

G.R.E.A.T.



Grand River Environmental Action Team

P.O. Box 223, Jackson, Michigan 49204

www.great-mi.org

Spring 2006

GREAT Retreats From Key Role in Watershed Council

With reluctance, the GREAT board has voted to step back from key role in leading the Upper Grand River Watershed Council. GREAT's president, Chuck McKeown, had been serving as the administrator of the UGRWC for the past year under a contract established between GREAT and UGRWC. However, funding originally provided by a Michigan Department of Environmental Quality grant to implement the Watershed Council has now been depleted. Therefore the position of Water Council Administrator can no longer be financially supported.

GREAT still believes the concept of a Watershed Council is sound, but new sources of funding the work of the council must be established. One possible source of funding is the many townships and government agencies which are encompassed within the boundaries of the Upper Grand River Watershed, however most municipal government entities are strapped for money and are reluctant to fund a new environmental initiative. Another possible source of funding would be for the Watershed Council to establish itself as a non profit 503c organization to receive tax-exempt donations. Though the Watershed Council has made several attempts to achieve this status, they have been unable to satisfy all of the requirements of the State of Michigan.

The Upper Grand River Watershed is not unique. Michigan has been entirely divided into watersheds in order to more effectively protect the water resources of our river systems and the Great Lakes. History has clearly shown us that when many individual municipalities have authority to govern their own section of a river,

Mix of Old and New Faces Make Up 2006 GREAT Board

Chuck McKeown will begin his fifth year as GREAT's president with a solid background in environmental science, and a thorough knowledge of the Upper Grand River watershed. In addition Chuck has a variety of on water experiences in both kayaks and canoes. Todd Zeller also steeped in river know-how continues as GREAT's river master. Rounding out the officers with years of past experience will be Nancy Lapinski who will serve perhaps her fourteenth year as membership secretary.

New to an office in GREAT but not to the board will be Bryon Ennis as vice president, and Ken Dodge with his DNR field experience will hold the post of treasurer. Fine match of skills to duties right Ken? New to both the GREAT board and stepping immediately into the office of recording secretary will be Dayna Rudolf. Dayna must have realized the need for her particular skills because she sat down at her first GREAT board meeting and began to copy minutes without even being asked. Jeff Grund, although not officially holding a designated office will keep our accounting accurate, and Loise Hefka, though no longer actually on the GREAT board has expressed her willingness to keep our check book balanced.

GREAT Welcomes Five New Members

Carol Badgley

Rick Berry

Kay Brown

Cecelia Govrik

Dar Poceta

Small Group Enjoys May Trip

The May GREAT river trip took place on a stretch of the Grand River that last year was impassable. This year, thanks to the heavy rains during mid May we had ample river depth. The stretch of river was through a natural wetland very important to Jackson, from Jefferson Road and US 127, to Reed Road and US 127. This stretch of river flowing through hundreds of acres of wetland is a natural sponge protecting Jackson from flooding. It has the capacity to absorb millions of gallons of water and then to release them slowly.

Because of GREAT's lack of publicity (see related article in this issue), this trip was only enjoyed by about a dozen seasoned participants. The day was windy and bright and the water was fairly high for this stretch of river. It was noted by Terry Beaver our resident botanist that wildflowers and other vegetation was about two weeks behind schedule due to the extended cool weather. Bill Sonnett, perhaps

one of the areas most knowledgeable naturalists and his wife Irene were on hand to identify dozens of birds along the way. One notable bird Bill identified singing just above the marsh grass was the rare sedge wren.

Our thanks for a relatively easy passage on this paddle goes to Rivermaster Todd Zeller and Bill Bivens for scouting the river beforehand and cutting away fallen trees and opening up passages in illegal rock dams. That is not to say the entire passage was unhindered. Terry Beaver and his constant companions, Shadow and Angel, his black and white dogs, had to fight strong current and a low leaning tree at one point. After four tries and being turned sideways by the current, Terry was able to squeeze under the tree and stay in his canoe.



Wetlands lying only inches above the normal water level easily flood and hold water releasing it slowly back into the river system. These wetlands help protect the Jackson area from flooding.



Kimberly Watkins begins a three-hour paddle through acres of natural wetlands south of Jackson.





No-Till Farming

Good for Rivers, But Is It Safe For Humans?

By Bryon Ennis

According to Agricultural Extension Agent Mike Metzger, the planting season of 2006 will see a growth in the number of acres in Jackson County planted to no-till crops. The practice is considered beneficial to both the producer (the farmer) and the consumer (us) in many ways, and according to Metzger, “The main reason more farmers haven’t gone to it is the high cost of the special planting equipment.” It saves the farmer fuel, fertilizer and labor, and often out-yields traditional methods of completely turning over the topsoil before planting. To folks interested in the environment like members of GREAT, no-till creates less opportunity for soil to wash or blow into our rivers, streams and lakes. With no-till agriculture farmers will plant this year’s crop without first plowing, disking and harrowing the soil. A specially designed piece of equipment allows seeds to be sown with minimal disruption of the soil. According to Rattan Lal of Ohio State University, “No-till farming helps soil retain carbon. Healthy topsoil contains carbon enriched humus - decaying organic matter that provides nutrients to plants. Soils low in humus can’t maintain the carbon-dependent nutrients essential to healthy crop production, resulting in the need to use more fertilizers.”

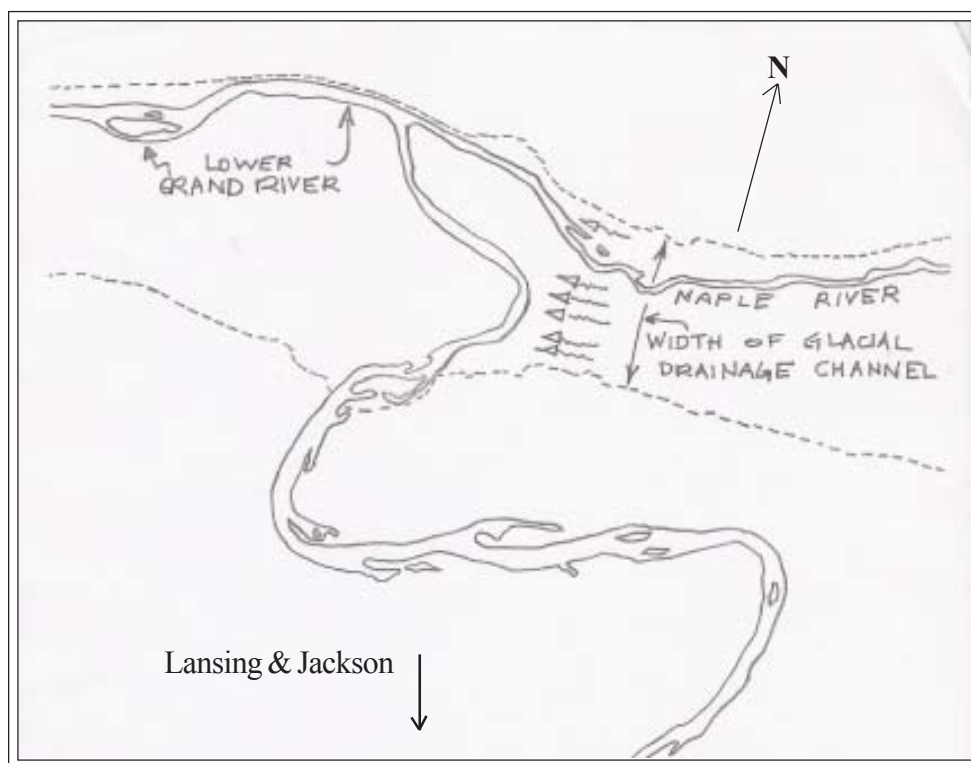
The downside of no-till farming is that in order to grow crops on fields that will never be cultivated for the entire growing season, genetically modified seeds, and

herbicides must be used. The genetically modified seeds are necessary so that the herbicides applied to the fields will only kill unwanted weeds and not the plants that are desired. The seeds and the herbicide are so perfectly matched that the herbicide inhibits everything else that tries to grow except the desired crop. The most popular herbicide used for corn and other commercial crops is Atrazine. Recently this chemical has come under scrutiny for altering the genetic makeup of amphibians such as frogs. It has also been shown to persist in soil and ground water for over a year. The chemical has been banned in seven European countries, but it is still widely used in the U.S.



No-till plants emerge through the debris of previous years’ crops.

GREAT Member, James Woodruff's Books Bring Michigan History and Michigan's Rivers to Life



After flowing north for about half its length, the Grand River abruptly turns west after its confluence with the Maple River. According to topologist and author **James Woodruff** of Lansing, this abrupt shift in the direction of the Grand is due to its arrival at an ancient riverbed that once carried a river the size of the present day Niagara. This ancient river was glacial meltwater from an ice field that filled Lake Huron and the Saginaw Bay. As the ice fields receded a huge torrent of water flowed from westward toward Grand Rapids. After making a slight loop to the north, this ancient and truly grand river lost elevation quickly

and scoured the bedrock forming the long series of rapids for which the City of Grand Rapids is named.

In his book, Across Lower Michigan by Canoe 1790,** **Jim Woodruff** says, "The Upper Grand River is[merely] a post glacial tributary of the Ancestral Grand.that is now considered to be the main stream. The Maple River and the Lower Grand River follow the channel of Glacial Lake Saginaw Drainage." When the last glacier retreated, the earth in this region began to rebound having shed the tremendous weight of miles-thick ice and the drainage direction of the Saginaw Valley changed to the north east leaving a shrunken Maple River.

Canoe Trip Honors Explorer

A weekend trip on the Huron River from Warrior Park to Belleville was recently organized by a group of Washtenaw County canoeists to commemorate a journey made 326 years earlier by explorer Robert La Salle.

According to the book La Salle and Michigan's History by **James Woodruff**, LaSalle and his companions traveled from Lake Michigan to Lake Erie in 1680. When they ran into the Huron River they built elm bark canoes and attempted to float down to the

Detroit River. However, they encountered many log jams on the Huron and after five days gave up the river route and walked to Detroit which was at the time a small Indian settlement.

***This book and others by **James Woodruff**, are available for purchase. You may call Jim at (517) 323-4528 or contact him by email thetopologist@sbcglobal.net.*

GREAT Board Members Recount Their Winter Paddling Adventures

Costa Rican Adventure

By Barbara Anderson

Last winter I vowed I'd plan a tropical getaway for this year rather than face another five months of cold without a breather. I settled on a canoe (what else?) trip to Costa Rica with an outfitter I've done several other trips with.

We crossed the mountainous interior to the northern lowlands. Then for eleven days we traveled by van (canoes on top) to put-ins on not altogether flat water rivers. Each flowed through monkey, iguana and cayman jungle habitat, alternating with pastoral stream sides with curious cattle and horses. Overnights were spent in pleasant lodges surrounded by tropical gardens in full bloom and water features.

My dry passage through the rapids we encountered was assured by having on of the guides in the stern of my canoe. However, one couple from Winnipeg who had only lake paddling experience got very wet on three different rivers. We encountered numerous sweeps and submerged rocks and "lined" our canoes several times past stretches considered too challenging! We paddled the Rios Fortuna, Penas Blancas, Arenal, Frio Toro and Sarapiquí.

Lunches were served on canoe bottoms on sandbars streamside (see photo below). Breakfasts and dinners were enjoyed on decks overlooking bird feeding stations made lively by exquisite and colorful tropical species. It was definitely a wonderful break from winter, and it sharpened my skills "river reading." Anybody interested in experiencing a similar trip with this Vermont outfitter is welcome to contact me for further information.



Kayak Winter

By Warren Renando



Last winter Jean and I loaded our kayaks on our SUV and drove to Florida where we spent several weeks. Because we had kayaks, we had a chance to leave tourists and get out on our own. Our first stop was at Fort Desoto Park, a Pinellas County Park, just south of St. Petersburg where we got a great campsite right on the gulf. Once the kayaks were off the truck we could leave them next to the tent and launch anytime of the day and on any tide. There were times when we saw six dolphins from our kayaks and over a dozen parrots from our tent site. The shallow bays and lagoons of Fort Desoto make it ideal for sheltered bird watching, fishing and exploring the mangroves. Fort Desoto is urban camping, so we could easily go to town when it was cold and rainy. There is a fine selection of restaurants just outside the park's boundaries. We made use of the St. Petersburg library to keep in touch with friends and family.

We used Kayaks just to reach our next destination, Cayo Costa State Park. This is an island between Boca Grande and Sanibel Island. After checking in at the light-

(This article continues on page 6: "Kayak Winter")

Kayak Winter, continued from p. 5

house with a ranger who seemed surprised that we were going to paddle to the park, we left Boca Grande for the four mile trip. We crossed the pass(an opening to the sea between barrier islands), getting rocked by the wakes of the big boats. Accompanied by a pod of dolphins, we had no difficulty reaching Cayo Costa. On the island we found 12 rustic cabins and some camp sites. The cabins have no electricity, a shared bathroom and an outdoor coldwater shower.

The next day when I paddled back across the pass to get more supplies, I encountered a strong wind and a strong tide going in opposite directions. This created high waves and a current agaist which I had difficulty making progress. I was taking water over both ends of the kayak. When I finally made it to shore, I was blocks away from the lighthouse. There is a commercial ferry that takes people, kayaks and gear to the island, and after this harrowing passage, I'd recommend it.

Once on the island which is Cayo Costa State Park, there are several protected bays for good kayaking. Here also one can find terrific shelling, beautiful empty beaches, and people who aren't ready for the group tour bus.

Our final destination was Bahia Honda State Park in the Florida Keys. Just 30 miles from Key West, Bahia Honda is frequently rated as one of the best beaches in America. Because the island is also on a major pass, the fishing is terrific. Just ask retired Jackson Fire Chief Ken Gaiser, who was towed around for 30 minutes in my kayak, by a fish that eventually got away. The kayaks got us out onto the flats too shallow for other boats and into the mangroves to see an amazing variety of tropical wildlife. When we were tired of the beaches, snorkeling and nature watching, we went to see the wildlife in Key West, which can only be described as abundant and bizarre. If you're going to visit Florida, see more of it in a kayak.

For reservations: Fort Desoto 954-588-3900, Cayo Costa and Bahia Honda State Parks 800-326-3521



Annual Meeting Speaker Says Pollution From China Reaching U.S.

Along with an assessment of the Upper Grand River's environmental status, and a rundown of hot spots of contamination at other Michigan sites, GREAT annual meeting speaker John Wuycheck had some surprising news for us. Mercury contamination from China is reaching the U.S. When questioned about how lakes in Minnesota and the western Upper Peninsula of Michigan could have high levels of mercury contamination, he replied without hesitation, "China." However Wuycheck added that many sources of mercury pollution in the midwest and the east coast of the United States are also contributing to the degradation of Europe's air. The point is that we all live in one world with one atmosphere and integrated oceans. There is no way to keep the pollution within political boundaries.

On a happier note Wuycheck said the Upper Grand River was, under normal conditions, environmentally sound except at the confluence of the Portage River and the Grand River. After high levels of precipitation there are also brief high levels of contamination from impermeable surface run-off(streets, driveways, and parkng lots) directly into the river. In addition Wuycheck says there are non-point sources of contamination which may be the most difficult to remediate. Non-point sources means the sources of contamination cannot easily be determined, but they include agricultural and residential run-off.



GREAT Retreats (Continued from page 1)

standards of protection often give way to economic opportunity. GREAT continues to believe in the wisdom of maintaining a strong Watershed Council. We will continue to have a presence on the Watershed Council through the participation of several of our members, and we look forward to the day when this organization will effectively coordinate high standards of protection for the entire length of the Upper Grand River.

Two Long-Time GREAT Members Take Seats on Board

Dayna Rudolf has long been interested in being out-of-doors, especially on the water. Perhaps her move from Jackson to Clark Lake when she was ten years old had something to do with this. Dayna now works at a Brooklyn medical office, and still tries to get out on the water as often as possible. She has also talked her fiancé, into kayaking. In fact,



their love of nature will take Dayna and Ken to Alaska in June to be married.

As for her willingness to serve on the board of GREAT, Dayna says, “I knew when I found GREAT, I had found an organization

that I could be a proud member of. I have found this group so diverse. Friendly, educated, and all with the same concern for preserving nature.” As for her experiences on the Grand River, Dayna describes how she found . . .the area larger than I thought, and it[paddling} gives me the feeling of being out in the ‘rough’, but actually homes are often just around the river bend.”

Jim Seitz, though long a GREAT member has just been tapped for service on the board. Jim has been on many Sunday River trips sponsored by GREAT and has often been a great help with novice paddlers and in moving boats from trailer to river and back. Jim is currently the Director of Technical Services for the Onsted School District, while many are also familiar with his wife Jan Seitz who is the MSU Extension Service Director for Jackson County.



Jim believes his love of the out-of-doors was kindled as an Eagle Scout in Erie, Pennsylvania, when he took part in several wilderness trips to New York’s Adirondacks. Jim will keep watch on GREAT’s web page so that members can access information and maps from their home computers. Jim believes that communication with members and the general public is an important aspect of GREAT’s ability to protect and improve the Grand River.

Participants in the May outing prepare boats for put-in at Jefferson Road.



GREAT Board Members

Chuck McKeown
President

Bryon Ennis
Vice President

Todd Zeller
Rivermaster

Nancy Lapinski
Membership Secretary

Ken Dodge
Treasurer

Trustees:
Bill Bivens
John Hand
Warren Renando

Dayna Randolph
Recording Secretar

Jim Seitz
Bill Sonnet

Jeff Grund
Accountant

Betty Desbiens
Historian

Louise Hefka
Bookkeeper

The GREAT board meets on the second Wednesday of each month, at 7:00 p.m. at the Summit Township Hall, 2121 Ferguson Road. Meetings are open and visitors are welcome. If you would like to have an item placed on the agenda, please notify Nancy Lapinski at 783-3661.

GREAT,
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Jackson MI 49204

The GREAT Newsletter editor is Bryon Ennis.
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Upcoming GREAT Activities

June 25, Sunday, Noon

N. Branch of Kalamazoo River
King Rd. E. of Albion/
Concord Rd.
To 29 ½ mile Rd.

July 16, Sunday, Noon

Grand River
Ella Sharp Pond, southside
Near Probert Rd. to E. High
& 127S

August 20, Sunday, Noon

Grand River
Put in at Onondaga park
Take out at Gale Rd.,
Drive back to Onondaga
Park for picnic.

September 16, Saturday, 9am

to 2pm Grand River Clean-up
Equipment, food, water
provided. Meet at Consumers
Energy Park bandstand--Boat
drawing and happy hour at
Daryl's Downtown after.

October 15, Sunday, Noon

River Raisin
Vinyard Lake Park to Brooklyn
Dam. Picnic at Vinyard Lake
Park.

Important Notices

1. You may bring your own boat on any GREAT outing, however if you need to reserve a canoe or kayak, please go to the GREAT website: www.great-mi.org for the phone number. We are in the process of establishing a separate phone number for GREAT. Sorry for the inconvenience.

2. GREAT must charge a \$10.00 insurance fee for each boat on each outing. This covers increased liability costs.

GREAT's fiscal year runs from January 1 through December 31. Your dues is a tax-deductible contribution as are other donations to GREAT.

Name _____

_____ GREAT Membership \$15.00

Street Address _____

_____ ACA(American Canoe Association)
membership \$30.00. Dual Membership is \$45.00

City _____

ZIP _____ State _____

Make checks for \$15 or \$45 payable to:

GREAT
P.O. Box 223
Jackson MI 49204

Telephone _____