



ANNUAL REPORT

2015 - 2016

WMEAC



WMEAC STAFF



BILL WOOD

Executive Director



MARY ROBINSON

Director of Development



ELAINE STERRET ISELY

Director of Water and LID Programs



JESSICA VANDERARK

Director of Environmental Education



ANNE MARIE HERTL

Community Activism Manager



JON HELMRICH

Director of Operations



ONDREA SPYCHALSKI

Water Programs Outreach Coordinator



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We.Me.Act.

community

There is beauty in this place we live. It stems from the natural wonders of lakeshore dunes and streams running through our cities. But this beauty reveals its truest form in the people who come together in shared love to protect and preserve West Michigan.

commitment

There is power in the individual resolve. It is a source of energy and a guide to keep us true. The seeds of this energy lie in each of us, waiting to emerge. Ready to change minds. Ready to change the world.

action

We must preserve this special place for all generations. By gathering our collective hopes and intentions we create a beginning. Our next step is to act; placing our intentions in policy commits our communities to sustaining what is best for today and tomorrow.

Christine Helms-Maletic

Dear WMEAC Members and Friends,

As I look back at the past year of WMEAC activities, I am struck by the old adage, “the more things change, the more they stay the same.” While much has changed here at WMEAC since our last Annual Report, our commitment to protecting our natural resources, strengthening our resiliency to climate change and including EVERYONE in our education and advocacy efforts is steadfast. This year saw the launch of our newest three-year Strategic Plan, the refreshment of our mission and the expansion of our Board of Directors. We said goodbye to some great staff who were also good friends, and will be welcoming our new Executive Director at our Annual Meeting in November. Yet with all of these changes, we remain, in essence, unchanged in the things that matter: partnership (WE), empowerment (ME) and engagement (ACT).

While WMEAC celebrates another year of strong performance and vigorous activity, we recognize that we do not do this work alone, and indeed, we could not. We owe many thanks to our volunteers for giving us their time, to our donors for contributing their resources and to our organizational partners for their commitment to our shared missions. From committee and board members to Teach for the Watershed mentors to rooftop gardeners to Grand River cleaners-uppers, WMEAC has been the beneficiary of your goodwill and efforts: thank you. Whether your contribution was a few dollars a month or a major sponsorship of one of our key events, if you supported us financially, we are grateful. As for our organizational partners, elected officials, governmental staff, and other nonprofit or professional groups who work in the environmental sphere: your support and cooperation is essential to our continued success. WE are all in this together, and we appreciate you.

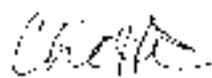
Whatever political winds may blow, WMEAC believes that only a collective effort can bring us fresher air, cleaner water and healthy ecosystems. This effort would not be possible without the education

and engagement of everyone who breathes the air, drinks the water and eats of the bounty of the land. Thus, we continue our concerted efforts to reach out to people that have traditionally been under-served or overlooked by the environmental movement for decades. We spend hundreds of hours a year in classrooms teaching our young people new strategies for saving the world. No matter who you are or where you live, there is always something more you can do to protect the environment: flip a light switch, install a rain garden, call a legislator, recycle your waste, become a supporting member of WMEAC! Always remember, it all starts with ME.

Any organization is only as strong as those who work to support it, and no one works harder than WMEAC staff. This year we bade farewell to two of our long-time staff members, Executive Director Rachel Hood and Policy Director Nick Occhipinti. Nick took advantage of an opportunity to travel and teach in Spain, and Rachel has taken on several projects—environmental consulting and a new family business among them. WMEAC has benefited greatly from their leadership, and we wish them both the best of luck. No one embodies the directive to ACT more clearly than our friends Rachel and Nick.

In closing, I am pleased to introduce our new Executive Director, Bill Wood. A truly dedicated and outstanding team of Board members and staff worked hard over the summer to ensure that our next leader would ensure the continued growth and stability of this venerable organization. We are excited to have brought Bill to West Michigan, and we hope you'll join us in welcoming him to the community.

With gratitude,



Christine Helms-Maletic
WMEAC Board President





Bill Wood

Hello!

As the new Executive Director and a recent transplant to West Michigan, you might think that I would be overwhelmed with all of these changes. However, there is one constant that remains true from the time I was a boy, and will certainly be true as I serve at WMEAC: I can take action to bring about change. Growing up in rural Illinois, I used to love walking in the country with my mom at the end of the day. Even at the age of 5, I was perturbed by cans and bottles I saw in the ditch and along the roadside. When I asked my mom why people littered out in the country, she simply replied that they were “lazy”. The next question I asked would frame my approach for the rest of my life: can I bring my wagon on our walks and pick up the cans and bottles? Maybe if the internet had been around in those days, I would have had an early 15 minutes of fame, but regardless, I spent many summers dragging that wagon behind me, pulling cans and bottles and other trash off the route my mother and I liked to walk.

I’m a bit older now, but still like to throw myself into the fray when I see a problem that needs solved. Over the past 10 years of my career, I designed and implemented an architectural salvage and building deconstruction program, a latex paint recycling program, opened and managed a building materials reuse center, and acted as Executive Director for a Habitat for Humanity affiliate that served two counties with a combined population of over 500,000.

I see this vibrant, member-based group as a community of people who, like me, throw themselves into solving problems that perturb them, and I’m excited and honored to be at the helm of WMEAC to continue the great work that this storied organization has undertaken.

A few highlights from the past year:

- WMEAC broke the 1,000 volunteer mark for the Mayor’s Grand River Cleanup
- We quadrupled our Teach for the Watershed participation in Holland/West Ottawa County
- During the 2nd River City Water Festival, over 100 5th, 6th and 7th graders entered WMEAC’s poster contest
- WMEAC was awarded Level 1 credentials from Partners for a Racism-Free Community

Going forward, WMEAC will continue to advocate for a diverse, inclusive environmental movement that focuses on watershed protection, environmentally sound energy policy focused on renewable energy and reducing demand, and mitigating our region’s carbon footprint through increasing recycling rates while reducing waste. WMEAC’s ability to actively engage stakeholders, constituents, and legislators puts us in a unique position to evoke positive change at the micro, mezzo and macro levels.

I hope to meet you all, or see you at one of our events. And if your child ever asks to be that kid that pulls a wagon full of beer cans behind them, I trust that you’ll say yes and be right there by their side.

Sincerely,



Bill Wood
WMEAC Executive Director

Water Trailblazers

They decided on kayaking down the entire lower Grand River... in one day.

On a cool, breezy summer morning in West Michigan, two recent graduates from Calvin College strapped their kayak to the top of their car and drove down to the Grand River. Gabe LePage and Peter Sunshine Cahill had just received their Bachelors of Arts in Geography and were looking for a post-graduation adventure. They decided on kayaking down the entire lower Grand River, from downtown Grand Rapids to the shores of Grand Haven, in one day.

Using atlases to navigate over forty miles of the river, they set off where Plaster Creek joins with the Grand, just west of where Interstate 196 crosses over the river. With some food, a first aid kit, and plenty of water, they canoed the river to see what it had to offer.

“We wanted to see what comes after the city,” said LePage. “We live a certain way and we build our lives a certain way, so it’s interesting to leave the spaces we create and see how the systems and landscapes we’ve created affect different flows of energy, like water.”

LePage and Cahill expressed a desire to get up close and personal with their watershed—or the common point where water drains when it falls within a given area. The Grand River, the longest river in Michigan, serves as the central vein of the Grand River Watershed. An impressive 19 counties drain into the 5,572 square mile Grand River Watershed, and 108 species of fish and 218 species of birds call the watershed home. Avid birdwatchers themselves, LePage and Cahill kept a long list of birds they saw, including various types of gulls, herons, and songbirds. “Watersheds are a great way to organize the geography of the world,” says Cahill.

Watersheds operate as independent systems—they don’t adhere to state boundaries or county lines, yet a given watershed experiences environmental issues, like water quality and pollution, as a whole, interconnected system.





Though they were unaware at the time, the stretch of the lower Grand River they navigated in Ottawa County is actually an established water trail called the Grand River Heritage Water Trail. A water trail is a designated route on a waterway with a network of public access points and signage. Similar to a hiking trail, water trails help encourage recreation and conservation by directly connecting people with the water system.

The Grand River Heritage Water Trail was implemented and is maintained by the Ottawa County Parks and Recreation Commission. Ottawa County Parks has invested in facilities, bathrooms, signage, and other infrastructure, like more boat launches and accessibility points, all along the river. In addition to boosting tourism and promoting physical fitness, water trails help intimately connect people with their local bodies of water, bringing to light both the beauties and the problems present in their water.

Ottawa County has already installed 18 access points, three of which are universally accessible. They've also highlighted 60 historical

In addition to boosting tourism and promoting physical fitness, water trails help intimately connect people with their local bodies of water, bringing to light both the beauties and the problems present in their water.

features along the river, which water trail users can learn about through signage along the river and online maps. Even with substantial water trail development so far, according to LePage and Cahill, some additional features could still make paddling the river a more enjoyable experience.

Input and ideas for improvement like this are exactly what Elaine Sterrett Isely, the

Director of Water and Low Impact Development Programs at WMEAC, is looking for. Along with representatives from Grand Valley State University's Hospitality and Tourism Management Department, Ottawa County Parks, the Lower Grand River Organization of Watersheds (LGROW), and the Grand Haven Area Convention and Visitor Bureau, Isely is working to evaluate the current infrastructure, marketing, and management of the existing Grand River Heritage Trail that runs the length of the Grand in Ottawa County, and to identify and analyze whether there are gaps in access, marketing and signage, user amenities, safety considerations, and connectivity with potential water trail development upstream.

This project builds on a number of local, regional, and statewide efforts to establish water trails and paddling amenities along Michigan's rivers and coastal areas. Ottawa County Parks launched the Grand River Heritage Trail in 2012. This water trail traverses nearly 44 miles of the Lower Grand River, through its length in Ottawa County, to the river mouth at Lake Michigan. However, since its implementation, little is known about actual usage of the water trail.

The project was introduced at a public meeting at Ottawa County Park's Grand Ravines North facility in Jenison. Information was solicited about current usage of the water trail and suggestions for improvements to water the trail. The 16 participants included outfitters, township officials, county officials, state representatives, and team members, and self-identified interested individuals or riparian landowners.

"As part of that process, we reached out to paddlers, outfitters, and the communities along the river corridor – specifically community leaders and safety officers. Our plan was to take what we learn in Ottawa County upstream to the communities along the river in Kent, and then Ionia county," said Isely.

The project includes research, site assessments, ordinance and master plan

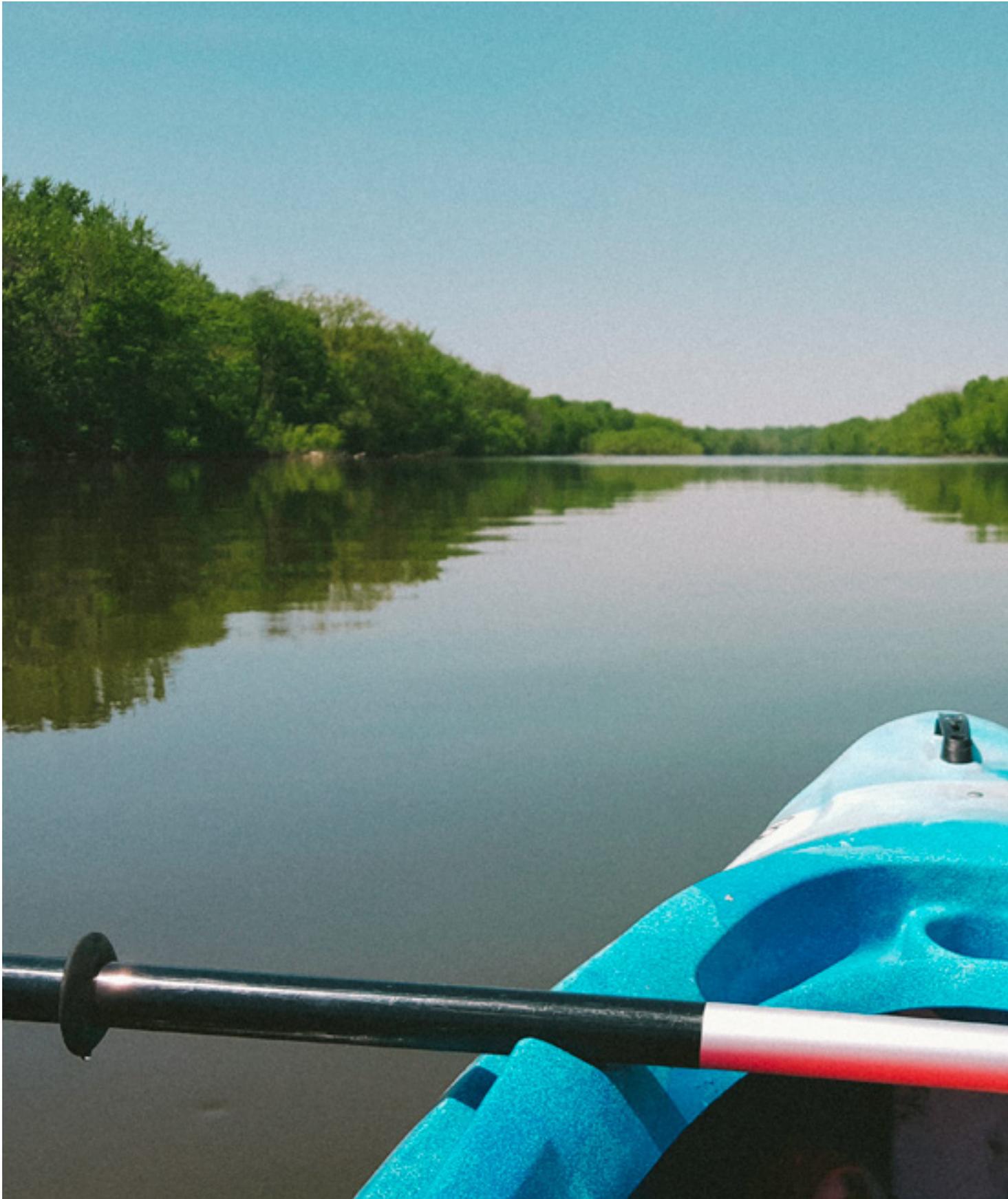




reviews, and stakeholder meetings and interviews. The resulting improvement plan includes recommendations and action steps that Ottawa County Parks and Recreation Commission will consider to enhance the trail resource, and to bring new users to the Grand River Heritage Water Trail. It is anticipated that the information and recommendations found in this report will be used to inform the development of a Trail Town Master Plan for the entire Lower Grand River, as well as the Water Trails Manual.

The Grand River is a Lake Michigan connecting waterway; it is the blue thread that ties together our natural resources, opportunities for recreation and economic development, and a sense of place. The Grand River is the natural resource that West Michigan has rallied behind and has worked to protect over generations. Now, with the City of Grand Rapids poised to restore its namesake rapids to the river, a unique opportunity exists to support the development of a Lower Grand River water trails system.

This project was funded, in part, by the Michigan Coastal Zone Management Program, Office of the Great Lakes, Department of Environmental Quality, and is supported through a grant under the National Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, as amended, administered by the Office for Coastal Management, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Additional funding was provided by the Meijer Foundation and the Frey Foundation, and consultation and advice was provided by the National Park Service Rivers, Trail, and Conservation Assistance program.





What is a water trail?

A water trail is a designated route on a navigable waterway such as a river, lake, or canal that is designed, implemented, and managed to foster educational and recreational experiences for the user. Water trails provide safe access to, and information about these waterways, while also providing connections to cultural, natural, and other attractions. Water trails are intended for non-motorized uses such as kayaks, canoes, and other human/muscle powered craft, along with wind-powered activities depending on the character and conditions of the water trail. They can be classified by cultural experience – historic, urban, culinary, or wilderness trails; or by skill-level – beginner, intermediate, advanced, family-friendly, or challenge trails. For some water trails, skill-level classifications can vary depending upon weather and water conditions or intended float/paddle time.



For the Future

WMEAC's education programs are developing the future of environmental activism - children.

While many of WMEAC's programs deal with educating adults about what they can do for the environment, WMEAC also realizes the importance of educating the future -- our children. Three programs in particular focus on this - Teach for the Watershed (T4W), Teach our Energy Future (T4EF), and Zero Waste in Landfill (ZWIL).

WMEAC's interactive watershed education program, T4W has reached the end of another very successful year of watershed education in Grand Rapids Public Schools, West Ottawa Public Schools, Godfrey Lee Public Schools as well as others. A growing number of students and classrooms in West Michigan participated by incorporating watershed education into their science curricula. WMEAC has introduced many teachers, students, and volunteers to the watersheds, stream biology, and chemistry concepts, emphasizing how they relate to sustainability and protecting our local watersheds.

T4W works within each school's neighborhood streams,

all of which contribute to the Lower Grand River watershed. This helps students connect with their local water sources. Students see the connections to what they learn in the classroom and learn about actual careers that are utilized in the sciences of chemistry, biology, geology, and environmental engineering.

"Students were engaged in hands-on learning while outside, and were able to make connections to what we were doing in class," said Samantha Zerbel, a teacher at CA Frost.

T4W provides trained mentors, who work and study in these fields, to share information about their career choices to encourage our diverse youth population to consider pursuing science careers. This approach supports a key goal of the original T4W model: connecting students interested in the sciences with professionals who are using science skills in their fields of work.

This past year we utilized approximately 200 staff hours, nearly 300 intern hours, and nearly 400 volunteer hours implementing the T4W program in the sixth grade classrooms across 25 schools

“Students were engaged in hands-on learning while outside, and were able to make connections to what we were doing in class”

- Samantha Zerbel, a teacher at CA Frost.

in four school districts with over 1800 students. We sampled 15 different stream locations in the lower Grand River watershed.

With a team of water quality professionals from around West Michigan, students were introduced to the major issues that affect the Great Lakes watersheds. This includes where different types of pollutants come from and how they affect water quality, stormwater best management practices, managing invasive species, and changes to the water cycle.

Students and teachers were guided through the methods used in aquatic ecological assessments including water chemistry, studying in-stream habitat conditions, and studying the diversity of the macroinvertebrate communities. The students worked side-by-side with qualified mentors who encouraged the students to take the lead in conducting hands-on science. Most students were able to take action to improve the watershed by removing litter and invasive species in their local creeks. Fifth graders at Burton Elementary enjoyed learning about stormwater and planting

a native plant garden to reduce stormwater runoff on the school's property.

T4W maintains educational partnerships with Groundswell, West Michigan Great Lakes Stewardship Initiative, Grand Valley State University, and the Michigan Environmental Education Curriculum Support to deliver high-quality, professional development for teachers to learn how to educate children outdoors, with approximately 25 teachers. With a continued strong funding relationship with Grand Rapids Public Schools and the Student Advancement Foundation and through continued support through our volunteers, WMEAC will continue to facilitate the finest in educational programming to West Michigan's young people, ensuring their commitment to the Great Lakes in the years to come.

T4W also helped educate the Roosevelt Park Community in Grand Rapids about the rain garden installed in their local park in the Plaster Creek watershed. T4W introduced 24 career camp students to the native plants, and helped them

learn how to identify them and understand why they are important to promote healthy watersheds.

In 2015-2016, WMEAC education staff have been working closely with our partners in Holland to create a Teach for our Energy Future curriculum. This work will be implemented in the summer of 2017 with professional development for teachers and classes for campers at the Hope College Summer Science Camp program. We aim to help students learn more about energy science and get excited about energy usage, efficiency and alternatives. Teachers will be learning and creating innovative ways to teach energy science that involve hands-on and placebased activities.

WMEAC and local parents have worked at Holmes Elementary School in Spring Lake this year to pilot the Zero Waste in Landfill program. 3rd graders became Zero Waste Warriors and helped their classmates learn how to reuse, recycle and compost classroom and lunchroom materials.

Using Plants to Protect Our Rivers

WMEAC is helping communities protect their rivers by using native plants and inclusive outreach.

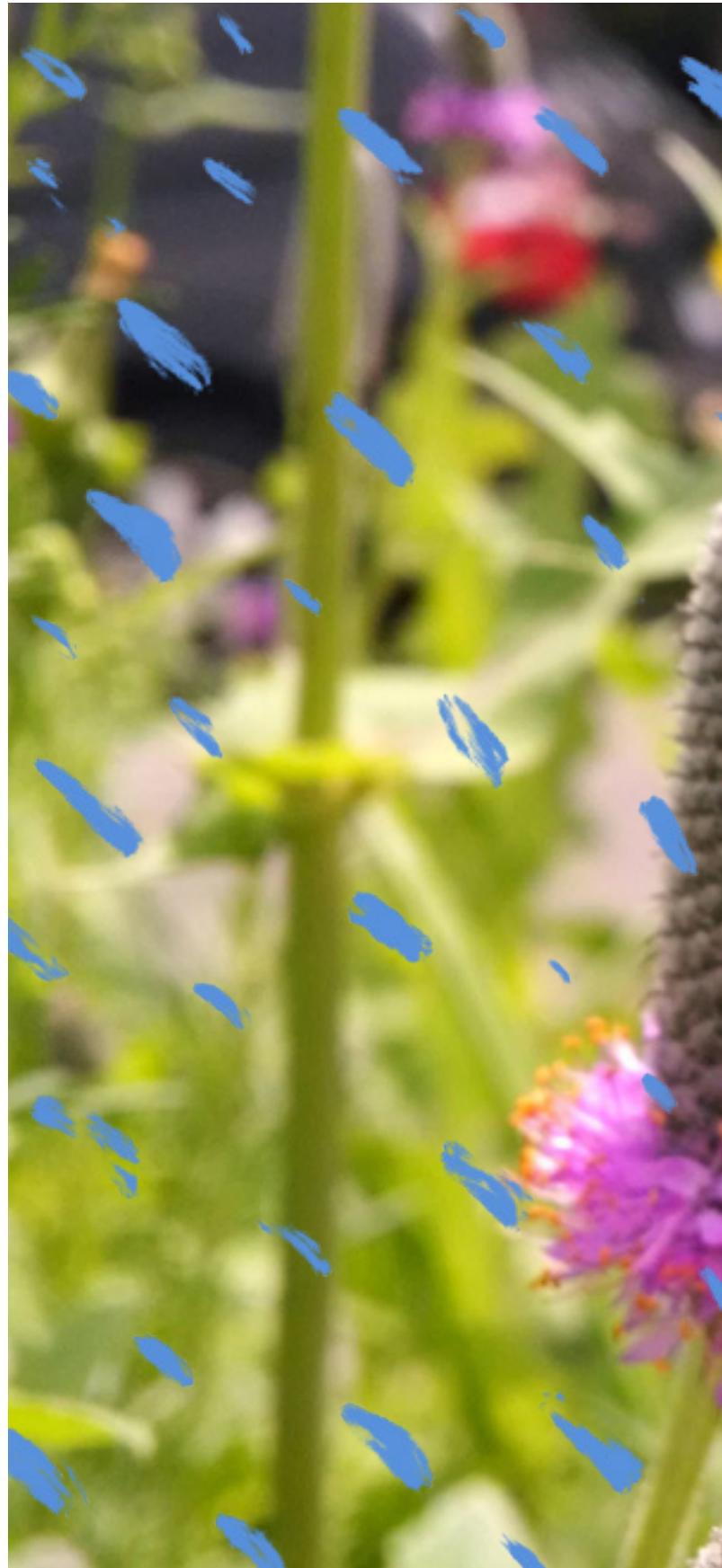
WMEAC partnered with Friends of the Grand Rapids Parks, Plaster Creek Stewards, and the City of Grand Rapids, with funding from Herman Miller Cares, to do park improvements in Roosevelt Park in southwest Grand Rapids throughout Fiscal Year 2016.

On May 21st of Fiscal Year 2017, WMEAC hosted a 3 ½ hour public stormwater education and rain garden planting event at the park. Community members joined our project partners and assisted with the planting of a new rain garden. Activities included soil preparation, mulching, and planting. Rain garden signs were installed – in both English and Spanish. We had 3 rain barrels on-site that were painted by neighborhood children. Those were given away by a drawing, and three additional rain barrels were prepped for additional participants who asked for them. WMEAC had another 44 barrels paid for out of this grant that were made available to community members in Roosevelt Park at future events.

The Great Lakes region is intimately connected to one of the largest freshwater systems on Earth, a full 20% of the world's fresh surface water. Unfortunately, this great privilege is being threatened by the leading source of water pollution: incorrect management of rain and stormwater.

Communities can take action against rain and snowmelt flowing off of our yards, roofs, and sidewalks and washing pollution into our water systems. Rain gardens are designed to collect and absorb runoff from a roof or parking lot, the way nature intends rain to soak into the soil.

Rain Gardens naturally protect our water sources and look great doing it! By planting a rain garden, you can help reduce water pollution in your community!









Turning a Community into Members

Working with students to evolve the large WMEAC community into WMEAC members

During the Spring 2016 semester, students in Professor Kevin McCurren's Entrepreneurship for Non-Profits class at Grand Valley State University had the opportunity to work with WMEAC on a business model project to identify new revenue streams for WMEAC. The 300-level class introduces business students to real world situations, especially those experienced by non-profits and values-based organizations. WMEAC received a Community Engagement Award from GVSU in April for its work with the class.

"ENT 351 is a course designed to develop new enterprises on real-world validated opportunities," said Professor McCurren. "Class members worked in consultations with local organizations to validate new business opportunities or startup ventures. The sponsoring organizations were involved in the process throughout the term of the class."

The students visited WMEAC at the beginning of the semester to get a feel for what exactly the day-to-day operation looks like and meet key program and management staff in order to lay the groundwork for students to begin a strategic planning process. They looked at potential development products and opportunities available to WMEAC. Specifically, the students saw the need to engage a younger population in terms of membership. They suggested using more social media platforms to achieve this. Additionally, the students put together a small crowd funding campaign that solicited donations for our spring river cleanup.

Another student group analyzed the Rain Barrel Workshops Program. They started by identifying why people buy rain barrels. For example, they found that one customer uses it as a way to teach their children about gardening, while another customer just wants the free source of water. The students made a recommendation that WMEAC expand beyond rain barrels and explore the other products that could be used for stormwater management. WMEAC's mission revolves around education, and rain barrels are just one process in stormwater management.

The class also explored an opportunity for WMEAC

to develop a certification and education program for local builders to follow new State of Michigan guidelines

Overall, the experience was helpful for WMEAC, allow us to view operations from an outside perspective. It revealed some opportunities for WMEAC to improve and extend their reach. WMEAC is excited to partner with future classes and continue to provide an opportunity for students to gain valuable real-life experience, while benefiting from their hard work.

The class will continue to be offered at GVSU throughout the 2016-2017 school year.

Creating an Inclusive Environmental Community

WMEAC recognized a need for more inclusion in their policies, programs and outreach, so they are taking action.

WMEAC recognizes that underrepresented communities are among the most vulnerable to environmental deterioration. In order to strengthen West Michigan's environment as a whole, it is important to involve all communities in the process of identifying opportunities and implementing solutions alongside those who are most affected. This realization brought about the IDEAL Initiative and has driven WMEAC's operations to be more inclusive and ensure WMEAC's leadership structures and membership are more representative of West Michigan's demographic mix.

“I wanted this opportunity to help me build upon what I was learning but also push me to become connected in a way that would help me feel the heartbeat of the people,”
- Bree Bode

IDEAL is a nationally unique approach that was intentionally comprehensive, covering internal policies and external engagement practices including communication and program design. There is a clear lack of racial diversity



in the environmental movement and in environmental organizations. IDEAL's intent was to recognize this gap of service and start from listening to the concerns and opportunities directly from the communities we were not adequately serving or interacting with.

This initiative was supported by the efforts

of Progress Strategies+ and a team of community members and WMEAC stakeholders who have experience in diversity and inclusion strategies and a passion for environmental protections. A special thanks to WMEAC's Board of Directors and leadership to prioritize and support the IDEAL initiative. The support of the board

WMEAC recognizes that underrepresented communities are among the most vulnerable to environmental deterioration.

“I wanted this opportunity to help me build upon what I was learning but also push me to become connected in a way that would help me feel the heartbeat of the people,” said Bode. “I started as an intern working with the IDEAL initiative. This meant I would research environmental justice, seek out opportunities for the staff to grow and develop as leaders and students of environmental justice, inclusion, diversity, and equity.”

Bode’s work as an intern involved going out into the neighborhoods of Grand Rapids area and listening to key stakeholders and residents in order to find out what environmental justice meant to them and what further actions they would want to see in order to achieve their perceived vision of environmental justice. The next step was determining how those actions matched up with the common definition of environmental justice. This information was the beginning of further research and efforts to help mold this component of IDEAL..



was necessary for IDEAL to become truly integrated into the culture of the organization.

One way WMEAC has used IDEAL as a strategy is through the IDEAL Scholar program. IDEAL Scholars participate in research, program development, policy, and administrative activities to support WMEAC’s IDEAL initiative, with

the intended goal of providing learning and leadership opportunities that contribute to the professional development of the IDEAL Scholar. So far, WMEAC has had 15 IDEAL Scholars.

Bree Bode became involved with the WMEAC IDEAL Scholar program while looking for a way to get involved in the community.



Taking Action to Protect Our Water

What impact are river cleanups and rain barrels having on our cities?

On a Saturday morning in early September, people gathered at Sixth Street Park in Grand Rapids, ready for a day of picking up trash along the Grand River. Sporting the WMEAC logo on their shirts, volunteers of all types, are bussed to multiple locations along the river to fill orange bags with the trash they pick up from the water and the banks.

A family in Grand Rapids sets up a rain barrel in their backyard, to catch the rainwater before it flows from the roof to surfaces that contain pollution and into stormwater drains, where it then travels to nearby streams and waterways. The family opts to use the water collected by the rain barrel to water their lawn and garden.

What do these two situations have in common? They are both ways that WMEAC is working to get the community involved in water conservation efforts, and trying to

get people to commit to lifestyle changes, instead of just one day of volunteering.

Mayors' Grand River Cleanup

The 12th Annual Mayors' Grand River Cleanup took place on Saturday, September 19th, 2015. Approximately 1,100 volunteers came out to collect trash along the Grand River. Roughly 10 tons of refuse, about 13,792 lbs of trash and 5,363 lbs of recyclables, were collected from a span of the Grand River.

Following the 2015 Cleanup, the first ever West Michigan Peoples' Climate March took place. Nearly 200 people from all walks of life commenced to march as a call to all Michiganders to think climate global and act climate local. Featuring a tribal dance by a local Native American tribe, the event prided itself on being an inclusive celebratory walk to motivate all people who

care about the future of our earth and communities. The march was sponsored by WMEAC, the Sierra Club, Partners for a Racism-Free Community, Wisemaker of the Geek Group, the Citizens' Climate Lobby, the Dominican Sisters of Grand Rapids, and Honor Heal Nurture.

The impact the Mayors' Cleanup has on the Grand River can be seen in the decrease of the amount of trash collected each year. There is less and less to pick up each year because this event has had such a great impact.

The Ottawa County Cleanup took place on May 16th, 2015. With 250 volunteers, about 3,780 pounds of trash and 1,500 pounds of recyclables, a total of roughly 5,280 pounds of refuse, were collected along a 20 mile stretch of the Grand River in Grand Haven, Coopersville, Ferrysburg and Spring Lake.

Rain Barrels

Rain barrels have been proven an effective and easy strategy for managing community storm water issues and improving water quality. Through its rain barrel education programs, WMEAC provides low-cost rain barrels to the West Michigan community as a means of addressing water conservation and pollution

issues in West Michigan. Each rain barrel can save up to 1800 gallons of water per summer season in Grand Rapids. This can equate to a monetary savings on water usage by \$23 – \$32 per summer season with one rain barrel installation.

“I’m on my third rain barrel, and it’s really something to see how much water it collects.

I use the rainwater to water the plants in the backyard. I attended workshop in Rockford where they taught us all we need to know about setting up the barrel, and gave us all of the tools,” said WMEAC supporter Toni Lane.

In 2015, WMEAC’s Rain Barrel Program surpassed 3,000 barrels built and distributed across all of West Michigan. The program has



delivered this simple, green infrastructure practice and stormwater education to thousands of people in West Michigan, primarily in the City of Grand Rapids. This program has been impactful to the Lower Grand River Watershed communities in two major ways. First, it provides local community members with low-cost rain barrels to capture stormwater runoff from their rooftops. Second, it provides community education about the importance of stormwater management to watershed residents. WMEAC’s Rain Barrel Program has also helped program staff increase its engagement with community partners including schools, businesses, libraries, and other nonprofit organizations.

Since the inception of the program in 2009, WMEAC has been able to distribute more than 1,800 barrels during its workshops within the City of Grand Rapids alone.

Stormwater Calculator

In addition to these ongoing projects, WMEAC also undertook a new project in partnership with Grand Valley State University and Michigan Institute of Technology, to create a stormwater calculator to aid the city in reducing the cost of stormwater removal by tracking usage. With an award from the United States Forest Service through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, WMEAC is working with Grand Valley State University (GVSU)

to develop an online calculator and mobile application that will be used to value changes in ecosystem services provided by existing and planned stormwater green infrastructure (GI) practices.

GI can be defined as environmental assets, which in West Michigan include forests, prairies, waterways, Great Lakes sand dunes, shorelines, and riparian areas. Stormwater GI includes manmade or enhanced features that mimic these natural systems; it can include tree canopy, forested riparian buffers, bioswales, bioinfiltration basins (e.g. rain gardens), porous pavement, green roofs, and rain barrels. Implementation of these types of stormwater GI practices provides numerous benefits – or ecosystem

services – for communities, including improved water quality, natural habitat, aesthetics, and water interception.

“Green infrastructure helps capture rainwater closer to where it falls and limits the amount of polluted stormwater that enters our rivers and streams”, said Elaine Sterrett Isely, Director of Water and Low Impact Development Programs, WMEAC. “Implementation of these practices can reduce the amount of traditional stormwater infrastructure needed to manage runoff. This stormwater calculator will help community leaders better understand how an investment in green infrastructure now will pay off in the long run.”

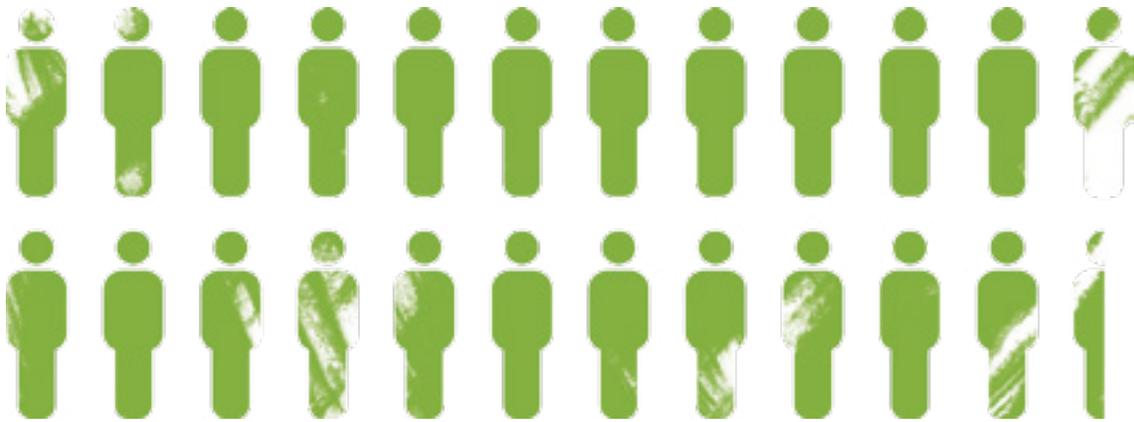
In 2016, it is hoped that the calculator, and accompanying community training, will be rolled out to demonstrate how the calculator works, and show the benefits of GI.



Volunteers

6120

volunteer hours this year

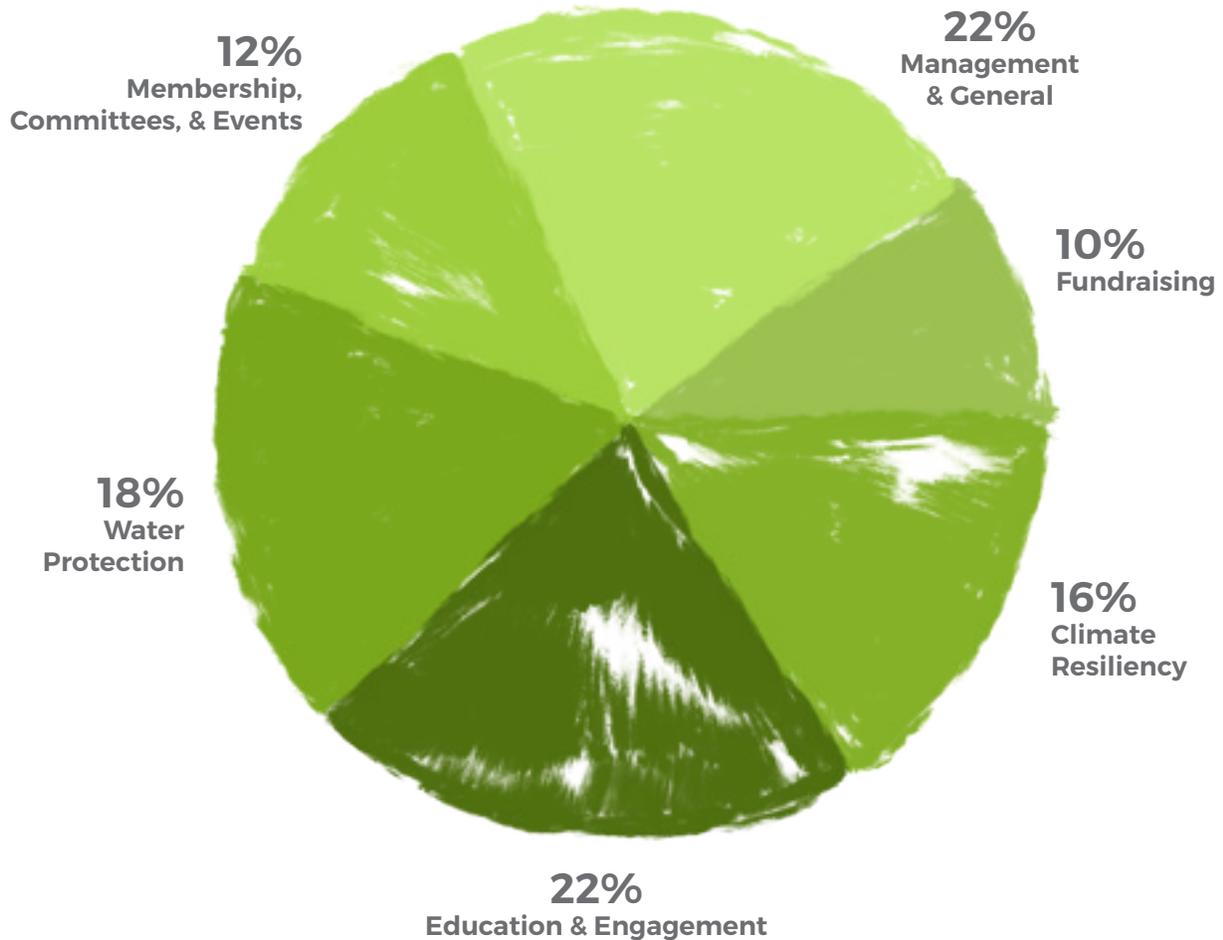


Average of 23.5
volunteer hours per day

Expenses



Functional Expenses



Income Breakdown



63%

Foundations & Grants

\$560,000



11%

**Events, Programs
& Sales**

\$98,000



14%

Investment Income

\$120,000



12%

**Membership Dues
& Contributions**

\$110,000

Donors

Henry & Chris Aay
Mike & Shirlene Abma
Amanda Adams
Charlotte Amberger
Dan & Doris Andersen
Richard App
Tom Appel
Peter Armstrong
Jill Armstrong
Steve & Julie Ashmead
Ric Maycroft & Sharon Attar
Carter & Mary Bacon
William & Jennifer Baguley
Jean & David Bahle
Carl & Claudia Bajema
Lori Baker
Janet & Dan Balice
Belinda Bardwell
Zach Bartel
Guy Bazzani
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Alan & Nancy Bedell
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