

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

\$30 family membership or
\$100 for sponsor membership

GREAT to hold Annual Dinner & Meeting

Speakers Gary & Linda DeKock present “Paddling the Grand River & Mississippi River”

by Mary Lenardson, Director

In 2014, following well-earned career retirements, my good friends of 26 years, Gary and Linda De Kock, kayaked the full Mississippi River, 2,291 miles from Northern Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico, a trip of 70 days. They went just a bit back upstream to New Orleans to attend the national annual conference of the Water Environment Federation, of which Gary has been a member for 35 years.

In 2015, they kayaked the Grand River from Grand Lake, Liberty Township, to Grand Haven, kayaked then cycled the Lake Michigan coast to Chicago, attending the annual WEF Technical and Exhibition Conference, or WEFTEC, there as well.

Their goals, on these trips, were to increase awareness of these rivers as an asset to the communities in its watersheds and raise funds for the charity, Water For People.

These first two trips have raised \$27,000 for Water For People, a Denver-based charity currently working in nine countries around the world to promote the development of high quality and sustainable drinking water and sanitation services, for everyone, forever.

In 2017, they will canoe along five rivers, from Lac Vieux Desert near Watersmeet, MI, down the Wisconsin River, the Mississippi, to the North side of St. Louis, upstream on the Illinois River, Des Plaines River and the Chicago River, ending in Chicago, a trip of 1,176 miles in 60 days, and again attend the WEFTEC Annual Conference.

Linda De Kock received the Michigan

M A R K T H E
D A T E I N Y O U R C A L E N D A R

Wed. March 15, 2017

Steve's Ranch, 311 W Louis Glick Hwy, Jackson, MI 49201

\$15 for dinner. Cocktails 6pm;
Dinner 6:30pm; Meeting 7pm.

Must RSVP to eat, 517-416-4234 or
grand@great-mi.org by
Monday, March 13

Water Environment Association President's Award in 2015 and a Kenneth J. Miller Founders' Award this year. Besides those first two long kayak trips and the one planned for this year, she also dreams, daily, of a voyage down the Missouri River. She is active on the MWEA Water For People Committee and helps to stage Pedal With Purpose bicycling events at national Water Environment Federation and American Water Works Association conferences.

Gary De Kock joined MWEA in 1982 and has been active on the Water For People, Lab Practices and Lagoon committees. Since retiring from the Grand Rapids Water Resource Recovery Facility in 2013, he has focused his efforts on bringing to life MWEA's value of water objective.

Their presentation will include photos and video from the Mississippi and Grand River voyages. The take home message will be that healthy rivers support healthy communities. There are so many ways to help communities to use water sustainably. Let's all be part of the solution!

GREAT pole barn history

by Jack Ripstra, Treasurer

In 2014 the Grand River Environmental Action Team began working on a master plan for the 25.3 acres of land they own along the Grand River in Birdland Subdivision. A site plan, building plans and a cost estimate were prepared for a pole barn to hold canoes, cleanup equipment, kayaks, personal floatation devices, river debris removal equipment and trailers. In April of 2015 the GREAT Board adopted a master plan for the 25.3 acre parcel of land which included the construction of the pole barn.

Application was made and a variance was granted from Blackman Township to construct a pole barn on a residential zoned parcel of land that did not have a house on it. In September of 2015 an informational meeting was held at the site of the proposed pole barn to explain the project to our



The ribbon cutting ceremony on a chilly December 16, 2016.

neighbors in Birdland Subdivision. In November of 2015 a campaign was launched to begin seeking donations for the estimated \$42,000.00 cost to construct the pole barn.

Bids for the labor and material to construct the pole barn were received by the GREAT Board in June of 2016. Thanks to the generous donations of our members, the Consumers Energy Foundation and the Jackson Community Foundation, our fund raising goal

was achieved in September of 2016.

Construction of the pole barn began in November of 2016 by R.A. Schoch Builders with the material coming from Spring Arbor Lumber Company.

On Friday, December 16, 2016 a dedication ceremony was held for the Grand River Environmental Action Teams pole barn. Those present included Pete Jancek from Blackman Township, Carolyn Bloodworth from the Consumers Energy Foundation, Dana Ashlock from the Jackson Community Foundation, seven GREAT Board Members, two GREAT Members and the construction team from R.A. Schoch Builders were all present for this ceremony.

A compost toilet, shelving for the cleanup equipment, personal flotation devices and river debris removal equipment, landscaping and solar lighting are scheduled for this spring with plans to begin using the pole barn by early summer.



The hard working team that made the GREAT pole barn a reality. Left to right: Jack Ripstra, Dana Ashlock from the Jackson Community Foundation, Kenny Price, Jim Seitz and Carolyn Bloodworth from the Consumers Energy Foundation



Construction started on the GREAT pole barn in October.



Barn is finished except for concrete pad.

Annual Winter Stonefly Hunt

Aleta Daniels,
Program Manager at Jackson County Conservation District

On February 4th, we trekked out into a beautiful, calm winter day to examine five separate sites along tributaries of the Grand River for the presence of stoneflies. To the casual observer, this may seem boring, or maybe fun but with no real purpose, or just plain crazy (wading in the river in winter?!?!?). Stonefly hunts are anything but boring, definitely have a purpose, and while I admit it may have an aspect of crazy, the work is incredibly important.

Why stoneflies? Stoneflies are known as indicator species. They are the proverbial canary in the coal mine for aquatic ecosystems. Stoneflies are incredibly sensitive to pollution, so their presence can be used as an indicator that an aquatic environment is in pretty good shape. Additionally, they need certain habitat characteristics in order to survive, including fast-running streams with high oxygen levels and plenty of boulder and cobble substrate. Oxygen levels can decrease with warmer waters and nutrient pollution, which can affect all life forms dependent on those environments.

Why winter? During a time when most species slow down, hibernate, or leave the area completely, stoneflies can be found actively moving about their aquatic environments. The two stonefly families we look for, Capniidae and Taeniopterygidae, begin their process of transforming from larval stage to adult stage during the late winter months, an evolutionary process allowing them to avoid the majority of predators. Because of this timeline, we would not normally find them during our spring hunt that takes place in late April/early May.

What do we gain? By tracking the presence/absence of these important aquatic organisms, we can get a first-hand look at the quality of a stream, and therefore the general health of the watershed overall. If we know through previous years of collections that stoneflies are found in certain areas and they become rare or absent, that can indicate declining water quality. If we find stoneflies in areas not previously known to harbor them, it can be a cheery indicator of improving water quality. The information we gain with all of the bug collections we do throughout the year can help us determine any necessary action steps that need to be taken.

What did we find? During our recent foray into the streams, we found stoneflies at three out of the five sites we sampled. The locations where we found stoneflies are Kate Palmer Sanctuary; a privately-owned section of Trist Creek; and a section of Sandstone Creek at Roth Road. The Trist Creek location is newly added to our list of sites, and we look forward to monitoring that location for years to come. The two sites at which we did not find any stoneflies are Minard Mills Park and a section of the Falling Waters Trail. Neither of these locations have had stoneflies found in prior years, so this was not unexpected.



Left to right: Cathy Juhnzen, Pete DeWitt and Kay Brown, and identifying the captured bugs.



Jim Seitz wading in the river netting for stoneflies.



One of the stoneflies that were captured.

Our adopt-a-stream program is heavily dependent on the help of volunteers. If you are interested in finding out more, or learning how you can be involved in our adopt-a-stream events, contact Aleta Daniels at 517-395-2089 or aleta.daniels@macd.org.

Water Trail updates

by Don Nelson, Rivermaster

If you noticed my article in the last newsletter you may remember we identified a water trail as "...recreational routes on waterways with a network of public access points supported by broad-based community partnerships." I also spoke a bit about access points and signage. Here in Jackson County along the Grand River we have few formalized access points.

One will often pull over to the side of the road near a bridge and drag their boat to the water. Have an adventure maneuvering the downed trees and log jams and somewhere down river near another bridge, get out. They hopefully do all of this without getting too wet. One of the discussion points we have spent much time on during many of our meetings over the past few years has been about identifying spots along the Grand River that could be an access site.

There are a few existing places some use already. A good example is the boat launch at Vandercook Lake County Park on the east end of the lake and the area just off Maplewood Drive next to the river in Ella Sharp Park. One can put in at Vandercook Lake, paddle across the lake and beneath the bridge at Browns Lake Road. Paddle to the west end of Browns Lake and find the stream leaving the lake at the northwest end of the lake and follow that into Williams Lake. Cross that lake and again on the northwest shore fine the stream leaving the lake and you are on the Grand River. Follow the river and a little past Probert Road Bridge on your left hand side is a good spot to pull out of the river.

This is a clearing in the Ella Sharp Park with parking space and a concrete pad at the water's edge. Both of these sites would be ideal for inclusion to the water trail. Improve each site as required with toilets near to the put in, maybe some fresh water, trash bins, and signage explaining how far down river to the next access site and a map to show you how to spot a car at the next site. Also, what you could expect to run into along the way like low bridges or dams or perhaps swift water that might be beyond your skills. The signage should have a map of where you are in relation to town, near by shopping/eating/drinking establishments or police and medical facilities. It would be good to know if these are within walking distance or whether you need a car or access to public transportation (if available) to get there.

These two sites are also appropriate for the placement of ADA compliant systems similar to the photo of EZ Docks floating dock and roller system. You can place your boat on the roller, step in and push off into the water. This is great in reverse for getting out. There are additional seating options for people in wheelchairs to sit on and get into their kayaks. There are several different launch systems available that would make getting into and out of the water much easier.

These kinds of sites, in my opinion, are 'no brainers'. They exist and are the correct distance apart for a rewarding paddle experience without being too ambitious for most paddlers. Over the past few years I have been going to symposiums, conferences, lectures and many other types of gatherings focused on this topic. There seems to be a general consensus that the distance between access sites, usually measured in the



Roller docks are proposed.

time it takes to travel this "Goldilocks" distance rather than actual miles, should be about two hours. As one often seen river advocate at these meetings has put it, "...a pop and potty stop". As we look at the rest of the Grand River in our county using these two sites as good examples we come up with locations for other sites that fit this general criteria.

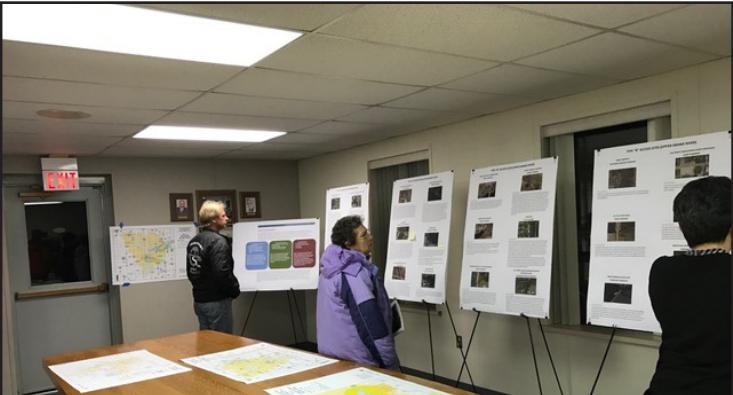
As noted in that previous article, The Upper Grand River Watershed Alliance and several GREAT members have been working with other interested parties to put together a plan to create a water trail in Jackson County. We have hired a company out of Traverse City called Land Information Access Association (LIAA) to help us develop a Master Plan to implement our section of the Grand River Water Trail. Interesting to me is that this same company is working with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to develop a manual for communities to create their own water trails with all of the applicable requirements to be eligible to apply for State recognition.

The DNR has recently started their in-house review of the application process to gain official state water trail designation. We have been working with representatives of the DNR and the other Watershed groups with the goal of making the Grand River the first official State of Michigan approved Water Trail. You can look at the plan of what has been developed by going to the watershed's home page (<http://www.uppergrandriver.org/>) and selecting the Upper Grand River Master Plan.



Upper Grand River

Upper Grand River Watershed Alliance and the Upper Grand River Water Trail Planning Committee held open house



Individual launch sites displayed.



Kay Brown, Deb Snell and Kenny Price.

On Feb 15, 2017 The Upper Grand River Watershed Alliance and the Upper Grand River Water Trail Planning Committee had an Open House at the Blackman Township Hall, for review of the Draft Upper Grand River Water Trail Masterplan. The meeting was well attended, and the people attending had several new ideas to add to the plan. The plan will be reedited and sent to committee for final approval. G.R.E.A.T. members Don Nelson and Jim Seitz have been strong proponents of the plan.

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Upper Grand River Watershed Alliance
Virginia Coney Island

GREAT 2016 Sponsors

G.R.E.A.T. is very lucky to have had such great sponsors in 2016. We are very proud of our sponsors and wish to honor each one of them. Each one is a very vital access to our to the mission of GREAT, which is to promote the protection and preservation of the Grand River Watershed through activities and educational programs.

GREAT Activities Calendar

*Grand River Environmental Action Team
2017*

March 15th (Wed.) 6:30 PM

Annual Dinner and Meeting

Steve's Ranch, (311 Louis Glick, downtown Jackson)

Dinner \$15.00 charge; Cocktails 6:00, PM Food 6:30 PM., Meeting begins at 7:00 PM

Speakers: Gary and Linda DeKock "Paddling the Grand River and Mississippi Rivers"

Attendees must RSVP for food: 517 416 4234 or grand@great-mi.org by Monday, March 13th

April 22rd (Sat.) 1:00-4:00 PM

JAOC Earth Day

Sparks Foundation Park (Cascades)

Enjoy the booths and activities of many local outdoor and environmental organizations.

Paddle GREAT's boats in the park lagoons

All paddle events are open to the public. To reserve a kayak or canoe (no charge) and to check trip status due to weather status, call GREAT 517 416-4234 or check <http://www.great-mi.org>. Cancelled trips and clean-up will be rescheduled for the following weekend unless posted on web otherwise. Waivers must be signed at Put-in. A PFD must be worn at all times. Arrive no later than 11:30 AM for car placement shuttle. Click on Calendar button on GREAT's home web site for trip attributes, maps of put-in, and take out locations.

April 9th (Sun.) 12 Noon

Grand River (2 to 3 Hour Paddle) (3.4 Mile Trip)

Jefferson Rd (US 127 Bridge in Liberty Twp.) to US 127 (Bridge North of Reed Road)

May 21st (Sun.) 12 Noon

River Raisin (Washtenaw County) (2 to 3 Hour Paddle) (4.7 Mile Trip)

Sharon Hollow (at the Mill) to Manchester Dam (Main Street lot near Edward Jones)

June 18th (Sun.) 12 Noon

Grand River (2.5 to 4 Hour Paddle) (6.2 Mile Trip)

Fourth Street (Michigan Center) to Lions Park (Adams Street)

July 16th (Sun.) 12 Noon

Huron River (Washtenaw County) (3 to 5 Hour Paddle) (8.5 Mile Trip)

Hudson Mills Metropark (Dexter) to West Delhi Metropark (Ann Arbor)

A \$10.00 Metropark Daily Pass is required

August 20th (Sun.) 12 Noon

Center Chain of Lakes (3 to 4 Hour Paddle) (5.7 Mile Trip)

DNR Boat Launch (Washington Street on Center Lake) to Little Wolf Lake County Park (Wolf Lake Rd.)

September 9th (Sat.) 9 AM to 2 PM

Annual Grand River Clean-up

CMS Energy band shell off Cooper St. in Downtown Jackson. Contact us prior if you wish to bring a canoe (no kayaks). Dress to be in or near the river. Tools and lunch provided.

October 15th (Sun.) 12 Noon

Grand River (2 to 3 Hour Paddle) (4.2 Mile Trip)

Trestle Park (Dixon Road) to Tompkins Road (DNR Boat launch)

Invasive plant species removal project



Benjamin Ward cutting buckthorn with a chainsaw.



Charity and Bill Steere making brush piles.



Kurt Rudolph cutting brush with loppers.



A stump that has been treated with Tordon.

By Jack Ripstra, Treasurer

The morning of January 7, 2017 was the second invasive plant species removal project at the Grand River Environmental Action Team's property located along the Grand River in Birdland Subdivision. Fourteen volunteers met at a chilly 7° at 9:00 that morning at GREAT's newly constructed pole barn on the property. Over the years, as is common across the majority of the land in this part of Michigan, aggressively growing non-native plants have made significant inroads on the property, resulting in decreased diversity of native plants and wildlife. Because part of GREAT's mission is to work toward the betterment of the environment, the board decided that it would strive to restore their property to conditions similar to historic record.

Ellen Rathbone and Gary Siegrist

marked with fluorescent spray paint the most aggressive of the invasive non-native plants, buckthorn, autumn olive, garlic mustard, dame's rocket, and honeysuckle. The remaining volunteers split into three groups with Group 1, armed with chainsaws, hand saws, and loppers cut down the previously marked non-native plants. Group 2 gathered the cut branches, stems, and trees and dragged and stacked the material into piles. These brush piles provide excellent habitat for box turtles, rabbits and song birds. Group 3 dabbed Tordon, a powerful herbicide on the cut stumps and branches which will prevent the plants from sprouting this spring.

With a high temperature of 9° and a 10 mile per hour wind that morning, the group of volunteers had to work hard for four hours to stay

warm. These two invasive plant species removal projects have addressed 1.8 acres of GREAT's 25.3 acres of property in Blackman Township. Invasive plant removal is a long-term process, especially in areas where the plants have been allowed to grow unchecked for decades. However, it is an important undertaking, because the re-establishment of native plants provides food for native insects, which in turn are food for native birds. Restoring habitat really is restoring the health of the land, and it spreads all the way up the food chain. GREAT's invasive species removal project is going to continue for many years as we try to wrest control of our parcel away from the nonnative plants. Many thanks to our volunteers for making this a success and we will be continuing with this project again next fall.



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 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. alternating between the Summit Township Hall, and Blackman Township Hall.

March's meeting will be held at Blackman Township. April's meeting at Summit Township Hall etc.

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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visit: www.great-mi.org/Membership2.htm