



SUMMER
NEWSLETTER

WMEAC is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization

West Michigan
Environmental Action Council



WMEAC's mission is to work collaboratively
alongside our diverse community to educate,
engage, and advocate for environmental values,
environmental and climate justice, and a healthy
and resilient community for all.

WMEAC
West Michigan
Environmental Action Council
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www.wmeac.org

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DIRECTOR'S CORNER

Hello, West Michiganders! I write this as spring gives way to summer, when the days are sunny and the nights cool. Normally, I sleep with the windows open, enjoying the breeze and stealing a few more nights under some blankets. However, this past weekend most of Michigan was under an Air Quality Alert, and many were advised to stay indoors, with windows closed and air filters whirring. One day last week, one of the top 10 worst Air Quality Index (AQI) ratings on the planet was in Detroit, our state's largest city. And little did I know that between my time writing and your time reading this, the same would hold true for Grand Rapids.

I felt it. I could tell when I woke up with feelings in my chest, nose and throat that reminded me of my COVID experience. By the end of the day, I felt completely sick, my eyes itchy and red, and my throat still sore no matter how much hot tea I drank. My weekend was spent indoors and sedentary, which is quite the opposite of how I prefer to enjoy our sunny days. Several of our staff represented WMEAC at an outdoor community event over the weekend of that first alert, and noticed more people wearing masks than we've seen in quite some time.

We know the climate crisis is at a tipping point. Selfishly perhaps, I didn't realize Michigan's air would be subject to smoke from fires thousands of miles away. While some aspects of my work at WMEAC mean that I confront climate issues daily, I sometimes forget how impactful distant events can be on my life in Michigan, where our air is (usually) clear and we are surrounded on nearly all sides by fresh water.

By the time you read this, several WMEAC staff and myself will also have returned from talking to our elected leaders in Washington, D.C. about climate change. Individual actions are important, but nothing short of large-scale policy change will bring about the transformation critical to ensuring more of our future spring and summer days aren't spent indoors in front of a HEPA filter. I urge you to keep the issue of climate change front and center of your government, whether it be tribal, local, state, or federal. Elected officials get a lot of requests put in front of them, and we mustn't let the urgent need for equitable climate action fall off their radar.

Thank you,



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bill Wood'.

Bill Wood, Executive Director

MEET THE TEAM

Staff

BILL WOOD

Executive Director

ELAINE STERRETT ISELY

Deputy Director

TANYA CABALA

Lakeshore Outreach Organizer

CARLOS CALDERON

Director of Sustainable Community Development

DEIDRE COURTNEY-NIEVES

Director of Climate Solutions and Justice

KYLE FAULDS

Operations Manager

KALINA FOSTER

Communications Coordinator

KYLE HART

Education Programs Manager

MARSHALL KILGORE

Director of Engagement

SHARLENE KIPFER

Director of Development

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Environmental Operator, Consumers Energy

BOB ZYLSTRA

Retired, Feyen Zylstra UE



UPCOMING WMEAC EVENTS

GREEN DRINKS

August 17th, 5:00–7:00pm – Grand Rapids, MI

Did you know that WMEAC is the Grand Rapids chapter host of this national event? Join WMEAC staff and other sustainability-minded community members for networking and happy hour every third Thursday of the month. Check wmeac.org/events for the next location!

KEEPING WHITE LAKE WATER CLEAN: HOMEOWNERS' SEPTIC SYSTEM WORKSHOP

August 17th, 6:00–7:30pm

Montague Township Hall, 8915 Whitbeck Road, Montague, MI

August 23rd, 6:00–7:30pm

Whitehall Township Hall, 7644 Durham Road, Whitehall, MI

Septic systems abound across private township properties in Muskegon County. Keeping them well-maintained is critical if we are to avoid toxic algae bloom pollution like those we are now seeing in White Lake and other waterways. This workshop with Michael Eslick, operations manager for Public Health Muskegon County, will cover septic system care and maintenance, septic system regulation in Michigan, alternatives, and possible state funds available for septic system replacement.

WMEAC BOOK CLUB

September 6th, 6:30–7:30pm – Virtual

Sponsored by Books & Mortar independent bookstore, WMEAC Book Club meets virtually the first Wednesday of each month from 6:30–7:30pm. To join and learn more contact Marshall Kilgore, Director of Engagement – mkilgore@wmeac.org, (616) 451-3051 x140.

20TH ANNUAL WMEAC MAYORS' GRAND RIVER CLEANUP

Kick-off Clean up and Celebration – September 9th

Cleanup Week – September 10th – 16th, Kent County, MI

Did you know WMEAC hosts the largest organized river cleanup in the state of Michigan? We're celebrating our 20th year! Check wmeac.org/events for additional information on location and time of the Kick-Off. To organize an additional cleanup session for your own organization, business, or group, contact Kyle Hart, Education Programs Manager – khart@wmeac.org, (616)-451-3051 x 128.

WMEAC RAIN BARREL WORKSHOP

September 16th – 4:00–5:00pm – LGROW Jamboree in conjunction with Thornapple Watershed Council, Ada, MI

WMEAC's Director of Sustainable Community Development, Carlos Calderon, will guide you through building a 55-gallon rain barrel to take home! Rain barrels reduce storm water runoff and pollution, and with our changing climate, are a great way to conserve rain water – a plant's favorite kind- for when you need it most. Register at wmeac.org/events.



Find more events hosted by WMEAC, and events hosted by our community partners, at www.wmeac.org/events

ON THE LAKESHORE: IMPROVING RECYCLING IN MUSKEGON COUNTY

BY SAMANTHA RYPSTRA, WMEAC LAKESHORE FELLOW

Though WMEAC's main office is in Grand Rapids, we also have a satellite office in Muskegon County and staff working on projects stretching across West Michigan. WMEAC's Lakeshore Outreach Coordinator, Tanya Cabala, is leading many important events and projects on the lakeshore. For a few years now, one of the biggest has been the Muskegon County Recycling Project, a major initiative to improve the county's recycling rate. It builds on a former county study that examined issues surrounding recycling. That study noted a low recycling rate of about 12%, meaning only a small amount of materials in the county are diverted from landfill disposal. Increasing this rate will reduce the stress on landfills in the area, and allow the county to reap the additional benefits to recycling such as lowered pollution rates, fewer greenhouse gas emissions, and conservation of important natural resources.

Tanya is leading a group of "recycling cheerleaders" in the county including educators, elected officials, and local businesses to work towards improvements. Thanks to the group's efforts, the state of Michigan recently announced it will help expand the project by creating a leadership team and collaborative framework to implement the group's recommendations. This will help prepare Muskegon County for new state requirements related to recycling.

Community feedback will be sought during the summer via town hall meetings and a survey about ideas for improvements such as a central depository, increased services, and increased access. By hearing directly from the community, project leaders hope to improve the recycling process and increase recycling rates in Muskegon County.

WMEAC is very grateful to the many leaders who are actively involved, as well as the community members who are sharing feedback to help aid the project. For more information or to participate please contact Tanya Cabala at tcabala@wmeac.org or (231) 798-5196.



MONTAGUE STUDENTS TALK TRASH

BY KYLE HART,
EDUCATION PROGRAMS MANAGER

In addition to the Muskegon County Recycling Project, WMEAC has been encouraging several schools, including NBC Middle School in Montague and Ealy Elementary in Whitehall, to talk trash with their students and teachers. A new student club at NBC Middle School, The Climate Cats, take their name to heart and have been working to spread awareness about climate change and improve recycling efforts in classrooms and the cafeteria with posters and bin labels. Kyle Hart, WMEAC's Education Programs Manager, and the Climate Cats have been generously supported by the Howmet Aerospace Foundation to create scholars in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) that will help bring a sustainable, circular economic future for Muskegon County.



Evolving and Growing: Business Giving at WMEAC

WMEAC's Business Giving program has recently evolved to offer a more diverse array of sponsorship opportunities and benefits to businesses supporting our efforts! We have expanded our Business Giving levels, accept financial and case-by-case in-kind support, and offer both recurring and one-time donation options. Whether the business you work for or own is small or large, established or new, there's an option for you! Learn more and check out the businesses currently supporting WMEAC by contacting WMEAC's Director of Development, Sharlene Kipfer, at skipfer@wmeac.org or 616 451-3051 x 124, or by visiting wmeac.org/business-giving.

WMEAC JOINS FORCES WITH CLIMATE ACTION CAMPAIGN TO FIGHT CLIMATE CHANGE

BY KELLY OTTERNESS, MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS INTERN



Photo: Deirdre Courtney Nieves

We are thrilled to announce that the West Michigan Environmental Action Council (WMEAC) and the Climate Action Campaign (CAC) have joined forces. Leading the year-long partnership is our Director of Climate Solutions and Justice, Deirdre Courtney Nieves. Her most pressing

goal is to snowball public involvement in the EPA proposals to reduce air pollution emissions.

“There is much work to be done in this space, and due to the urgency, we need to act now. One challenge has been getting others on board. I therefore absolutely love this new role as it allows me to work on a new partnership between WMEAC, the Climate Action Campaign, and a coalition of other major national environmental, environmental justice, and public health organizations,” notes Deirdre. “The campaign is leveraging partners’ strong brands and membership to win bold federal action on equitable climate change solutions.”

CAC has two primary campaigns. The first is Solutions for Pollution, which calls on the Biden Administration to go big on climate and public health by advancing approximately 20 key protections across federal agencies.

The second is the Climate Wins Here campaign to educate the public and key stakeholders on the many local benefits of climate investments in the Inflation Reduction Act and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. This is a long-term campaign to address and transform the politics of climate change by helping voters and elected officials see the benefits of investing in climate solutions.”

Our first joint initiative is to rally public input on the Cut Climate Pollution standard proposal by the EPA. This key legislation aims to establish new carbon pollution standards for fossil fuel-fired power plants. We need these standards to be as strong as possible to have a fighting chance against climate change. The public comment period is open until August 8th, offering an opportunity for citizens to voice their opinions and push for stronger pollution controls.

Every comment counts in this journey towards a cleaner future. Add your thoughts to the public comment petition by scanning the QR code below:



As we embark on our partnership with CAC, we’re excited about the collective impact we can create. Join us in this crucial step towards a healthier environment.

Let’s act on climate, together.

A GUIDE TO COMPOSTING WITH WORMS

BY KELLY OTTERNESS,
MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS INTERN

Vermicomposting is an easy, environmentally-friendly way to reduce waste, fight climate change, and enhance soil quality. Start vermicomposting today and you'll contribute to a greener, more sustainable future for your family and friends - every time you clear the table!

Composting keeps food waste out of landfills, where it would have produced methane, a potent greenhouse gas. If everyone in the U.S. composted, the emissions reductions would be equivalent to removing nearly all of the cars in Michigan from the road.

Here's a simple guide to setting up a worm composting bin at home. While WMEAC keeps our worm bin indoors at the office, you can also set up your bin in a sheltered spot outdoors.

Materials Needed and Preparation Steps

- Two opaque storage bins and lids, and a drill and 1/8" drill bit - drill many small holes all over what will be your inside bin and many holes on two sides of the outside bin. Worms need darkness, oxygen, and ventilation!
- Three terra cotta pots, bricks, or other objects - place the outside bin on its lid, then place the pots or bricks into the outside bin. Stack the inside bin on top. This elevation provides additional ventilation.
- Shredded newspaper and a few cups of garden soil - place 1 inch of newspaper into the inside bin, followed by the soil. This is the bedding medium the worms will live in!
- About one pound of Redworms - they will create the worm compost! We recommend the redworm species *Eisenia Foetida* - also known as Red Wigglers- as the best for home composting. We order ours from Uncle Jim's Worm Farm.
- A spray bottle - mist the worms a few times a week, just enough to keep their bedding damp.
- A small hand rake or trowel - you'll use this to mix in new food, soil, and bedding.





- Food for the worms. See our graphic below. You can feed a little each day, or wait a few days to add more. You'll soon discover that your worms have favorite foods, too!
- Cover this bin with its lid, and you're done! Your worms will remain healthy and produce lots of compost living in an area where the ambient air temperature is between 55-77 degrees Fahrenheit.

When is the compost ready?

After 3-6 months, you'll be able to nourish your garden or indoor plants' soil with the composted *humus*. You'll know it's ready when it resembles dark, crumbly soil and has a pleasant, earthy smell.

Using Your Compost

Once ready, the compost can be used to enrich your garden soil or nourish indoor plants. Remember to reserve some compost material and worms in the bin to kick-start the next batch.

FUN FACT: WMEAC's compost bin is probably a decade old and still going strong!

Check out the resources available at WMEAC's Sustainable Schools and Living webpage (<https://wmeac.org/solution/sustainable-schools-and-living>) for more vermicomposting guides and activities you can try at home.



Students welcome red wigglers into classrooms during WMEAC's frequent vermicomposting workshops.



HANDY NEW FEATURE ON WMEAC'S WEBSITE

BY SHARLENE KIPFER, DIRECTOR OF
DEVELOPMENT

Did you know that, nationwide, 78% of donors are unsure about whether their workplace offers a matching gift program? The good news is that many employers do, and WMEAC can help you find out if yours is among them.

How can you check?

Visit wmeac.org/give where we'll see if your employer will match your donation; enter the name of your workplace, and we'll tell you right then and there! In addition to matching your donation dollar-for-dollar, some businesses will donate funds when you donate your time. You can check that on our website, too. With the volunteer-driven Mayors' Grand River Cleanup happening this September, it's a great time to find out!

Whether you volunteer or make a gift to WMEAC online or by mail, you can use our tool to link directly to your workplace to prompt them to give. It's a fantastic way to expand your support!

Some generous companies offer these benefits not only to current employees, but also to retirees, partners and spouses.

Visit wmeac.org/give to see what your workplace can do!





WMEAC MAYORS' GRAND RIVER CLEANUP TURNS TWENTY

BY KALINA FOSTER,
COMMUNICATIONS COODINATOR

The WMEAC Mayors' Grand River Cleanup is celebrating its 20th anniversary this autumn, beginning with our kick-off on Saturday, September 9 and continuing with clean ups across 45 different sites through September 16. Thanks to the many participants who have joined us, WMEAC's clean up effort is one of the largest in the state of Michigan!

An easy way to get involved in this effort is by attending our kickoff celebration — all ages are welcome. Last year, participants met in downtown Grand Rapids, had a light breakfast, and heard from our local mayors before heading out on foot to pick up litter. After the clean up, we celebrated with food and drinks, music, games, and a prize drawing. We plan to kick things up a notch in celebration of 20 years this year!

The remainder of the week is dedicated to cleanups in the surrounding area led by businesses, community organizations, or even a group of friends who can sign up to adopt a site to clean at their convenience. WMEAC will provide a list of locations, scheduling assistance, and supplies like trash bags, gloves, sharps containers, and first aid kits.

Last year alone, 37 sites were adopted and over 750 people participated in cleanup campaigns. Each volunteer removed an average of 10 pounds of trash from the Grand River and surrounding watersheds. Join us this year to help us beat these numbers and make an even bigger impact! You can find more information on our website, in our newsletter, and on social media. We can't wait to see you there!



GREAT LAKES PROTECTORS UNITE! WMEAC LOBBIES D.C. WITH THE HEALING OUR WATERS - GREAT LAKES COALITION

This past Earth Month, WMEAC's Assistant Director Elaine Sterrett-Isely and our Director of Engagement, Marshall Kilgore, visited Capitol Hill on behalf of the West Michigan Environmental Action Council.

Together with other partners of the Healing Our Waters - Great Lakes Coalition, they met with members of both chambers of congress to advocate for the protection and restoration of our Great Lakes, and to bring environmental justice to the forefront. We have the opportunity to make these amazing natural resources accessible for everyone, especially communities who have not historically been welcomed in environmental spaces.

Elaine and Marshall also celebrated the monumental investments we are seeing around the Great Lakes. Since its inception 19 years ago, the Healing Our Waters - Great Lakes Coalition has successfully secured a strong restoration plan and more than \$2.9 billion in federal funds for the Great Lakes. These funds have, and will, clean up toxic pollution, reduce the runoff that causes harmful algal blooms, help stop invasive species, and reverse habitat destruction, to the benefit of ecosystems, wildlife, the economy, and ourselves.