

2021

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 31 subwatersheds.

MISSION

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

VISION

Connect water with life.

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LGROW Spring Forum



LGROW Staff

Wendy Ogilvie

Director of Environmental Programs

Cara Decker

Stormwater Programs Coordinator

Courtney Cromley

Outreach and GIS Coordinator

Josh Arnold

Aquatic Specialist

Senci Pace

Environmental Programs Associate

Eileen Boekestein

Former Environmental Education Coordinator

Rachel Frantz

Former Environmental Programs Associate



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A LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Hello LGROW Community –

One thing that has been on my mind recently is culture. Not societal culture, but rather organizational culture. The culture of LGROW and its supporting cast of employees and member organizations is why the accomplishments listed in this report occurred.

Culture is why we are able to work together outside of jurisdictional boundaries. It is why “we” as engineers, scientists, administrators, elected officials, regulators, specialists, etc. can collectively make meaningful improvements to our watershed.

Respective of this, several significant events happened within our watershed this past year that I would like to briefly highlight. Probably the most noteworthy was that a number of municipalities received their stormwater permits from the state. These permits started as applications way back in 2015, finally coming to reality in 2021.

Several components of these permits are more rigorous than the old permits. These include additional sampling/monitoring of area waterbodies, and increased educational and reporting requirements. The most difficult but impactful permit-required work has been done drafting a design spreadsheet and a regional stormwater ordinance. If our respective participating organizations did not have cultures that emphasized collective, mutual benefit over selfish siloing, these two complicated items would never have been done at the existing scale.

Additionally, LGROW staff were able to successfully hold a multi-day Spring Forum. With the theme of Learn-Help-Explore, staff and volunteers were able to provide a variety of in-person and virtual events throughout the community. This event was also only made possible by a willingness to work together for a shared good (and our amazing sponsors).

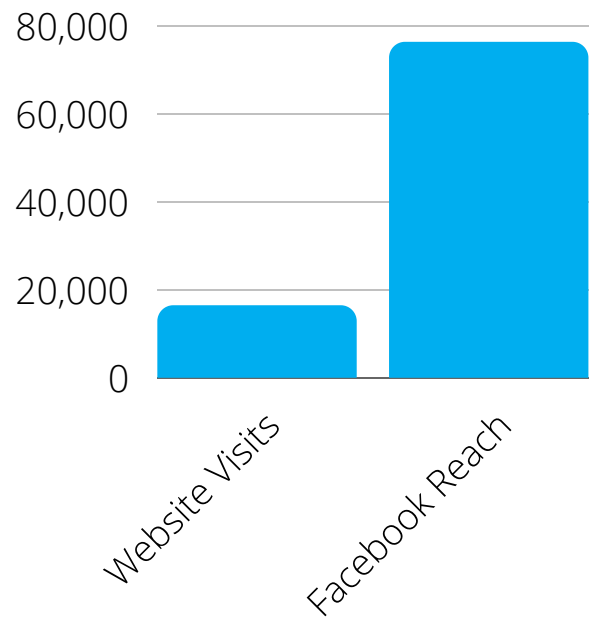
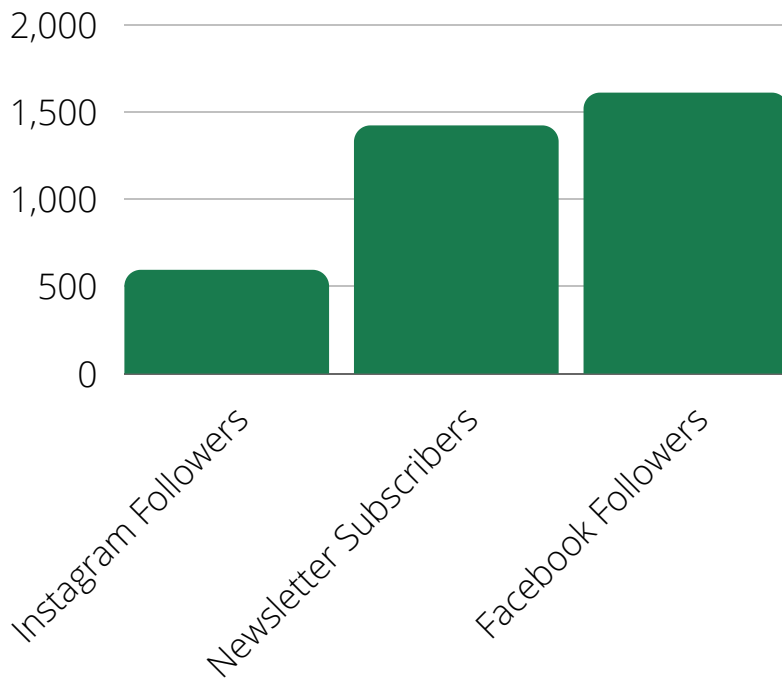
All of us work, volunteer, or participate in multiple organizations within West Michigan, and each of us bring our unique perspective to these groups. Yet, despite having varied backgrounds and perspectives, we are generally able to have meaningful conversations to resolve common problems. Sometimes I think we get so accustomed to this, that we fail to appreciate how unique and beneficial it really is. I hope each one of us takes a step back to realize these benefits, especially when contrasted with many events going on in society today.

Please enjoy the 2021 Annual Report and thank you to LGROW staff for another great year.

Aaron Vis
Assistant Director of Public Works
City of Wyoming
avis@wyomingmi.gov



BY THE NUMBERS



WEBSITE & SOCIAL MEDIA

This year the LGROW Facebook page had **1,608** followers and reached **76,172** people through posts. The LGROW Instagram page had nearly **600** followers. Our website had **16,335** visits and **35,000** page views. Our seasonal newsletter had **1,420** subscribers.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

LGROW hosted an **11-day** Spring Forum with **38** in-person and virtual events, with over **200** attendees! Throughout the year, LGROW visited **22** different schools to educate **2,566** students about healthy watershed practices.

LGROW received \$621,361 in new grant funding and entered into several partnership agreements.

WATERSHED WINS

Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) Permits

LGROW collaborates with **23** communities to ensure that they are meeting federal National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) regulations as specified by their Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) permits. EGLE issued **19** individual permits to watershed communities in 2021, and LGROW continues to provide a regional approach for **23** municipalities with MS4 permits.

Adopt - a - Drain

A monumental **1,196** storm drains were adopted by the end of 2021. In 2020, only **891** drains were adopted, this results in a **34% increase** since last year! We now have **16** communities involved in the program.

ADOPT-A-DRAIN
GRAND RIVER



Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Grant

Planting trees helps soak up stormwater runoff, filter pollutants, and provide valuable habitat for many different creatures. In this watershed win, we planted **300** trees at **15** schools. Staff, students, and their parents were invited to help plant, for a total of **1,093** helpers over the duration of this project! All **300** trees will intercept **123,459** gallons of stormwater runoff.





Macroinvertebrate Sampling

LGROW staff members sampled 15 creeks, streams, and rivers in the Lower Grand River Watershed in 2021. Collecting these macroinvertebrates helps scientists us determine water pollution levels in our local waterways. Macroinvertebrates have different tolerances to water pollution, which makes them indicators of water quality. LGROW staff is perfecting their techniques so they can train community scientists and subwatershed groups to conduct their own aquatic insect sampling at their local creeks, streams, and rivers.



Mussel Survey

LGROW helped Josh Arnold collect and measure 165 of the original 200 translocated freshwater mussels in Cedar Creek. This work was done for his thesis, in order to determine the effects of translocation on freshwater mussels. Josh found little to no differences in growth rates of mussels, indicating that in the short-term, translocation can have minimal effects on growth rates. He also found that short-term studies can be useful in determining if translocation sites can have long-term success.

A FEW PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS:

Grand River Rainscaping

The Grand River Rainscaping program continues to inspire and help community members get involved in improving water quality through green infrastructure. This year, LGROW conducted **33** residential and business site assessments. The site assessments inform property owners of the best green infrastructure practices that could be implemented on their site to manage stormwater. These practices include raingardens, native plantings, vegetated swales, rain barrels, or riparian buffer zones. Through funding awarded to LGROW and partners in our watershed, we are implementing many of the recommended green stormwater infrastructure practices at residential and business sites.



Grand River Rainscaping
An LGROW Program



Conservation Planning

LGROW continues to work on the **Lower Grand River Watershed Resilience Plan**. The Resiliency Plan characterizes the threats and vulnerabilities the watershed faces from a changing climate and the resources and strengths it possesses for building resilience. It aims to create subwatershed-based action plans that allow our communities to prepare for and adapt to a changing environment.

The **Lower Grand River Water Trail Development Plan** describes the formation of a sustainable, enjoyable, and safe water trail for residents and tourists alike. With the help of citizens, access and launch points will be established, potential waterway hazards will be reported, and heritage sites will be identified. Once the plan is completed, we can apply for State designation and join the Middle and Upper Grand River Organizations in creating a seamless paddling experience.

LGROW, Great Lakes Audubon, and the West Michigan Environmental Action Council (WMEAC) were awarded funding to lead the **Grand River Coastal Corridor Study**. This conservation project will support landscape level management by spatially prioritizing ecosystem creation, restoration, and enhancement areas on public and privately managed lands through public engagement, volunteer events, and community science efforts

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT



Earth Day

One of many Earth Day events LGROW attended was at Third Nature Brewing Company, where staff helped attendees find what subwatershed they lived in and collected comments about their environmental concerns.



West Michigan WhiteCaps

Batter Up! LGROW staff promoted proper pet waste disposal at two West Michigan WhiteCaps baseball games over the summer. Hundreds of attendees at these events learned more about their watershed and got free doggie waste pick up bags!



Festivals & Events

LGROW tabled at five festivals and events in 2021 all across the watershed. From *Movies in the Park* to the *Mayors' Grand River Cleanup*, staff was able to communicate and promote watershed stewardship to a diverse population.



Storm Drain Cleaning

Storm drain cleaning as a part of our Adopt-a-Drain program was successfully completed at four locations in the watershed, removing hundreds of pounds of garbage & debris from entering local waterways.

LGROW SPRING FORUM

Learn

The “Learn” events provided many opportunities: from butterfly walks to river tours, to virtual freshwater mussel webinars. The educational opportunities were available for all, with both in-person and virtual offerings. Pictured here is the Macroinvertebrate Survey taught by LGROW’s Aquatic Specialist.



Help

The “Help” events were outdoor activities to get the whole family involved. People got their hands dirty with river clean-ups, volunteering at sustainable agriculture practices, and maintaining raingardens. Pictured here is the Indian Mill Creek clean-up where 4 car tires, a chair, a laundry basket, and several bags of garbage were removed from the river.



Explore

The “Explore” events were recreational activities that got people outside and active. Kayaking trips, cycling and walking explorations, and free fishing provided outdoor enthusiasts an opportunity for seeing a different view of the Grand River and its watershed. Pictured here is the guided exploration of the Native American Hopewell Indian Mounds Park.





LGROW STRATEGIC PLAN

Goal #1: Healthy Watersheds

Restore and protect impaired and threatened waterways
Advance natural connections
Promote sustainable agriculture and rural character

Goal #2: Engaged Community

Involve the public
Incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion

Goal #3: Robust Organization

Recruit new members and develop watershed leaders
Secure sustainable revenue and strengthen board

A Letter from the Director

I hope you enjoyed reading about our projects and program accomplishments from last year. I truly believe (and am forever hopeful) that 2022 is the year that we will be able to get together and celebrate our watershed in ways that foster collaboration, encourage a sense of community, and actually see each other in person! LGROW was founded on the idea of protecting and improving the Grand River - this valuable resource that we have in our own backyard. The importance of this idea has been evident these past two years as families are traveling less and exploring what trails, parks, and waterways they can find close to home. We are building on this increased use of our natural resources and finding innovative and community-centered projects that meet LGROW's goals of a Healthy Watershed, an Engaged Public, and a Robust Organization. We could not do this work without our valued partners, talented staff, and dedicated LGROW Board members.

Thanks to all and here's to a great 2022!

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, visiting www.lgrow.org, and by watching and reading about us in the press.

River Network

Eight Network Members Awarded Technical Assistance Grants to Support Community-Led Research

January 2021

Grand Haven Tribune

Let's Get Outside: Environmental activities in 2021

May 2021

Storm Water Solutions

Grand Rapids, MI, Advises Residents to Keep Storm Drains Free of Leaves & Debris

November 2021

NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS

North American Association for Environmental Education

CEE-Change Fellow

Eileen Boekestein

Grand Valley State University

Masters of Aquatic Science

Josh Arnold

Grand Rapids Community College

National Green Infrastructure Certified Professional

Cara Decker

Non-Profit Leadership Lab

Grant Writing Boot Camp

Wendy Ogilvie

**LOWER GRAND RIVER
ORGANIZATION *of* WATERSHEDS**



For more information:

 www.lgrow.org

 (616) 776-7605

 info@lgrow.org

 [@LGROW.org](https://www.facebook.com/LGROW.org)

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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.

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