



2015 Annual Report

Don Lynd, President

It was a busy year with GREAT beginning its pursuit of a permanent home for its equipment to better serve the community and a water trail, *in addition* to its usual paddle trips, cleanup, and community events.

After acquiring full ownership of our land in 2013, the board began work on property cleanup and development of a master plan. This year, following up on previous inventory work, an invasive species removal project was begun on the land. A master plan for the land was completed and approved by the board in April. This plan identified the needs for and benefits of a GREAT-owned storage facility on the property. To support this goal, a zoning variance to construct the building was applied for and received from Blackman Township. Reacting to some of the feedback the GREAT board received at the zoning hearing, a community outreach was held on our land to introduce us and our plans for the land to our Birdland neighbors – this meeting was well received. Land preparation began in the fall with removal of a few trees and grading and site preparation. A fundraising effort of our membership to assist in funding the new home of GREAT was begun. Our members gave generously in 2015, covering approximately one-third of the anticipated funding needed. Simultaneously, the land committee began preparing and applying for grants to cover the balance.

2015 also saw greatly increased interest in a water trail on the Grand River. GREAT, along with the Watershed Alliance has participated in planning meetings hosted by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources for such a trail that would extend from Jackson County to Lake Michigan.

GREAT continued its mission of providing environmental awareness of the area's waters. Six paddles were planned to expose our members and the public to our rivers in and around Jackson County. Unfortunately, while our April paddle had to be cancelled due to low water, the remaining five paddles were completed: three on the Grand River, one on the River Raisin, and one on the Kalamazoo. Despite the one cancellation, we were able to finally complete one trip that had been postponed a couple times. The Enbridge clean-up was finally complete for our planned paddle down the Kalamazoo River from Saylor's Landing to Historic Bridge Park. Participants were provided an opportunity to see the outcome of the cleanup of the 2010 oil spill. Additionally, this trip provided a look at how dam removal and restoration changes the landscape, with the removal of the Ceresco Dam. Overall, we cleared 28 miles of river, with 246 hours of work to provide these opportunities to the 296 participants on our paddle trips.

GREAT participated in several outreach opportunities to increase public awareness of GREAT and the Grand River including: the Quiet Water Symposium, which saw 2,700 participants; a volunteer fair at Consumers Energy; the Fitness Council's Glow Run; and the ever popular opportunity to a paddle a canoe or kayak around the Cascades ponds at the Earth Day event.

In our efforts to help the Grand live up to its name, the annual cleanup of 12 miles of urban river was completed with 116 volunteers in September. While the river averaged about 1 cubic yard of trash for every mile cleaned and, unfortunately, 15 tires, much progress is being made in this area and the river is cleaner than it has been in years. Additionally, GREAT members supported the Adopt-a-Stream efforts.

GREAT closed out 2015 with 156 members, five of which have been continuous members since the founding in 1991. I wish to extend my thanks to all of GREAT's members and volunteers, as we could not contribute to the river and the community so greatly without you!

Helping the Grand live up to its name!