



Friends of the St. Clair River inspires citizen action through stewardship, monitoring and education to restore, protect and enhance the St. Clair River and its watersheds.

STRATEGIC PLAN: 2019 - 2021

Friends of the St. Clair River

Friends of the St. Clair River is the Blue Water Area's largest environmental non-profit, showing 40 miles of love to the St. Clair River and its watersheds since 2007.

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Introduction

Our Watershed Description

The St. Clair River is a 40-mile long river that begins underneath the Blue Water Bridges in Port Huron in St. Clair County, and is fed by Lake Huron at its northern end and empties into Anchor Bay in Lake St. Clair at its southern end. The St. Clair River forms the eastern boundary of St. Clair County and an international boundary between the United States and Canada. The cities of Port Huron, Marysville, St. Clair, East China, Marine City, and Algonac are along its course.

The St. Clair River contains the largest threatened Lake Sturgeon population in the Great Lakes; surrounds ten islands, six of which are land of the Canadian Walpole Island First Nation; forms the largest freshwater coastal delta in North America; and provides drinking water to 60% of St. Clair County's residents. For these reasons, the health of St. Clair County's water resources must be protected to preserve the quality of life for people, plants and wildlife.

The service area of Friends of the St. Clair River is contained within the jurisdictional boundary of St. Clair County, Michigan (Attachment A). It includes the St. Clair River and its six U.S. sub watersheds: Black River, Mill Creek, Pine River, Belle River, Lake Huron and Anchor Bay.

Despite centuries of challenges, the St. Clair River today is well-known for commercial and sport walleye fishing, world-class scuba diving and duck hunting, boating and sailing, and international freighter watching. The River supports plant and animal species listed as threatened and endangered by both State and Federal agencies, including: the Spotted Turtle, Lake Sturgeon, 5 different mussel species, Mooneye, and Painted Trillium. The River also plays an integral role in the travel of migratory waterfowl and shorebirds.

Current threats to St. Clair County's watersheds are similar to those of other rapidly urbanizing areas including: pathogens from combined sewer overflows and wildlife waste; nutrients from agricultural and residential runoff; storm water runoff from impervious areas (i.e. parking lots, roads, driveways); toxic pollutants from industrial spills; aquatic and terrestrial invasive species; loss of wetlands and high quality habitats; and soil erosion causing sedimentation and log jams. These threats can lead to advisories for fish and drinking water consumption, closed beaches, and impaired recreational activities. For the Blue Water Region to remain prosperous and sustainable, a united effort from the private, public, and non-profit sectors must promote and protect its most significant natural feature.

Our Unique Water Resources include:

- 1,000 miles of tributaries draining into the St. Clair River and Anchor Bay
- 14 Lake Huron and St. Clair River public beaches
- 134,000 brown and rainbow trout stocked annually by the DNR across our watersheds
- Most diverse population of federal and state threatened and endangered native mussels found in the Belle River, more than any other river in Michigan
- 2,500-acre freshwater coastal delta located in Clay and Ira Townships, largest in North America
- A swift and dangerous current at the mouth of the St. Clair River of 2.5 knots (4 ft/second)

Our History

Our story first begins when the St. Clair River was designated an *Area of Concern* in 1985 by the United States and Canadian governments due to poor management of pollution problems long before regulations better protected our river. *Areas of Concern* are waterways around the Great Lakes that have severe environmental degradation and are in need of restoration. In response to this, partners on both sides of the River formed the St. Clair River Binational Public Advisory Council (BPAC) to oversee a plan restoring the River's health. Funding was needed to implement this plan.

As a result, in the late 1990's, Friends of the St. Clair River (Friends) was incorporated to serve as the non-profit arm supporting BPAC on the American side of the River. A similar non-profit organization was developed on the Canadian side of the River. Friends filled the role as fiduciary to obtain grants supporting St. Clair River remediation projects. Thanks in part to these early efforts, substantial progress was made to the River's health, including: contaminated sediment cleanup projects, reductions in industrial chemical spills, and a decrease in fish and wildlife tumors and deformities.

However, in 2000, federal budget cuts in both countries slowed progress for the *Area of Concern* program and in 2002, Friends of the St. Clair River dissolved as an organization. BPAC limped along with little support.

A resurgence in volunteer energy following a 5-year absence resulted in the formation of a new non-profit; and in 2007, Friends of the St. Clair River Watershed was granted IRS tax-exempt status. A grant from the Community Foundation of St. Clair County provided the necessary start-up funding. With a new identity and Board of Directors in place, progress began towards implementing education activities and formulating the structure for this new watershed-based organization. In 2013, the Board of Directors elected to drop the word "watershed" from the organization name and use "Friends of the St. Clair River".

After thirty years of collaborating on international river restoration efforts and execution of numerous watershed management plans, St. Clair County's waterways, collectively known as the "Blue Water Area", are increasingly healthy and offer many recreational, social, and environmental opportunities.

MISSION

Inspire citizen action through monitoring, education and stewardship to restore, protect and enhance the St. Clair River and its watersheds.

Today, Friends is supported by local and county government contracts, business sponsorships, state, federal and private grants, and donations. We accomplish our goals through the use of research-based data, community partnerships, and citizen science to influence decisions and actions made by local, regional and state agencies. Although great progress has been made, there is still more work to be done.

Our Organization Today

Friends of the St. Clair River is headquartered in Port Huron, Michigan, and serves all of St. Clair County. Our organization consists of a volunteer Board of Directors, paid staff and consultants, and volunteer stewards. As the Blue Water Area's largest environmental non-profit, Friends of the St. Clair River works with numerous partners on both sides of the River on a variety of initiatives, including: conserving and restoring native habitat, promoting use of Low Impact Development, improving biological integrity, water quality monitoring, volunteer cleanups, and promotion of responsible water-based recreation.

Our vision is to be a highly visible champion for St. Clair River watershed programs, issues, research, policies and partnerships using sound research, respected advocacy and innovative education. We believe that the St. Clair River and its watersheds should be a thriving ecosystem that is protected to maximize environmental, social, recreational, and economic values and services.

Friends blends watershed management efforts with scientific research to provide technical consultation on a variety of water quality issues ranging from riparian habitat restoration to invasive species management to excessive nutrient inputs. We keep watch on emerging and controversial issues such as pathogen sources, pharmaceuticals and microplastics, climate change impacts, and energy pipelines. We serve as a fiduciary for local grant projects partnering with the private, nonprofit and public sectors. Through these activities we strive to promote an understanding of the connection between a healthy watershed and quality of life for all people, plants and wildlife.

Our Strategic Planning Process

This strategic plan builds on the environmental and recreational assets in St. Clair County, recognizes the areas for improvement, and realizes that there are new economic opportunities on which to capitalize. With a region-wide renewed interest in elevating the natural features of the Blue Water Area, Friends hired the River Network in February, 2018 with a grant from the Michigan Office of the Great Lakes to guide our organization's first-ever strategic plan. The 10-month planning process included: meetings with our consultant, gathering input from stakeholders with face-to-face interviews and online surveys, and conducting internal evaluations. This strategic planning process was overseen by the Board of Directors and was adopted by the Board November, 2018.

CORE VALUES

Inspire Watershed Stewardship

Foster Collaboration

Advocate for Healthy Water

Support Responsible Water Recreation

Provide Data-Driven Education

Remain a Trusted Environmental Leader

As we move forward with implementation, maintaining the energy and partnership created through development of this plan will be critical to our ability to achieve each of the actions. Our focus will be centered on creating a thriving ecosystem that is protected to maximize the environmental, social, recreational and economic values and services of the St. Clair River and its watersheds.

We are advancing Friend's mission through these five pillars presented in our 3-year strategic plan.

I. Organizational Capacity

Strengthen board and staff capacity and expertise to enhance our organization's reputation and relevancy.

II. Fund Development

Ensure adequate financial stability through resources that are multi-pronged and proactive.

III. Public Relations

Build a strong presence through effective outreach with messages that are positive, consistent and motivational.

IV. Watershed Stewardship

Establish robust stewardship programs for habitat management, volunteer management and citizen science.

V. Community Education

Design and execute mission-driven programming that educates the public in both formal and non-formal settings.

Friends of the St. Clair River Strategic Plan: 2019 - 2021

GOAL I: ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY – Strengthen board and staff capacity and expertise to enhance organization’s reputation and relevancy				
Strategy 1: Hire an Executive Director		Responsible	Timeline / Due Date	Measure of Success
Tactics	Create an ED job description that outlines responsibilities, pay structure and benefits package	Board, Governance Committee, ED	2019	Job description created & published
	Post ED job description and conduct interviews	Board, Governance Committee, ED	2019	Position filled
	Provide training and development opportunities for ED	Board, Governance Committee, ED	2019 - 2020	# & types of trainings attended
Strategy 2: Improve the use of database practices for donors and volunteers, and financial information				
Tactics	Use Little Green Light database more effectively and efficiently to manage donors and volunteers	Fund Development Committee, Stewardship Committee	Ongoing	Reports generated bimonthly
	Use financial database more effectively and efficiently	Finance Committee	Ongoing	Same as above
Strategy 3: Improve board governance functions				
Tactics	Maintain a Board with 9-12 members with broad variety of skills, expertise and diverse backgrounds	Governance Committee	Ongoing	Current, updated list of Board members
	Update Board orientation process for clear knowledge of roles and responsibilities	Governance Committee & Consultant	2019	Protocols for orientation established
	Create a Board manual	Governance Committee & Consultant	2019-2020	Board manual available electronically & physically
Strategy 4: Provide physical space, equipment, hardware and software that is well-tailored to current and anticipated future needs				
Tactics	Maintain a reliable, safe facility accessible by all Board and Staff, including looking at a long term plan to secure a permanent office	Facilities Committee	Ongoing	Facilities committee report
	A set of managerial processes are in place for the current facility	Facilities Committee	2019	Maintenance record
	Create and maintain an electronic information management system that is secure, reliable and accessible	Board, Staff	2020	Facilities manual

Strategy 5: Seek training and development opportunities for Board and Staff		Responsible	Timeline/ Due Date	Measure of Success
Tactics	Establish budget for trainings and share training opportunities as they arise	All, Finance Chair	Ongoing	# of trainings attended
	Conduct staff and board evaluations to assess if performance targets are being met	Board, Staff	End of the calendar year	Creation of Board & Staff evaluation forms; Summary of assessment
Strategy 6: Research organization status and/or name change into a Watershed Alliance, Council or Friends group				
Tactic	Meet with other Michigan watershed councils, alliances and Friends groups to determine and assess pros and cons of status change and/or name change	Board, Staff	2019	Survey report

GOAL II: FUND DEVELOPMENT – Ensure adequate financial stability and resources that are multi-pronged and proactive

Strategy 1: Develop a Fundraising Plan that is integrated into the organization’s strategic plan and budget		Responsible	Timeline/ Due Date	Measure of Success
Tactics	Establish a Fund Development Committee	FD Committee & Consultant	2019	Establish regular calendar of meetings & work plan
	Establish and promote a tiered, fee-based membership program	FD Committee	2020	Program is up and running
	Purchase accounting software	Finance Chair	2019	Monthly/annual budgets; Clarity of BOD reports; annual financial report
	Diversify funding stream with new financial contributors and individual donors per year	FD Committee & Consultant	2019	Increased # of sponsors, # of donors; amount raised/annum/ group
Strategy 2: Add online giving to website				
Tactic	Contract with 8 th Day Media/Restyle Marketing to add online giving feature to website	FD Committee	2019	Increased # of online donations received
Strategy 3: Identify financial contributors at the local, regional, state and federal levels				
Tactics	Identify corporate, business, foundation, commercial, industry and private grantors and underwriters	FD Committee & Consultant	2019	List of contributors; value from potential contributors; Increased # of sponsorships
	Establish a gift acceptance policy	FD Committee & Consultant	2019	Policy adopted and approved
Strategy 4: Update budget and integrate into all operations				
Tactic	Conduct a financial needs assessment and investment performance	Finance Committee & Consultant	Annually	Assessment completed

GOAL III: PUBLIC RELATIONS – Build a strong presence through effective outreach with messages that are positive, consistent and motivational				
Strategy 1: Develop a Communication Plan		Responsible	Timeline/ Due Date	Measure of Success
Tactics	Identify opportunity to contract public relations/marketing services for short-term efficacy	Board	2019	Job description/ Contract for services
	Maintain a website that is comprehensive, user-friendly, interactive (Q&A surveys, donations, etc) and regularly updated	Staff/ PR Firm	Ongoing	Web stats
	Develop marketing materials that are consistent, updated regularly and professional in appearance	Staff/ PR Firm	Ongoing	Products
	Expand e-newsletter outreach with new subscribers and subscribers retained	Staff	Ongoing	Newsletter stats
	Broaden reach by recording and posting workshops/presentations/events online (i.e. webinar, live social media, etc.)	Staff	2020	Online links
Strategy 2: Report and track the health of the St Clair River watershed through various mechanisms				
Tactics	Develop a State of the Watershed annual report and/or hold an annual meeting	Board, Staff	2019/ Annually	Meeting date/ copy of report
	Evaluate environmental strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats throughout service area	Board, Staff, Partners	Annually	Annual report
Strategy 3: Develop strong, high-impact relationships with a variety of entities throughout service area				
Tactics	Identify program (non-financial) partners throughout service area and Ontario, Canada (gov't, nonprofits, schools, agencies, businesses, individuals, etc.)	Board, Staff	2019	List of partners
	Collaborate with the academic and scientific communities and recreation-based organizations	Board, Staff	Ongoing	List of entities
	Become member of Chambers of Commerce in shoreline communities	Board	2019	Membership
	Establish a program partnership policy	Board, Staff	2019-2020	Policy adopted and approved
Strategy 4: Proactively advocate for a healthy watershed in a highly effective manner at the local, regional and state level				
Tactics	Follow emerging and/or controversial watershed issues and communicate research-based information to the public as a trusted leader	Board, Staff	Ongoing	Media interactions
	Create opportunities for meaningful action and engagement for all members of the community	Board, Staff	Ongoing	Community projects lead, guided/year
Strategy 5: Identify and participate in existing events throughout service area				
Tactic	Participate in 4-6 events per year with a booth with displays and hands-on activities	Board, Staff	4 – 6/ year	# and location of events

GOAL IV: WATERSHED STEWARDSHIP – Establish robust stewardship programs for habitat management, volunteer management and citizen science				
Strategy 1: Develop a functional and responsive system to recruit, develop, train and retain volunteers		Responsible	Timeline/ Due Date	Measure of Success
Tactics	Define a variety of volunteer roles with position descriptions	Stewardship Director, Stewardship Committee	2019	Position descriptions created & available
	Conduct volunteer orientations and trainings with emphasis on skills, knowledge competency	Stewardship Director	As needed	Volunteer manual; # of orientations
	Improve the use of database practices for volunteer tracking, management and recognition	Stewardship Director	Ongoing	Increased # new volunteers; Tracking retention
Strategy 2: Establish citizen science monitoring programs to track and measure ecosystem health				
Tactics	Collaborate with the academic and scientific communities and recreation-based organizations to identify and measure criteria for citizen science programs	Stewardship Director, Env Educator	Ongoing	Participation in scientific committees/programs
	Interpret and summarize citizen science data for public dissemination (i.e. State of the Watershed report, habitat manager contracts, etc)	Stewardship Director	Annually	Annual report
Strategy 3: Create and execute a Stewardship Committee work plan				
Tactics	SMART goals, strategies and tactics are defined; budget included	Stewardship Director, Stewardship Committee	Annually	Work plan
	Identify resources for habitat management projects	Stewardship Committee	Annually	Habitat project contracts
Strategy 4: Support habitat and green infrastructure management projects				
Tactics	Field days, documentation, successes	Stewardship Director, Stewardship Committee	Ongoing	Signed habitat contracts
	Develop, document and share best management practices for projects	Stewardship Director	Annually	Project reports

GOAL V: COMMUNITY EDUCATION – Design and execute mission-driven programming that educates the public in both formal and non-formal settings

Strategy 1: Use research data and sound science to support program planning and development				
		Responsible	Timeline/Due Date	Measure of Success
Tactics	Develop standard operating procedures for field trips, including weather, safety, cancellation, bussing, chaperone, policies	Environmental Educator, Education Committee	2019	Policies approved by Board and E. Committee
	Create, maintain and promote list of existing programs to appropriate stakeholders and program partners (schools, summer camps, scouts, youth groups, Canada, etc.)	Environmental Educator	2019, Ongoing	List of programs
Strategy 2: Create new, innovative programs and fine tune existing programs				
Tactics	Explore and establish a fee-based menu of program options	Environmental Educator	Ongoing	Creation & dissemination of programs
	Align programs with Michigan’s K-12 curriculum goals and social studies and science standards	Environmental Educator, Education Committee	2019, Ongoing	# of programs (new & existing)
	Identify program partners	Environmental Educator, Education Committee	2019, Ongoing	Increased # of program partners
	Create program content that incorporates social, historical, cultural and biological content	Environmental Educator	2019, Ongoing	Creation & dissemination of program content
Strategy 3: Create and execute an Education Committee work plan				
Tactics	SMART goals, strategies and tactics are defined; budget included	Environmental Educator, Education Committee	2019, annually	Budget, Work plans
	Transition PT Environmental Educator to FT position with updated responsibilities, pay structure and benefits package	Board	2020	Job description
Strategy 4: Increase public's knowledge of St. Clair County's watershed health				
Tactics	Create and partners in activities in which the public can participate to maintain/improve watershed health	Environmental Educator, Stewardship Director	Ongoing	# of communities that participated, success of each activity
	Facilitate public programs at the Blue Water River Walk and other watershed habitat sites	Environmental Educator	Ongoing	Program evaluations; # of programs
	Create self-guided tours and make available online of habitat project sites	Environmental Educator	Ongoing	Online content; # of tours

ATTACHMENT A: St. Clair County Watershed Map

