

Thumb Region Watershed Center Project



Sheri Faust

Board of Directors, President
Friends of the St. Clair River



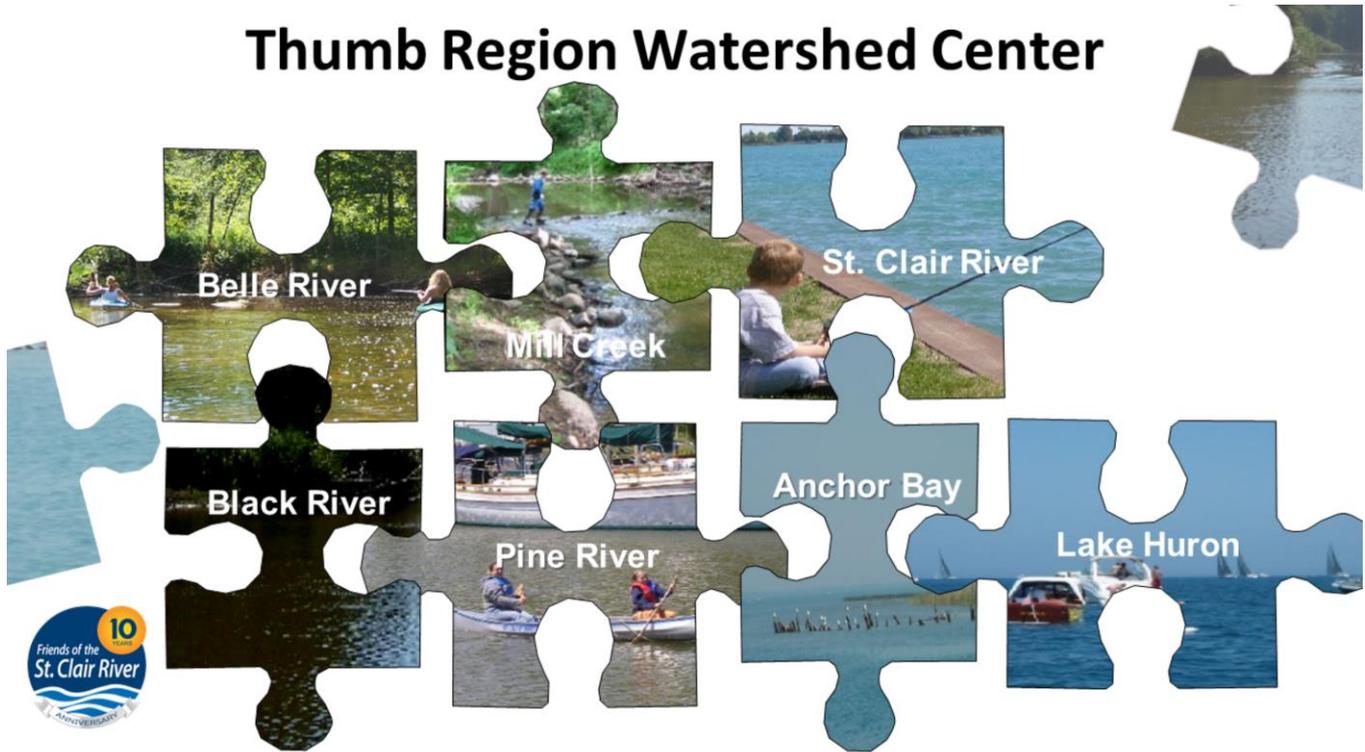
Here is the first unveiling of the conceptual drawing of our region's first Watershed Center, as envisioned by a local 4th grade student.

Friends of the St. Clair River's vision for a Thumb Region Watershed Center is much grander. We want to create our region's first Watershed Center as the tangible hub to elevate environmental priorities for the Blue Water Area. We've heard today about projects relying on our county's natural assets, which points to the fact that now is the time we create a watershed center to balance community vibrancy with environmental responsibility. These are complimentary, not competing interests. The Watershed Center will be highly visible, publicly accessible, and headquartered in a vibrant downtown along the heart of the St. Clair River.

Picture this: The watershed center is a thriving space where schools & businesses visit; where communities connect with a water restoration project; a space where families put knowledge into action; and is the nucleus for boosting the region's environmental credibility and water-related enterprise.

Friends of the St. Clair River is the Blue Water Area's largest environmental nonprofit, and in our 11 year history, we've become a respected leader for on-the-ground projects. Our board & staff have high standards for driving positive change, and Our strength is our network throughout Southeast Michigan and Ontario which gives us the upper hand to prioritize quality of life initiatives.

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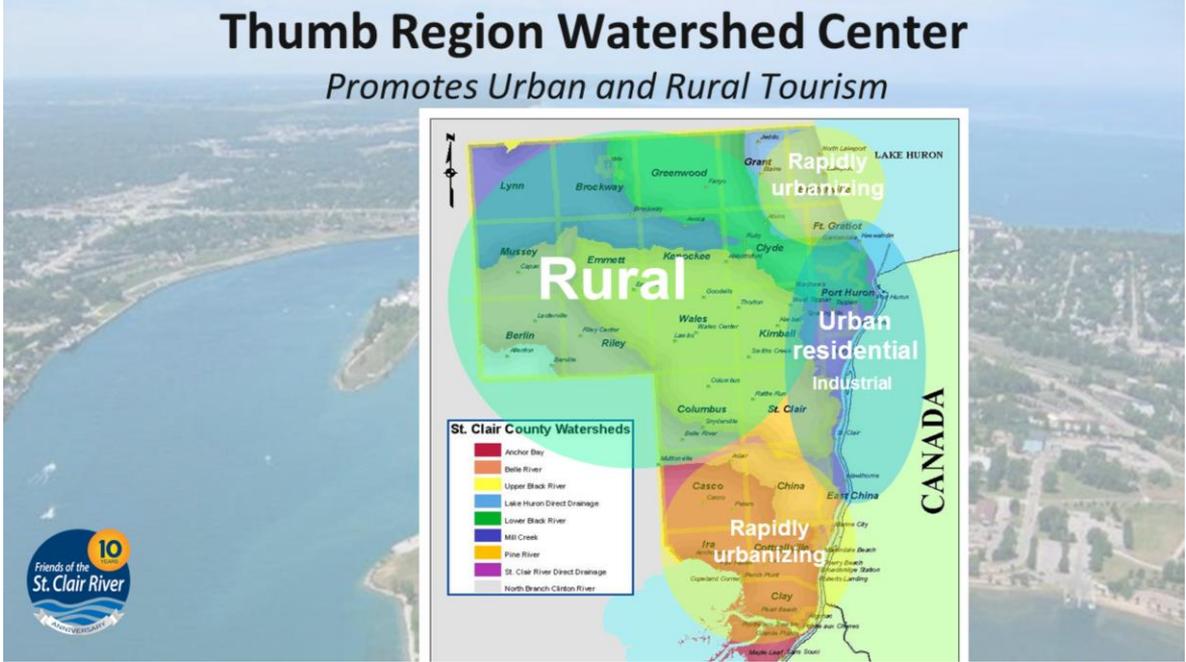
What is a watershed? Watersheds are the jigsaw pieces that make up our water and landscape. These are St. Clair County's 7 watersheds. Each of these are primed as recreational destinations; and with development pivoting to face our water, championing the health and aesthetics of our watersheds is critical, now more than ever.

It's difficult to put a dollar value on our watersheds, but researchers have shown they do have economic benefits. A study by Grand Valley State University showed the Huron River generated \$53 million in annual economic output. This study is valuable because our rivers are not typically regarded for their dollar value. But this proves there is real value for us to invest in our 7 watersheds.

Healthy watersheds make our communities attractive places to live and work.

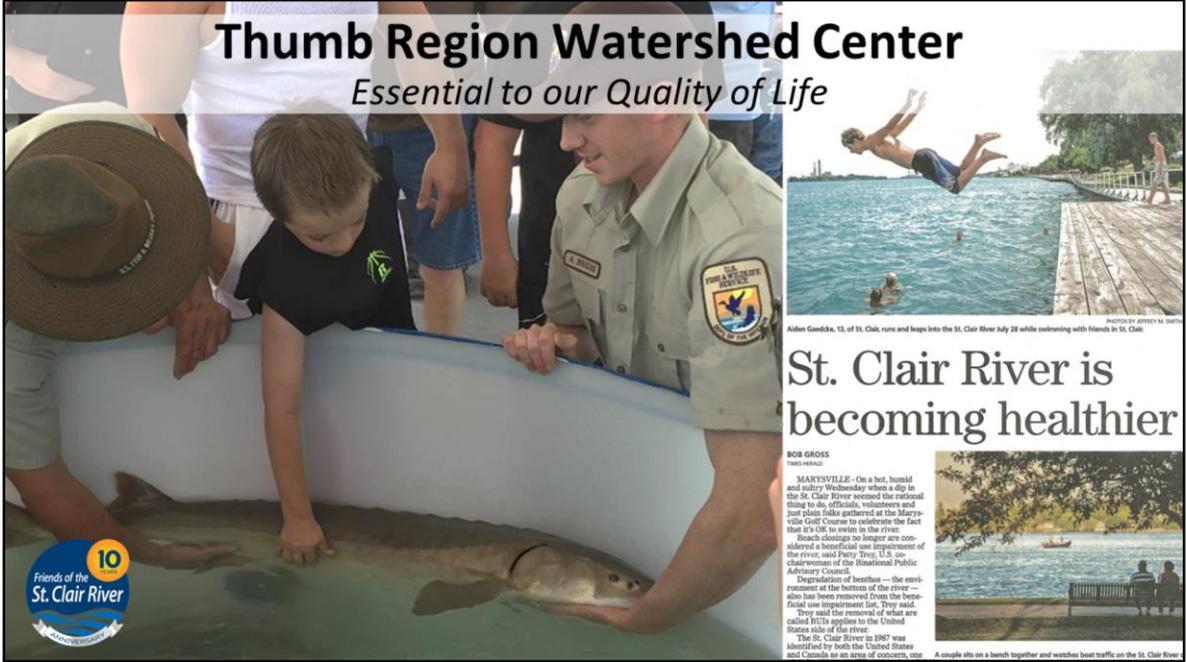
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Promotes Urban and Rural Tourism



Environmental restoration can produce economic benefits like we've seen with the \$21 million in federal funding for projects like Port Huron's Blue Water River Walk, Marysville Living Shoreline, Harsens Island Krispin Blueway, and the new Wetland County Park. According to a 2018 Great Lakes Commission study, the return on investment for water restoration projects like these is 3:1.

Many local master plans have identified preserving community character is their number one goal. A Watershed Center will be the common ground where we can bring together decision makers to shape the type of communities that bring tourists, boost property values, and attract and keep talented workers.



The value of a watershed center will be measured by its economic impacts and our community's health and wellness as a whole. The same 2018 study showed that environmental restoration projects attracted millennials and young families who were drawn by improved quality of life. Let's just be honest, it really all comes down to just one thing... clean water equals great craft beer!

There are already 30 watershed centers around the state; in place protecting, enhancing, and promoting their region's natural amenities and qualities. We're asking you to advocate for a Thumb Region Watershed Center. It will capitalize on the momentum of this group's important work.

It's time for us to establish the Blue Water Area's legacy with our region's first watershed center.

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Let's keep this environmental conversation and momentum going that's changing the culture of our region forever. Thank you for your support.