

2023

ANNUAL REPORT

A yearly celebration of achievements
for the Lower Grand River
Organization of Watersheds

LOWER GRAND RIVER
ORGANIZATION *of* WATERSHEDS



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WHAT IS LGROW?

The Lower Grand River Organization of Watersheds (LGROW) brings together local municipalities and community stakeholders in a unique format to address issues facing the Lower Grand River watershed and its 31 subwatersheds.



MISSION

Understand, protect, and improve the natural resources of the Lower Grand River Watershed for all to enjoy.



Image by Thom Bell

VISION

Connect water with life.



Image by Hank Ottens

Meet the Team



Cara Decker
Director of Environmental
Programs

Wendy Ogilvie
Past Director of
Environmental Programs

Rachell Nagorsen
Stormwater Programs
Manager

Robert Cloy II
Urban Waters Ambassador



Matt Bain
Aquatic Specialist

Anna Kornoelje
Project Manager

Courtney Marek
Past GIS and Education
Specialist

Senci Pace-Monastersk
Past Environmental Programs
Associate

Ella Carr
Intern



Paige Vizard
Intern

Board of Directors

Dan Taber
Chair

Aaron Vis
Past Chair

Rachell Nagorsen
Past Chair

Scott Yonkers
Vice Chair

Brent Guerink
Past Vice Sustainability Chair

Grant Simons
Technical Chair

Andrew Reinhardt
Technical Vice Chair

Kate Milzarski
Public Engagement Chair

Natalie Davenport
Past Public Engagement
Chair

Ben Jordan
Subwatershed Committee
Chair

Gerry Konning
Subwatershed Vice Chair

Bradley Boomstra
Stormwater Ordinance Chair

Carrie Rivette
LGROW Historian



A LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Hello LGROW Friends –

First off, I want to say thank you to all of you for taking the time to engage with LGROW and participating in our many programs and events to keep our waterways and the Grand River healthy! Without your support, we wouldn't be able to accomplish all the great outcomes we were able to achieve this past year.

I'm very excited to move into the LGROW Chair role and continue to work with Rachell Nagorsen (Past Chair) as she takes on the role of Stormwater Programs Manager with LGROW. This was all a part of a season of change at LGROW, as long-time director Wendy Ogilvie, retired this past fall. I again want to acknowledge and thank Wendy for her hard work and dedication to LGROW and for her mentorship and guidance in making LGROW the successful and impactful organization that it is today. So with Wendy's departure down the retirement river, Cara Decker has been officially named new Director of Environmental Programs. I can't think of anyone better who can step into this role hitting the water paddling to keep the positive momentum going. Cara is a dedicated professional with strong aptitude relating to stormwater regulations and grant funding opportunities, but more importantly, is a great team builder and is passionate about ensuring everyone has a voice at the table as we work diligently to improve the water quality of the Lower Grand. I'm excited to work closely with both Cara and Rachell in their new roles, and the rest of the LGROW staff.

Looking back at 2023, LGROW had great impacts throughout the year. Our accomplishments from 2023 will lead into some very exciting work in 2024. Thanks to you all for your involvement and dedication to the work of keeping our watershed clean, and I look for to seeing you all throughout the year!



Dan Taber, P.E.
LGROW Chair

Stormwater Manager- Acting Assignment
Environmental Services Department
City of Grand Rapids

A LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

I am incredibly thankful for all of the support that our partners in the watershed have shown LGROW over the past few years, and especially grateful for everyone encouraging and lifting us up in 2023. I am excited to continue to work with all of you in my new role! I believe in the wonderful work that we are doing to understand, protect, and improve the natural resources of the Lower Grand River Watershed for all to enjoy. We have an incredible team with a diverse skill set that we are putting to use, and are eager to support our partners and promote watershed resilience in 2024. Thank you for continuing to support the work that LGROW does, and I can't wait to see what opportunities are presented to our organization in 2024.

Cara Decker
Director of Environmental Programs

A LETTER FROM THE PAST DIRECTOR

Goodbye, 2023. Hello, 2024!

After 10 years at GVMC, I retired as Director of Environmental Programs at GVMC on October 31, 2023. These years went by in a flash (looking back on it now) and I'm proud of all the work that was initiated and accomplished with the help of staff and interns, partners and volunteers, and the leadership of John Weiss. And now, Cara Decker, as the new Director, will bring her experience, knowledge, and connections to advance those initiatives and create new opportunities for GVMC's Environmental Programs, including LGROW, to thrive. We met many of our goals, but I wanted to see a couple of projects through to the end, so I am working on those through my newly formed consulting endeavor, Natural Resource Connections, LLC. I will be helping GVMC staff and assisting the City of Grand Rapids and Grand Rapids WhiteWater in revitalizing the Grand River and removing the low-head dams to enhance habitat and establish a more natural flow of the river. I am also continuing work on the Lower Grand River Water Trail to achieve state designation. Once those projects are completed, I'll be one of the first to put my kayak in the river and paddle off into the sunset. Thanks to all of you who have supported me and this work throughout West Michigan over the years. Hope to see you around the watershed!

Wendy Ogilvie
Past Director of Environmental Programs

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT



3,100+

PEOPLE
IMPACTED

28

SCHOOL EVENTS

1,100+

STUDENTS
IMPACTED

OUR EVENTS

LGROW hosted or attended nearly 40 events this year with an overall attendance of over 3,100 people.

SCHOOL EVENTS

LGROW was able to work with 28 different school groups and more than 1100 students on watershed education. Student ages ranged from 3 years old to college and university students.

SPRING FORUM

Partners joined us in celebrating work in the watershed over 3 days in June. New events like the river boat cruise provided family fun and engagement on the water!

SUBWATERSHED JAMBOREE

In September, we convened subwatershed groups at Legacy Park in Ada, in the Thornapple River Watershed. Attendees reveled in games, music, and conversations about our watersheds health.



MUNICIPAL SEPARATE STORM SEWER SYSTEM (MS4) PROGRAM

LGROW is pleased to have assisted with successful MS4 audits of 5 communities and would like to thank them for their commitment to stormwater quality and community stewardship! We also submitted 20 MS4 permit reapplications to EGLE in 2023.

ADOPT A DRAIN

At the end of 2023, there were over 1,500 storm drains adopted in our watershed!



RAINSCAPING

In partnership with WMEAC on an EGLE non-point source pollution grant, LGROW planted 4 residential raingardens in the Lower Grand River Watershed. We plan to plant 7 more raingardens in 2024. In 2023, our team planted over 400 native plant plugs, and shoveled 13,500 lbs of topsoil, 3,000 lbs of mulch, and moved 4,500 lbs of rock to create curb-cut raingardens that will infiltrate stormwater from nearby roads and reduce pollution and sediment flowing into our waterways.



LGROW'S 20TH ANNUAL SPRING FORUM

On June 8 - 10, 2023 LGROW hosted its 20th annual Grand River Spring Forum. Nearly 200 guests attended the three-day event and throughout participated in engaging and educational events.

To celebrate our achievements in the watershed, we hosted a kickoff celebration at City Built Brewing, an MS4 Community Stormwater Meeting, a River Cruise on the Grand Lady Riverboat in Jenison, and a birdwatching paddling event on the Grand River, launching from Mill Point Park in Spring Lake.

LGROW is immensely grateful for the support we received in attendance and sponsorships. Thank you to all who have supported LGROW and our mission of connecting water with life over the last 20 years.



Image by Thom Bell

Save the date for the 2024 Spring Forum: June 13 - 15.

URBAN WATERS FEDERAL PARTNERSHIP (UWFP)

10-YEAR COMMEMORATION

On October 6th, 2023 the Grand River/Grand Rapids Urban Waters Partnership convened a group of local, state and federal partners to commemorate the 10-year anniversary of the UWFP designation.

There were a total of 45 attendees, 15 individual local organizations and 6 federal organizations. Michigan Senator Debbie Stabenow sent a video congratulating partners and the local ambassador on 10 years of success.

The presentations were followed by a walking river tour through downtown Grand Rapids. Michael Staal, Project Manager for the Engineering Department for the City of Grand Rapids led the tour and gave attendees additional information on future river edge projects.



WATERSHED WINS

Basin Wide Resilience Plan

The Lower Grand River Watershed Resilience Action Plan was written in response to the need for a holistic, watershed-based approach to developing resilience to climate change. Its purpose is to catalyze and build resilience within the LGRW to respond to the challenges and demands of a changing climate. The plan is intended to inform each subwatershed within the LGRW of the likely impacts of climate change on our region, and to equip them with strategies, tools, and practices that will best position them to respond with resilience to the uncertainty of the future. Actions are detailed at an individual, community, and governmental level.

Lower Grand River Water Trail

The Grand Rapids Downtown Development Authority is providing \$60,000 to LGROW to ensure the 92-mile stretch of the Grand River from Ionia County to Grand Haven is designated by the State as a recreational water trail. The goal is to bring communities and resources together to strengthen recreation along our waterways, and strengthen the river economy.

MiCorps Water Quality Monitoring

In 2023, we hosted 6 events for macroinvertebrate training and sampling. These events had a total of nearly 70 attendees. LGROW engaged in a massive outreach campaign with the Rogue River Watershed Partners, Grand Valley State University, and Trout Unlimited, and conducted three training days over the course of the year. 22 total volunteers were trained in MiCorps protocols in the Lower Grand River Watershed. LGROW also presented a summary of this work at the annual MiCorps conference.



NEW GRANTS AND AWARDS



DTE Energy \$4,000

to plant trees in Hudsonville and Kentwood

Downtown Grand Rapids Inc. \$75,000

to continue work on the Lower Grand River Water Trail and receive State designation of the Lower Grand River Water Trail

Partnering Opportunities

Kent Conservation District - Mill Creek

to perform water quality monitoring, education and outreach in the Mill Creek watershed as part of an EGLE 319 grant

Rogue River Watershed Partners Support

to assist with conservation efforts in the Rogue River watershed; installing riparian buffers and to perform education and outreach to watershed residents

2024 GOALS

EXPAND WATERSHED RESILIENCE WORK

RECEIVE STATE DESIGNATION FOR THE WATER TRAIL

ENGAGE AND FOCUS WORK IN UNDERSERVED AREAS
OF THE WATERSHED

LOWER GRAND RIVER
ORGANIZATION *of* WATERSHEDS



www.LGROW.org

LET'S CONNECT:



www.lgrow.org



(616) 776-7605



info@lgrow.org



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[@atlgrow_org](https://www.instagram.com/atlgrow_org)

LGROW is an agency of the Grand Valley Metro Council, which puts LGROW in a unique position to blend non-governmental organizations with the local government members of GVMC.

GVMC