

# G.R.E.A.T.

Grand River Environmental Action Team



Website: [www.great-mi.org](http://www.great-mi.org)

517.416.4234

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## Grand Review & Equally Adventurous Treat Annual Meeting

Okay so that is not what GREAT usually stands for, but it was an adventurous evening in many ways.

First, we changed venues for the annual meeting and the space, food and attendance was a delight. Our servers, Jennifer and Cheryl added to a fun and delicious evening.

Thanks were shared with many persons who have supported GREAT projects throughout the year. The hard work of board members and the silent support of spouses was sounded with thanks. Past GREAT board members in attendance, area governmental officials and the County Conservation office were mentioned for their various means of support and/or information sharing that makes our project and paddles a joy.

Kenny Price, President extraordinaire, gave his review of the year's events, and a good year it was! While we were somewhat hampered by the drought, we still had well attended paddles that had some interference from rain showers on the paddle days. What a combination! The clean up once again had help from the Junior ROTC team and we look forward to their help this year as well. GREAT received a grant due to highest votes on Face-Book's Love Your Neighbor contest. We were also the recipients of financial support from TAC, whose employees voted to support us.

The election of board members was conducted and nomination of Ellen Rathbone was accepted.

Our featured speaker was Dave Drullinger, DEQ Specialist from the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality. Dave addressed the issue of what makes a river stable, flow rates vs. volumes, volume controls for river channel protection and reducing pollution. He offered information on good stream and pond management.

One of the points that caught attention was flow rate and volume. When someone makes a manmade pond, while it helps to control flooding, ponds have heated water and are contaminated with fertilizer. A better choice is for a low impact development, such as native plantings which have deep roots. Look for information on rain gardens. For more information you can contact Dave at: (517) 335-4117 or [drullinger@michigan.gov](mailto:drullinger@michigan.gov).

**MAKE IT HAPPEN AWARD** - The Make it Happen award was presented at the meeting to Greg Moore, legislative aide to Senator Mike Nofs. You will find another article highlighting the work Greg put forth to support GREAT's acquisition of a land swap.

Elections conducted had the following results:

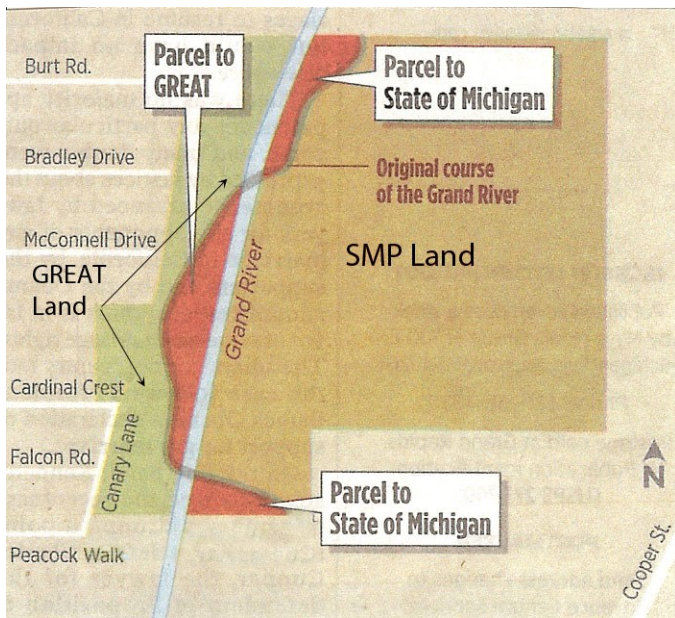
2 year terms: Don Nelson, Jack Ripstra, Mary Lenardson, Helen Burnett, and Don Lynd. Congratulations and thank you for serving GREAT and the community.

Helen Burnett



*Greg Moore (left) receives the Make it Happen award from Jim Seitz of GREAT*

# Land Settlement Deal Nets GREAT Six Contiguous Acres on Grand River



Who would have predicted in 1918 that straightening the Grand River from downtown Jackson to Berry Road in Blackman Township would have led to a record land deal negotiation for the State of Michigan. No, it was not the amount of land at issue. That only amounted to land swaps totaling eleven acres. The state record set was the number of years these negotiations required to complete a land proposal—over twelve. That is the State of Michigan Record.

Though the story goes way back to 1918 when the Grand was straightened with a complete disregard of the river's zigs and zags. Many people who owned land in an ox-bow of the river before 1918 found themselves completely cut off from that land! Such a piece of land was deeded to GREAT in 1995 by the Grand River Nature and Discovery Project who had received it as a gift from Mrs. Joanne Fox.

When GREAT received the deed it found that two chunks of their land lay across the river, contiguous with state prison land. One large parcel of state prison land now lay across the river contiguous with GREAT's land.

From the first negotiations between GREAT and the state, there was a strong desire to swap parcels. Civilians had for some years before GREAT owned the land, been crossing the river to hunt deer on this parcel not owned by the state. Though the state prison authorities were alarmed to find armed hunters on their side of the river, they could not deny them access to land that was

not state property. These folks knew where the old property lines lay.

Soon after GREAT received the land in 1995, Nancy Lapinski, then an officer on the GREAT Board, began to petition the state for the land swap. At first the process moved along smoothly and in 2000 Governor Engler signed the agreement sent to him by the legislature. Unfortunately, the state Attorney General found a problem in the language and the agreement was frozen.

Nancy Lapinski did not falter. In 2002 a revised bill was sent to Governor Engler which he again signed, but this time a problem with "sunset" language was the cause for rejection. Still Nancy forged on to accommodate the requirements of the Attorney General and a new bill was signed by Governor Engler.

The next problem with the land swap occurred when it was learned that there was a "wild claim" on part of the land that was supposed to be traded. Since the land claimed by the "wild claim" was quite small, both GREAT and the state agreed to release this land in a quit claim deed so that negotiations for the larger parcels could proceed. By then there was a new governor and the new bill was duly signed by Governor Granholm in 2008.

Jim Seitz had become president of GREAT in 2007 and took over the cause from Nancy Lapinski after seven years. But the battle was not over. A new problem arose in the eyes of the Attorney General. This time it was determined that the swap of land was unequal because of the "wild claim". The state was getting short changed even though the Blackman Township assessor's office tried to rescue it by issuing a written statement that the parcels were of approximately equal value.

With still another change in the governor's office and a change in control of the legislature, progress was temporarily slowed. However, Jim Seitz picked up the ball and brought the long-standing issue to the attention of Senator Mike Nofs. Apparently Senator Nofs recognized the persistence of GREAT and the dedication of Jim Seitz and put one of his top aides, Greg Moore, on the case.

Moore spent a good deal of time studying what had already been done and where the pitfalls were. In guiding the new bill through its necessary channels, he made certain that the Michigan Attorney General would sign on to the language.

Then he found willing stewards of the bill in both the Michigan House and Senate. This time the signed bill was fully cleared by the Attorney General and the land was transferred on March 19, 2013.

Seitz gives much credit for the land swap to long-time GREAT board member Nancy Lapinski. “She got the process started, especially with the Department of Corrections. Even though I spent the next five years with countless phone calls, emails and meetings with different parties, I think Nancy had initially done even more. She is the winning pitcher, and I was the closer.”

When Seitz took over the project, it looked as though Lansing didn’t really want it to happen as they kept putting one obstacle after another in the way. However, Jim notes, “Even given the failures of the past and some complexities, I never doubted this was doable. To make it happen we needed a quarterback in Lansing to get these parties on the same page. After Senator Nofs was elected in Jackson County, his aide Greg Moore stepped up to perform this role that no one previously did.”

During twelve years of uncertainty about the outcome of the proposed land swap, few GREAT Board members maintained the faith in a positive resolution that Nancy Lapinski or Jim Seitz had. Concrete plans for use of this land could not compete with the immediate need to plan outings, improve safety measures, clear the river of obstacles and maintain equipment. Therefore when board members were asked what GREAT’s plans were for the new land, the answers were often uncertain. Obviously board members want to provide another venue for the public to experience a natural setting. Perhaps it is in this regard that current GREAT President Kenny Price says of his ironic, hopeful vision, “I’d like to see if GREAT can put one of those old oxbows back in the river.”

Bryon Ennis

## A Team Effort & The Toast

It was “team effort” of Jackson area legislators to finally get GREAT’s swap with the state completed. The Blackman Township land is in Representative Mike Shirkey’s district (Clark Lake). Last summer, Jim Seitz and Greg Moore, Senator Nof’s Aide, testified on behalf of GREAT before both the Appropriations Committees in both the Senate and the House. Senator Bruce Caswell, (Hillsdale) made the motion for approval and in the House Earl Poleski (Jackson), who is a member of

that powerful committee, had members prepped in advance. Senator Majority leader, Randy Richardville (Monroe) quickly put it on the Senate’s agenda. Delays could have resulted in having to start over again next year. David Arking, of the Michigan Department of Technology, Budget, and Management’s Real Estate Division, who had worked on this for almost 13 years (he says it was number one on his “Most Wanted List”), wrote a toast to make it and when it finally happened.

After GREAT Board members went to Lansing to sign the deeds, a small gathering of those in Jackson and Lansing who had worked on this took place in a local gathering spot to celebrate. Finally David Arking’s toast was made:

*There once was a river that was crooked –  
a status that stickler Army Engineers deemed to be  
wicked;  
The river was duly straightened,  
but the crooked & wicked on DOC’s side remained  
unchastened  
and for the security of all, a GREAT land swap was  
(eventually) brokered.*

Cheers!

## Is That Cow in the Water Legal?

Occasionally, on a hot day while padding with others, we would come across livestock in the water. Often someone would say this was illegal. Is this true or false? The answer in Michigan, can be either yes or no, depending upon the facts.

A few summers ago while on a GREAT paddle, we came across five cows in the water (see picture). I took pictures, documented the location, and decided to finally test the question. Not wanting to try to arrest the cows, the first thing, was to which agency do I report the incident? After calling different agencies, each one referring to another, I finally got to the correct one as this was a livestock issue: Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA).

I was asked to send the name of the property owner (easily found the web) and the address of the property (Google Earth is perfect), which I also confirmed from driving by the place. MDA is required to check out any credible complaint within seven days and the reply I received was close to this time frame. Depending upon staff time, MDA will either send the farmer a letter or do an on-site inspection, which is what happen in this case.





Later I received reply from the MDA official. He stated this farmer was not in violation. He based this upon his “manure management and pasturing practices, stocking densities, and condition of the river banks, and river bottom”. Specifically, this farmer's operation is small and by winter his cattle are sold to market, so they would not be there during winter/spring ice/water runoff. The river is not the main source for the cattle’s drinking water, which would be a violation. He had water at the barn where they spend most of their time. The river had a somewhat stony bottom which means the cattle will not stay there long since they don't feel comfortable standing on this type of surface (much like us humans). There was no evidence of bank damage from the cattle or runoff from a muddy pasture next to the river (see picture above).

The MDA letter encouraged me to contact them if I had any questions, which I did to learn more. If farmers are in violation, they are often advised on how to change practices and not fined unless they do not follow through. Local Conservation Districts and MSU Extension offices can work with farmers to help them meet the codes. Sometimes farmers are told to add stone, such as crushed limestone to the river bank if there is a serious problem of their cattle spending a lot of time in the river. Another method is to put big narrow rocks along the bank which discourage cattle from going to the water.

I was told that livestock in rivers is less common than the past as result of bigger cattle operations, but wildlife actually in many places present a bigger bacteria problem, especially Canada Geese. Barbed wire across the river is also a violation. This should be reported to the local sheriff, but if fence posts are actually in the water, the matter could be handled by the DEQ.

In many years of paddling in Jackson County and elsewhere in Michigan, I have only seen livestock in the water a few times, almost always on hot days as the livestock are trying to cool off (like many humans). Farmers in Michigan through the Right to Farm Act, have riparian rights for water use within our agricultural codes, therefore each case is evaluated on its impact upon the ecology of the river. Based upon the above, paddlers should have some idea what to look for before reporting a possible violation.

Jim Seitz

## GREAT Welcomes New Board Member



*Editor Helen Burnett (left) with new GREAT Board Member Ellen Rathbone (right)*

Ellen Rathbone comes to GREAT with outdoor experience and is a newcomer not only as a GREAT board member, but she is also new to Jackson in the last year and 1/2. She grew up in the New York area and came from the Adirondacks where paddling was a big part of her life. Canoeing is her boat of choice and has been so since she was a kid. A Spitfire, a solo canoe, is her boat of choice.

Fun time for Ellen is being an avid reader, quilting, and gardening as well as a love of folk music. Gardening is mostly vegetables and some flowers. Her big goal in this area is to restore some of her property to a native habitat and put in rain gardens to handle the runoff from her roof. [http://www.lowimpactdevelopment.org/raingarden\\_design/downloads/CreateRainGardenWesternMI.pdf](http://www.lowimpactdevelopment.org/raingarden_design/downloads/CreateRainGardenWesternMI.pdf) is a resource page to learn about rain gardens.

Her work days are spent as the Education Director for the Dahlem Conservancy. Make sure you visit the Dahlem Center and take advantage of Ellen’s knowledge to learn about their many habitats and creatures. Her other previous teaching opportunities have been to teach canoeing and serve as a leader for paddle trips on many of the rivers in New Jersey while she worked in that area.

While Ellen was recruited by Kat Kulchinski to serve, she really sees GREAT as an opportunity to meet people, feed her desire to canoe and be on the water as well as give back to the community. If she had her choice on how to spend her time she would spend it traveling and being a forever student.

Glad to have you as a Board Member for GREAT!!!  
Thank you for accepting the request to serve.

# Field Trip to Vandercook Lake



*Jim Seitz teaching the history of the Grand River*

May second. The morning greeted us with sunshine and a clear blue sky. The water on Vandercook Lake was as still as a looking glass. Fifty-five kayaks and stand up paddleboards, in a rainbow of colors, lit up the new green grass next to Quiet World Sports' headquarters, where they sat in two rows awaiting the arrival of the first wave of students from Parkside Middle School. Members from GREAT joined up with Kat Kulchinski and her crew to teach these students how to handle a kayak on the water and to share with them the history of the Grand River and the shoreline restoration project at Vandercook Lake. We couldn't have asked for a nicer day.

When the first bus loads arrived after 9:00 AM, a cool breeze was blowing, but the sun promised to warm the day. Half the students donned PFDs and were soon carrying boats down to the water's edge, eager for instruction from Kat and her crew.

The other half of the group set up base in one of the park's pavilions, where Jim Seitz shared with them the history of the Grand River, from how the Native Americans used it, to details about why the river was capped (and why the cap was removed) and how far the river has come in the last few years pollution-wise. He then walked the students down to the shoreline where last year a crew of volunteers worked with Paul Rentschler to install coir logs and native plants to help stabilize the shoreline from the harsh impact of wind-driven waves. Ellen Rathbone, from The Dahlem Conservancy, pointed out some of the native birds (Killdeer, Canada Geese) that routinely are on the lake, and talked about some of the others (Great Blue Heron, Common Loon, Wood ducks) that are often seen as well. She told the students that although this is an urbanized (or suburbanized) lake, there is plenty of nature around and opportunities to interact with it (fishing, paddling, dip-netting for aquatic insects).



After about an hour, the two groups switched places, the boaters joining Jim and Ellen for an environmental talk, and the kids who were still dry made their way over to the boats.

All too soon (from the viewpoint of the kids on and in the water) it was time to get back on the busses. Nearly every student was bubbling over with tales of their exploits on (or in) the water. By now it was almost 80 degrees outside, so no one was complaining about being wet. Some even went wading and swimming – getting thoroughly soaked! It was a good thing they brought a change of dry clothes with them.



The folks from GREAT and QWS had about a half hour to swallow some lunch and regroup before the second wave of students arrived for similar lessons on and about the water.

This was the second year students and teachers from Parkside partnered with QWS to get their feet wet learning that not all sports require a ball and a court or playing field. It was the first time GREAT and Dahlem joined in to broaden the message to include some environmental education and lend some additional paddling support to Kat's team. The extra eyes and boats on the water assured everyone had a safe and enjoyable time.

Ellen Rathbone



# Quiet Water Symposium

The 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Quiet Water Symposium held the first Saturday in March seems to have been a big hit. Everyone I spoke with that had attended said it was the biggest and best yet. That was my assessment as well. The final attendance estimate according to Allen Denning, Chairman of the planning committee, was over 1,900 people! The G-R-E-A-T booth was set up on the east side of the hall just across from the Quiet Water Sports booth and around the corner from MGROW (Michigan Grand River Organization of Watersheds). There were booths with information featuring water and conservation districts, nature centers and parks, paddle and sailing clubs, environmental groups a plenty and so much more. I arrived in the morning and was glad to have gotten there early enough to have a chance to look at all the different information and chat with some rather interesting folks! All together there were over 470 exhibitors this year. Maps of trails and information on forming water trails appealed to me, but the eye candy of the hand made wooden kayaks and canoes was what really got me excited. I would be almost too afraid to actually use one of those beauties and would probably just hang it on the wall as a piece of art! (I have a history of bashing boats a bit too much to have anything that nice...).

For anyone who has never attended the Quiet Water Symposium, it promotes non-motorized outdoor recreation and conservation. If you like bicycling, hiking, paddling canoes or kayaks, sailing, bird watching, camping and or any number of other outdoor recreational or educational interests, then you should attend. There are presentations, demonstrations and exhibits, enough to satisfy most any outdoor adventurer. There are authors to share stories and sign books, folks who maintain the trails through the woods so many of us like hike on, non-profit groups promoting responsible stewardship of the lands and waters of our state and then there are the craftsmen and manufactures that allow us to get out and be part of nature while staying warm, dry, and safe. So many groups that it can almost be too much to do in just one day! One thing that impressed me was the general enthusiasm of the people I spoke with. Everyone was passionate about their interest and was eager to share with anyone who was willing to listen.

Several G-R-E-A-T board members were there and took turns working the booth. We had many people stop by and take information and several stayed to talk about the river and paddling for quit a while in some cases. I was pleased to see so much interest in the annual clean up

that G-R-E-A-T organizes and hosts in September. People from other communities that had not heard of G-R-E-A-T seemed rather impressed that we have been around for 22 years and are stronger than ever. This event is a wonderful way to meet people from other areas of our state with similar interests to share ideas and inspire one another. I am already looking forward to next year's event.

Don Nelson



*Don Lynd, Mary Lenardson and Don Nelson help out at the GREAT booth*

## Reward Cards

Karen and Frank of the Bone Island Grille in Vandercook Lake have graciously partnered with GREAT to raise funds for our operations and special projects. Their Bone Island Grille Fundraising rewards card enables the holder to earn 10% back on each food order and B.I.G. donates 10% to GREAT! All you have to do is present the card at time of payment. If you wish to use the rewards for yourself, you must register the card online, otherwise GREAT will receive the reward. The cardholder may redeem their reward at a future visit or save them up. One couple has earned several hundred dollars with the rewards card. Now those funds can go to a GREAT cause and help improve the quality of our river and watershed. GREAT is proud to be associated with a fine local, family owned business that supports the community. If you would like to participate, contact any GREAT board member or call Kenny Price at 517-795-6847.

# Beavers: Not Just in Canada, Eh?



*Beaver lodge on the Kalamazoo River west of Parsons Road*

If you are anything like me, when you hear about beavers the first thing that comes to mind is Canada and dams. However, did you know that beavers can be found in Jackson County? In fact the beaver is a native species that can be found throughout most of the continental United States as well as Canada.

While the beavers in our area do not appear to construct many dams, lodges can be found on both the Kalamazoo River and the Grand River. Beaver activity seems more prevalent or at least more visible on the Kalamazoo River watershed.

Recently beavers have constructed a dam on a tributary of the Kalamazoo about 1.5 miles upstream. The dam is not higher than the banks so no flooding is occurring.

This dam appears to have been challenged by spring rains and snow melt, but most of the time it has a head of about 1 foot. In fact, it appeared to have no impact on flooding during the recent high water levels, as so much water flowed over the dam such that the height of the stream was the same below the dam as above. Beaver dams are constructed using sticks and twigs as the basis utilizing both mud and dried grasses to enhance the water tightness of the dam.

Beavers fell trees not only for their lodges and dams, but also as a food source. The smaller size wood gets used for dam and lodge construction while the larger limbs and trunks appear to be only utilized for their bark and underbark as food. Beavers in our area tend to be quite attracted to the quaking aspen and willows, though they are known to utilize other woods such as cottonwood, alder, birch, maple, and cherry trees.

Though beavers are reported to be nocturnal, they can be seen in the evening around sunset.



*Spring brook beaver dam*

If you stand quietly just in view of the waterway, they can be observed swimming by. They swim with just the head above water so looking for the water ripples is actually easier. They are hard to find other than by sight as they swim very smoothly and quietly. To observe successfully stand very still, as just the slightest of movement or sound will cause the beaver will duck under water, slapping its tail on the surface just as he goes under. This “crack” can be quite startling in the silence of the late evening, especially if not expecting it.

Given that it is difficult to observe the beaver itself, keep lookout for the other visible signs of their presence. Spotting a lodge is relatively easy as it predominately will look like a pile of sticks possibly entwined with weeds and mud. These are often located on the water’s edge as they are typically built upon a land base. Occasionally they may be constructed on the bank, but will certainly have an underwater entrance. Probably the most visible sign of beaver activity, not just past presence, is their tell-tale chewing to fell a tree. The result is the top of the stump left in a cone shape. Look closely and the individual teeth marks can be seen.

Although the author is not specifically aware of any beaver activity on GREAT’s remaining 2013 paddles, he will certainly be on the lookout for them. If you do want to view some of the beaver lodge work in the area, head over to Concord and put in the mill pond at the Falling Waters trail head. Paddle upstream, easterly, to the east end of the pond where a lodge can be found. With a little bit more work, you can keep paddling to just shy of the Parsons Road bridge where another lodge is located.

Don Lynd

## Upcoming Activities

### June 9th (Sun.) 11:30 am

#### *Grand River*

Vandercook Lake County Park (Floyd Ave.) to Ella Sharp Park (Maplewood Dr.) Joint trip with Dahlem with GREAT as hosts. Cookout (12 noon) prior to launch with food provided. Arrive no later than 11:30 am for car placement shuttle.

### July 21st (Sun.) 12 noon

#### *Grand River (Ingham and Eaton Counties)*

Eaton Rapids (Public parking lot #7, off Mill St. behind Quality Dairy M-99/50) to Burchfield Park (\$5 fee, Grovenburg Rd.)

### August 18th (Sun.) 12 noon

#### *Kalamazoo River (Calhoun County)*

15 Mile Rd. (Saylor's Landing Park) to Wattles Rd. (Historic Bridge Park). 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.

## GREAT Newsletter

Published quarterly by the  
Grand River Environmental Action Team

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GREAT is a tax deductible 501c3 non-profit organization.

## Welcome New Members!

Joseph Delor

Rebecca Jaminson

Ted Janiuk

Sally Kern

Jann Krupa

Linda McLean/Leo Klalisner

Quiet World Sports

Bill & Laura Schlecte

Jack Taylor

Thomas Weaver

## River Eternal (Deceased)

John Robe - 3/15/2013

## 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

### Special Assignments:

Louise Hefka, Publicity

Jeff Grund, Tax Statements

Barb Anderson, Historian