

G.R.E.A.T.

Grand River Environmental Action Team



Website: www.great-mi.org

517.416.4234

Volume 21 Number 4 December 2011

“This Thing is Not Beating Us...”

Youthful energy and idealism power another successful clean-up

It was inspiring to hear GREAT Team Leader Jack Ripstra describe his positive experience on the Grand River September 10th. Jack led 10 young JROTC volunteers and a few caring adults on a clean-up mission in a shallow part of the river between Morrell St. and E. High. Armed with garbage bags and pulling an empty canoe, they entered the river about 9:30 a.m. The canoe was meant to be a convenient “trash barge” but they had no idea how much trash awaited them.

Jack was just one of eight team leaders for the day; some led walkers and others led small canoe flotillas. About 50 cadets took part, along with many adult volunteers from the community. Some brought their own boats with them; others loaned boats for the day.

Asked later how his group did, Jack replied, “Well, we got 8 tires, 3 gas tanks, a car grille, a car hood, a lazy-boy chair, an axle, a wheel chair, a train coupling, a microwave oven, 5 55-gallon drums and a box springs with mattress.”

It is revolting to consider the amount and variety of trash that is dumped each year into the Grand River.

At one point some of Jack’s cadets discovered the mattress and box springs. Both were heavily embedded in mud. Loosening these from the river bottom was a back-breaking proposition. Jack mentally calculated the effort needed to succeed, then suggested the youngsters move on to easier targets. That is when one cadet said, “Oh no; this thing is not beating us.” More cadets joined the effort and, in the end, they hauled both from the river.

It was inspiring to see that level of dedication from these young people who are determined to be of service and

sense what they can accomplish, as a group, when they set their sights on a common goal. Their collective idealism trumped the harmful selfishness of a few, on September 10th.

This public spiritedness can be traced back to the leadership of the Career Center’s Army JROTC commanders, especially one; Lt. Col. Curt Lapham, leader of the Golden Knights Battalion. Lapham has involved his cadets for the past 4 years in GREAT’s annual clean-ups. This is not surprising since he often leads his charges into the outdoors for physical activities, endeavoring to impart to them a respect for nature and for stewardship of the land.

Multiply Jack’s team efforts by 8. Seven other teams cleaned and hauled industriously. These teams were led by Kathy Kulchinski, Barb Anderson, Ken Dodge, Debra Bucholtz, Emily Curry, Kim McKeown, Kenny Price,



Kathy’s group of volunteers



A member of Kathy's group guides a boat full of trash

Rod Monasmith, Don Nelson and Rick Berry. Beginning in southeast Jackson at the east bridge on High St., they cleaned through the city and north into Blackman Township; beyond Parnall Rd. and even beyond where the Portage River joins the Grand.

Kenny Price, GREAT's Board Chair, led a canoeing team covering the river from Lions' Park to the Wastewater Treatment Plant on Lansing Avenue. His group included several members of the Coast Guard Auxillary as well as State Rep. Earl Poleski from House District 64. Also present were Bill Dunphy from the Great Lakes Paddlers, based in Ann Arbor and a young Jackson couple, Hannah and Ron Kellenberger. The team was rounded out by 2 JROTC cadets.



Kathy's group had quite a haul!

Kathy Kulchinski, GREAT Rivermaster, led a team of 3 cadets and 4 adults who cleaned from an overpass on E. High St. to Losey Avenue. Their haul included old tires, an inflatable swimming pool, a plastic chair, assorted metal objects and a large quantity of floating trash.

While Kathy, Kenny, Jack and the other Team Leaders were doing their good work, others were setting up for lunch at R.A. Greene Park. Under the direction of Food Team Leader Mary Lenardson, awnings were erected and tables were set up to hold the many offerings needed to feed a large group of hungry volunteers. Donations were collected at many area restaurants, including Papa John's Pizza, Fazoli's, Mancino's Pizza, Rooster's Coney Island, Virginia's Coney Island, Hungry Howies, Marino's Pizza, Kroger Bakery and Hinkley's Bakery. *Continued on page 3*



Members of Kenny's group



Trash went straight into the dumpster



Bill Dunphy takes his collection to shore

Around noon the last trash bags and items were dragged from the river up onto roadsides for later pick-up. Then it was time to travel to Greene Park where lunch was waiting for river workers of all ages. Dirty, wet and tired (in a good way) the assembled group of around 100 volunteers washed up and lined up to fill their plates with pizza slices, coney dogs, chips, salad, vegetables, cold drinks and cake.

Enjoying the satisfaction of a job well done, the workers were praised by GREAT President Kenny Price and by Career Center Assistant Principal Ron Kinch. Around 1:00 pm boats, paddles, rakes, nets and other gear were loaded up. Cadets and adult volunteers made their way home and the 21st annual GREAT clean-up of the Grand River came to a close.



A dump site on the river's banks

Will River Gauge Survive?

Members of GREAT, and a large number of other concerned citizens, were recently distressed to learn of a budget-cutting plan to shut down the USGS Grand River Gauge, possibly as early as next year.

The river gauge, located a mile north of the city, is on the grounds of Green Park and the Jackson Wastewater Treatment Plant and it provides important data for GREAT members. It measures both the river level and the rate of flow, then automatically feeds that data to a USGS website. GREAT's website homepage (www.great-mi.org) provides a link to this information for a number of reasons.

GREAT planners watch the river data when they are nearing a paddle outing or an annual clean-up. If the river is running too high or too low this could mean problems. For example, the depth gauge needs to be under 10.5 feet for kayaks and under 10 feet for canoes, to paddle under downtown Jackson railroad trestles. On the other hand, if the river drops significantly, logs previously submerged can become barriers to travel. While portages may be possible in these cases, they might not always be safe or convenient. In addition, if the river is running too fast, this can also create unsafe paddling conditions.

Many other people make use of the river-gauge data. The principal use is to allow the National Weather Service to forecast flooding. Wastewater Treatment Plant personnel use it to manage the outflow of clean water into the Grand. The gauge is used by fisheries management and by those participating in the Adopt-a-Stream program. It is being used to study recent downstream flooding on the Portage River. Local authorities need to insure target reductions in pollution established by the MDEQ. Many municipalities must regulate storm water discharge under permits, and need the flow data for this purpose.

The estimated cost of operating and maintaining the gauge is said to be \$15,700 per year. GREAT is not the only organization or agency that would suffer if the gauge were discontinued. Early this past October a call to action was issued by Aquatic/Wetland Ecologist Paul Rentschler. Rentschler penned a letter to USGS officials outlining the many uses of the river gauge and has requested its continued funding. Members of GREAT, too, have made their wishes known in the form of emails and letters. Now the question becomes; will the budget axe fall on an important and proven Grand River tool?



Autumn Colors On Display

Onondaga the destination for 2011's last paddle



Above: Paddlers getting ready at the staging area

Fortunately, no rain was experienced in the afternoon. Clouds obscured the sun with temperatures in the low 60's. All-in-all, not a bad day for an outing.

The river brought its normal share of challenges; maneuvering around various obstacles, such as fallen trees, barricades of debris, and ox-bow changes of direction.

Displays of red, yellow and orange foliage added seasonal appeal. Strung out along the river, the group took several hours to complete the journey.

At one point it was necessary to take a right turn and then a quick left in order to stay on course. This had been confusing during the scouting phase, so Don Nelson and Jim Seitz stationed their kayaks strategically, helping paddlers choose the right path and avoid wasted effort.

One boater lost a cell phone on the river when a storage bag got scraped off a kayak by an errant tree branch. Luckily the bag was waterproof and floated. It was picked up later by another paddler and returned to the owner.

GREAT's final paddle of the season, held on October 16,th featured fall color on a "cloudy-bright" afternoon.

The groundwork for the outing had been laid, as usual, by our hard-working members. Jim Seitz and Bill Kantor cut through river blockages. Kathy Kulchinski and Rick Berry did pre-paddles to scout the route. Debra Bucholtz served her first stint as the Trip Leader, a demanding job that includes boat reservations.

About 55 boaters showed up near Tompkins Center, 15 miles northwest of the city, for a leisurely paddle downstream to Onondaga's Baldwin Park. This was one of the annual joint ventures between GREAT and the Dahlem Center, with GREAT doing the

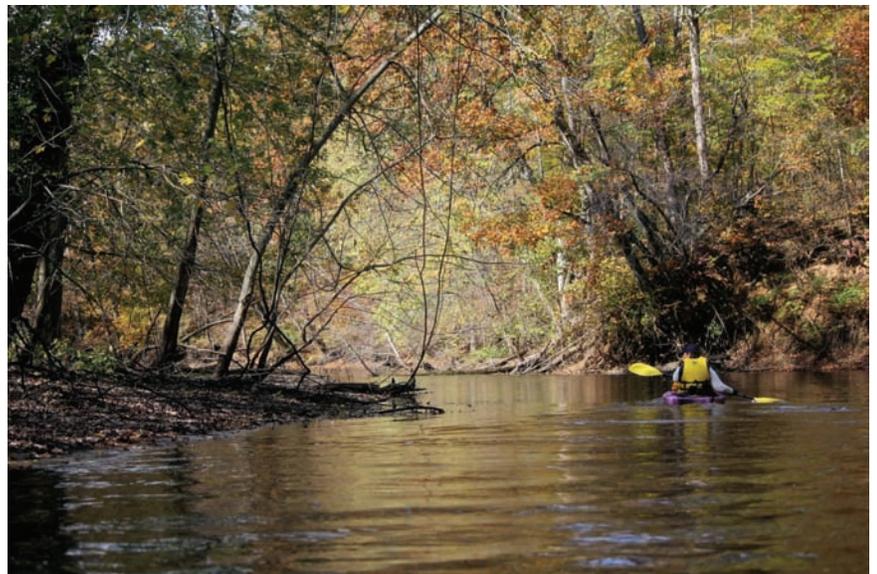
hosting this year.

The weather was a concern, as there were scattered morning showers in the Jackson area.



Left: Maple leaves beginning to show their autumn colors

Below: A paddler enjoying the serenity of the river





Everyone enjoyed the outing, no matter how small!

A couple of individuals did have the bad luck to spill into the river, but fortunately for both, these incidents happened near the take-out point. Don Nelson retrieved the drifting kayak of one young man and helped to empty it of water. The hapless and soaked teen was loaned a sweatshirt to help keep him warm. At that time he and his father were only a 10-minute paddle from Baldwin Park.

Another boater tipped over at about the 3/4 mark of the trip. Though wet and, doubtless uncomfortable, she continued on but left for home soon after disembarking.

Mishaps like these remind us that, in colder months like October and April, it is always a good idea to bring along a change of clothes in a "dry bag." It is also good to consider alternatives to cotton clothing. Wool will keep you warm, even when wet. Synthetic blends containing such materials as polypropylene, polyester or acrylic do not hold water



It turned out to be a great day to be on the water!

and will wick away excess moisture from your skin, thus helping a wet person retain body heat. Hypothermia is the dangerous condition to be avoided in wet situations on cold days. Outdoor apparel shops can offer guidance on what fabrics or blends might be most appropriate.

A picnic meal was offered at Baldwin Park, prepared by our diligent Trip Leader, Debra Bucholtz. It consisted of brats, polish sausage, chips, salad, chili, baked beans, cake and brownies. Dahlem Director Brad Whaley made appreciative remarks on behalf of the Dahlem participants and Kenny Price, GREAT President, thanked those whose efforts had made the event possible. Luckily, Kenny only mentioned the great state of Texas a couple of times. Then, since the weather had turned colder and the wind was up, it was time to pack up gear and call it a day.



Left: The group relaxes and enjoys the meal at Baldwin Park



Something Beautiful From Something Ugly

How I learned to stop posing and start working during the clean-up

I was a team leader on the G.R.E.A.T. Clean-Up this year. I believed since I am so cute and handsome and important, that my only job duties were to paddle and point out trash to people. I had a rude awaking when the Clean-Up started. My crew did not quite visualize how cute and handsome I was, and they stated that I wasn't all that Important either. They further stated I needed to pick up trash out of the river if I wanted to get back home that night.

We put in at Lions Park heading downstream to the Waste Water Treatment Plant. So being the nice guy I am, I started picking up trash out of the river with them. I did want to get home that night in one piece. We found tires, baseballs, golf balls, soccer balls, tennis balls, basket balls and a little wooden ball.

I am not sure how many glass and plastic bottles we found. If I had a nickel for every cigarette Lighter we found, I could buy dinner for the next six months. We found large safety cones and metal Tote-bins. We found **LOTS OF WASTED STUFF THROWN IN THE WATER.**

The last thing I found before getting to the Treatment Plant was a lid to a metal Tote-Bin. It is 42 inches long and 15 inches wide, made out of hard green plastic. When I got to the plant, I did not throw it into the dumpster, I kept it. I figured I could use it somehow.

That is when Lighting hit me right in the big toe. I could turn it into a table. Then I got a second jolt, a better idea. My wife and I have an Art and Photography studio at ART 634. Every Thursday afternoon, my wife and seven other ladies meet to create Art projects. I figured I could con them Ladies into doing the work for me.

I told them about the top and my idea; they came up with a better, cooler idea. If I could find some little bits of trash from the Grand River, they would turn it into a Grand River Trash Treasure Table.

So that is now the project. My friends and I will scout the river for little pieces of trash. The ladies will use their Art Talents to place the trash in the spaces and then we will get a clear Plexiglas plastic top for the table to show it off. After it is finished we can auction it off and give the money to G.R.E.A.T. Someone should want a table with Grand River trash as a prize in their home, don't you think?

Kenny Price



It doesn't look like much now but just wait 'til the ladies are done with it!

Song of the River

Students learn the science and hear the music of the Grand



Students analyze water samples taken from the river



Collecting aquatic creatures can be lots of fun!

“The good life of any river may depend on the perception of its music; and the preservation of some music to perceive.” — Aldo Leopold

As an educator, my goal is to share the music of the Grand River with my students. For the past three years, at Jackson High School, we have had Environmental Science classes. For students taking the class it fulfills their required third year of science. The state of Michigan mandates that every student must pass Biology and Chemistry, as well as one additional science course. So some students want to be enrolled in Environmental Science, some need to be there for the credit and others just get stuck there because they needed something in their schedule.

Despite how or why the students get placed there, every year I teach a unit on water in the Environmental Science course. Students learn the basics of the hydrological cycle, and the importance of groundwater. They examine different land uses and best management practices to protect our waterways. They examine local issues like the currently proposed storm water fee here in Jackson. At the end of the unit, we take a trip to the Trail Street Bridge to complete a biological, chemical, and physical profile of the Grand River.

Taking students to the Grand River is one of my favorite days of the entire school year. At Jackson High we have seventy two minute class periods. That gives us about forty five minutes at the river, when you account for the time it takes to walk to the river. To maximize our time at the river we delegate jobs.

Several students complete the chemical tests; dissolved oxygen, temperature, turbidity, and pH. Another group completes a habitat survey, sketches the river and takes pictures. The third group we call the “river people.” They are the individuals brave enough to put on the waders and get in the water. They take the physical measurements of the river, as well as use nets to collect macroinvertebrate samples. Everyone else falls into the “sorter” category. They are in charge of combing through the samples in search of the “creepy crawlies.”

State Curriculum aside, what I really want students to get from their experience is to hear that sweet song of the Grand River; to value its importance and, in the future, care for the Grand River. For if this generation does not, who will? Every giggle, scream, and shout I hear at the river is a memory for them; one I hope will last a lifetime.

Emily Curry



**GREAT Welcomes the following
First Time Members:**

Alicia Barber
Sara Brown
Timothy Brown
Tami Bucholtz
Cliff & Jeanette Cole
Creative Graphics
Diane Cummins
Ed Daly
Steve Doan
Lynn Fessel
Andrea Frye
LeAnn Gaffke
Carol Galloway
Chris Grehrs
Osamu Hamaguchi
Joe Hart
Pat Huebner
John Ryan Juckett
Steve Kafont
Rhapsedy Kiley
Kurt Lafrance
Daniel Machnik
Steven McKenna
Mary Morin
Michael Nation
Andrew Owen
Mark Schultz
Laurence Shaffer
Jim & Mary Spring
Michael Tarolli
Greg Walker
Patricia Wiley
Phil & Pat Willis
Scott & Kris Willis

GREAT Newsletter

Published quarterly by the
Grand River Environmental Action Team

GREAT
P.O. Box 223
Jackson, MI 49204

grand@great-mi.org
http://www.great.mi.org
517.416.4234

Editor: Jonathan Hoover
(john141969@comcast.net)
GREAT is a tax deductible 501c3 non-profit
organization.

GREAT will be seeking a newsletter editor to replace Jonathan Hoover who will step down in March of 2012.

Anyone interested in providing this service should contact Jonathan Hoover at (517) 782-9546 or any GREAT Board Member.



2011 GREAT Board

Kenny Price, President
Don Nelson, Vice President
Jim Seitz, Secretary
Debra Bucholtz, Treasurer
Kathy Kulchinski, Rivermaster
Emily Curry, Recording Secretary
Jonathan Hoover (Past President), Historian
Jack Ripstra, Trustee
Mary Lenardson, Trustee

Special Assignments:

Louise Hefka, Publicity
Todd Zeller, River Consultant
Bill Kantor, Financial Statements
Jeff Grund, Tax Statements