







### Letter from the Executive Director

Like birthdays, anniversaries offer an opportunity to pause, reflect on the past, think about the future, and eat too much cake. In 2018, WMEAC celebrated 50 years of activated, motivated West Michigan folks standing up to protect the abundant natural beauty that makes where we live so unique. In the past year, we reconnected with WMEAC's first paid Executive Director, Roger Conner, and celebrated the accomplishments of immediate past Executive Director Rachel Hood, now a State Legislator, and Winnie Brinks, a longtime friend of WMEAC and current State Senator, both of whom rode a wave of environmental champions that won election in 2018. Our new water justice initiative, the Rainy Day Project, kicked off its pilot phase by working with 17 low-income homeowners in Grand Rapids to install low-flow water technology, free of charge, in order to reduce water usage and bills. And, in the very tradition that led to WMEAC's inception, we helped organize a group of concerned residents who refused to let a proposal to dredge the Grand River for powerboats go unchallenged.

As we work through the next year, you'll see WMEAC continue the fight to shut down the dredging plan, expand and grow the Rainy Day Project, and join with other concerned residents and organizations in West Michigan to confront the causes and effects of climate change wherever we can. I like to view our organization's actions much like the properties of the water we protect; the process of capillary action draws water into spaces where it initially might not appear to belong. The strength of water is that it can flow with or seemingly against gravity, and it changes everything it comes into contact with. Through capillary action in our communities, WMEAC works in schools, neighborhood centers, city halls, waste management facilities, state legislatures, rivers, streams, and the Big Lake itself. And much like capillary action, the reason for our presence may not be obvious to the untrained eye, but we have an impact on everything our work touches. Thank you for moving fluidly with us.

Sincerely,

Bill Wood

WMEAC Executive Director

# WE.

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

# ME.

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

# ACT.

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.

### What we do best:

Advocating. Activating. Educating. Partnering.









### Water

Rain can fall into the sea or rain can fall on you and me Water here, water there, watersheds are everywhere When water comes raining down, it should disappear into the ground When we cover land with other things, look what all this runoff brings

Stormwater Rock: Watersheds, Brian Vander Ark

#### **STORMWATER**

Stormwater runoff remains one of the greatest sources of pollution in our local waterways and it is the primary focus of our Water Team's efforts.



#### STORMWATER ROCK: WATERSHEDS

The quote above is from a new song written by WMEAC friend Brian Vander Ark. WMEAC is finalizing an accompanying video and coloring book with Michael Lynn Animation Studios. This song will be used in classrooms and at festivals.

IDEAL Committee members provided feedback to the animator throughout the character and video development process to ensure inclusive and appropriate representation.



#### **RAIN BARREL WORKSHOPS**

Last year WMEAC distributed 202 rain barrels at workshops and community events, bringing the total distributed since 2009 to over 3,500. We hosted our first ever bourbon rain barrel workshop in partnership with Brewery Vivant at their new location, Broad Leaf Local Beer in Kentwood. This program has strong partnerships with Brewery Vivant, Rylee's Ace Hardware and the City of Grand Rapids.



#### **STORMWATER SOLUTIONS**

WMEAC's green infrastructure workshops now include breakout stations with a variety of hands-on activities that help participants learn more about stormwater. Educational and instructional materials are now available in both English and Spanish. These include information on ways Grand Rapids has improved stormwater management over the years; a property owner's guide to protecting their property from stormwater damage; a self-guided tour of green infrastructure practices in Grand Rapids; and a glossary of common terms.

#### **RAINY DAY PROJECT**

In early 2019, WMEAC kicked off the Rainy Day Contest in four Grand Rapids neighborhoods, where participating residents qualified for installation of water conservation devices and green infrastructure practices in their homes. The participant who shows the greatest reduction in water use compared to last year in each neighborhood will receive a \$100 credit to their water bill. Partnering neighborhood associations are Baxter, Garfield Park, Roosevelt Park, and Seeds of Promise.

IDEAL Committee representative Fran Dalton has served as an advising partner for the Rainy Day project and has strengthened the inclusiveness of the project and helped build connections and relationships within the participating neighborhoods.

#### **RAINWATER REWARDS**

WMEAC continues to expand its stormwater calculator programming. Last year, WMEAC delivered eight stormwater calculator workshops and presentations to various audiences from throughout Michigan and the Great Lakes Basin. WMEAC also piloted a student workshop at the River City Water Festival last fall and plans to develop a high school-based lesson later this year.

#### **GRAND RIVER WATER TRAIL**

In 2018, WMEAC engaged with communities along the Grand River in Kent and Ionia counties about plans to designate the Grand River as a state water trail.

13 presentations resulted in 9 resolutions of support for these efforts in the Lower Grand River Watershed.

WMEAC is finalizing its boat launch site assessment report, which will be presented to the Grand River Partnership so that the Lower Grand can join the Middle and Upper watersheds as a designated state water trail.







# **Environmental Education**



The 2018-2019 school year was a busy one for WMEAC's environmental education team. This year, two new staff members were brought on. Kyle Hart was hired as the environmental education coordinator after working with us for several years in different capacities. Thea Van Goor joined us as the environmental education director. Together, Thea and Kyle work to connect local environmental issues to larger environmental concepts in the classroom.

The education team was able to deliver Teach for the Watershed (T4W) programming to over 3,500 students in the 2018-2019 school year. We play an important role in providing out-of-the-ordinary experiences by taking students out of the classroom and into their watershed. Meeting students at their neighborhood stream gives them the chance to see how they can directly influence the local environment. Students are given the opportunity to not only engage in place-based learning opportunities, but they also get a chance to use the tools of the trade, like microscopes, Petri dishes, chemistry testing kits, nets, and waders.



Our programming in schools could not happen without our interns. They dedicate a lot of time, energy, and enthusiasm for our programs. We would like to recognize and thank the following: Emily Brink, Emma Case, Leah Anderson, Logan Mulholland, Nora Baty, Stephanie Clark, Will Hempel, and Briana Meeker.



# School and Community Programming

Festivals & Community Events

~2000

Godfrey Lee
Public Schools

290 People

Godwin Heights
Public Schools

80 People Grand Rapids
Public Schools

1098 People

After School Clubs & Guest Speakers

40 · People

**Grand Rapids Canoemobile** 

155 People West Ottawa
Public Schools

179

Boys & Girls Club of Muskegon

26 People

~3800
Total People Reached



#### **ZERO WASTE**

WMEAC staff have worked for nearly two years to write and test a Zero Waste Handbook - a hands-on, how-to for schools and businesses to use to incorporate zero waste into their facilities management. With the support of Steelcase, this handbook is being professionally designed and should be available in late October 2019.

#### **WOMEN, COMMUNITY & ENVIRONMENT SERIES**

The 8th annual Women, Community & Environment Series took place February 21-23, 2019. It focused on how to be an environmental activist through a series of events which included networking, a film, panels, a service fair and a keynote by state senator Stephanie Chang.

IDEAL Committee members served on the 2019 Women, Community & Environment Planning Committee. Fran Dalton helped develop and deliver surveys to women at family-focused events to gain insight into current topics and issues of interest in order to focus on content relevant to local women.

#### **RIVER & BEACH CLEANUPS**

The 15th annual Mayors' Grand River Cleanup, held in September 2018, was WMEAC's most successful river cleanup to date. Nearly 1,200 volunteers gathered at the Sixth Street Park in Grand Rapids and then spread out across the metropolitan area to collect more than 20,000 pounds of trash and recyclables in one morning. Many partners work with WMEAC to make this cleanup a reality, including the cities of Grand Rapids, Walker, Wyoming and Grandville. In recent years, cleanup routes have included neighborhoods throughout the metropolitan area where volunteers focus on cleaning up stormwater drains - those gateways to our rivers and streams.

In April 2019, WMEAC co-hosted a Grand Haven Beach Cleanup that was organized by Briana Meeker, a former student intern from Aquinas College. Turnout was high and volunteers gathered more than 210 pounds of trash and recyclables at Grand Haven State Park.

# Advocacy





WMEAC staff continues to provide guidance and support for water-related policy initiatives in West Michigan.

#### **GRAND RIVER DREDGING**

In early 2019, a business proposal to dredge the Grand River from the Fulton Street bridge in Grand Rapids to the Bass River State Recreation Area near Eastmanville became public. The proposal had already been allocated funding from the state for soil testing. A citizens group, the Friends of the Lower Grand River, formed to oppose this project. The Friends group has supported Ottawa and Kent County municipalities, businesses and residents that also oppose this radical proposal. They have advocated actively at the local and state level to derail the project. WMEAC has supported this grassroots effort by providing guidance, meeting space and regional voice. The WMEAC Board of Directors also passed a policy resolution opposing the project in April 2019.

#### **WOLVERINE COMMUNITY ADVISORY GROUP**

WMEAC has been providing support and assistance to the Concerned Citizens for Responsible Remediation in Rockford since 2012. Since the exposure of PFAS contamination at the Wolverine Worldwide tannery and the House Street sites, there has finally been a concrete federal response. The US Environmental Protection Agency is facilitating a Community Advisory Group (CAG) to provide more information from the federal and state governments and Wolverine Worldwide to the community. WMEAC's Director of Water Programs was appointed to this group. This process is ongoing and will require a long-term sustained effort to get to solutions that will heal these communities.

WMEAC continues to support our partners around the state in advocating for strong, science-based and sensible solutions. These include:

- Providing backing to the Saugatuck Dunes Coastal Alliance as they work to prevent a deep water marina from being built along the Kalamazoo River. This site is environmentally sensitive and historically significant.
- Giving media support to Oil & Water Don't Mix in efforts to decommission Line 5 under the Straits of Mackinac.
- Supporting citizen scientists and advocating for changes in state regulations so that bottled water companies like Nestle face reasonable costs and hurdles before they can remove large amounts of groundwater from the state.













## **Environment for All**

WMEAC's Inclusion and Development of Environmental Allies and Leaders (IDEAL) committee began to critically review its role and purpose within WMEAC in Spring of 2018. Through this process we identified the need for the values of inclusion, diversity and equity to be intentionally incorporated into the organization's mission, programs and strategic plan. This intentionality will allow for greater prioritization of these values and better address a persistent need in programs, operations, and outreach. To address this need, the IDEAL committee focused on two main objectives: (1) supporting the organization through the development of a white paper that provides guidance on integrating the values of environmental justice into WMEAC's upcoming strategic plan and (2) serving as advisors on projects, programs, grants, and more to support the organization's efforts. The white paper was utilized by the Board of Directors at the October 2018 Strategic Planning retreat.

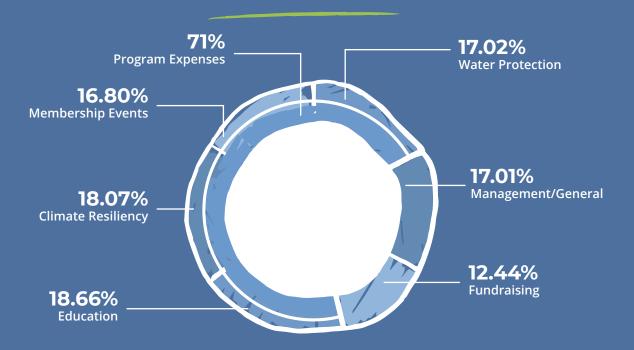
#### **INTERNAL PRACTICES - RECRUITMENT & HIRING**

The IDEAL committee was actively involved in revising and implementing a more inclusive and impactful hiring process for WMEAC. The committee participated in all aspects of the process - from the position description to deciding the top candidates. This included numerous hours working with staff to revise job descriptions, helping promote job openings, reviewing hundreds of applications, participating in interviews and assisting with final hiring decisions. Through this process we made critical improvements to the organization's hiring practices. The lessons learned in the process also gave WMEAC the knowledge and tools to revise intern position descriptions to reflect welcoming, inclusive language.

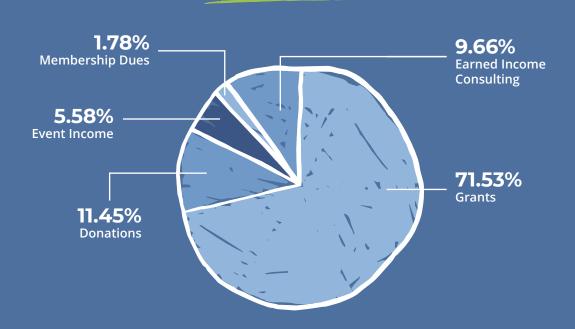
#### **BIOCULTURAL DIVERSITY**

WMEAC was invited to participate in the 1st North American Dialogue on Biocultural Diversity in Montreal in May of 2019. The conference focused on how indigenous languages, knowledge and governance systems are and have been a foundation for preserving biocultural diversity and the harm caused by the violent and systematic removal and disconnection of First Nations' peoples from their language, land and practices. It resulted in recommendations for promoting knowledge sharing between North American agencies, tribes, and researchers on the interconnections between biological and cultural diversity. Board of Directors President Lin Bardwell attended along with Staff Members Ericka Popovich and Bill Wood.

# **Expenses**



### **Income**



### **Board of Directors**

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