

# G.R.E.A.T.

## Grand River Environmental Action Team



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## How you can join GREAT

Contact information is on page 8 to Mail, Email, Website, Facebook or Phone

Send \$15 individual membership  
\$25 family membership or  
\$100 for sponsor membership

## Earth Day huge success



**GREAT provided canoes and kayaks to the public.**

By Kenny Price

Earth Day 2016 in Jackson County fell on April 23 this year. The weather was great not too hot and not too windy. In years past we have had wind storms, rain storms and even snow one year. In 2009 we had such bad weather the event was almost canceled and started two hours late. 2016 was a banner year of good weather.

Earth Day was started nationally in 1970 to bring awareness of how we are harming the earth with our trash and waste. I am sure there were celebrations in Jackson back then. Our current Earth Day celebration was started in 2007 and

has gotten bigger and better every year.

We once again had a great crowd of public and vendors. G.R.E.A.T. was again a huge hit with children and adults. We had 98 children sign waivers to ride our canoes and kayaks. We had 52 adults sign to ride our boats. We had no swimmers this year just lots of smiling faces on the water, and lots of cameras on shore taking lifetime memories of the children on the water.

If you came out to Earth Day, you know what a great day it was. If you did not come this year, mark it on your calendar for next year, and be there early. You will thank yourself all next year.

## SUMMER PADDLE TRIPS

**June 19th**  
St. Joseph River  
(Hillsdale Co.)

**July 17th**  
River Raisin  
(Washtenaw Co.)

**August 21**  
Kalamazoo River  
(Jackson Co.)

# GREAT receives grant money towards building project

The Jackson Community Foundation recently awarded GREAT \$10,000 towards the construction of our equipment storage building project. This is the first time GREAT has applied for and received a sizable grant from a local foundation. Along with completing a lengthy application, GREAT also submitted letters of support from the Dahlem Environmental Center and Jackson Conservation District.

GREAT president, Kenny Price, said "It is exciting the Jackson Community Foundation has showed their trust and respect to GREAT. Their Grant will allow us to build our equipment storage building on our own

property. We will now have one location to store our equipment, boats and records, instead of having them scattered in multiple distant locations."

Since August of 2015, GREAT has spent \$9,300 of savings on road access and site preparation, raised over \$14,500 in member donations prior to receiving the \$10,000 grant. By the terms of the grant, we must spend this money prior to September 30th. Therefore, we will start construction of the building sometime this summer, but we will still need about \$6,000 to complete it. We are very grateful of the generosity of GREAT' membership.



## "No Shows" can be a problem

GREAT has experienced, in the past, an increase of those who reserve canoes and kayaks for our public paddle events, but then do not appear on the date to use the boats set aside for them. When making boat reservations, we request to all, if they are not coming to let us know as soon as possible, anytime right up to the hour of the event. This is because we have often have a waiting list of people to use our limited supply of canoes and kayaks, who we will contact accordingly.

Please be responsible.

Thanks!

## Deb Snell fills new board member position

Deb has been a GREAT member for the past several years and has worked 24+ years with Department of Environmental Quality Water Resources Division. Deb has a strong commitment to environmental educa-

tion and water quality, which led her to volunteer for the GREAT board (that, and a little arm-twisting from Kenny!). Deb enjoys backpacking, camping, kayaking, and exploring our beautiful



state of Michigan. She appreciates the opportunity to serve on the GREAT board.

# Creation of a local Grand River Water Trail



**Jim Seitz (right) sharing thoughts amenities a water trail should have.**

## By Jim Seitz

A local steering committee, chaired by Jackson County Drain Commissioner, Geoffrey Synder through the Upper Grand River Water Alliance has been meeting since October to investigate and develop a master plan for a water trail for small boat use in the Upper Grand River Watershed, which is primarily in Jackson County. The committee is made up of GREAT members (Don Nelson, Kenny Price, Jim Seitz), the Washanong Land Conservancy, Michigan Association of Townships with local townships, Jackson County and Jackson City Parks, Region 2 Planning, and some local paddlers.

Unlike GREAT's public paddle trips with the access points we use, a water trail would have designated sections of a river system maintained for navigability and public use throughout the season. The system would have well developed access points marked with common road and river signage. Water trails are often near significant historical, environmental, and cultural areas of interest and might include amenities such as restaurants, hotels, and camping. While access points will have good parking and boat launch facilities, some might also include equipment for handicap (universal) access for put-in and take-out. With paddling activities bringing over 140 million to the state's economy, the Jackson County area could significantly benefit from tourist using our Grand River water trail.

Two year ago, spurred by Governor Snyder's Pure Michigan Blue Trails initiative, the Jackson County Parks Board and the City of Jackson added creating local water trails as part of their long term plans. The GREAT board also made investigating the possibilities of a local water trail as one of its three goals in 2014 and to work with related groups on this goal in 2015 and 2016. As result Don Nelson and Jim Seitz attended the 2014 and 2015 Clinton



**Participants reviewing water trail maps.**

River water Trail Summit Conference in St Clair County. They met presenter Harry Burkholder of LIAA, a Traverse City non profit agency who does regional planning, including non-motorized recreational trails. As result in March 2015, Harry made a presentation to the Upper Grand River Watershed Alliance, (meets bi-monthly at the Jackson County Drain Commission Office) to develop a master for a local water trail. With donations from GREAT (unused Consumer's Power River Gauge grant money), Summit Township, and the Drain Commission office, Harry was hired to work our local steering committee to develop such a plan. ASTI Environmental consultant, Paul Rentschler and Grant Bauman of Region Planning will also provide professional services.

Local efforts were still in the talking stage, until this fall when Marc Miller of the DNR announced plans to facilitate discussion of designating the Grand River, the state's longest river, for creation of a paddle trail from Jackson County (Grand Lake and Center Chain of Lakes) to Grand Haven on Lake Michigan. In recent years, water trails have been established on nearly all of the perimeter of Michigan's Great Lakes shoreline. Now the effort is to establish inland water trails as well. GREAT board members, Don Nelson, Kenny Price, Jon Hoyle, and Jim Seitz have attended the four DNR meetings in various Grand River towns to give input about the features of our local Grand River. Jackson will host the next such meeting. To our advantage, the DNR has also hired Harry Burkholder of LIAA to develop a manual on how to create a water trail. The DNR will help groups involved in trail planning along the Grand River share ideas and develop some common standards such as signage.

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# Betty Desbiens Receives GREAT' Make it Happen Award

Former board member and long time GREAT member, Betty Desbiens received GREAT's 2016 Make it Happen award at our March 16th Annual meeting.

Down through the years, Betty has helped GREAT in many ways. Betty's contributions to GREAT and Jackson County outdoor and other organizations has been both hands on and as a generous benefactor. She often helped with the food at GREAT's annual clean-ups. After leaving the board, she was GREAT's historian until moving to Key West Florida in 2010. In 1976, the John and Mary Dahlem Environmental Education Center named after her parents, came to be from large donation she made. In 2007, GREAT commissioned a local artist to do a painting of the local Grand River, which we would offer in a silent auction at our Annual Meeting. The intent was not money, as much as it was to get a painting of the local Grand River on display somewhere in county, even if it was a private residence. With a generous bid, Betty won the painting. After the purchase, she announced she would donate it to Jackson County. It now proudly hangs in the County Commissioner chambers. This is the only picture of the local Grand River on display in a public place, and likely any place. Because of Betty, the public won, but what better place in the same room that also has a picture of her father, who help start the Jackson County Park System!

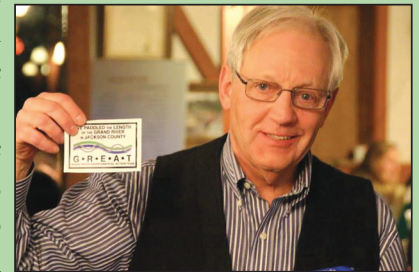
In 2010, GREAT helped her celebrate her 90th birthday with a large cake at our July paddle. Even though, Betty has left Jackson County, she has remained in contact with GREAT though e-mail and nice cards of encouragement. She enjoys reading our newsletter. Even though she has only lived in Key West a short time, she has also received specials recognitions from their local organizations who she has helped in different as well. Because she could not attend our annual meeting, Pegg Clevenger accepted the award on her behalf and through a



**Betty Desbiens**

phone call, Betty spoke with a strong voice in the audio system to the attendees.

Jim Seitz was the second person since its inception two years ago to receive the Paddle All of the Jackson County



**Jim Seitz**

Grand River boat sticker award. He was also honored for his ten years of board service that included for nine years in the offices of president and secretary. Also honored was Don Lynd for three years of board service, with his last as president and Ellen Rathbone for two years of board service. For its 25 year's as a local organization, GREAT also received commendations from the Jackson County Board of Commissioners (Steve Shotwell), Michigan House of Representative (Representative, Earl Polesky), and US Senate (Debbie Stabenow).



**Don Lynd (left) accepts plaque from Kenny Price (right) as he leaves the board as president.**



**Jim Seitz (left) accepts plaque from Don Lynd (right) for his years of work on the board of GREAT as secretary, among many other things.**

# Snapping turtles in our rivers

Perhaps one of the lesser appreciated Michigan native turtles is the common snapping turtle, (*Chelydra serpentina*). Not as attractive as the painted turtle, or as docile, they are the largest turtles in Michigan sometimes growing over 19 inches in length. It is estimated this species can live over a century although in captivity rarely live more than 50 years. They consume a variety of plants and small animals. Unlike some turtle species they are relatively insensitive to pollution and quite common.



Often covered with algae, they do not bask in the sun as other turtles and seldom get out of the water, except to lay eggs. While not aggressive to humans in

the water, on land they can exhibit a good degree of tenacity when threatened. The female buries eggs in a nest, often as many as fifty eggs, or more. The only period of vulnerability to predators in the long life of a snapping turtle is as eggs or small hatchlings.

The rest of their lives are mostly free of natural predators'.

## Grand River Trail

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Earlier this month, the local Grand River Trail Steering Committee hosted a publicized public focus meeting at Blackman Township Hall. The 34 attendees, which included some local township officials and attendees from the Eaton Rapids area were asked to look at local maps of the river to place sticky note comments on them about access sites, any inaccuracies, and other points of interest. They were also asked to comment their likes and dislikes of several dozen enlarged pictures of the local Grand River from GREAT's trip archives which showed access sites, nature, and people paddling. This information will be used to help establish priorities on what parts of the local river to establish as the local water trail and how design its public features. Please let us know if you are interested in helping with local river trail planning. See you on the river!

# One open board member position

GREAT has one open board member position starting immediately. Terms are two years. Unlike many organizations of GREAT's activity level, we have no paid staff, so our board is a working board. Along with some member support, the GREAT board carries out the organization's administrative tasks. We need to fill this position to remain an ef-

fective organization to successfully continue our local mission. Please let us know if you are interested. Thanks!

While the content is strong, the design of GREAT's web page is getting out of date. If you have web design experience and would like to help with a new design, please let us know. Thanks!



# 21st Annual Quiet Water Symposium

This year was the 21st Annual Quiet Water Symposium. Held Saturday, March 5th and if you let the snow storm scare you away from attending, you really missed out. For those who have never gone, or if it has been awhile, the QWS is listed as “Outdoor Michigan’s favorite Indoor Show”, that works for me. It is held at the Michigan State University Pavilion for Livestock and Agriculture Education in East Lansing. There is a large auditorium where the vendors, non-profit groups, clubs, government agencies, private business owners and more have a verity of booths set up to show off their passion, interest, products or services. An “outdoor person” can spend a long time looking at all the options for recreation in Michigan’s woods and waterways. As the title implies, the focus is on non-motorized water activities such as canoeing, kayaking, paddle boards and the like, but hiking and biking have become more common as well. There are several rooms with different presentations going on throughout the day. Talks on a variety of subjects from the Au Sable River Marathon to the Top 10 Michigan Backpacking Treks. In the “Arena” there are hand made boats and paddles and other large displays that are such a treat to see (at least for me....I found a couple beautiful kayaks I want to have!). According to all I spoke with, this year seemed to be the biggest and best yet. With a reported 2,700 people in attendance I can believe that claim. This event has been listed as, “.. the largest one-day paddling show in North America”.

GREAT had a booth again this



**GREAT's booth at the Quiet Water Symposium.**

year manned by volunteers willing to engage all who stopped by to talk about the Upper Grand River Watershed and GREAT's mission. We were strategically placed near the Middle Grand River and the Lower Grand River Organization of Watersheds. All of these groups have similar missions and interests, but each has their own unique challenges and river characteristics. While we here in the Upper Grand River Watershed have a mostly narrow river running through woods, marshes and farmland, further downstream the river is much wider and more urban in some areas. Many who stopped by to chat seemed intrigued by our differences from the Grand River they were familiar with and many want to come paddle our part of the Grand.

One of the things I enjoy so much about this event is the op-

portunity to chat with the different representatives of the various clubs or groups. The folks manning the booths all seem have a passion for their activity or organization's mission. I have learned about many areas to hike or bike or kayak and camp thanks to the time these people have spent with me. I have seen products, tools, equipment and 'toys' that in some cases I did not know existed, but now that I have seen them...how can live without them? And lets face folks...they are all “toys” when it come down to it....we play with these things...well, I do. The whole event is something I look forward to every year. The number of participants and speakers are far too many to even share a short list here; the best thing would be to check out the website at [www.quietwatersymposium.org](http://www.quietwatersymposium.org).

# The first GREAT paddle of the 2016



The first GREAT paddle of the 2016 season started at the headwaters of the Grand River near Grand Lake. Although the water was relatively high due to the snowstorm of the prior weekend, it was still a challenge requiring some walking of the boats in shallow stretches of the river leading to the Liberty Mill Pond. Fortunately we arranged an optional take out site about midway be-

tween Grand Lake and Liberty mill pond at the “trailer” bridge which several paddlers utilized. Most however, made it to the mill pond and the take out point at Liberty Township offices. It was a beautiful day with temperatures near 70 degrees - exactly seven days after a snowstorm. Later, many of the paddlers enjoyed good food and fun at the Bone Island Grill.

## May Paddle celebrates the 25th anniversary of GREAT with luncheon



May 22 dawned a beautiful sunny day with lots of people waiting to get on the River. We had 61 adults and 5 children sign up to paddle from Ella Sharp Park to the E. High street bridge. Don Lynd, Kurt LaFrance and Don Nelson cut a large tree out of the water on Monday before the paddle and some other bumper logs before the paddlers came down the river. The river had dropped a foot Saturday night before the paddle and caused some excitement for people going over it. Natalie Schroeder, Brian Soltis and Helen

& Ken Burnett helped a lot of people get their boats over some logs. The uneven river bed caused Helen to go swimming amidst her good intentions to help people over the log jam. Kierra Brown also went for an unexpected swim on the Grand River, so they both received the Swimmer Award. Everyone got out at E. High with big smiles, a little sunburn and most were a little tired after traveling the 6 mile trip. After the paddle, a group went to the Bone Island Grill for refreshments and fellowship.





# VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

If you have a chainsaw and a desire to help clear a path on the river so our paddlers can get through, we sure could use the help. The work falls on the same few and it would be nice to have more help. Email [grand@great-mi.org](mailto:grand@great-mi.org) to volunteer or call 517-416-4234. Thank you!

## Board Meetings

The GREAT board meets on the second Wednesday of each month, with the exception of December, at 7:00 p.m. at the Summit Township Hall, 2121 Ferguson Road (across from Knights Restaurant, near the Intersection of South Jackson and Horton Roads).

Meetings are open and visitors are welcome. To be on the agenda, please contact us prior to the meeting.

## Welcome New Members!

Shirley Bean  
Kierra Brown  
James Waggener  
Amber Brannick  
Brad Hesse  
Jams Grenobl  
Vickie Schroeder  
Todd Zeller  
Mark Ludowese  
Pete & Shirley Janeck

## GREAT Newsletter

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If you wish to join or renew your membership  
visit: [www.great-mi.org/Membership2.htm](http://www.great-mi.org/Membership2.htm)

## GREAT Board

Kenny Price, President  
Kurt LaFrance, Vice President  
Jack Ripstra, Treasurer  
Pam Brown, Secretary  
Don Nelson, Rivermaster  
John Minar, Director  
Jon Hoyle, Director  
Mary Lenardson, Director  
Deb Snell, Director  
Kay Brown, Director  
Dan Kaser, Director

### *Special Assignments:*

Louise Hefka, Publicity  
Jeff Grund, Tax Statements  
Barb Anderson, Historian