

# Watershed

## REPORTER

PARTNERING TO PROTECT, PRESERVE, AND IMPROVE OUR WATERSHED

DECEMBER 2015

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### MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**REBECCA FEDEWA**



Rebecca Fedewa

It's been a tough year for the reputation of the Flint River. When the City of Flint made the switch to using the Flint River as its drinking water source, we supported that decision. Based on the information we received from City officials, and our knowledge of the consistently improving health of the river, we felt (and continue to feel) that the Flint River is a perfectly suitable source of drinking water for the Flint community.

But as the news continued to worsen—first it was the bacterial issues, then the elevated levels of TTHN, and finally the evidence of elevated lead levels in Flint children—we knew our beloved river was the focus of a firestorm not of its doing.

To be clear, the board and staff of the Flint River Watershed Coalition are dismayed at the fact that our area's most vulnerable were put at risk. We are working with our partners at the Sierra Club to contribute toward assisting residents impacted by lead in their drinking water.

But we also want to set the record straight regarding the quality of the Flint River and the health of our watershed.

- Our benthic monitoring data shows that most reaches of our watershed score in the "good – excellent" range and are generally improving. Please visit our website at [www.flintriver.org](http://www.flintriver.org) for our benthic monitoring results.
- We have begun independent testing of the chloride levels in the river, and our early results indicate that the levels in the Flint River are well below the threshold for concern (elevated chloride levels were indicated as a potential cause for lead leaching into the drinking water of city residents).
- We also have begun to test for lead downstream of the waste water treatment plant. So far, we have not seen a single hit for lead going back into the river as a result of waste water treated from City of Flint homes.

We will continue our independent testing of chloride and lead in order to draw more definitive conclusions, and will report back to our members on the results as we get them.

As we move into the new year, please extend our invitation to one and all to get out and enjoy the precious resource we have in the Flint River. We have many opportunities, and will be announcing some fun new programs for 2016. Stay Tuned!

Thank you for joining us in our mission to Protect, Preserve, and Improve the Flint River and its watershed. **Now, more than ever, the Flint River needs your voice.**

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# SPRING GROVE WETLAND RESTORATION SITE

## AN ECOLOGICAL GEM IN THE CITY OF FLINT!

This summer, the Flint River Watershed Coalition and the Flint River Corridor Alliance were awarded a \$5,000 grant for ecological restoration services and materials provided by PlantWise of Ann Arbor, MI. The project will build upon what our partners, the Grand Traverse District Neighborhood Association (GTDNA), the Stockton Center, and General Motors (GM) Tool & Die have been working at for many years: ecological restoration and maintenance of the Spring Grove Wetland Restoration Site.

Spring Grove is located on Second St. between Ann Arbor and Hall Streets, across from Swartz Creek in the City of Flint. It is home to two wetland ponds, turtles, frogs, birds, and many desired native species. Unfortunately, Spring Grove is also the breeding ground for non-native (invasive) species that have invaded and crowded out areas of native growth. Invasive species known to be at the site are Phragmites, Chinese Sumac (a.k.a. Tree of Heaven), Garlic Mustard, and Reed Canary Grass.

Through the generosity and hard work of PlantWise, dedicated partners and volunteers, we removed an overwhelming amount of Chinese Sumac and replanted those areas with Michigan native trees and shrubs. The project also included installation of a rain garden to help catch and filter rain water as it flows to the wetland near the Stockton Center.

Spring Grove is a prime example of an urban ecological restoration project and educational opportunity for the community. Its success is due to the hard work of our partners who have dedicated many hours of planning and labor. We are honored to have had the opportunity to help build upon those efforts and look forward to continuing to help with ecological improvements at Spring Grove. For more information on this project contact Sondra Severn, FRWC Project Coordinator at [ssevern@flintriver.org](mailto:ssevern@flintriver.org) or 810-767-6490. For more information on volunteering with the Flint River Watershed Coalition please visit our volunteer page at [www.FlintRiver.org](http://www.FlintRiver.org).



To learn more about Michigan Invasive Species visit the Michigan DNR website, Invasive Species page at [Michigan.gov/dnr](http://Michigan.gov/dnr).

For resources on how and why to plant Michigan Native Plant Species visit the MSU, Native Plant and Ecosystem Services website at [NativePlants.msu.edu](http://NativePlants.msu.edu).



# FRWC PROGRAM RECAP

2015 has been quite the year for us at the Flint River Watershed Coalition. As we look back over everything that has been accomplished, we can't help but be proud of the efforts of our dedicated volunteers, and of our beautiful Flint River. Here are some of the highlights from this past year:

This summer, we organized 21 different kayaking events, ranging from our scheduled Paddles, to private trips, the 2nd Annual Flotilla, and kayak tours at our 'Love Your Lakes' events. Over 450 people got out on the Flint River to enjoy the peace, beauty, and abundant wildlife that flourish there.

**FUN FACT:** You may have heard about our thriving bald eagle population but were you aware that we have a growing number of ospreys now calling the Flint River home?

If you are familiar with the FRWC then you have probably heard about two of our most important programs, Flint River GREEN and the Water Monitoring Program. Both play a vital role in helping to assess the health of the river, highlighting how vibrant the Flint River really is, and serving as an early detection system for changes that would threaten the health of the river.

In 2015 GREEN (Global Rivers Environmental Education Network) engaged 23 middle and high schools with over 1,100 students from across Genesee and Lapeer counties. Students performed chemical water testing at local streams, and shared their results with us and each other at the GREEN Student Summit held at Kettering University in May.

GREEN (Global Rivers Environmental Education Network) has been engaging middle and high school students in chemical water testing for over 25 years. Westwood Heights (Hamady) was one of the 23 schools to participate in 2015. Students, teachers, and their mentors from GM and the Genesee County Drain Commission went out and tested at a stream to see how the water in their area scores.



Our Water Monitoring program targets 35 sites across the watershed. For the last 16 years volunteer monitors have gone out every spring and fall to collect the 'bugs' that call the river home. This past fall season over 65 volunteers donated their time to help with monitoring, including 4 school groups. The amount and diversity of the bugs collected during monitoring, along with measurements taken at the river, result in a "score" for each site. This is compared to historical data to ensure that the site is either improving or continuing to do well.



*monitors in the field*

In addition to monitoring the Flint River, we also take a more hands-on approach with our Annual Flint River and Community Cleanup, Periodic Cleanups, and Storm Drain Stenciling. Our Annual Flint River and Community Cleanup kicks things off each spring by gathering several hundred



*hard working clean-up crew!*

volunteers at multiple sites across the watershed to clean up the banks and areas surrounding the Flint River. After all the hard work is done a celebration luncheon is held to thank all those who volunteered. Then our River Clean-up volunteers get down and dirty all summer long, pulling tires and other debris from the river at various locations as needed. Lastly, Storm Drain Stenciling is an educational program where volunteers stencil storm drains and spread awareness to homeowners about the dangers of dumping pollutants, such as motor oil, into storm drains which lead directly into local rivers and streams.

There are so many ways to help protect, preserve, and improve your Flint River. Contact us today to get involved!



Each spring the GREEN Student Summit is held at Kettering University. The Summit offers students a chance to share their results and compare them to other streams in the Flint River Watershed. Kids also attend breakout sessions conducted by local environmental professionals such as "Incredible Edible Plants" and "Sewer CSI". It's a great day, as you can see from the picture.

# LAPEER HAPPENINGS!

7th graders from Chatfield School in Lapeer canoed from Rotary Park to Saginaw Street on the South Branch of the Flint River this September. Over the years these students have removed more than 120 tires from this section alone. This year they only found 2. They spelled out "Chatfield Loves Lapeer" with river trash to promote their stewardship of the Flint River as part of a weeklong service learning initiative.



Planning, permitting, and fundraising are underway for the new canoe landing being developed at the North Saginaw Street Crossing of the South Branch. This land is owned by the county of Lapeer and access is being facilitated by the FRWC Lapeer Chapter. Recently, The Lapeer Land Conservancy, one of our community partners, designated \$4000 for this purpose.

On October 4, 25 people gathered for a canoe rally on the South Branch of the Flint River. Despite predictions of foul weather, a hearty crew showed up for what turned out to be a gorgeous afternoon with barely a drizzle at the beginning. The 2.8 mile stretch of river between Millville Landing and Stanley Rd. was clear of obstructions, and even with below average water levels, still provided for a great float. Most participants had never been on this part of the river before and were impressed with the quality of the paddling and the beautiful scenery. Thank you to Joe Suma, Lapeer County Drain Commissioner, for providing yummy pulled pork, potatoes, and salad at the end. Special thanks also to the Sharkey family for hosting our group and for offering to host again next year! We hope to see you then!



400 N. Saginaw St., Suite 233  
Flint, MI 48502

810-767-6490

[www.FlintRiver.org](http://www.FlintRiver.org)

**The Coalition** is an organization representing individuals, businesses, community organizations, and local units of government sharing a vision of a healthier Flint River Watershed. We envision a day when the future of our drinking water is secure and the integrity of the Flint River is protected. We believe that all people should have access to the river for recreation, swimming, and fishing as well as the economic value it provides to our communities.

## FRWC Board of Directors

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Amy McMillan

### Executive Director

Rebecca Fedewa

### Board of Directors

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Alex Thibeault  
*S. Olof Karlstrom,  
Member Emeritus*

FRWC Board Meetings are held the third Friday of the month.

Printed locally at a union shop on recycled paper with at least 40% post-consumer waste.

*Please recycle!*



Newsletter design and layout by Jon Wood

# CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Third Friday of Every Month - 8:30am Board of Directors Meeting  
Third Tuesday of Every Month - 7:00pm Lapeer Chapter Meeting

**THURSDAY JANUARY 28TH - 6-9PM -  
ANNUAL VOICE OF THE RIVER CELEBRATION  
SLOAN MUSEUM IN FLINT'S CULTURAL CENTER**

January 30, 2016	EarthForce Professional Development day
February 24, 2016	GREEN Professional Development day
April 30, 2016	9am - 1pm Flint River And Community Clean Up
May 8, 2016	FFRT Sunday Rides Begin
May 18, 2016	7pm Ride of Silence
May 20, 2016	GREEN Summit

**Spring monitoring is First Two weeks of May**

**Check our Calendar for the full schedule of activities  
and further details at [www.FlintRiver.org](http://www.FlintRiver.org)**

Be sure to find us on social media: Facebook, Twitter, and Flickr for the most up to date information about what is happening in your watershed.

*Give The Gift of Membership This Holiday!*

## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION DECEMBER 2015

name _____	___ student \$10	___ watershed protector \$500
organization _____	___ individual \$25	___ watershed guarantor \$1000
address _____	___ family \$40	___ other \$ _____
city/state/zip _____	___ river sponsor \$100	___ river patron \$250
phone (h) _____ (c) _____	Some companies will match an employee contribution to an eligible charity or non-profit organization. Please check with your employer to obtain a matching gift form, if applicable.	
email _____		

Your support is sincerely appreciated. The Flint River Watershed Coalition is a not-for-profit organization with 501(c)(3) tax exempt status. Your contribution is deductible.

Please make checks payable to: **Flint River Watershed Coalition or FRWC, 400 N. Saginaw Street, Suite 233 Flint MI 48502**



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IT'S TIME TO MARK YOUR CALENDARS FOR THE  
FRWC 2016 ANNUAL

# *Voice of the River* Celebration

THURSDAY JANUARY 28 6-9PM

THIS YEAR'S EVENT TO BE HELD IN FLINT'S CULTURAL CENTER AT THE

**SLOAN MUSEUM**

1221 E. KEARSLEY ST. FLINT MI 48503

ANNOUNCING

**Dr. Gary Pace Volunteer of the Year**  
Tom Jones, Genesee County Drain Commission  
For his work on the Flint River GREEN committee and creating the Flint River GREEN website

**Joe Leonardi Leadership Award**  
Art Wenzlaff, International Academy of Flint  
For his tireless effort around improvements around Thread Lake and Thread Creek

AS ALWAYS, WE WILL BE PRESENTING THE COVETED GOLDEN GLOVE AWARDS!

Tickets for Groups or Individuals, as well as opportunities to sponsor, are available by calling the FRWC Office 810-767-6490