



**WEST MICHIGAN  
ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION COUNCIL**

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(616) 451 3051

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**ANNUAL  
REPORT**

**2021 - 2022**

# LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Greetings friends,

I hope you're hatching some fantastic winter plans as you're reading this. As the snow starts to fall and we dig sweaters out of storage and figure out how to accessorize flannel with everything, our thoughts tend to drift back to great summer moments. It might be a highlight reel of swimming in the big lake, putting that first tomato seedling into your gardenbed, or grilling out with friends and family. In the world of environmental advocacy and education, we always have so much work going on during the summer that we tend not to pause to reflect and celebrate our accomplishments as often as we should. This is truly your work. WMEAC is able to succeed only because of supporters like you.

We believe in the power of local action's ripple effect and that from something small, larger changes may radiate. While WMEAC continues to be involved in federal and state issues when they are relevant, most of our focus remains on ways our work ensures this special environment we call West Michigan remains healthy and accessible to ALL who call it home. We continue to provide support and resources for environmental education and advocacy to the 8 counties in our region.

Some of my personal favorite highlights of the past year include:

- Continued support of local climate change movements in Grand Rapids, Holland, Grand Haven, and Muskegon
- Being part of a statewide coalition that pressured Consumers' Energy to create and adopt an Integrated Resource Plan that included expediting the closure of coal-fired power plants and accelerated adoption of renewable energy
- Successfully guiding state and federal funding into our community to support BIPOC-led sustainability initiatives in urban agriculture and green infrastructure
- Our first ever "Blue Tie Alfresco," moving our annual fundraiser outdoors to be socially distanced and closer to nature
- Educating middle-school students about watersheds and aquatic health through our flagship Teach for the Watershed program
- Rebooting our Adopt A Stream river & stream monitoring program

Looking to the year ahead, there are plenty of opportunities and challenges on the local, regional, national, and global scale. As you read through this Annual Report, I hope you are as inspired by the variety of programs and projects that WMEAC is involved in as I am. Together, WMEAC and the West Michigan community will keep making ripples in the lake, and watching our good works radiate outward. Thank you for your continued support and participation in the environmental movement.

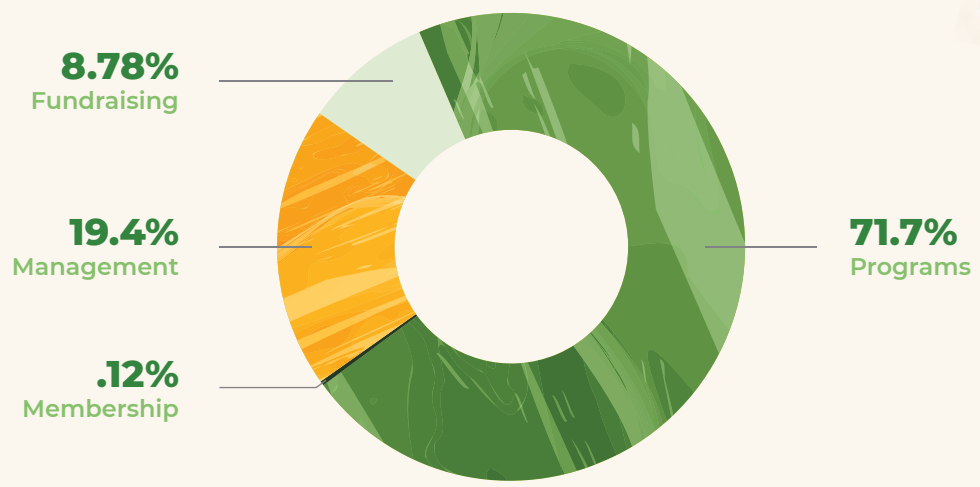
Sincerely,



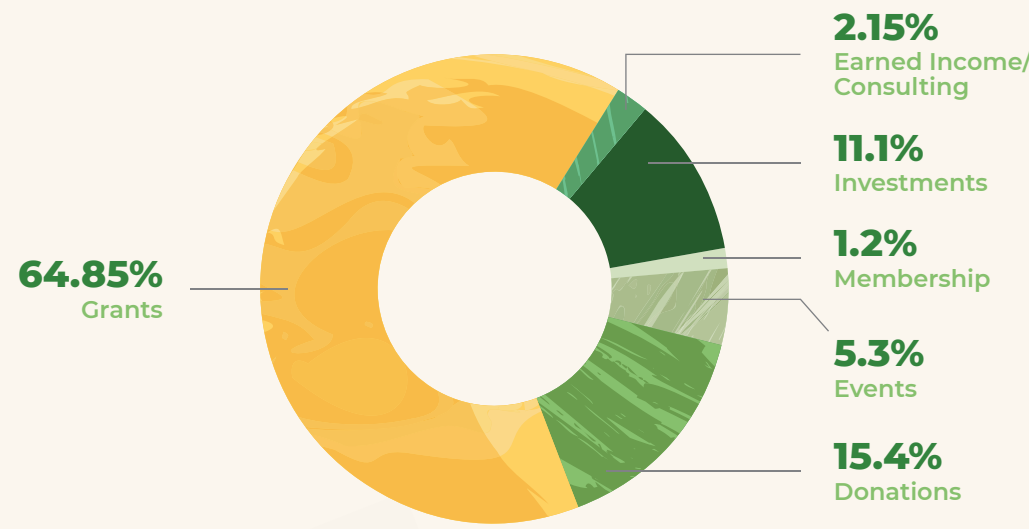
**Bill Wood**  
WMEAC Executive Director



## EXPENSES



## INCOME



PASS THRU REVENUE	IN-KIND HANSEN	PPP FORGIVENESS	MISC.
\$47,604	\$30,466	\$83,449	\$4,092

# WMEAC STAFF

**BILL WOOD**  
Executive Director

**CARLOS CALDERON**  
Water Programs Manager

**TANYA CABALA**  
Lakeshore Outreach Organizer

**ELAINE STERRETT ISELY**  
Deputy Director

**KYLE HART**  
Education Programs Manager

We said a fond farewell to Thea VanGoor, our Education Director, as she transitioned back to the classroom. We also said goodbye to Ericka Popovich, as she moved to Baltimore, MD for new adventures.

**MARY ROBINSON**  
Director of Development

**SARA ROSE**  
Manager of Operations

# WMEAC BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**MIKE TROUPOS**

**TOM CHRISTY**

**TANYA GIBBS**

**DR. ANNE HISKES**

**DANIEL MORRISON**

**BOBBY SPRINGER**

**ED COLE**

**DR. KELI CHRISTOPHER**

**PAUL ALBARRAN**

**EUGENE SUEING**

**ROBERT ZYLSTRA**

**ARA SEO**

**LIN BARDWELL**  
Termed out 2021

**FRANCISCO VEGA JR**  
Joined 2022

**HEIDI FRASURE**  
Termed out 2021

**DR. MATTHEW HEUN**  
Termed out 2021

**KYLE MEYAARD-SCHAAP**  
Joined 2022

**REBECCA BROWN**  
Joined 2022

WE.

**Community.** There is beauty in this place we live. It stems from the natural wonders of the lake-shore 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.



# IMPACT

## 23 INTERNS/FELLOWS

who provided a cumulative **4,454 hours of support** to WMEAC's mission

## 4 CLIMATE CONVERSATION PROGRAMS

with **over 80 participants**

## 2,000 SQ FOOT

**rain garden** was created in Garfield Park

## 47 RAIN BARRELS

from Montague to Middleville used for **Rain Barrel Workshops**

## 37 ARTICLES AND OP-EDS

on **WMEAC blog**, Rapid Growth, Seidman Business Review, Wolverine Community Advisory Group website, Grand Haven Tribune, Grand Rapids Lawyer, and Rockford Squire

## 50 MUSKEGON CLIMATE TASK FORCE MEETINGS

at **500 participant hours**

## 9 'TEACH FOR THE WATERSHED' SEASONAL EDUCATORS

who provided a cumulative **305 hours** to our place-based water quality program

## ADVOCACY AWARDS AND THE GEORGE HEARTWELL ENVIRONMENTAL LEGACY AWARD

At the 2021 Blue Tie Alfresco, we were thrilled to give our WMEAC Advocacy Award to four all-volunteer organizations who did an amazing job advocating for stronger energy policies, more transparency in municipal government, keeping the Grand River safe and wild, and stronger climate action along the lakeshore. They included:

**Holland Climate Coalition**  
**Grand Haven Energy Organization**  
**White Lake Climate Action Council**  
**Friends of the Lower Grand River**

We also were proud to give the Heartwell Environmental Legacy Award to Carrie Rivette, the Stormwater Maintenance Superintendent for the City of Grand Rapids for her strong leadership and collaborative work with multiple organizations in Grand Rapids.

At the 2022 Blue Tie Alfresco, we honored these amazing community organizations with the WMEAC Advocacy Award for their groundbreaking work throughout Grand Rapids neighborhoods:

**The Diatribe**  
**Southeast Market**  
**New City Neighbors**

We were also proud to give the George Heartwell Environmental Legacy Award to Mark Fitzpatrick, director of the Ada Township Parks and Recreation Department for his life-long efforts to increase the community's access to green spaces and water as well as his work to promote green infrastructure.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

With our new Strategic Plan, WMEAC is making sure our alignment is centered around water protection, climate change, and increasing diversity, equity and inclusion in the environmental space. We have some exciting things happening in 2023, regarding volunteer-based water quality monitoring, increasing access to urban agriculture in Grand Rapids, and hiring a dedicated position to work on climate change messaging and action. Before you know it, we'll be getting the swimming trunks out again, trading in our winter boots for hiking boots, and tracking the birds (and maybe a few snowbirds we know) as they start making their way back to our great state for another glorious summer. Thank you for the work you do to keep our environment safe and welcoming for all.



# CLIMATE

As climate change accelerates, WMEAC has redoubled its efforts to address climate change through community education and engagement as well as through sustainability projects.

## CLIMATE ACTION EDUCATION

Climate action education has been a primary focus of WMEAC'S expanded effort along the lakeshore. The goal has been to raise the level of public awareness of climate science, impacts of climate change, and solutions, and establish a community activist base with a working knowledge of climate change, the scientific authorities, and solutions. We have done this by working alongside the Grand Haven Energy Organization and Holland Climate Collaborative, and also assisting new groups like the White Lake Area Climate Action Council.

The Grand Haven Energy Organization successfully advocated for a sustainability plan for their area and its members stepped up to serve on the city of Grand Haven's new sustainability and energy committee. The Holland Climate Collaborative adjusted its mission to include promoting solar energy along the lakeshore.

We continue to assist these groups as needed, and with the Sierra Club Michigan Chapter, have also established a Lakeshore Climate Action Network of members of the community groups, connecting them regularly to determine and work together on common interests. Other climate action activities included the Muskegon County Community Read 2022 and Muskegon area Earth Day 2022. WMEAC also developed a volunteer group of climate

advocates who attend their local government meetings to speak out on climate and educate their elected officials.

## MUSKEGON RECYCLING EFFORTS

WMEAC partnered with PADNOS on a Cash for Plastics program, resulting in a drive that collected nearly 500 pounds of plastic from throughout Muskegon County. WMEAC also received a grant to perform a feasibility study to improve recycling, to update and build on county information from 2017, and we began work on a recycling market analysis and an update on the current status of recycling services and facilities in the county. The Muskegon Area Recycling Network, convened in 2020, continued to meet.

## GRAND RAPIDS CLIMATE COALITION

Beginning in Summer 2021, WMEAC provided support to the Grand Rapids Climate Coalition, a grassroots group advocating for equitable climate action in Grand Rapids. We initially assisted the Coalition in elevating its media presence and visibility in the community, and we also presented our climate change communications strategy to the group in order to promote unified, research-backed messaging around climate change. The Coalition continues to be an important community partner.

## MAYORS' GRAND RIVER CLEANUP

**6,306 LBS**

of **trash** removed from our rivers

**~650 VOLUNTEERS**

over **7** days of action

**20+ MILES**

of the **Grand River** and its tributaries

## TEACH FOR THE WATERSHED STEWARDS

**168 STUDENTS**

in **Fall**

**658**

in **Spring** for **~840 students total**

**30 CLASSES**

of **4/5/6th grade scholars**

**14 SCHOOLS**

**engaged** in T4W



## WATER

WMEAC’s water program work extended from White Lake to southeast Michigan this year - stormwater to septics! In addition to these new projects, our team continued to present rain barrel workshops, develop rain gardens and support public/private collaborations in green infrastructure development.

### STORMWATER CONSULTATIONS IN SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN

WMEAC implemented two stormwater research projects in Southeast Michigan. The first used WMEAC’s Rainwater Rewards Stormwater Calculator to show the costs and benefits of implementing green stormwater infrastructure (GSI) on public and private sites in the City of Detroit. The Nature Conservancy will use the results of this study to advocate for more GSI within the City. The second project did a market analysis and business plan for the Southeast Michigan GSI Collaborative, who would like to develop a earned-income model for GSI products and services throughout four major watersheds in Southeast Michigan.

**Thanks to our partners and collaborators on this project:** *American Rivers, the Seidman College of Business at Grand Valley State University, and Drummond Carpenter*

### KEEPING WHITE LAKE CLEAN PROJECT

White Lake area residents in northern Muskegon County stepped up to clean up their lake, polluted from industrial and municipal discharges. In 2014, the lake was removed from the Great Lakes Areas of Concern. But the work of protecting a lake is never done, so WMEAC and community partners

launched the Keeping White Lake Water Clean Project in 2022, with support from EGLE. Local residents were updated on current water quality issues such as E. coli and harmful algal blooms, and provided information on how maintaining septic systems can help keep local waterways clean. The project included students at the two schools in the area as they learned about the potential impacts of septic systems and designed educational materials to in turn educate local residents.

**Project partners include:** *Public Health Muskegon County, Muskegon County Resources Commissioner; the Muskegon Conservation District; Fruitland and White River Townships; and teachers from the Whitehall and Montague Middle School Science Programs.*



## ENVIRONMENT FOR ALL

WMEAC is working to ensure that environmental issues and solutions are representative of all people and communities in West Michigan. To that end, WMEAC strives to provide input and guidance as well as to listen extensively with a variety of organizations and groups.

### WOMEN IN SCIENCES PANEL

As part of the Joint Aquatic Sciences Meeting, held in Grand Rapids in 2022, our Deputy Director, Elaine Isely, served as a panelist in a discussion about “Leading for Change - How Women in Sciences are Overcoming Adversity.” Sharing stories about sexism, inequality, and harassment, panelists offered support, guidance, and resources on these difficult topics for participants.

### GRAND RIVER EQUITY FRAMEWORK STAKEHOLDER ADVISORY BOARD

WMEAC’s Deputy Director was appointed to the Grand River Equity Framework Stakeholder Advisory Board. This Equity Framework will serve as a guiding document for residents, policymakers, advocates, city/county departments, philanthropy, and others that includes common language, shared goals, and strategies aimed at embedding equity as part of the significant impending investment into the Grand River corridor revitalization.

### USDA/FREEDOM FARM

In the Fall of 2021, WMEAC and the South East Market were awarded funding for a USDA Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production planning project to develop Freedom Farm Collective. This initiative will provide resources that promote self-reliant urban food production for growers in Neighborhoods of Focus in the City of Grand Rapids. The Collective includes the National Young Farmers Coalition, Blandford Nature Center and the City of Grand Rapids’ Urban Agriculture Committee. The Collective has engaged hundreds of individuals, seeking input that will inform program offerings, policy changes and material support to residents and aspiring urban farmers.





# ADVOCACY / COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

WMEAC dedicated significant time and energy to our advocacy efforts locally, basin-wide and federally this past year. For the first time in over two years, WMEAC staff were able to combine travel with strong collaborative relationships with other water-focused organizations.

## RIVER RALLY '22

Due to generous scholarships from River Network and the Wege Foundation, four staff members and an intern were able to attend the River Rally in Washington, DC in June. As part of that conference, WMEAC was able to participate in 10 federal legislator visits on Capitol Hill to discuss water and infrastructure issues with members of the U.S. Congress. After the conference, WMEAC was accepted as a new member to the Clean Water For All Coalition.

## CLEAN WATER ACT OWNER'S MANUAL

River Network began their updates to this manual in early 2022 so that the release of this third version would coincide with the 50th Anniversary of the Clean Water Act in the fall of 2022. Our Deputy Director, Elaine Isely, served on the advisory committee, and provided editorial content for the final version.

## ADVISORY BOARDS AND COMMITTEES

WMEAC staff lend their expertise to a number of organizations and agencies at the local, state, regional, and federal levels on a number of different environmental and equity issues. Some of these boards/committees include the Grand Rapids Stormwater and Vital Streets Oversight Commissions, the Grand Rapids Community Collaboration on Climate Change (C4), the Wolverine Community Advisory Group (CAG), Michigan State Waterways Commission, Empower Michigan, Michigan Climate Action Network (MICAN), Michigan Water Table, RE-AMP, and the Great Lakes Healing Our Water Coalition.

## RAIN BARRELS

Water Programs continued offering our DIY Rain Barrel Workshops, with growing success coming out of the height of the pandemic. Nearly 50 households in West Michigan assembled their own upcycled rain barrels.

**Community Partners include:** *Roosevelt Park Neighborhood Association, Broad Leaf Brewery, The Mary Free Bed YMCA as well as the City of Montague.*

## GARFIELD PARK NEIGHBORHOODS RAIN GARDEN (RAINY DAY PROJECT)

In our fourth year of the Rainy Day Project, WMEAC focused on getting residents activated and engaged in implementing green infrastructure. In an effort to resolve persistent flooding in a park parking lot, the Garfield Park Neighborhoods Association, the City of Grand Rapids and WMEAC planned a large-scale rain garden. GPNA hosted WMEAC Water Programs in a two-night collaborative design workshop that taught residents how to plan a rain garden with native plant species. The result was an imprint of community pride (the shape a letter "G" for Garfield/Grand Rapids/Garden), with more than 40 individuals helping design, excavate, amend and plant over 900 wildflowers, grasses and sedges.

## PROMOTING PUBLIC/PRIVATE LOW-IMPACT DEVELOPMENT IN THE LOWER GRAND RIVER

In a continued effort to bring more stakeholders into the Stormwater Management arena, WMEAC collaborated with a wide variety of for-profit, non-profit and municipal leaders, in a city-wide program that invests State & Federal funds into business districts and residential areas. On the City's southeast side, an under-utilized alleyway & parking lot will be activated for pedestrian uses while incorporating GSI practices to reduce run-off in an impaired watershed. LGROW's Rainscaping for Business program will expand partnerships throughout the watershed by encouraging businesses to implement nature-based solutions to stormwater management.

**Partners include:** *the Grand Rapids Area Black Businesses, Olvera Enterprises, the Grand Valley Metro Council, Plaster Creek Stewards, American Rivers, WMSBF and the City of Grand Rapids*





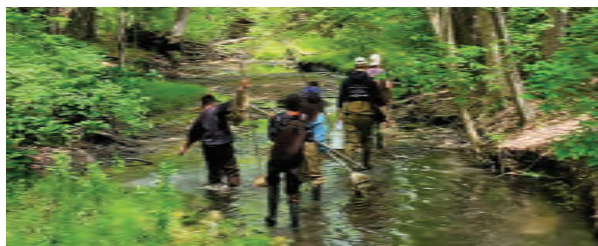
# ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Our environmental education team was very excited to return to in-person programming this year to deliver both familiar and new programs to students and communities across West Michigan. We set our sights on expanding our K-12 education in Muskegon County this year with a continued partnership with the Boys and Girls Club of the Muskegon Lakeshore. We continue to explore new opportunities for climate equity, resilience, and empowering students to take direct action to protect our natural resources.

## TEACH FOR THE WATERSHED

Putting the “place” back in place-based education, more than 800 students visited their local stream to learn about water quality. In complement with virtual resources developed the year prior, our T4W program returned to classrooms in the Grand Rapids and Godfrey Lee school districts to bring high quality watershed education. Students collected aquatic macroinvertebrates such as crayfish, insect larvae, beetles, and other cool crawlies to estimate the health of local waterways.

This program was made possible by the generous support provided by the Grand Rapids Public Schools Foundation, General Motors Components-Holding, and the Brookby Foundation. As well as the time, enthusiasm, and knowledge of our seasonal educators: Emma Miedema, Matt Bain, Logan Mulholland, Nicholas Jansen, Shannon Irvin, Jen Judson, and Devin Moore.



## GRAND RAPIDS ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION NETWORK (GREEN) CONTINUES ON ITS DISTRICT WIDE INITIATIVE FOR PLACE-BASED ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Wrapping up a pilot for the GREEN initiative, WMEAC has been able to support Grand Rapids area educators in developing extension curriculum to our flagship place-based program: Teach for the Watershed. As GREEN looks to increase access and integration of environmental education into school districts to create the next generation of scientists and stewards.

## SUMMER SCIENCE EXPLORERS PROGRAM

Because of the delay due to COVID-19, WMEAC (re) started our second year of programs for a NOAA B-WET grant in collaboration with the Boys and Girls Club of the Muskegon Lakeshore (BGCML). Our Summer Science Explorers program started in June of 2022 with a trip to McLaughlin Grows Urban Farms to learn about food security and the importance of locally grown produce. Each week students at the BGCML were able to discover a different facet of sustainability such as local food access, water quality in Muskegon County, and protecting local parks and green spaces.



## MAYORS' GRAND RIVER CLEANUP 2021

Once again our annual Mayors' Grand River Cleanup campaign rallied over 650 volunteers to remove trash from our local waterways, streets, and storm drains. We continued last year's model with expanding this opportunity across the second week of September to allow our community members to engage at their own convenience. Over 25 groups adopted sites in Grand Rapids, Grandville, Kentwood, Walker, Wyoming, and East Grand Rapids to remove a cumulative 6,300 lbs of debris!



## ADDITIONAL EE PROGRAMS AND OUTREACH

- Collaborated with ENS 201 students at GVSU to develop materials; guest lecture about the history of the Grand River
- Showcased subwatershed maps with activity at the Macatawa GSI seminar in Holland
- Green Infrastructure tour and service day with GVSU Public Health Masters students
- Rock the Park' at Roosevelt Park
- Vermicompost workshop with Union High School students
- Vermicompost workshop at Calvin University
- Tabled at Earthfest on the Blue Bridge

