



Friends of the St. Clair River

2021 Annual Report

Water Moves, We Move





Message from our President

We embraced the theme *Water Moves, We Move* this year. It was our theme when we moved out of our first home on the Blue Water River Walk in 2019, and it became our theme once again in 2021 when we opened the Thumb Coast Watershed Center. We have to be like water and keep changing. When rocks are thrown into water, water flows around them and keeps moving. That's what we do; keep moving!

This year we more than doubled our staff, opened the region's first watershed center, and stayed connected to local issues like the St. Clair River Enbridge Line 5 replacement. We worked on Columbus County Park's new Disc Golf Course and supported economic development with Bridge to Bay Trail expansion. We demonstrated our spirit of collaboration by supporting the Marine City Belle River Marina project and Casco Township's new Belle River Park. A watershed approach requires the partnership and investment of all of us to see the progress we desire.

We are grateful you keep 'moving like water' with us. We need all of our efforts to elevate the message that land conservation and increased recreational access are key ingredients to sustaining the quality of the environment we depend on.

See you on a trail,

Sheri J. Faust



2021 Annual Report

Water Moves, We Move

Vision

Blue water,
green spaces,
clean air, for
all, forever

Mission

To protect
and restore the St.
Clair River watershed
through community
education, environmental
monitoring, hands-on
stewardship, and
advocacy

Board of Directors & Staff

Sheri Faust, *President*

Dan Danner, *Treasurer*

Carrie Dollar, *Co-Secretary*

Alyssa Winters, *Co-Secretary*

Directors: Tiffany Francis, Doreen Kephart,
Dave Putt, Don Rice, Gordon Ruttan, Linda
Schoonover, Lindsay Wallace, Kieth Zick

Staff:

Kirsten Lyons, *Stewardship Director*

Melissa Kivel, *Education Manager*

Brooke Hiller, *Restoration Coordinator*

Lydia Nicholas, *Environmental Field Technician*

Amy Meeker-Taylor, *Environmental Educator*

Interns:

Christy Ellery, *Science Communication Intern*

Lily Smalstig, *Recreation Intern*

Zach Bachler, *Field Tech Intern*



Brooke Hiller
Restoration
Coordinator



Amy Meeker-Taylor
Environmental Educator
(We said farewell to Amy
after 4 years)



Melissa Kivel
Education
Manager



Lydia Nicholas
Environmental
Field Technician



Kirsten Lyons
Stewardship
Director

Our Volunteers Make A Difference

300 volunteers | 1,779 hours of work | \$50,000 value

Our volunteers are active and committed, and regularly give of their time and talents for parks and trails throughout our watershed. Their hands-on work included native plant restoration, invasive species management, butterfly monitoring, and leading youth field trips. Since 2015, our volunteers have served over 14,500 hours of hands-on work!

Invasive Species Challenge

Our volunteers amassed 170 hours pulling 1,225 pounds of Garlic Mustard and other invasive species through the Stewardship Network's annual spring challenge. For this effort, we were able to declare Fort Gratiot County Park a Garlic Mustard-Free Zone!

Sanborn Park Ecological Survey

A dozen volunteers mapped and measured the ages of over 60 mature trees in Port Huron's Sanborn Park. The data volunteers and staff are providing helps protect trees, identify rare plant and wildlife species, and avoid damage to habitats during future trail work. This information will be used to guide education programs and restoration actions in the park.



You guys rock. Keep up the good work!
- Nicole Hutchinson



Shoreline Inspection Paddle

Volunteers took to the St. Clair River in their kayaks to survey Port Huron's Blue Water River Walk shoreline to document the impacts due to record-high water levels, flooding, and erosion. Their photographs and investigation results are used to assess how the St. Clair River shoreline is changing over time and will inform recommendations for habitat improvements and trail repairs.

Volunteer Spotlight - Laura McEnery

I love the opportunity to be outdoors, learning from others who are knowledgeable and passionate about healthy, diverse habitats. Stewardship also presents opportunities to share what I have learned about our human interdependence with plant and animal diversity in our yards, and local parks - not just our big National Parks and faraway, exotic places like the Amazon rainforest. I find the physical act of removing things that don't belong in a habitat deeply gratifying!



Our Work in Action



Thumb Coast Watershed Center

Our vision to secure a permanent home came to life as we put down roots and established the first Thumb Coast Watershed Center. Our community of volunteers and donors came together to prepare the space for our arrival. Our new home enables us to serve the region with greater access to our technical support & environmental services. This is an exciting time to see the environmental sector and recreation culture thriving!

As always, thank you for your tireless efforts to make Southeast Michigan a better place now and in the future.
- Amy O'Leary, SEMCO Executive Director



21
volunteers



13
routes

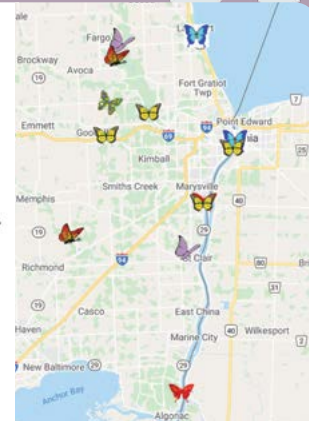


41
species

Butterfly Monitoring

Butterflies are a useful indicator of a healthy environment. By identifying butterflies and learning about their populations, volunteers are able to gauge the health of their habitat. As a result of the data collected we added thousands of Common Milkweed seeds and plants to local projects to improve habitat for monarch caterpillars.

- Algonac State Park
- Blue Water River Walk - North
- Blue Water River Walk - South
- Columbus County Park
- Greig Park
- Hewitt Pit monitoring route
- Lakeport State Park Day Use...
- Marysville Living Shoreline
- Marysville Golf Course
- Metcalf Ponds
- Pine River Nature Center
- Wadhams to Avoca Trail
- Woodson County Park



Spongy Moth Suppression Program

The Blue Water Area faced a severe Spongy Moth outbreak in 2021, which led to St. Clair County partnering with us to revive its suppression program of this invasive insect. We received over 800 infestation reports and developed a variety of educational resources and field training for homeowners and communities. Our staff and volunteers completed more than 450 property surveys covering 5,180 acres to gather data for the 2022 aerial spray treatment.



800
reports



450
properties



5,180
acres

Bridge To Bay Trail

We championed progress of the Bridge To Bay Trail by overseeing \$4.5M secured for nine new trail segments, creating new trail kiosks and signage, and launching a new trail website. The Trail received a face lift in the Blue Water River Walk tunnel and new directional stencils. Trails provide exceptional recreational experiences that reconnect residents to natural resources and lay the foundation to foster a stewardship ethic.



"It's interesting to see how the world changes before our eyes. It encourages people to enjoy our parks, as well as contribute to this community science project."

- Keely Baribeau, former President of the Port Huron Rotary Club



St. Clair River Drinking Water Survey

420 responses | 67% rated water as good
90% are concerned about contaminants

Our survey assessed perception of the St. Clair River to rebuild trust in our drinking water. While most residents know their drinking water comes from the St. Clair River, most do not understand how water gets to the tap and what the water treatment process involves. Progress to restore and protect the St. Clair River is ongoing, including the reduction of spills to the river. The continued actions of many groups are contributing to St. Clair River improvements.

Chronolog Photo Stations

3 stations | 90 photos

We installed photo stations at three parks for visitors to help us document the dynamic changes of the landscape. When visitors place their phone in the holder and snap a photo, a time-lapse video is built revealing the environmental change happening before them. The crowd-sourced time-lapse videos allows us to us to monitor invasive species, fluctuating water levels, and wildlife migration.



Environmental Education: K-12 Classrooms and Beyond

We continued to provide education programs online and in-person, which enabled our outreach to grow. Environmental education provides opportunities for students to become engaged in real-world issues that transcend classroom walls and take action to improve the environment. Preparing students to be good environmental citizens is some of the most important work we do.

Conservation Stewards Program

25 participants | 10-week class | 500 hours

This MSU Extension leadership program gave participants knowledge to help care for local ecosystems and confidence to share what they learned. These Conservation Steward students will continue in 2022 by contributing 40 hours of volunteer service to local natural areas.



Lake Sturgeon Outreach

We engaged hundreds of 5th graders in our free Sturgeon Science School, created a calendar with students' winning sturgeon stories, and adopted out dozens of Lake Sturgeon that are tracked around the Great Lakes. Our Lake Sturgeon adoption kit provides informative, engaging sturgeon facts along with updates about their fish from biologists conducting research in the watershed.



We learned so much about the sturgeon. It was amazing that we know so little about a species on our doorstep. I can't help but think of the old adage about "being out of sight and out of mind".
— Jim, Kiwanis Club of Sarnia-Lambton Golden K

OptOutside Hike and Bat Hike

Our educational hikes encourage families to experience and celebrate nature. Outdoor recreation offers the opportunity to become involved in a positive way with the natural world and have a personal stake in the stewardship of these natural resources.



Sturgeon Story Contest

Artwork from 5th grade students across St. Clair County was compiled into a 2022 calendar that promotes sturgeon and other native fish in the Great Lakes.



Community Science: Powered By Nature

Restoring land is part of our day-to-day work. Our activities range from water quality monitoring and invasive species control, to tree planting and tracking endangered wildlife. This work from our staff and volunteers helps communities come together to continue the important work of protecting the St. Clair River watershed for generations to come.

Wetland Wanderings

3 events,
60 families
Blue Water River Walk

Stream Leaders

12 volunteers
Cuttle Creek, Marysville
Pine River Nature Center

Winter Stonefly Search

100 winter stoneflies collected
Belle River at Columbus
County Park

I could not think of anything more important than learning about native species in our local area.
— Hope Meyers

Stream Leaders

This program empowers community members to protect local streams and rivers in a hands-on way by monitoring water quality. We train participants how to care for and protect streams. The small animals that live at the bottom of streams, like snails, mussels, and insects, are useful signs of clean water because these organisms vary in sensitivity to polluted water.



Growing Nature

We trained 20 volunteers to grow over 90 species of Michigan native plants from seed. Collecting and saving of these seeds is crucial to the continued restoration of parks. Seeds were harvested, dried and stored, and then were cleaned for use in 2022 restoration projects.



May The Course Be With You

We led volunteers for 18 workdays to prepare Columbus County Park for a 9-hole Disc Golf Course. Our volunteers added 263 hours of work valued at \$7,153 to the project by clearing brush, removing invasive species, identifying areas of high ecological value, and recommending actions for future invasive species control.



Financial Overview

Fundraising Events

Blue Water Sturgeon Festival - \$21,100

Blue Water Sturgeon Sponsors:

DTE Energy, Great Lakes Fishery Commission,
St. Clair – Detroit River Sturgeon For
Tomorrow, Meijer, Cargill, Gun Lake Tribe,
SEMCO, Enbridge

The Big Give - \$15,547

Water Moves, We Move Campaign - \$10,825

Giving Tuesday - \$3,460

Sturgeon Full Moon Lighthouse Climb - \$1,559



*Supporting a wonderful group of people
doing great things right here in our backyard!*
– Dr. Sarah Pasia, DO

Environmental Service Contracts

St. Clair County Parks and Recreation Commission – Environmental Services

The County of St. Clair - Spongy Moth Suppression Program

City of Port Huron – Sanborn Park Stewardship

St. Clair Rotary Club – Pine River Rotary Wildlife Landing

Grant Awards

Community Foundation of St. Clair County - Bridge To Bay Trail Coordination

DTE Energy Foundation - Pursuit of Growth and Prosperity

Community Foundation of St. Clair County's Grants and St. Clair Endowment Funds
committees - Thumb Coast Watershed Center Support

Michigan State University Extension - Michigan Water School

St. Clair County Health Department - MiCorps Volunteer Stream Monitoring

Continuation of Grant-Supported Work

Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy - St. Clair River Area of Concern

Six Rivers Land Conservancy - Lake St. Clair Cooperative Invasive Species Management

Regional Trails Governing Board – Trail projects pass-through



Michigan's Thumb Coast Watershed Organization



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Friends of the St. Clair River is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization

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