

# G.R.E.A.T.

## Grand River Environmental Action Team



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## How you can join GREAT

Contact information  
is on page 8 for Mail,  
Email, Website,  
Facebook or Phone

Send \$20 individual  
membership  
\$25 family  
membership or  
\$100 for sponsor  
membership

## Grand River 2016 cleanup recap

by Jack Ripstra

The morning of September 10, 2016 started out at 65° and a light rain turned into a cloudy and windy 70° at 1:00 p.m. The weather did not dampen the spirits and enthusiasm of our 92 volunteers, which included 6 board members, 1 granddaughter, 20 from CMS Energy, and 58 from the Junior ROTC. Warm donuts from Hinkley Bakery and hot coffee from the Jackson Coffee House arrived soon after the volunteers at the CMS Parking Garage for registration and team assignments. Three teams consisting of trailers with eight canoes each and junior ROTC members for unloading the canoes and gear were sent out to spot the canoes and gear at six different locations along the Grand River. At 9:00 a.m., six teams were formed, assigned their equipment, and transported with their team leader to the canoe drop off locations thanks to the buses and drivers provided by the Dahlem Center, Jackson Career Center and the Jackson Area Transportation Authority. Depending on water depths in the river, these teams would wade in river using the canoes as garbage barges or paddle the canoes while placing the collected trash around themselves in the canoes. Two teams formed by CMS Energy and Junior ROTC volunteers walked the banks of the Grand River, from Washington Street to Monroe Street, placing and carrying the debris they picked up in burlap bags and returning it to the CMS Energy Parking Garage. Roll off containers generously donated by Emmons Service Inc., Granger and



Junior ROTC volunteers with river debris.

Photo by Jack Ripstra

Modern Waste were strategically placed along the river where trash and debris picked up by the teams was deposited. Over 9.5 miles of the Grand River was cleaned from South Meridian Road North to Stonegate Farms Subdivision with 24 canoes and many walkers. The 16 cubic yards of trash collected from the Grand River included automobile parts, bikes, blankets, bottles, cans, carpeting, clothes, furniture, glass, highway barrels, plastic, shopping carts, siding, styrofoam, and 20 tires. Lunch was provided at 1:00 p.m. to all the hard workers from Fazolis (bread sticks), Little Caesars (pizza), Los Tres Amigos (tacos), Marino's (Pizza), Papa Johns (pizza), and Virginia Coney Island (coney dogs). Thanks to our Grand River Clean Up volunteers, and the efforts of the Grand River Environmental Action Team, we are making an impact in the quality of the headwaters of the Grand River in Jackson County.

## Merry Christmas & Happy New Year!

# Water Trails are helpful

by Don Nelson

We have all heard someone say something about water trails. So, just what is that exactly anyway? The rivers, lakes, creeks and such have a long history of being trails through the dense forests of this region. Take a look at any of the old hand made maps from the era of the first explorers in the “New World” and the water ways are one of the most prominent features. The water ways were the highways of the time. So, why the big deal now about calling these naturally occurring tracks “Water Trails”?

Well, I don’t know about you, but I am not willing to compare myself to the intrepid explores of old and would be hesitant to pack a canoe with food and supplies and embark on a journey into an unknown wilderness. I like the idea of it, but would not go off into the unknown with the same adventurous zeal that fore fathers did. Yes, I know... we now have well crafted maps, our phones with GPS locations and we can know just where we are at anytime. How far we have gone and how far we have to go to get to the next landing, well maybe. Many of the rivers, in Jackson County in particular, do not have many official landings. There are a few DNR boat launching sites along the Grand River out north of Jackson. Many lakes will have boat launching sites as well, but in general along most of the river miles you stop at a bridge and scramble up the steep bank dragging your boat through the poison ivy and pricklers...what joy! So, back to the original question, what is a “Water Trail”? According to the web site for the National Water Trails System (<https://www.nps.gov/WaterTrails/Home/About>);

“Water trails are recreational routes on waterways with a network of public access points supported by broad-based community partnerships. Water trails provide both conservation and recreational opportunities.”

O.K., that’s nice, so what does that really look like? We are fortunate in that we do not need to look too far for a good example of this in practice, the Huron River Water Trail just off to our east a short distance. From their web site (<http://huronriverwatertrail.org/>);

“The Huron River Water Trail is a 104-mile inland paddling trail connecting people to the river’s natural environment, its history and the communities it touches in Michigan’s Lower Peninsula. From the rapids at Delhi and Dexter to the placid flat water at the entrance to Lake Erie, a variety of paddling experiences await you. For kayaking, canoeing, fishing on a fly, and other freshwater pursuits, follow the Huron River Water Trail to learn what others already know.”

Actually, there are already many water trails in place around Michigan that you can go and explore. A great source for identifying them would be the Michigan Water Trails web site (<http://www.michiganwatertrails.org/default.asp>). But, still...just what are the bits and pieces that make up an official water trail compared to just getting out and paddling down some river like the AuSable or Pine Rivers up north. They have well identified landings and even camping sites along the way but are they official water trails? Well, to my



Water trail map

thinking one of the big items is signage. “Way Finding” some call it. Information about where you are, what you can expect to see or do along the way and how far to the next access point. Also, what facilities are available at each access point such as toilets, portable water, shopping or eating within easy walking distance? Some sites have lockers to safely keep your boat and other things locked while you go explore. This works great in the many “Water Towns” along the Huron and Clinton Rivers. Having signs at each bridge you go under along the way can help you know where you are. This can be helpful if you need to call for help, you can tell your rescuers where you are on the river. Some stretches of trail have mile markers so help can find you quicker. So, to my thinking signage can be a big deal to help make it easier for a traveler, tourist or anyone unfamiliar with a local water way to be able to go for an adventure armed with the knowledge of just what they are getting themselves into.

For those of you have joined us on some of our GREAT outings, you know about the access points we use to launch from. Most are a wide spot in the road where you can pull over to off load your boat. There are no signs, no water available for drinking, and no toilets usually, parking is often poor and access to the river can be a bit of a struggle sometimes. Still, we do it because getting on the river and going for a paddle can be such a rewarding experience. To help make this experience easier for anyone to achieve GREAT has been working with the Upper Grand River Watershed Alliance, Jackson County Parks Department, City of Jackson Parks Department and a host of others to develop a plan to have the Grand River be the first State of Michigan approved water trail. The State is currently developing their process for water trail designation and our efforts along with the Middle Grand and Lower Grand River Watershed groups and their affiliates are intended to get the entire length of the Grand River to be the first state designated water trail. As this process continues, there will be additional articles sharing the progress and details of this effort.

# GREAT's October 9, 2016 paddle trip: Grand River from State Rd. (at Territorial Rd.) to DNR Access at Dixon Rd.

by Mary Lenardson, *October Trip Leader*

The weather was very nice and comfortable.

We had plenty of people of varied ages and paddling experience. There were 27 adults and 12 youth. The biggest group was from a local church.

We ended up having several of our boats available, but there was no waiting list this time.

Don Nelson, having been the major part of the tree trimming and pre-paddle team, gave everyone the news about the condition of this section of the Grand and where to pay closest attention.

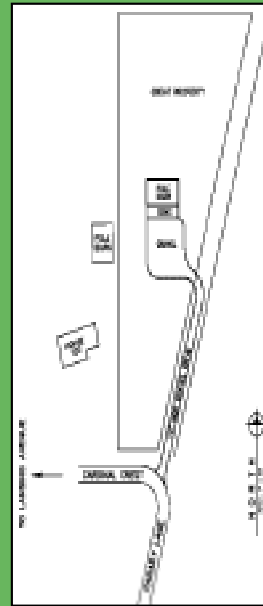
This was the first paddle where GREAT provided a Porta-potty at the parking/take-out location. The shuttling of vehicles went well, there was enough parking and we got in the river, mostly, on time. John Minar brought his RC drone and took aerial pictures/video along the river at both ends of the route. Sometime, he hopes to use it along a GREAT trip while riding in one of the canoes. We did have a couple of swimmers but no injuries! The group met at Klavon's North Restaurant afterwards. It was a GREAT last trip of the 2016 GREAT paddling



Deb Snell is sweep boat on the last GREAT paddle of the year.

season! Watch for our 2017 Activities Calendar on our website after the beginning of next year. We'll see you all again next Spring!

## Dedication of the GREAT pole barn



### ***Invasive species removal***

***January 7, 2017***

The GREAT property has several invasive species present. We are in a multi-year effort to eradicate the invasive species to encourage the native species to thrive. If you are interested in helping, please join us on January 7 at 9 am at the new GREAT barn.

Come dressed for the weather and ready to work! If you have equipment to help (chain saws, loppers, etc.) feel free to bring it, but we also need people to haul debris and apply herbicide.

On Friday, December 16, 2016 at 1:00 p.m. there will be a dedication ceremony for the Grand River Environmental Actions Team new pole barn. This pole barn is located at 100 Cardinal Crest in Birdland Subdivision, Blackman Township, located North of Parnall Road and East of Lansing Avenue (see map). This pole barn has become a reality due to the generous contributions of our members, the Consumers Energy Foundation and the Jackson Community Foundation. Please join us to celebrate the dedication of our new storage building located on GREAT's 25 acre parcel along the Grand River.

# Jackson area bridges you may have seen



Bridge in 1914 Downtown Jackson



Bridge on Park Rd. Between Sharp lake and Grand River



Mechanic Street Bridge Over the Grand River



Napoleon Rd. between Olcott Lakes



Railroad Bridge over Grand River between E. Morrell and Lewis



Walking Bridge over Grand River at Lions Park

*PHOTOS BY: Kenny Price/kpricephotos*

## GREAT receives grant from Consumers Energy Foundation

The Grand River Environmental Action Team is very pleased to announce that we have received a \$15,000 contribution from the Consumers Energy Foundation. This money will be used for the concrete floor, composting toilet and solar lighting for our pole barn which is under construction. This pole barn will be used to store our canoes, kayaks, trailers and cleanup supplies, and is located at 100 Cardinal Crest on the GREAT land along the Grand River in Blackman Township. With this generous gift from the Consumers Energy Foundation our pole barn will be able to be put in use this fall instead of the projected summer of 2017 opening.



# ANIMAL SPOTLIGHT

## Eastern Box Turtle

by John Minar

Most often associated with tropical climates, one species of terrestrial turtle is native to Michigan. The Eastern Box Turtle (officially the *Terrapene Carolina Carolina* - so nice they named it twice), is Michigan's only true terrestrial turtle. Not surprisingly, these creatures are found in the Eastern United States, but some as far west as Texas where, contrary to typical Texan claims, they are not bigger than the 7" length found everywhere else.

One interesting feature of the Eastern Box Turtle is the hinged shell which enables them to 'clam up' and protect legs, head and neck from predators. This is the only defense these slow moving turtles have.

How slow are they? About the only things these turtles can out run are earthworms, snails, slugs and plants including mushrooms and berries. Researchers are unable to determine if this diet is by choice or necessity.

Slow moving is not the only reason they are the State Reptile of North Carolina. They are also good eats, according to North Carolina legislature (Session Laws, 1979, c. 154).

"Whereas, the turtle is derided by some who have missed the finer things of life, but in some species has provided food that is a gourmet's delight; and

Whereas, the turtle watches undisturbed as countless generations of faster hares run by to quick oblivion, and is thus a model of patience for mankind, and a symbol of this State's unrelenting pursuit of great and lofty goals."

Since the Eastern Box turtle consumes fungi (mushrooms) poisonous to humans, several references suggest this species may not be your first choice for the dinner table.

Another interesting characteristic is



that gender identity is apparent from the bright red eyes of the male and the dark eyes of the female. Fortunately, they are not known to use human bathrooms which could present problems for the species under North Carolina laws.

In Michigan the Eastern Box Turtle population has seen a steady decline over the decades. While not endangered in Michigan, their official status is "State Special Concern". Many factors contribute to this.

One factor is that Eastern Box Turtles are slow to mature. Shells are not completely hard until 7 years old. Reproduction starts around that age, and some ma-

ture years later. Only a few eggs are laid per year, and not every year. In addition almost every faster animal is a predator. Raccoons, skunks, turkeys, possums, fox, weasels, birds, snakes, cats, dogs, and even chickens. Automobiles and bulldozers also contribute to mortality. The later causing loss of habitat for a species which wander no more than perhaps five acres during its considerable lifespan of 50, while a large portion live to over 100 years (in the wild). In captivity the life spans are much shorter for far too many reasons to cover here. They remain a popular pet, however it is unlawful to take wild turtles as pets in Michigan.



# Winter Ice Safety

Michigan winters offer all kinds of opportunities for outdoor fun!...ice fishing, snowmobiling, skiing and skating to name a few. With cold weather fast approaching, we thought we'd provide a few ice safety tips, courtesy of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR), to help keep you safe this winter.

If planning a trip out on the ice, remember that ice conditions vary from lake to lake. You can't always tell the strength of the ice simply by its look, its thickness, the temperature or whether or not it is covered with snow. Strength is based on all these factors – plus the depth of water under the ice, size of the water body, water chemistry and currents, the distribution of the load on the ice and local climatic conditions.

## **SOME COLD FACTS ABOUT ICE:**

New ice is usually stronger than old ice. Four inches of clear, newly-formed ice may support one person on foot, while a foot or more of old, partially-thawed ice may not. Ice formed by melted and refrozen snow appears milky, and is very porous and weak.

Ice seldom freezes uniformly. It may be a foot thick in one location and only an inch or two just a few feet away. Also, ice near shore can be weaker than ice that is farther out.

Ice formed over flowing water and currents is often dangerous. This is especially true near streams, bridges and culverts. Also, the ice on outside river bends is usually weaker due to the undermining effects of the faster current.

Ice covered by snow or slush should always be presumed unsafe. Snow acts like an insulating blanket and slow the freezing process. Ice under the snow will be thinner and weaker. The extra weight also reduces how much weight the ice sheet can support. If there is slush on the ice, stay off! Slush ice is only about half as strong as clear ice.

Booming and cracking ice isn't necessarily dangerous. It only means that the ice is expanding and contracting as the temperature changes.

## **ICE TIPS**

Be especially cautious in areas where air temperatures have fluctuated. A warm spell may take several days to weaken the ice; however when temperatures vary widely, causing ice to thaw during the day and refreeze at night, the result is a weak, "spongy" or honeycombed ice that is unsafe.

Check with a local resort or bait shop about any known danger spots such as aeration systems or traditionally unsafe areas before heading out on the ice.

Have a plan of what to do if you do break through. Carry rope, ice picks and a flotation device to help save your life or that of a companion. A vest-style life jacket can provide extra warmth and flotation in case you fall through.

When venturing out on the ice: The DNR does not recommend taking a car or truck out onto the ice at any time. If you are walking onto the ice with a group, avoid going single file and avoid standing together in a single spot – spread out. Never venture out alone without telling a responsible adult on shore your plans. Test ice thickness with an ice spud before you settle on a spot. Wear a life jacket and bright colored clothing. Take a cell phone for emergency use. And avoid large cracks or depressions in the ice.



## **IF YOU FALL THROUGH**

Try to remain calm. Don't remove your winter clothing. Heavy clothes won't drag you down, but instead can trap air to provide warmth and flotation – this is especially true with a snowmobile suit. Turn in the water toward the direction you came from – that is probably the strongest ice. If you have them, dig the points of the ice picks into the ice and, while vigorously kicking your feet, pull yourself onto the surface by sliding forward on the ice. Roll away from the area of weak ice. Rolling on the ice will distribute your weight to help avoid breaking through again. Get to shelter, heat, dry clothing and drink warm, non-alcoholic and non-caffeinated drinks. Call 911 and seek medical attention if you feel disoriented, have uncontrollable shivering, or have any other ill effects that may be symptoms of hypothermia (the life-threatening drop in the body's core temperature).

# Cleanup of a Different Sort

by John Minar

While GREAT has long conducted an annual Grand River cleanup each September, there are a few groups in other states somewhat similar to GREAT. Cahaba Riverkeeper group in Birmingham Alabama is one such group. I was in Birmingham on November 13, 2016 the day of their cleanup of Lake Purdy.

Lake Purdy was a three square mile impound for the drinking water of Birmingham Alabama and is now little more than a stream. The extreme drought conditions made an excellent opportunity to assemble a large scale cleanup never possible before. Several hundred people arrived to clean up the source of their drinking water.

Recently the Colonial Pipeline incident spilled an estimated 250,000 gallons of gasoline near the Cahaba River which feeds Lake Purdy. Reminiscent of the West Shore Pipeline spill in Jackson, July 17, 2012. Unlike the Jackson spill, the Cahaba River is part of the largest drinking water system in Alabama.

The Birmingham Water Board serves the Metro Birmingham area, population of 1.14 million. Fortunately, if it can be called that, the severe drought in the region meant the tributaries were dry. Gasoline could not flow into the Cahaba River, Lake Purdy impound, or the water supply. Unfortunately, due to the drought, water customers may face a 400% surcharge.

In Michigan we share concerns with our fellow Americans in the south, such as water quality, E. coli, access to water resources, and impact of land development. One concern we do not share is a reliance on man-made impounds for our drinking water. Our 'impounds' (Lake Michigan and Huron) are a blessing we seldom think about. Water, like air, is only a concern when absent.



More than 200 volunteers participated in cleanup day at Lake Purdy.

*Photos by John Minar*



The lake is open from 6am to 5:30pm. Canoeing & kayak are not allowed on Lake Purdy. Neither is swimming as it is the drinking water supply. Gasoline boat rentals are available during open hours.



# VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

If you have a chainsaw, or can use a chainsaw, and a desire to help clear a path on the river so our paddlers can get through, we sure could use the help. The work falls on the same few and it would be nice to have more help.

Email [grand@great-mi.org](mailto:grand@great-mi.org) to volunteer or call 517-416-4234. Thank you!

## Board Meetings

The GREAT board meets on the second Wednesday of each month, with the exception of December, at 7:00 p.m. at the Summit Township Hall, 2121 Ferguson Road (across from Knights Restaurant, near the Intersection of South Jackson and Horton Roads).

Meetings are open and visitors are welcome. To be on the agenda, please contact us prior to the meeting.

## GREAT's Mission

The mission of Grand River Environmental Action Team is to promote the protection and preservation of the Grand River Watershed through activities and educational programs

## GREAT Board

Kenny Price, President

Kurt LaFrance, Vice President

Pam Brown, Secretary

Jack Ripstra, Treasurer

Don Nelson, Rivermaster

John Minar, Director

Jon Hoyle, Director

Mary Lenardson, Director

Deb Snell, Director

Kay Brown, Director

Dan Kaser, Director

*Special Assignments:*

Louise Hefka, Publicity

Jeff Grund, Tax Statements

Barb Anderson, Historian

## GREAT Newsletter

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If you wish to join or renew your membership  
visit: [www.great-mi.org/Membership2.htm](http://www.great-mi.org/Membership2.htm)