

G.R.E.A.T.

Grand River Environmental Action Team



Website: www.great-mi.org

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Volume 23 Number 3 September 2013

Annual Grand River Clean Up

Our annual Grand River Clean-up is just around the corner and your help is needed. Please reserve September 14th to help keep our waterways clean.

I began thinking about a few things as we prepare for the clean-up and why we conduct this annual event. For so many years the Grand River here in Jackson County was not just neglected, but openly shunned. When I was a very young man living out north of town the river was at the end of the street and a few of us boys would play in the woods next to the river. This would have been back in the 1960's. Most boys I have ever known would want to play *in* the water, but not us. The river was foul smelling and mucky and we had all been told by our parents that it was nasty and to never, never go near it. While in Jackson the river had been covered over in concrete through the center of town. Had been for years, and I was told it was because it had been so polluted and the smell was offensive. During this time, from my young perspective, it seemed to me the physical world was something to use up without regard to any consequences. By 1969 this perspective was being challenged and changed.

On the news I can remember stories of rivers catching on fire because there was so much pollution in them. In June of that year the Cuyahoga River in Cleveland, Ohio caught on fire. This was not a new thing, it had happened several times in the past. At least 13 fires had been reported on the Cuyahoga River, the first occurring in 1868. The largest river fire in 1952 caused over \$1 million in damage to boats and a riverfront office building. Fires erupted on the river several times between the 1952 fire and the one in 1969. The big difference this time was that it captured the attention of Time magazine, which described the Cuyahoga as the river that "oozes rather than flows" and in which a person "does not drown

but decays". The previous year the Buffalo River had caught fire due to the pollutants in and on the water. Fires on the Chicago River were so frequent they were community events. Spectators gathered on bridges like it was a Fourth of July celebration. That same year closer to home the Rouge River with its thick oily sludge and rafts of human feces caught on fire. "The 1969 Rouge River fire didn't get much local media attention," John Hartig noted in his book *Burning Rivers: Revival of Four Urban-Industrial Rivers that Caught on Fire*. He writes, "Most citizens accepted the fires as part of the industrial operations that brought jobs to the area." During this time "Industry was king, and dirty rivers were considered a sign of prosperity." Sign of prosperity?



Please plan to join us on September 14th @ 9am. The activity begins at the CMS Energy Bandshell off Cooper St. in downtown Jackson. Feel free to bring your own canoe but no kayaks. GREAT canoes will be available for some and others will be supplied with waders to 'walk' the river. Wear clothes and shoes you do not mind getting dirty. There will be snacks to help us get off and running and lunch will be provided at the end of the clean-up.



Volunteers pull an amazing amount of trash from the Grand River

The 1969 Cuyahoga River fire helped spur an avalanche of water pollution control activities, resulting in the Clean Water Act, Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, and the creation of the Federal Environmental Protection Agency to name only a few. It also helped to spur a grass roots movement of environmentalists and to start the discussion about sustainability. On a much lighter note, this also brought us the Burning River Pale Ale from the Great Lakes Brewing Company of Cleveland, Ohio named after the event!

So, what does all of this mean? Well, I guess that answer depends on your perspective. Over the years mine has changed dramatically. When I was young it was not uncommon to see people throw paper and debris from their car windows. At a park after their picnic they would gather up their blankets and picnic baskets and walk off leaving trash behind...and this seemed to be acceptable! We have come a long way since then and I want to believe that most people would not do such things any longer. Our effort at keeping our local resources clean and free of debris is a worthy task. The Grand River has made a come back that many would not have believed possible. We are near the headwater of the Grand River and it has another 200 plus miles to go before it empties into Lake Michigan. If we can not have it clean here, what hope is there for the folks downstream? Over the past 40 years I have seen the Grand change to a point that now when I paddle down the river, in the city no less; I can see large fish in the water. To my thinking, this can only be called a success.

Don Nelson

Challenges Overcome for Portage River Cleanup

GREAT partnered with the Upper Grand River Watershed Council utilizing a grant to do a July clean-up of the Portage River, which had not been subject to a clean-up since the 2007-08 joint GREAT clean-ups with the Jackson County Conservation District.

This year's effort had the same challenges as were faced five years ago: pulling the canoes and kayaks over, around, or even through all the huge trees blocking normal navigation. However, the 16 volunteers (nearly all GREAT members), managed to accomplish even more ambitious goals. Before, only one section was done each of the two years, but this time, three sections for a total of 10 miles were cleaned in one partial day. A pre-paddle done two weeks prior after heavy rains, we were able paddle the entire length (Dunn Road to Cooper (M-106) without getting out of our boats, but by the clean-up date, the river had dropped to its much lower normal July levels which as result, usually yields more trash, but also exposes all of those downed trees. Since this river is not used for GREAT's monthly paddle trips we do not do any advance chain saw work to open up boat passages on the Portage River. The amount of trash there is very minimal compared to the Grand River and is a clean-up location only occasionally.

The Portage River, in northeast Jackson County, was named as such in the 1700's, as it was the used by trappers, missionaries, and traders to move from the Huron River on Lake Erie to get to the Grand River on their way to Lake Michigan. It enters the Grand River in Blackman Township, just downstream from the Cooper Rd. Bridge. Because of the excessive silt from the muck lands and farms which drain into it, the Portage River has the worse water quality of any tributary in the Upper Grand River Watershed. Almost its entire length was dredged and straighten decades ago which also has contributed to long term problems. In recent years, the Upper Grand Watershed Alliance (UGWA) has sought grants to try to improve its environmental quality. In spite of its negative reputation we learned from talking to fishermen we encountered that this muddy looking and somewhat deep river has some very good Northern Pike and Large Mouth Bass along with other species.

Jim Seitz

GREAT's Participation is Growing!

Goose Creek to Lake Columbia

The May paddling event took us from Goose Creek to Lake Columbia. We had a record number of 85 participants. Prior to May the previous record of 81 was set in August of 2009, from High St. to the Elks Club on Lansing Ave.

Just prior to the launch at the May Trip, participants had an informative environmental presentation by Garret Johnson of the Michigan Nature Association's Conservancy, about their 70 acre grasslands conservancy located at the put-in bridge on Goose Creek, south of Cement City. This rare wet prairie, marsh, and fen has over 200 native plant species and relies on volunteers to maintain.

Goose Creek, which starts in Hillsdale County and part of the River Raisin watershed, is a small, very pristine, stream which often has a strong current. Our starting location was the same as the put-in/take-out of last year's July paddle on Little Goose and Goose Lakes, but this year, we went the opposite direction. With special permission from the Lake Columbia Property Owner's Association, GREAT had special permission to take-out at two of their private parks for this trip only. Several Lake Columbia residents (at least 17) participated and some joined GREAT, making this event a win-win for all. Local residents along Goose Creek also responded with enthusiasm seeing us passing by their land and engaged in some friendly conversation.

Jim Seitz

Grand River: Vandercook Lake to Sharp Park

June's paddling event took place on the Grand River from Vandercook Lake to Sharp Park. While May's paddle presented a record of 85, it was quickly broken by June's paddle with 92 signed waivers of which 46 are members, 38 non-members, and 8 youth. GREAT also picked up 4 new members.

We did things in reverse for this event. It was our shared paddle with Dahlem. GREAT did the cooking. Meal planning was lead by Ellen Rathbone and it was a GREAT success with a change in menu to wrap sandwiches. Lots of vegetables and shaved ham and turkey, potato salad, chips and plenty of cookies were enjoyed by

all. The meal was at the start at Vandercook Lake. Our take out was at Ella Sharp Park. We had one winner of the Swimmer's award, but our trip leader did not find out who our swimmer was so we could present our first certificate.

Just a reminder that all persons participating in a GREAT paddle, whether you are using your own boats or ours, must keep their PFD's on and fastened during the paddle. This is a liability issue for GREAT and our insurance carriers require wearing of the PFD's. Please be safe and help us keep you safe.

Helen Burnett

Grand River: Eaton Rapids to Butterfield Park

The July paddle took place on a beautiful sunny day with 64 paddlers joining us for the 11 mile trip from the park on Mill Street in Eaton Rapids to Butterfield Park. We were also joined by members of the Eaton Rapids Paddling Club led by Ruben Green. Kathy Kulchinski, owner of Quiet World Sports generously funded the entry fee for all of the vehicles at Butterfield Park. GREAT President Kenny Price was disappointed in this paddle for he had no new members for his swim club. All paddlers made it thru the rapids at Petrieville Highway with smiles on their faces and no overturned boats. Many thanks to the seven GREAT Board members who made this paddle a success.

Jack L. Ripstra



Launching boats on Vandercook Lake

The Joys of the Solo Canoe

I grew up with paddling. Every summer, on a cool evening, the family would drive over to the lake and haul the big ol' family canoe out of storage, stick it in the water, and off we'd go: Mom in the front, Dad in the back, and my sister and I in the middle, the Cleopatra's.

Fast forward some twenty-odd years and I was a paddle trip leader for a county park in New Jersey. We taught paddling and led trips on many of Central New Jersey's rivers (Passaic, Raritan, Batsto, Delaware). Our paddle trips were so popular that we replaced our fleet of Grumman's with boats made of Royalex – a “new lightweight material” that brought a 70-pound boat down to a more reasonable 40 or 50 pounds.

Still, for comfort and ease, these boats required two people to manhandle them onto trailers or vehicles. Not really what a single gal was looking for. Oh, I tried a kayak once, but it was not comfortable...I was canoeist through and through.

In the mid-90s I started looking for a boat just for me. There was a craftsman in the Adirondacks who was making lightweight solo canoes. I had his contact information, but never got to see his wares. These were the days before the Internet and by the time I moved to the mountains, he had gone out of business.

But not too far away from where I lived (in those very same mountains), was another craftsman: Peter Hornbeck. Pete was building a robust business of lightweight solo canoes, the Lost Pond Boats. His original designs were made of Kevlar, and by the early 2000s he was also doing boats of carbon fiber. These boats are perfect for paddlers who want to go into the back country and paddle the ponds and lakes that are otherwise inaccessible: who wants to schlep a 50-pound boat ten or more miles up and down a wilderness trail? The Lost Pond boats weigh in at about 17 pounds, and the Black Jack weighs a mere 12 pounds! You can imagine my flabbergasted delight when I won a Black Jack in a raffle! (Sadly, my skin reacted adversely to the carbon fiber and I ended up having to sell it).

So, my search for a solo canoe continued. I went to paddle shows and tried the solos made by Bell, Old Town and others – they weren't for me. But then I saw an ad for another Adirondack boat maker: Placid Boatworks. The solo boat they made, called a Spitfire, was tougher than the Black Jack (more layers), and not only had a cane seat, but also wooden gunwales and wooden thwarts.

It was a real looker. It weighed a bit more than the Hornbeck boats (22 pounds), but could also take more of a beating (Hornbecks are prone to being tossed by the wind and should not be paddled over rocks and beaver dams).

Using my tax refund from that year, and the money I got from selling the Black Jack and a hand-made quilt, I was soon the proud owner of a Spitfire. After 30-some years, I was finally able to go out on the water on my own in a boat I that could carry with little effort. A quarter-mile carry into Henderson Lake? No problem. Four carries between the various ponds in the Five Ponds Wilderness Area? Piece of cake! Facing a beaver dam with just enough water going over the top? Over we went, the boat and I. Life was good.

To this day, people try to convince me that a kayak is the way to go. Modern kayaks are tough, can take a real beating, and they are designed for all sorts of people. In fact, I borrowed one a couple times from Quiet World Sports recently and was grateful I did because the water was low and we scraped bottom quite a bit. The kayak I borrowed was very comfortable and a dream to enter and exit. Why, I even found myself contemplating adding a kayak to my “fleet” – just so I'd have something to take out when water levels are low.

But I'll never give up my Spitfire. It turns on a dime, can be carried with little effort, and is easy to lift on and off the car. It has a comfortable cane seat low in the boat and foot pedals, and I can use both a single- or double-bladed paddle with it, depending on the water I'm paddling. At a mere 12-feet in length, it handles narrow streams and snug curves pretty well and I can go out on my own at any time I want...provided the trip doesn't need a shuttle!

Kayaks might be the “in” thing these days, and now that I've had a good experience with one I won't poo-poo them so readily, but I just want to put out there that paddlers should also consider the solo canoe. While there are a lot of advantages to the kayak, there's just something romantic about a canoe that a kayak just can't match.

Ellen Rathbone



Someday I'd Like to Join Those GREAT Folks



Some people are slow starters. John Minar thought about joining GREAT in 1990. Well here he is!

It began in 1990 when the first Grand River Expedition was being launched. The members asked permission to use John's property at Liberty Mill Pond, which is the headwaters of the Grand River, to launch the Expedition. This sounded like a grand plan as it was mentioned on WJR with J.P. McCarthy as J.P. interviewed Verlen Kruger. Verlen Kruger was a canoe enthusiast who paddled over 100,000 miles in his lifetime. He is in the Guinness Book of World Records. This is so remarkable because he did not start until the age of 41. He authored three books and two videos on canoeing. There is a bronze statue in his memory in Portland, Michigan.

John welcomed this opportunity to meet Mr. Kruger. It was quite a gala affair with bagpipes heralding Verlen's arrival under the bridge on S. Jackson Road, ceremoniously pouring water taken from all points of the Grand River on the rock at the Liberty Dam. The members of GREAT were wonderful, "Someday I'd like to join those GREAT folks", he thought.

John started paddling in his youth as soon as he discovered a creek near his home in Detroit. He was inspired by the Adventures of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn and he set out for adventure in anything that floated. John and his pals paddled discarded plastic kiddie's pools, cement mixing troughs, whatever he thought might float. Those adventures included retrieving golf balls from the Rouge River at the Bonnie Brook Golf Course, much to his parents' dismay. That did not stop him. At this point he will take anything that floats, but prefers kayaks for the smaller streams.

Raising two fine children with their sports and school activities and a growing business did not allow much time for paddling, back in the day. He has made it through all of that busy time of his life with his high school sweetheart, Emilee, whom he married in 1978. They moved to Jackson in 1981.



John helps out at an obstacle in the river

John works for Methods and Equipment Associates in Livonia, Michigan. It is a machine tool distributor established in Detroit in 1962. John graduated in 1980 from Eastern Michigan University (~~Go Eagles - Hurons~~) and started as a Jr. Sales Associate. Now after 33 short years, John was appointed as President by the Board of Directors and is also the President of the Detroit Chapter of the American Machine Tool Distributors Association - the oldest chapter (established in 1902) and the last in existence.

John now enjoys anything on the water. That could include canoe/kayaking, swimming, fishing, sailing, snorkeling, scuba diving, water skiing, and even 'pontooning'.

Welcome to the GREAT Board!

Helen Burnett

Our Friend the Spiny Soft Shelled Turtle



There is a man who tours libraries and schools and such with his collection of animals in order to teach children (and adults) about some of the wildlife that share this planet with us. He goes by the moniker “Critter Man” and is a frequent presenter at the Dahlem Center. One of the critters he sometimes brings with him is Pancake, the soft-shelled turtle.

If you’ve never seen a spiny soft-shelled turtle (*Apalone spinifer*) up close, you are missing a nifty animal. These turtles are so unlike our concept of a turtle, mostly because their shells are not hard and covered with scales (scutes). Instead, their shells are smooth, flat, somewhat rubbery, and are covered with skin – there’s not a scale to be found. The edges of the shell are quite flexible and sport a series of small spines (hence the name).

Soft-shelled turtles are actually rather common in southern Michigan, although not everyone will see them. They live in rivers, lakes, ponds and marshes where the bottoms are sandy or muddy and there is little vegetation. Here they spend their days basking in the sun on logs or along the bank, or foraging in the water for crayfish, insects, tadpoles or the occasional small fish. It was once believed that these flat, disk-like turtles preyed heavily on game fish populations, and as such they were extensively killed because they were competition. Studies have shown, however, that fish make up a very small part of their diet, and game fish are pretty safe from them.

Even so, today some people still kill soft-shelled turtles either for sport or for food. In fact, the only real predator of adult soft-shelled turtles are people.

Sure, raccoons, herons, skunks, foxes and others will eat hatchlings or dig up nests to get to the eggs, but they all pretty much leave the adults alone. This is because the adults are aggressive defenders of themselves, snapping at whatever is pestering them. They can deliver a painful bite.

When a soft-shelled turtle reaches the ripe old age of eight or ten years, it is finally mature enough to reproduce. Mating takes place in the spring, and usually come June the females are trundling out of the water to find a sandy spot nearby in which to dig a shallow nest and lay upwards of 38 eggs. Unlike many turtles, the sex of the baby soft-shells is not determined by placement in the nest (temperature differences in nests often determine the sex of turtle eggs). When August and September roll around, the eggs will probably hatch and the young will head for the water. Some of the eggs, however, will overwinter and wait to emerge until the following spring.

If you are out paddling on one of Michigan’s many waterways, keep your eyes peeled for these very interesting turtles. They are fast swimmers (and very agile on land), but you have a good chance of catching sight of them while they catch a few rays on a log or along the shore. If the water is shallow and has a sandy or muddy bottom, you might just disturb one that has wiggled itself just below the substrate’s surface, resting. These turtles can breathe underwater for extended periods of time, thanks to the special linings of their pharyngeal slits and cloaca, as well as their skin. This, combined with dormancy, gets them through the winter as they hibernate under the sand or mud in their lake/pond/river of choice.

And just in case you are wondering, Pancake, and other females, can grow up to nearly 20 inches across! That is a big turtle. The males, as often is the case with herps (and raptors), are much smaller, maybe growing a bit more than nine inches across. The females rule. Yeah.

Ellen Rathbone



August 18, 2013 Paddle

The Grand River Environmental Action Team's paddle for August 18, 2013 has been changed. The section of the Kalamazoo River we were planning to paddle has been closed by the EPA to allow Enbridge to dredge five portions of this river to remove submerged oil. The new trip will have the put in at Rieger Park in Albion, where the South and North branches of the Kalamazoo River join. The first portion of the paddle travels through the downtown of historic Albion, and then through a natural and scenic area with a moderate current and two sets of rapids. There will be two options to paddle the trip. The shortest option will end at the Western crossing of B Drive North, with a length of 6.5 miles and a 2 to 3 hour paddle time. The longest option will end at Stuart's Landing in Marshall, with a total length of 12.5 miles, a 4 to 6 hour paddle time and includes 3 miles of slow and wide backwater from the Marshall Dam. All paddlers that are using GREAT canoes and kayaks will be required to take out at the B Drive North location.

Jack L. Ripstra

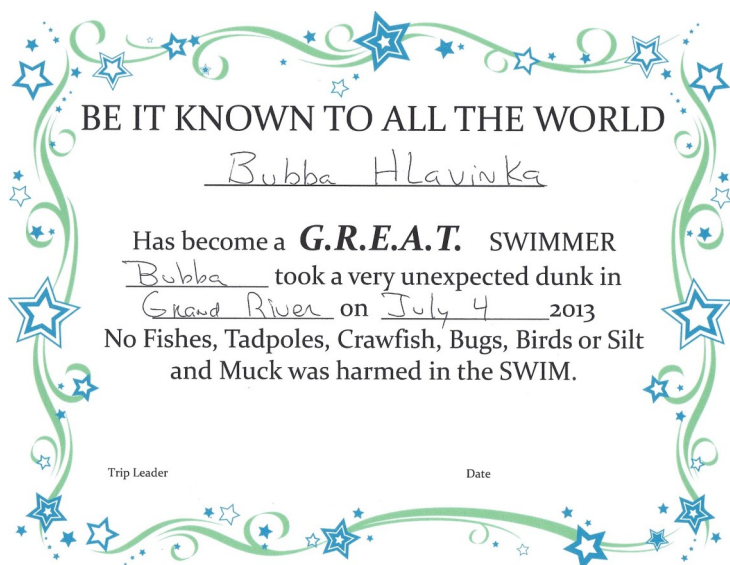
Doc Fletcher, A GREAT Fan

"I've always viewed GREAT as the most successful environmental/paddling group in the state.." "Doc" Fletcher is the author of Paddling Michigan's Hidden Beauty: The Rivers, the Towns and the Taverns—a 2012 book, and other colorful books on paddling Michigan and Wisconsin rivers where he adds a descriptions about the town, a local tavern, and history. He does presentations for a fee at libraries around the state. He included that GREAT provides boats for its trips which is kind of like a livery. Therefore, two of our recent paddles are chapters in his most recent book: St. Joseph River from Hillsdale to Jonesville in 2010 and 2011, the Grand US-127 to Vandercook Lake. Names of some present and past GREAT board members appear in those chapters. He has been planning to join us for our August trip on the Kalamazoo and he gave that quote in recent communications I had with him about it. He has become a big fan of ours.

Jim Seitz

New Certificate and Sticker

The GREAT board has come up with two new items to make it more fun to go on our paddles. We have approved a new Swimmer Certificate and are working on a Jackson County Paddling Sticker for your boat.



Sample Certificate

On most of our scheduled paddles, we usually have someone or some ones who takes an unexpected swim in the water. The unexpected swim can and has happened to the most inexperienced paddles all the way up to the river rats that spend all their free time on the river. For that reason we have come up with the Swimmer certificate. If a person goes into the river or the lake on one of our scheduled trips, all they have to do is see the Trip leader after the paddle and request the Certificate.

Please remember to try and always bring a change of dry warm clothing on our trips especially during cold weather time.

Helen Burnett, Don Nelson and myself are in charge of coming up with rules and sticker designs for people who have traveled the entire Grand River in Jackson County on our scheduled paddles. Each year the GREAT trip planners try to plan a lot of trips on the Grand River in Jackson and over a period of time a person who paddles on each of the Grand River trips would be eligible for the sticker. So stay tuned for this new item.

Kenny Price

Upcoming Activities

August 18th (Sun.) 12 noon

Kalamazoo River (Calhoun County)

Rieger Park in Albion (where the North and South Branches of the Kalamazoo River join) to B North Drive. Meet at 10:30 am for carpool from Shell Station.

September 14th (Sat.) 9 am—2 pm

Annual Grand River Clean-Up

CMS Energy Band Shell off Cooper St. in downtown Jackson. Feel free to bring your canoe but no kayaks please. No need to reserve a boat as GREAT canoes will be available. Lunch will be provided.

October 13th (Sun.) 12 noon

Grand River

North State Rd. (Adjacent to US-127, Rives Twp.) to Dixon Rd. (DNR Access).



GREAT Newsletter

Published quarterly by the
Grand River Environmental Action Team

GREAT

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Welcome New Members!

Harry Breniser

Joseph Delor

Greg & Martha Giles

Mike & Jan Hoffbauer

Sam & Paul Hudnutt

Kandice Karl

Bruce Maguire

Gina May

Michael McGhan

James McKay

Jason Moritz & Melanie Hilliard

Kathryn Palon

Rapid Refill Ink LLC

Kevin Smith

Will & Debbie Stoner

John Michael Timms

Jim Tylutki

Board Meetings

The GREAT board meets on the second Wednesday of each month, with the exception of December, at 7:00 PM at the Summit Township Hall, 2121 Ferguson Road (across from Knights Restaurant, near the Intersection of South Jackson and Horton Roads). Meetings are open and visitors are welcome.

GREAT Board

Kenny Price, President

Don Nelson, Vice President

Jim Seitz, Secretary

Jack Ripstra, Treasurer

Kathy Kulchinski, Rivermaster

Helen Burnett, Director

Kurt LaFrance, Director

Mary Lenardson, Director

Don Lynd, Director

John Minar, Director

Ellen Rathbone, Director