customers," said Russ. "I had more customers this summer than last."

Perhaps the most challenging new regulation, as Bodell saw it, was the state's insistence that he hold a Commercial Driver's License in order to transport customers and boats to and from put-ins. Russ explains, "If I was an over-the-road trucker who drove every day, I could afford the three months to study for such a driver's license and pay the increased costs. But I only drive customers during the warm months and then only on weekends. And if I ever got caught driving customers without a CDL, the fine was going to be huge."

Another cut into the profits of Grand Adventures was the new lease fees Bodell was to be assessed for using DNR launch sites to put in and take out boats along the portion of the Grand River that his customers float. "I can't understand that when I already help pay for those facilities with my state taxes," said Bodell. The third consideration Russ weighed was the increased costs of having his boats inspected yearly. According to Bodell, The Ingham County Sheriff's Department used

to receive a stipend of \$20,000 from the state to cover their time inspecting boats, but included in recent state budget cuts was the entire stipend. Now county sheriffs must recoup all the costs of providing inspections from livery operators. "I couldn't even get the sheriff's department to come out and inspect my boats last year," said Bodell. "I guess it costs them more than the four-dollar per boat fee, which is already two dollars more per boat than I used to pay."



In addition to the new regulations that are already in place, Russ considered the dismal possibilities of two more pending Michigan House bills HB 6319 and HB 6320. One bill would require non-motorized boats of any length to carry a registration sticker much like power boats currently have. The other bill would raise the boat inspection fee to five dollars. Looking on the bright side, Russ said, "Well I'm still a member

of GREAT, and maybe I can help you guys work on clearing the river. Now that I won't be occupied with my business every weekend, I can join in your paddle outings."

Russ has already sold off all of Grand Adventures kayak fleet, but if paddlers have an interest in buying a used Old Town canoe, Russ still has twelve canoes for sale for \$400 each including two paddles and three life vests with each canoe. Call 517-712-6475.

Save the Date:

GREAT Annual Members Meeting

Wednesday, March 23, 2011

Daryl's Downtown Restaurant

Relive the 13-day adventure down the Grand River with the people who paddled in Expedition 2010.

Paddle Season Concludes With a Jointly Sponsored GREAT-Dahlem Event

The bond between two of Jackson's most active environmental organizations was extended to four years as members of GREAT and Dahlem floated from Michigan Center to the city of Jackson. Forty participants paddled in cool but sunny conditions past Jackson's industrial south side and its downtown to a conclusion at city owned Lion's Park north of the County Fairgrounds. At the takeout, Dahlem's Mark Snedeker had a picnic feast of hamburgers, hot dogs, salads and desserts ready for a hungry group which at times had to scoot their boats over sand bars evident only in extremely low water conditions. More serious obstacles had been eliminated earlier in the week by the day-long work of Jim Seitz and Bill Kantor who used chain saws and pruning shears to cut through logs and branches.



Bright sun and flat water make for an enjoyable paddle to close out the season.



Rick Berry and Bill Kantor assist paddlers through a dam sluice near Michigan Center.

Barb Anderson and Ken Dodge, two veteran paddlers, recognized all the cutting that had been done in preparation for the trip. Said Barb, "It was evident to Ken and I that someone had done a lot of cutting before the trip. I am just pleased that the GREAT board is so organized for the paddle trips. Even to the extent that they stationed Rick Berry and Bill Kantor at the dam sluice to help people through." Both Barb and Ken commented that the low water conditions forced them to bump over some rocks in the downtown area. "But it was nothing that Ken and I hadn't encountered before and it didn't create a problem." Ken was happy to be paddling right next to the new Arts River Trail and the next day he walked it from end to end with his wife Hazel.

New to GREAT paddles and this particular route

through downtown Jackson were CitPat writer Aaron Aupperle and friend Dave Froelich from East Lansing.. From Froelich's perspective, "It was just a great way to spend a Sunday afternoon. I enjoyed the variations in topography from wetlands, to high banks, to downtown Jackson. I have only been to Jackson several times and it was really unusual to approach the city by river. Aaron Aupperle, a resident of Jackson was also impressed by the perspective gained from the vantage point of the river. "I often forget there is a river in downtown Jackson, and it was so different to see it from down there at the water level. Both young men said they built quite an appetite during the three hours of paddling and they were happy to join in the delicious picnic at Lion's Park. Both Aaron and Dave generously helped GREAT board members load several canoes on the trailer after the picnic. Another encouraging sign is that many of the paddlers brought in floating trash they had collected from the river.



By the time paddlers reach the end of the course they are mighty hungry for the picnic prepared by Mark Snedeker of Dahlem.

2010-2011 GREAT Board

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The following individuals and businesses have supported GREAT during 2010 with donations of \$100 or more.

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Would you consider being a GREAT sponsor in 2011?

GREAT Welcomes the following first-time members:

Brad Hess
Don Lynd
Anna Gering
Mary Leonardson
Debbie Soldner

At 154, GREAT now has the largest membership since its inception in 1990.



Thanks to Dahlem Conservancy's Mark Snedeker for a delicious picnic lunch following the October paddle.