

# GVMC

GRAND VALLEY METROPOLITAN COUNCIL

LOWER GRAND RIVER  
ORGANIZATION *of* WATERSHEDS



2025

# ANNUAL REPORT

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## Mission

Understand, protect and improve the natural resources of the Lower Grand River Watershed for all to enjoy.

## Vision

Connect water with life.

# Meet the Team

## LGROW Staff

Cara Decker  
Director of Environmental Programs

Rachell Nagorsen  
Stormwater Programs Manager

Kayla Grattan  
Stormwater Outreach Coordinator

Matt Bain  
Aquatic Specialist & Education Coordinator

Anna Kornoelje  
Land and Water Projects Manager

Damaris Potter  
Climate Action Planner

Andy Gordon  
Watershed Forester

Robert Cloy II  
Past Urban Waters Ambassador

Ella Carr  
Past Watershed Programs Associate



## 2025 Board of Directors

Dan Taber  
Chair

Scott Yonkers  
Vice Chair

Grant Simons  
Technical Committee Chair

Andrew Reinhardt  
Technical Committee Vice Chair

Kate Milzarski  
Public Engagement Committee Chair

Amy Haack  
Public Engagement Committee Vice Chair

Nathan Williams  
Sustainability Committee Chair

Ben Jordan  
Subwatershed Committee Chair

Gerry Konning  
Subwatershed Committee Vice Chair

Bradley Boomstra  
Stormwater Ordinance Committee Chair

Joel Morgan  
Stormwater Ordinance Committee Vice Chair

Aaron Vis  
Past Chair



“Our team showed so much resilience this past year. 2025 brought growth in projects, partnerships, and the addition of new staff members. I can’t wait to see what the new year holds for LGROW, and am excited to see you all in the watershed soon!”

- Cara Decker

Director of Environmental Programs



LGROW continues to be an integral community partner that provides valuable services and resources across the Lower Grand River Watershed and beyond. LGROW programming produces positive project outcomes within our area while providing an inspirational message to protect and enhance our environment, they are true champions of the Grand River.

- Dan Taber, PE  
Chair of LGROW

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# PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

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## Our Events

This year, LGROW led or participated in 50 public events, impacting 1,860 people in the Lower Grand River Watershed! These events included tours, training sessions, lunch and learns, volunteer stewardship activities, forums, conference presentations, summits, and culminated in our Holiday Social.

We look for every opportunity to engage the public, throughout our massive watershed, on water quality issues and climate concerns and hope to scale up our efforts, even further, in 2026!

1,860

People  
Impacted

50

Public Events

3,055

Students  
Impacted

76

School Events



## Student Outreach

LGROW worked in *numerous* school districts in the watershed to deliver watershed-based learning and lead student water-quality monitoring and stewardship activities. Thanks to new partnerships, we are continuing to expand our reach and ensure that watershed-focused education is accessible to diverse communities throughout the Lower Grand!

# HEALING OUR WATERS TOUR



Lemery Park with  
Congresswoman Hillary Scholten

## Great Lakes Restoration Initiative

On August 13, 2025, LGROW and GVMC hosted a Healing Our Waters (HOW) Tour with elected officials and community partners to highlight the local impact of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI). The tour showcased four restoration projects in Grand Rapids and Wyoming, MI that are improving water quality, restoring habitat, and supporting the long-term health of the Lower Grand River Watershed. Forty-one participants, including federal, state, and local leaders alongside municipal and state agency staff, traveled together to visit project sites and engage in relationship-building conversations and activities throughout the day. The tour offered an inspiring, firsthand look at how GLRI investments are making a tangible difference in the watershed and strengthened connections among partners committed to protecting the Great Lakes.

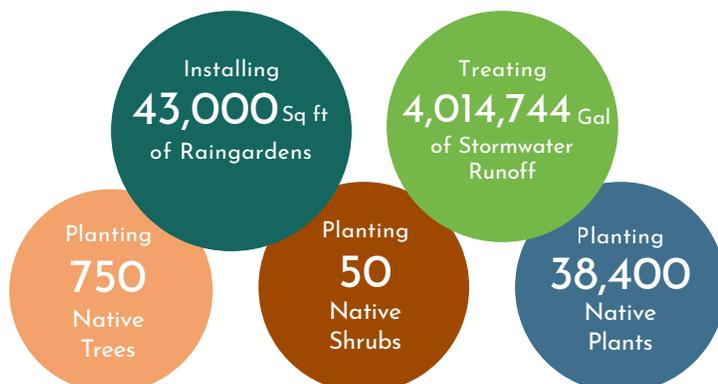


Attendees boarding a Rapid bus



Attendees gather at Kent ISD

The tour highlighted over \$1 million in federal, state, and local funding that has been invested for:



John Ball Zoo hoop house

# PROJECTS



## MS4

An MS4, or **Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System**, is a network of storm drains, pipes, ditches, and other infrastructure that collects and conveys stormwater directly to local waterways. These systems are owned by local governments and school districts and are separate from sanitary sewers. MS4 permits and Stormwater Management Plans help ensure communities take action to reduce pollution and protect water quality.

Throughout 2025, 20 MS4 permit reapplications and 12 new-use applications were completed, and more than 200 staff across the watershed participated in Stormwater 101 trainings on topics ranging from green infrastructure and stormwater design standards to everyday pollution prevention and good housekeeping practices.

Based on the 2020 census, the urbanized area within the watershed has expanded, bringing more communities and school districts under Michigan's MS4 stormwater regulations. In 2025, LGROW welcomed **14 new public agencies into the MS4 program**, growing the network to 41 members across the region. GVMC and LGROW support members in meeting permit requirements while encouraging collaboration through committees, shared resources, and trainings.



New MS4 Communities

# Rainscaping Update



In partnership with the West Michigan Environmental Action Council (WMEAC) on a non-point source pollution grant from the Michigan Department of Environment Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE), LGROW installed raingardens and conducted site assessments throughout the Lower Grand River Watershed. LGROW also collaborated with community partners including Michigan Sustainable Business Forum, Plaster Creek Stewards, and American Rivers.

LGROW customized reports with recommendations and resources to help people better manage the stormwater flowing off their property and improve wildlife habitat by planting native plants and removing invasive species. LGROW spread the word about rainscaping that provided information about raingardens and other forms of green infrastructure that capture and infiltrate stormwater to communities throughout the Watershed.



## By the Numbers



# West MI Healthy Climate Plan



## Milestones

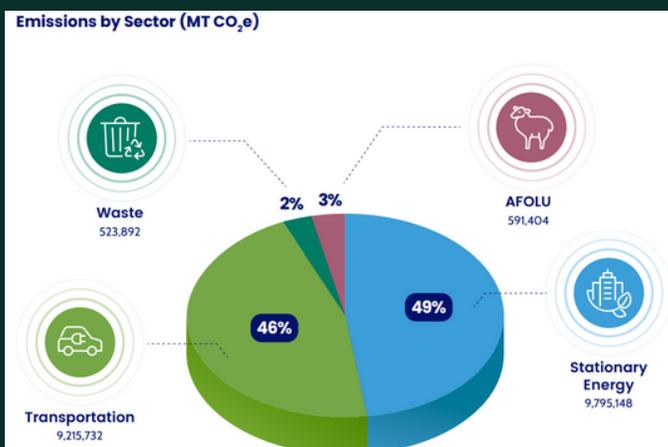
In 2025, LGROW and GVMC celebrated a major milestone with the submission of the West Michigan Healthy Climate Plan (WMHCP) to the EPA. This achievement marks the culmination of a two-year effort led in collaboration with regional partners to create a shared roadmap for Kent, Ottawa, Ionia, and Montcalm counties to decrease harmful Greenhouse Gas emissions.

Throughout the year, LGROW and GVMC focused on community engagement and strategy development to ensure the Plan reflects local priorities. The WMHCP is designed to improve public health, strengthen community resilience, and support local economies by providing practical, actionable guidance for communities across West Michigan. Looking ahead, our team will build on this momentum in the coming year by connecting with municipalities, organizations, and stakeholders throughout the four-county region to share, adopt, and implement the Plan.

### Emission Reduction Goals:



Community Ambassadors distributing surveys



## 2019 Greenhouse Gas Inventory

In 2025, GVMC completed a regional Greenhouse Gas Inventory using 2019 data to understand where emissions come from across West Michigan. The inventory looks at emissions from four major sectors and helps guide local climate action and track progress over time. Together, the four-county region emits 20.1 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (MTCO<sub>2e</sub>). Fully implementing the West Michigan Healthy Climate Plan could reduce emissions by more than 160 million metric tons by 2050.

# MICORPS VSMP

Since 2022, LGROW has managed a Michigan Clean Water Corps (MiCorps) Volunteer Stream Monitoring Program (VSMP) in the Rogue River Watershed. The Rogue River Watershed Partners and Rockford Sustainability Committee have provided incredible support, as well as our amazing volunteer base! Thanks to partners and volunteers, 11 sites were monitored in 2025, covering the entire Lower Rogue River Watershed.

Additionally, LGROW has supported Barry Conservation District's (BCD) MiCorps VSMP program in the Thornapple River Watershed since 2024. BCD and LGROW monitored 12 sites in 2025, covering the majority of the Thornapple River mainstem and four of its tributaries.



# GREAT LAKES FISHERY TRUST

Last year, with funding from the Great Lakes Fishery Trust (GFLT), LGROW began a new place-based stewardship education project called "Living the Mission." This project focuses on working with students from schools in disadvantaged communities or schools that serve disadvantaged communities and seeks to take these students from watershed learning to watershed stewardship. This past Fall, 8 different school groups began the journey by getting outdoors to sample a waterway in their community and one outside of their community for direct comparison. Currently the students are working on analyzing the data they collected and conducting research with the goal of creating a presentation for local policymakers. Finally, the students will select a stewardship activity to engage in that will support improved water quality in their community.



# TREE PLANTING PROJECTS



## FORESTS TO FAUCETS

6,500 saplings were distributed through the 5 Conservation Districts throughout the last 2 weeks of April 2025. Bringing the total number of saplings distributed through this program to 8,028 saplings between Spring 2024 and 2025.

LGROW assisted the Kent Conservation District during their fall tree sale in handing out 1125 native saplings. Saplings were bundled in groups of 5 and separated by deciduous and coniferous species. 58 people came and collected bundles during the October 11<sup>th</sup> tree sale, totaling at 870 saplings! Remaining bundles were shared with the Kent District Library Cascade Branch and Friends of Grand Rapids Parks for watershed residents to plant.



## CITY OF WYOMING TREE MAINTENANCE TRAINING

Significant progress was made on the DNR Urban and Community Forestry grant in partnership with the City of Wyoming. Davey Resource Group completed an Urban Tree Canopy Assessment, which will support data-driven decision-making for future tree planting locations. The first of four planned workshops was held in November and was attended by 23 City of Wyoming staff from the Parks & Recreation and Public Works departments. The workshop focused on proper tree planting and maintenance practices, including pruning, watering, and mulching. Tree planting is a major component of the grant, and substantial planning took place later in the year for a community tree planting event scheduled for Arbor Day 2026.



## US FOREST SERVICE GLRI GRANT

In 2025, LGROW supported planting projects with the City of Kentwood, Plaster Creek Stewards, and Friends of Buck Creek. 13 trees were planted in Kentwood across 4 different parks. Plaster Creek Stewards, with support from LGROW, planted 15 trees working with many different partners. Friends of Buck Creek planted native shrubs at Lemery Park. These plantings added to 77 total trees planted with many more in the works for 2026.



# 2025 CONFERENCES

Sharing our mission across the Great Lakes region!



## MI Healthy Climate Conference

Detroit, MI  
April 2025



## Quiet Adventures Symposium

Lansing, MI  
April 2025



## Healing Our Waters Conference

Rochester, NY  
September 2025



## Midwest Climate Resilience Conference

Milwaukee, WI  
October 2025



## EGLE's Michigan Sustainability Conference

Grand Rapids, MI  
November 2025



## MI Water Environment Association Seminar

Bath, MI  
December 2025

# 22nd Annual Spring Forum



## Celebrating the Grand River

LGROW's 22nd Annual Spring Forum brought together community members, partners, and sponsors for a week of connection, learning, and collaboration centered on the Grand River. Throughout the week, LGROW hosted a variety of experiences designed to deepen relationships with the river and with one another, including a kickoff celebration that welcomed partners and introduced new faces, guided river walk tours, an MS4 meeting focused on stormwater and watershed protection, and the Grand Lady Riverboat Cruise.

The Forum concluded with a kayaking trip at Ottawa Sands County Park, offering a hands-on opportunity to experience the river near its mouth. We are grateful to everyone who joined us and to our generous sponsors whose support made this Forum possible. We look forward to continuing this work together.



Spring Forum Kickoff



MS4 Presentations

**Save the Date: LGROW's 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Spring Forum  
May 28<sup>th</sup> - May 30<sup>th</sup> 2026**



Ottawa Sands Kayaking Trip



Grand Lady River Boat Cruise

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# RESOURCES

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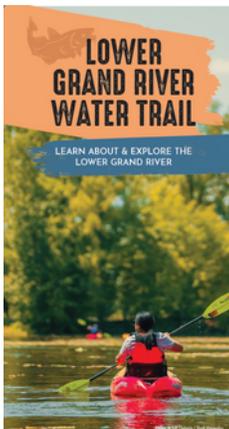


## ADOPT-A-DRAIN GRAND RIVER

More than 1,700 storm drains have been adopted across our watershed, demonstrating the region's commitment to keeping our waterways clean and healthy. Visit [our website](#) today to join the effort and make an impact!



## Lower Grand River Water Trail



The Lower Grand River is an official Michigan Water Trail! Spanning 96 miles from Portland to Grand Haven, this water trail boasts 35 public access points for paddlers, offering a scenic and accessible experience for kayakers, canoeists, and other small-boat enthusiasts.

Visit our Water Trail [webpage](#) to check out the interactive map and more! Find our [paddling guide here](#) and contact us for a **free** physical copy.

## MI Resilient Watersheds Project

In 2025, LGROW partnered with the MI Resilient Watersheds Project and Central Michigan University to deploy over 40 flood gauges throughout our watershed which will help us improve our understanding of flooding in smaller streams. The data collected through these gauges helps identify priority areas for targeted flood solutions—such as green infrastructure—that can reduce flood impacts while also improving water quality. Gauge locations and opportunities to contribute community-reported data are available [here](#).



# LOWER GRAND RIVER ORGANIZATION *of* WATERSHEDS



## Let's Connect!



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# GVMC

GRAND VALLEY METROPOLITAN COUNCIL

LGROW is an agency of GVMC which puts LGROW in a unique position to blend non-governmental organizations with the local government members of GVMC.