

G.R.E.A.T.



Grand River Environmental Action Team

P.O. Box 223, Jackson, Michigan 49204

Website: www.great-mi.org 517-416-4234 Volume 29 Number 1

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How you can join GREAT

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

Send \$20 individual membership
\$30 family membership or
\$100 for sponsor membership

Join us for GREAT's Annual Dinner and Meeting

**Wednesday,
March 13th**

**Dinner at 6:30PM,
Meeting begins at
7:00PM**

**RSVP for dinner:
517-416-4234 or
grand@great-mi.org
no later than Friday,
March 8th at noon**

**By Kenny Price
and Deb Snell**

GREAT's Annual Dinner and Meeting will be held at Gene Davis and Sons Banquet and Convention Center, 3575 Francis Street in Jackson on Wednesday, March 13th. Dinner is \$15 per person (pay at the door) and starts at 6:30PM, meeting begins at 7:00PM. You must RSVP for dinner by calling 517-416-4234 or email GREAT at grand@great-mi.org no later than March 8th. We hope you can join us for a fun and informational evening!

Our featured speaker this year will be Rodolfo Zúñiga Villegas, Project Manager for The Nature Conservancy's (TNC) Southern Fens

and Savannas. He will be talking about TNC's Grand River Fen Project - particularly about planning, goals, and restoration management (hydrology, invasive plant removal, prescribed fire, and monitoring).

The Grand River Fen Preserve, a high quality prairie fen located in Jackson and Hillsdale counties, is a 630-acre property owned by the TNC. This rare type of ecosystem is protected from agriculture and development. The wetlands occupy a glacial outwash channel that forms a portion of the headwaters of the Grand River. The fens and associated swamp and upland forest communities harbor a regionally significant and diverse fauna and flora including seven globally rare and eight state-rare species. Check out this video for a close-up look at the Grand River Fen Preserve from TNC: <https://vimeo.com/136845017>.

As TNC's project manager for this unique site, Rodolfo prioritizes, coordinates, and supervises stewardship work at Grand River



**This year's speaker:
Rodolfo Zúñiga Villegas**

Fen Preserve. His duties include a variety of tasks such as maintaining and operating equipment; planning and assisting with prescribed fires and planning, coordinating, and executing field work to control invasive plants. Year round he supervises a seasonal crew of several people. He has been with TNC since 2003. Rodolfo is a native of Costa Rica. He worked there as a park ranger and a conservation officer for over 8 years and as a para-taxonomist both collecting and classifying the flora and fauna in Carara National Park, which contains 35 per cent of Costa Rica's total biodiversity

See ANNUAL MEETING
on page 2

Annual Meeting, continued from pg. 1

(about 6 million species). He obtained a B.S. in Business Administration with a concentration in Natural Resources in Costa Rica. His B.S. thesis topic dealt with a proposal to create a biological corridor among several protected areas, an initiative which was later adopted and implemented by the Government of Costa Rica. In the U.S. he obtained a master's degree in Tropical Sustainable Development from Cornell University (thesis topic: Impact of Protected Area Expansion on Local Rural Communities). He has also completed coursework towards a Ph.D. in the same university.

We look forward to Rudolfo's presentation at GREAT's Annual Meeting.



Grand River Fen Preserve, TNC

What is a Fen?

Fens are peat-forming, groundwater fed wetlands. Fens differ from bogs in that they are less acidic, have higher nutrient levels, and can support a more diverse plant and animal community. They are often covered by grasses, sedges, rushes and wildflowers.

Fens provide important benefits which include preventing or reducing the risk of floods and improving water quality.

We hope you can join us!

For more information about The

Nature Conservancy in Michigan go to www.nature.org/michigan.

Tips for Recycling and Safe Disposal of Medications and Pharmaceuticals

*Adapted from JCCD
2019 Recycling Guide*
By Deb Snell

DID YOU KNOW?... Increasing amounts of prescription drugs and other medications are being found in surface water and ground water due to inappropriate disposal. Proper drug disposal is important because it helps protect human health and our environment. Unwanted drugs should not be flushed down the drain. Medications should be kept secure when in the home to prevent unlawful use. When drugs are no longer needed, they should be taken to a collection site for incineration to destroy the chemicals within them and prevent them from entering the water resources we use for drinking water.

In Jackson County, drugs may be dropped off at the following locations:

For pills only (no liquids, inhal-

ers, patches, or needles):

• City of Jackson Police Department
Everyday from 6am-10pm
216 E. Washington Ave, Jackson
517-788-4100

• Jackson County Office of the Sheriff
M-F 8-4:30
212 W. Wesley St, Jackson
517-768-7900

• Michigan State Police
M-F 8-4
3401 Cooper St, Jackson
517-780-4580

Non-narcotic pills, liquids, and patches may be taken to:

• Center for Family Health
M 8-7, Tu-F 8-5:30
505 N. Jackson St, Jackson
517-748-5400

If you are unable to take your prescription medications to a drop-off site, avoid contributing to drinking water contamination by following these instructions:

1. Mix drugs with cat litter and/or used coffee grounds
2. Place in a sealed container or plastic bag
3. Remove any personal information from the container
4. Place the sealed container in the trash for your regular pick-up
SHARPS/NEEDLES/SYRINGES
Please never place loose needles or syringes in the trash. For safe disposal, follow these instructions:
 - Place needles point-first into a thick plastic bottle. Clearly label with 'DO NOT RECYCLE'.When the container is over half-full, tape the lid on and place it in the trash.

The DEQ has put together a Household Drug Take Back Map to help you find a location or take back event near you. Check it out through this link: <https://www.michigan.gov/deqdrugdisposal>

Upper Grand River receives State Water Trail designation!

By Jim Seitz

The Upper Grand River (Grand Lake in Jackson County to Eaton Rapids), along with seven other Michigan rivers, were recently designated in December 2018 to receive state designation as an official public use trail, the first trails to receive this status. The other trails are: Central River Raisin (Monroe County); Chain of Lakes Water Trail (Antrim and Kalkaska counties); Huron River Trail (Livingston, Oakland, to Wayne counties); Island Loop (St. Clair County); Flint River (Genesee and Lapeer counties); Middle Grand River (Clinton to Ionia counties); Shiawassee River (Genesee to Shiawassee counties). Two of those trails, the Huron River and Island Loop had prior federal

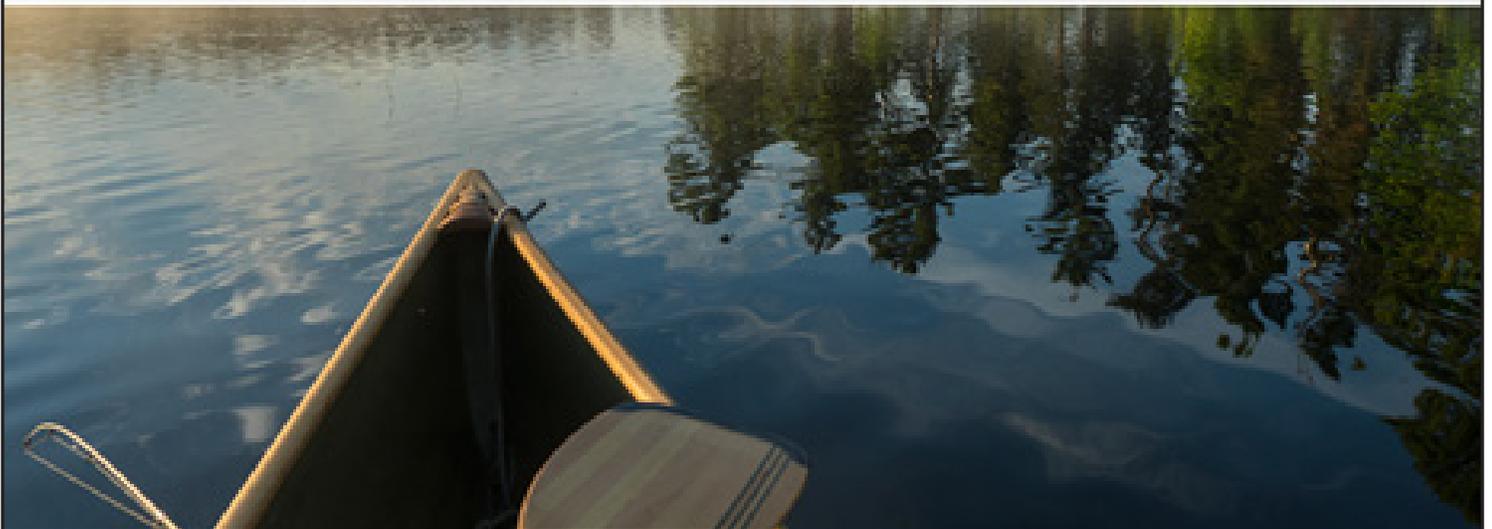
designation. All of Michigan's coast line and some other interior rivers have had local designations. The planning process to create and designate water trails were part of past Governor Snyder's agenda and is expected to continue with Governor Whitmer.

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources held several meetings beginning in 2016 to initiate the trail planning process for Grand River, the state's longest river. These meetings were attended by representatives of the Upper Grand River Watershed Alliance, including Geoffrey Snyder, Jackson County Drain Commissioner; Paul Rentschler, ATSI Environmental consultant; and Don Nelson, Jim Seitz, and Kenny Price of GREAT.

Quiet Water Symposium

MARCH 2, 2019

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY PAVILION

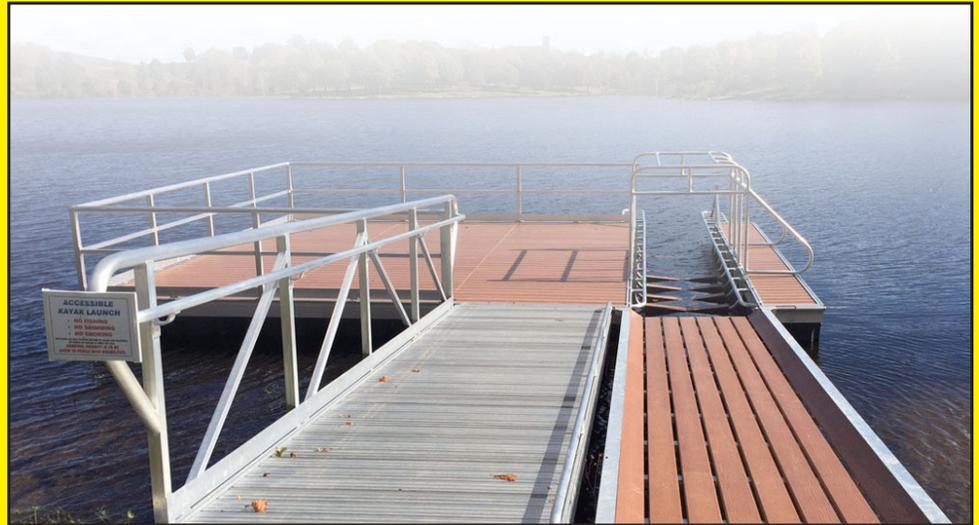
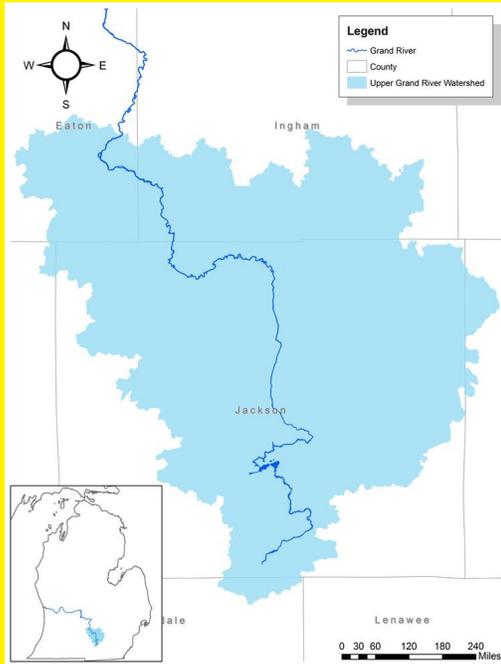


Plan on attending the 24th Annual Quiet Water Symposium on Saturday, March 2, 2019. It will be held again at the Michigan State University Pavilion located at 4301 Farm Lane in East Lansing from 9:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. There will be over 150 exhibits, speakers and demonstrations geared towards outdoor adventures. GREAT is excited to be a part of this

event and engage and educate other outdoor enthusiasts, who are as passionate about outdoor adventures as us. Come check out our booth and exhibit!

The entry fee is \$15.00 for adults, \$5.00 for students with identification and children under 12 are free. Go to the event website at <https://quietwatersociety.org/> for more details.

Jackson County Parks to Lead Upper Grand River Trail Implementation



Plans call for installing similar universal launch access facilities at Vandercook Lake and Little Wolf Lake County Parks as the first steps to implemented Upper Grand River Water Trail. These ADA compliant facilities will offer easy access to any paddler entering or exiting the water with a canoe or kayak.

Upper Grand River water trail

By Jim Seitz

The baton has been handed over to the Jackson County Parks Commission and its director Jeff Hovarter to implement the Upper Grand River Water Trail Development Plan. The Park Commission is in a good position to do this with its resources as the recently developed plan, includes several Jackson County parks located on the Grand River.

Initial Work

The efforts to create a local trail on the Upper Grand River from Grand Lake, the river's source in Liberty Township to Eaton Rapids, actually began in the fall of 2015 just prior to the DNR state trail effort. It was led by Jackson County Drain Commissioner, Geoffrey Snyder. A Steering Committee was formed of which GREAT was represented by Kenny Price, Jim Seitz, and Don Nelson, along with other Jackson County and Eaton Rapids officials and community members. With Drain Commission money, supplemented by GREAT and the Willis Foundation, consultant Harry Burkholder of LIAA was hired in March 2016 to help develop a plan. He was assisted

by Grant Bauman of Region 2 Planning and Paul Rentschler of ASTI Environmental. After several meetings, including two for public input and feedback, the plan was finally officially adopted in May of 2017. In addition to GREAT and the Upper Grand River Watershed Alliance, letters of support have been received from: the Jackson County Board of Commissioners; Jackson County Parks Commission; City of Jackson, Parks & Recreation Department; Blackman Township; Leoni Township; Summit Township; the City Eaton Rapids; Hamlin Township; the Eaton County Board of Commissioners; and the Middle Grand River Organization of Watersheds. To begin implementation, a total of \$32,500 to date has been committed mainly from the Hurst and Willis Foundations along with smaller donations from Hamlin Township, City of Eaton Rapids, and one individual.

Little Wolf and Vandercook Lakes First

Plans are to submit applications for Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (oil & gas revenue set asides) grants with a required 25% local match to fund the installation of universal access launch facilities (ADA compliant) at

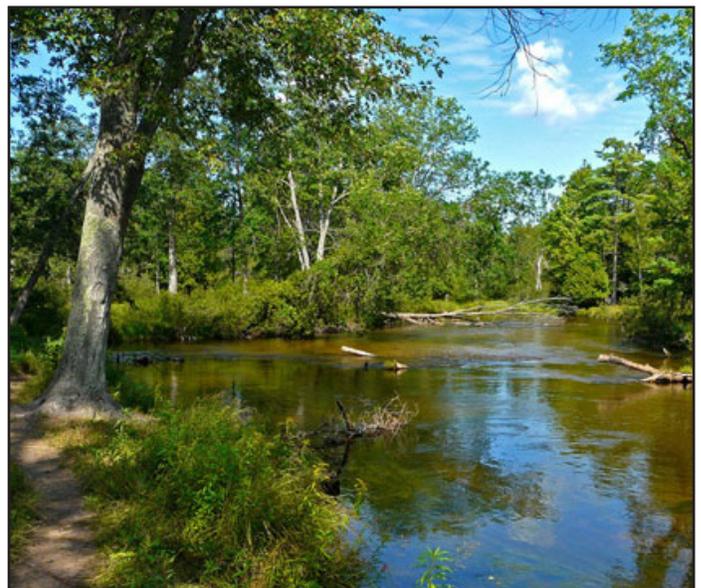
Little Wolf Lake and Vandercook Lake County Parks. Little Wolf Park will serve as the trailhead for the Chain of Lakes Trail on the North Branch of the Grand River while Vandercook Lake Park will serve as the trailhead for the Main (South) Branch. Both branches join immediately east of the US 127 bridge, near the adjacent bridge on East High Street. The river then flows downstream through downtown Jackson to complete its 260 mile journey to Lake Michigan. For the time being, paddlers will be able to enter and exit at the these trailhead locations and other previously established sites, but eventual plan implementation calls for adding access sites downstream from the Little Wolf Lake trailhead at Michigan Center and downstream from the Vandercook Lake trailhead at Sharp Park (city park), and after the branches combine: at High Street (East Bridge); Riverfront Park (CMS Energy headquarters); R. A. Greene (city park); Parnall Road; GREAT land; and State Road old bridge site (near US 127). Access sites currently exist at Maple Grove DNR, Trestle Park DNR (Dixon Rd.), Tompkins DNR, Baldwin Park (Onondaga), Gale Road State Game Area, and MacArthur Park (Eaton Rapids). The Portage River from the Waterloo State Park area to its confluence with the Grand River in Blackman Township and the headwaters of the Grand River upstream from Vandercook Lake to Grand Lake are included in the master plan as potential “wilderness” routes for the more adventurous with few amenities for the time being.

Launch Sites in the City of Jackson are Hopefully Next, but Much More Expensive

The best water trails like ours are designed to connect towns and other places of interest. The Upper Grand River Plan offers very nice paddle routes from both the Michigan Center and Vandercook Lake communities to downtown Jackson. Local and out of town paddlers will enjoy eating at local food establishments, many located within walking distance from the river. They will also buy gasoline and make other purchases in these communities. All of this is a plus for Jackson County tourism. It is also a plus for companies such CMS Energy trying to attract young out-of-area professionals to work here. Therefore, having good river access facilities for paddlers in downtown Jackson is a must. At the moment, the City of Jackson has not committed any funding support. However, the cost to implement the plan within the city limits is much more expensive than areas under other government entities, such as the county. This is because the city’s codes for the design and construction of access sites and their amenities have very expensive requirements. For example, the county recently paid only \$45,000 for their solar composting double unit design bathroom on its Falling Waters bike trail, but the city requirements call for flush toilets with hot water that average over three times more (East High \$132,000 and Sharp Park with septic \$148,000). Including first year operating costs of \$12,412 at each, this brings the city’s estimated total cost to develop a launch at East High Street to \$523,431 and Sharp Park \$618,633.

Looking to Expedition 2020 and Beyond

In 2020, Jackson County will be hosting Expedition 2020 for the third time since its inaugural in 1990. The every ten year event draws paddlers from around the state to start in Michigan Center to begin an 11 day paddle to Grand Haven on Lake Michigan. The event has many public ceremonies with public officials. Eaton Rapids recently has removed a dam and created a nice paddle access with a cool restaurant on the river nearby. The 56 miles of the Grand River in Jackson County offer paddlers more variety than any other county on the river with a small river that greatly expands as it goes through pristine forests, wetlands, lakes, and also scenic farmland, prime neighborhoods, and urban buildings. Hopefully, Jackson County can show our 2020 visitors the beginnings of our local trail, with future impressive plans to attract them to someday return!



Invasive species removal event a success



By Kurt LaFrance

Saturday, January 6th dawned a cold and snowy morning, with temperatures in the single digits. Perfect weather for heading to the GREAT land for the invasive species removal! Volunteers arrived to hot coffee, tea and snacks. With everyone bundled up for the cold, soon after the work got started.

GREAT's land, like most across the state, has many invasive species growing on it. This day's work focused on several larger glossy buckthorn trees, a few small locust trees and a lot of honeysuckle. Some volunteers started up chainsaws to cut through the larger trees and limbs, while others tackled the smaller plants with loppers. As the vegetation was cut down to size, it was collected into piles that will provide habitat for birds, small mammals and maybe even some reptiles.

Following along behind the cutters, other volunteers applied an herbicide designed for woody plants. Without this crucial step, the invasive plants would

simply grow back next year. The herbicide is applied with a contraption made of PVC pipe, a valve and a sponge, to allow dabbing at the stumps without having to bend over each one.

Meanwhile, other volunteers worked to take down a couple dead trees that threatened to damage the GREAT barn once they finally succumbed to gravity. These were cut into logs and piled on site. At least one of these dead trees was an ash that likely was killed by the emerald ash borer, so the state prohibits transporting it as firewood without additional treatment.

After a couple hours of cutting and stacking the invasive species, volunteers gathered in the office of the GREAT barn, where Treasurer Jack Ripstra had set up a propane heater for everyone to warm up. Despite the cold temperatures, it was a good invasive species removal. But there is still lots of work to do, so stay tuned for our next removal this coming December!

Earth Day Celebration



All photos are from the 2018 Earth Day event



Be sure to visit GREAT's booth at this event and go kayaking on the park's lagoons!

SAVE THE DATE

**Jackson County
Earth Day Event**
Cascades (Sparks)
County Park
Saturday, April 27th
1:00-4:00PM

By Nicole Vanerploeg, Jackson County Conservation District

Earth Day began in 1970 to bring awareness of environmental issues that our planet is facing, and also to celebrate the Earth's natural beauty. This day reminds us what we can do in our everyday lives to continue to keep the environment healthy and beautiful for future years to come. Earth Day is celebrated worldwide and there are many events that you can choose from. In Jackson Coun-

ty the 13th Annual Earth Day event will be held again this year.

The Jackson County Conservation District organizes the event. The Annual Earth Day Celebration will be held on April 27th (Saturday) from 1pm-4pm at Cascades Park. The celebration encourages people in the community to get outdoors, learn about nature and how to care for it. The event will feature many local organizations with hands on activities, live music from Kev-

in Nichols, and Paul McCormack's Classroom Critters. This is a free, family-friendly event so make sure to mark it on your calendars and bring the family! This couldn't continue to happen without generous sponsors and support from the community.

If you are an organization that is interested in joining the celebration please contact Nicole Vanderploeg (Nicole.vanderploeg@macd.org) for more information.



VOLUNTEERS NEED-

If you have a chainsaw, or can use 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 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. alternating between the Summit Township Hall (even months), and Blackman Township Hall (odd months).

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

GREAT's Mission

The mission of Grand River Environmental Action Team is to promote the protection and preservation of the Grand River Watershed through activities and educational programs

Visit www.cafepress.com/greatmi to order a GREAT t-shirt and coffee mug

GREAT Newsletter

Published quarterly by the Grand River Environmental Action Team a 501(C)(3) non-profit organization

GREAT
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Find us on Facebook: GREAT Grand River Environmental Action Team

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



We accept these major credit cards at all of our functions.

GREAT Board

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

Special Assignments:

Jim Seitz, Webmaster
Kurt Rudolph, Publicity
Jeff Grund, Tax Statements
Pam Brown, Historian