

2022

ANNUAL REPORT

A yearly celebration of
achievements in the
Lower Grand River Watershed

LOWER GRAND RIVER
ORGANIZATION *of* WATERSHEDS



GVMC

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 and its 32 subwatersheds.

MISSION

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

VISION

To connect water with life.

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OUR TEAM



LGROW Staff

Wendy Ogilvie

Director of Environmental Programs

Cara Decker

Stormwater Program Coordinator

Courtney Marek

Outreach and GIS Coordinator

Josh Arnold

Aquatic Specialist

Senci Pace

Environmental Programs Associate

Robert Cloy

Urban Waters Ambassador



Board of Directors

Rachell Nagorsen

Chair

Dan Taber, P.E

Vice Chair & Sustainability Chair

Benjamin Jordan

Subwatershed Chair

Scott Yonker, P.E

Technical Chair

Aaron Vis

Past Chair

Natalie Davenport

Public Engagement Chair

Brad Boomstra, P.E.

Stormwater Ordinance Chair

Carrie Rivette, P.E

Special Advisor

A LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Greetings LGROW Community and Network,

One of LGROW's values as an organization is being adaptive, which means the ability to change over time to continue to succeed in a distinct ecosystem. The communities within the Lower Grand River watershed are our ecosystem, and we succeed when we connect these communities to the Grand River. Over the ten years that I've been active with LGROW, I've watched our organization adapt and continuously evolve to support the needs that surface in our watershed.

A recent adaptation of LGROW is partnering with several federal agencies as we work to improve the water quality in the river and establish a designated water trail. This partnership has allowed us to bring on a new Urban Water Ambassador who will serve as a guide to connect more people from our watershed with the Grand River, thereby strengthening our commitment to making the watershed an ongoing resource for all of us.

LGROW also continues to expand existing programs that allow individuals and groups to establish a personal stake in their watershed, whether in the Grand River or one of its many tributaries, such as providing community services kits for storm drain or stream cleanup events. Visit <https://www.lgrow.org/volunteering> to sign up and learn more about these opportunities.

During a recent walk along the river in downtown Grand Rapids, I couldn't help but envision the day that we'll be able to view the City from a new perspective: while paddling on the river. We are steadily marching toward restoring the rapids and we'll face new challenges once we do. No matter the challenge, I'm confident LGROW will continue adapting to support both ecosystems: the communities in our watershed and those in the Grand River. Read on to see everything we accomplished last year and will continue to build upon. It would not have been possible without our dedicated staff, member organizations, and volunteers.

Rachell Nagorsen

Engineering Programs Coordinator

City of Walker

rnagorsen@walker.city



BY THE NUMBERS

30% 

Increase in likes on Social Media

51,410 

People reached on Facebook

\$514,395 

Received in new grant funding

1,371 

Students reached

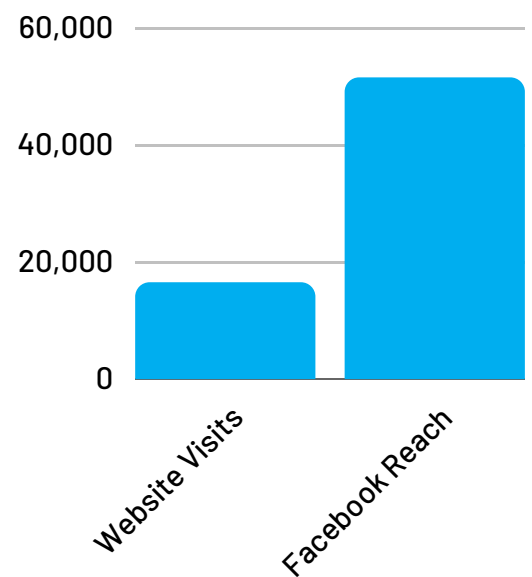
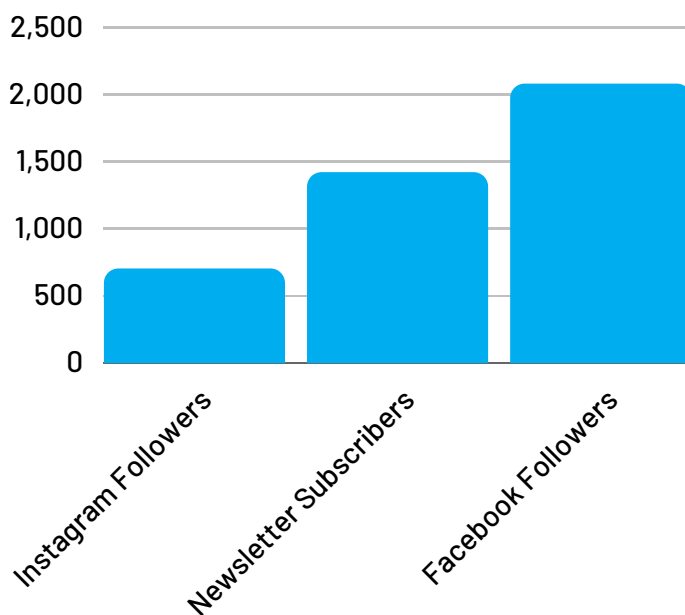
Website & Social Media



lgrow_org



@LGROW.org



WATERSHED WINS

Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) Permits

A waterbody can only receive a certain amount of pollution and remain a healthy ecosystem. The department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) has identified pollutants of concern in multiple waterways in the Lower Grand River Watershed. Communities in the watershed are following a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) Implementation plan, which outlines sampling procedures and best management practices to follow to restore the health of the polluted waterways. LGROW, with the help of contractors, sampled 14 sites in selected subwatersheds during rain events to collect the first flush of water coming out of outfall pipes. Some sites were sampled for *E. coli* while others were sampled for Total Suspended Solids (TSS). The results from the data collection will be reported in MS4 progress reports.

Adopt - a - Drain

This year 254 storm drains were adopted, bringing the total to **1,450** adopted drains. This is a **21% increase** since last year!

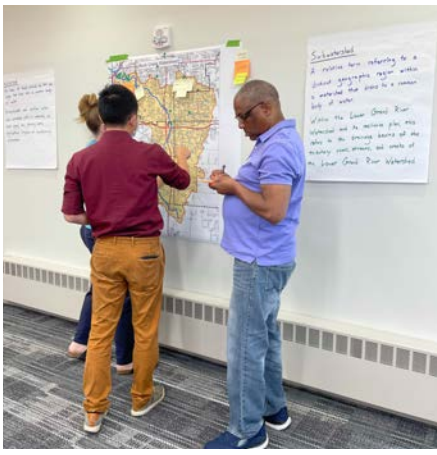
ADOPT-A-DRAIN
GRAND RIVER



Grand River Rainscaping

LGROW and its many partners worked together to install 7 green stormwater infrastructure (GSI) practices on residential properties in the watershed. LGROW conducted 10 residential site assessments and 5 business site assessments, where recommendations and resources were given to property owners on how they can manage their stormwater as close to where it falls. GSI practices like rain gardens, native plants, and bioswales are a few of the many ways that property owners can manage their stormwater onsite to reduce the amount of polluted runoff that enters our waterways.





Watershed Resilience Plan

LGROW was selected by the EPA to participate in a pilot project to evaluate their “Equitable Resilience Building” (ERB) tool. In conjunction with the Watershed Resilience Pan, LGROW and the EPA hosted workshops in Plaster Creek, Buck Creek, Indian Mill Creek, and Mill Creek subwatersheds. The objectives of the workshops were to 1) Build a deeper, collective understanding of pressing vulnerabilities and root causes that impact resilience, 2) Identify specific actions that can be taken to improve resilience and equity, and 3) Contribute community perspectives and consider equity and the needs of priority communities within actions that could be used for the Lower Grand River Watershed Resilience Plan. The end result was to identify actions that can then be carried out by individuals, community groups, and local governments to help make all subwatersheds more resilient to climate changes in the near future.



Environmental Education

From Water Quality monitoring to Macroinvertebrate Sampling, LGROW reached **1,371** students throughout several school districts in the watershed. LGROW hosted **13** Green Cleaning workshops, reaching **181** people, aiming to reduce household hazardous waste. We have a network of **20** Environmental Education Partners in Grand Rapids that we worked closely with to promote consistent and positive environmental education. From on campus activities to field trips, LGROW provided unique learning experiences to all ages in 2022. LGROW is continually establishing new partnerships to help broaden our audience and make watershed focused education accessible to diverse groups of people.

A FEW PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS:

Urban Waters Federal Partnership

In 2022, LGROW secured funding from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and United States Forest Service (USFS) to hire a full-time Urban Waters Ambassador. The Grand Rapids Ambassador's work will continue to build on the water quality improvement projects and community building efforts taking place in the area. Grand Rapids received designation as an Urban Waters Federal Partnership (UWFP) location in 2013. The UWFP is a federal program that works to reconnect urban communities, particularly those that are overburdened or economically distressed, with their waterways. The Partnership also collaborates with community-led revitalization efforts to improve our Nation's water systems and promote their economic, environmental, and social benefits. The program has since grown to 20 UWFP locations across the United States.



The Lower Grand River Water Trail Development Plan

The Lower Grand River Water Trail Development Plan describes the formation of a sustainable, enjoyable, and safe Water Trail for residents and tourists alike. In 2022, LGROW started writing the development and implementation plan for the Lower Grand River Water Trail. The development plan describes what a water trail is and its many benefits to individuals and communities. The plan talks about safety issues that users might face and how users can reduce their risk while on the Water Trail. It includes detailed maps, an access site inventory, and identifies what could be improved at each site. Three public community input sessions were held throughout the watershed to get valuable feedback and suggestions from a variety of users. The community input sessions involved many meetings with partners at local parks departments, counties, and the National Park Service. LGROW continues to look for funding to aid with the completion of the implementation portion of the plan. This development plan aims to establish a water trail which will allow users to safely navigate the Lower Grand River.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Stream Clean Ups



Removing trash from waterways is imperative to preserving our aquatic ecosystems. It's also a great way to get the community involved! In 2022, LGROW removed **hundreds of pounds** of garbage from waterways by assisting subwatershed groups that led stream clean ups and worked with local companies to fulfill their volunteer outing days. We also promoted various clean up opportunities in the watershed. Check out our [Volunteering](#) page for scheduled clean ups!

Green Cleaning Classes



LGROW worked with multiple municipalities to reduce household hazardous waste by hosting Green Cleaning Workshops. New partnerships with the Kent District Library and Fredrik Meijer Gardens were formed to host Green Cleaning and other healthy watershed focused workshops at any of their locations. Check your local library for upcoming programs.

Watershed Jamboree



The 2022 Watershed Jamboree went off with a splash! It was our largest Jamboree, with over **150 people** in attendance. We celebrated our partners and subwatershed groups, showcasing the wonderful work that they do to improve waterways in the Lower Grand. The Jamboree was held in the Rush Creek subwatershed in September. If you are interested in joining your local subwatershed group to help make a difference in the Lower Grand River Watershed, please visit our [website](#). Keep an eye out for our next Jamboree!

19TH ANNUAL SPRING FORUM

LGROW hosted its annual Spring Forum over four days with seven public events, and had **202** attendees. Keep an eye out for the 20th annual Grand River Spring Forum in 2023!

Explore

- Grand River Kayak
- Watershed Warbler Walk
- Green Stormwater Infrastructure Bus Tour



Help

- Planting with the GVSU Sustainable Agriculture Project
- Indian Mill Creek Clean Up at Richmond Park



Learn

- Sustainable Agriculture Tour at the GVSU Sustainable Agriculture Project
- Public Open House @ City Built Brewing Welcome Center
- Half Day Seminar for MS4 Permittees





LGROW STRATEGIC PLAN

Goal #1: Healthy Watersheds

Restore and Protect Waterways
Support Watershed Resiliency
Promote Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Character

Goal #2: Active Community

Engage the Public
Incorporate Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Goal #3: Robust Organization

Expand the Network and Develop Watershed Leaders
Secure Sustainable Revenue and Strengthen Board

A Letter from the Director

As I look back on this year, I feel such a sense of pride for our team and how we have worked together to protect and improve our waterways, engage the public, and strengthen the organization. These are the goals identified in LGROW's Strategic Plan, which drive us in our work and help us stay true to our mission. We updated the Strategic Plan this year, incorporating diversity, equity, and inclusion into our values and guiding principles. A focus on adaptation in our Strategic Plan will lead to recognizing opportunities for the watershed to reduce vulnerabilities in the face of changing conditions. We are developing action plans for creating more resilient watersheds, building capacity to anticipate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from significant climate threats with minimum damage to our social well-being, the economy, and the environment. The West Michigan community has demonstrated can we can reach our goals of creating healthy ecosystems and equitable access to resources by working together to build on each others strengths, earning each other's trust, and continuing with clear communications. I hope you will all join us in 2023 to celebrate 20 years of LGROW and share in our celebration and enjoyment of the Lower Grand River Watershed.

Wendy Ogilvie

Director of Environmental Programs, GVMC



LGROW IN THE PRESS

Stay up to date with what LGROW is doing by following us on social media or visiting www.lgrow.org

WoodTV

Water Trail Designation Would Improve Paddler Experience
February 2022

WKTV

Final Section of Water Trail Along Grand River May Become a Reality
March 2022

WoodTV

Storm Drain Art Aims to Raise Awareness About Waterways
June 2022

Grand Rapids Magazine

City: Leaves Clog Catch Basins!
October 2022






WYCE 88.1 FM

Community Connections
December 2022

Page 4 and back photo credit to Thom Bell.



For more information:

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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 governments in the watershed.

