

Friends of the St. Clair River

2019 Annual Report



Showing 40 miles of love to the St. Clair River and its watersheds since 2007



Message from our President

Every decision we make, every step we take is rooted in having every person know they are a citizen of their watershed. The overall health of our watershed is dependent upon each one of us and, in turn, has a cascading effect on the wildlife and plants that depend on it.

As we look to the future, not only do we celebrate what we've created, but also look to focus on the utilization of our resources in the most impactful way. Our supporters are helping us accomplish our goals of influencing environmental perceptions, improving water quality, and building healthy ecosystems.

This year has had its challenges: federal roll-backs in environmental protections, near record-high water levels causing flooding and property destruction, concerns with rebuilding Enbridge Line 5 in the St. Clair River, and fish consumption advisories amidst PFAS contamination. Our health is tied to the St. Clair River and we realized that more than ever with the June 28, 2019 CN Rail train derailment leaking sulfuric acid into the St. Clair River rail tunnel. Sometimes our work does feel like two steps forward, one step back. It is comforting to know that, as a network, we support one another.

All we have accomplished in 2019, and all that we are poised to accomplish in the future, is possible because of your support. I hope you are as excited as we are about the future of Friends of the St. Clair River. I am inspired by what you do and excited about the road ahead. Thank you for joining us in building a sustainable future for healthy rivers, clean water and green spaces for Michigan's Thumb Coast.

Sheri J. Faust



Friends of the St. Clair River

Mission

Inspire citizen action through stewardship, monitoring and education to restore, protect and enhance the St. Clair River and its watersheds.

Vision

We will remain a highly visible champion for St. Clair River watershed programs, issues, research, policies and partnerships using sound research, respected advocacy and innovative education.

We believe that the St. Clair River and its watersheds should be a thriving ecosystem that is protected to maximize environmental, social, recreational, and economic values and services.

Board of Directors & Staff

President: Sheri Faust

Treasurer: Dan Danner

Secretary: Kelsey Smith

Directors: Don Rice, Penelope Peck, Carrie Dollar, Deb Matthes, Doreen Kephart, Gordon Ruttan, Alyssa Winters

Staff: Kirsten Lyons, Stewardship Director
Amy Meeker Taylor, Environmental Educator



Proud Members of the Following Organizations:



Anchor Bay Chamber of Commerce
Blue Water Area Chamber of Commerce
Freshwater Future
Marine City Chamber of Commerce
Michigan Association of Non Profits

Michigan Festivals & Events Association
River Network
St. Clair Chamber of Commerce
St. Clair County EDA

News-worthy Achievements

We're proud to share with you our top highlights from 2019

- Stewardship Network Spring Challenge**
46 volunteers removed 330 lbs. of invasive weeds
- Adopt A Sturgeon Roll Out**
36 Lake Sturgeon adopted
- Amazon Wish List**
\$1,000 worth of items donated
- Regional Trails Initiative**
New Bridge to Bay Trail coalition launched
- Community Foundation of St. Clair County Women's Initiative**
Grant Finalist
- Blue Meets Green**
Phase IV Priority Project Finalist



**Play in it today,
drink it tomorrow.**
#keepitclean



Keep It Clean Campaign

In response to the annual Float Down, we launched a campaign aimed at promoting a more responsible use of the St. Clair River. The campaign included messages about stewardship and personal responsibility, a pledge and a free mesh trash bag giveaway. The campaign reached over 100,000 people.



Water Moves, We Move

The River Rat building on the Blue Water River Walk served as our home for over two years. Due to shoreline erosion and maintenance costs, the Community Foundation of St. Clair County demolished the 1950's building and we moved into the Marine City Chamber of Commerce office. The former River Rat site will be converted into wildlife habitat.

Provide Data-Driven Education

We are cultivating the next generation of stewards from K-12 classrooms and beyond

We collaborated with St. Clair County Community College to provide real world experiences such as stream monitoring with biology students, wetland surveys with environmental science students and urban ecology hikes with geography students.

Our programs are designed to inspire curiosity and an appreciation for the outdoors through hands-on science. Highlights included wetland exploration with the City of St. Clair's summer recreation program and welcoming St. Clair Middle School to the Blue Water River Walk for a day-long river exploration program.

Our custom Lake Sturgeon classroom program brings place-based education into 5th grade classrooms by delivering Lake Sturgeon content directly from biologists to explain their research and local importance.



SC4 Partnership included instruction to 115 students from 3 classes



Our watershed education programs reached over 1,000 youth



Our free Sturgeon Science School program served 650 students in 2019 and 2,500 students since 2014

We Foster Collaboration

Our programs inspire curiosity, stewardship, and an appreciation for natural habitats

Sturgeon Festival



2019

“**M**y family and I attended the wonderful sturgeon event this weekend. The event was fantastic. It is our third year attending and our boys love it more and more each year! Keep up the great work! – Stacy

8th Annual Sturgeon Festival

Our innovative 3-day event focused on education and stewardship of the St. Clair River's threatened Lake Sturgeon. The Sturgeon Festival provides an exciting setting to learn the fascinating story of this ancient fish – a mascot for the Great Lakes and their recovery.

Festival highlights included hands-on exhibits, workshops, native American drum ceremonies, kids activity area, and a live sturgeon touch tank. Three Sturgeon Cruises took place on the Huron Lady. A pre-festival event was hosted by War Water Brewery with an exclusive Sturgeon Reef Rye release party.

5th Annual Winter Bird Blast

We brought together the Blue Water Audubon Society and Studio 1219 for a day-long birding extravaganza to explore winter waterfowl along the St. Clair River.

Blue Water Wonderland

Through this Girl Scouts of Southeast Michigan inaugural event in Algonac, we provided hands-on lessons for 500 Girl Scouts to learn about water quality. Girls who completed the activities earned their Great Lakes patch.

St. Clair County Health Department

Our collaboration helped execute a 16-week surveillance program of the black-legged tick at Columbus County Park and Fort Gratiot County Park.

17th Annual Earth Fair

We participated in this two-day event that shares Earth Day messages with thousands to celebrate environmentally friendly living. We have been participating in Earth Fair since 2007.

Advocate for Healthy Water

We manage and monitor green spaces for people, plants and animals

Volunteers contributed 3,100 hours of field work

Water Surveys

How do we share the most accurate and up to date information with the public? We get our boots muddy alongside scientists in the field! We joined Central Michigan University biologists as they surveyed native freshwater mussels in both the Belle and Black Rivers.

Restoration Works

The thriving wetlands in the new Blue Water River Walk County Park are proof that restoration works! Five years ago, this stretch of waterfront was an industrial wasteland and was then restored with state and federal funds to its historic coastal wetland habitat. These three acres now provide habitat for native fish, birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians, while helping control the flow of storm water runoff from Military Street into the St. Clair River.

Paddle Training

MI Paddle Stewards is an invasive species training program and on Aug 10 our event trained 25 paddlers on how to recognize and report aquatic invasive species. Assistance and funding was provided by Michigan Invasive Species Grant, Michigan Sea Grant, Blueways of St. Clair and Lake St. Clair Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area.



Twenty participants joined our free mussel program



Volunteers collect water samples to be analyzed for species diversity



Twenty five paddlers participated in MI Paddle Stewards program

Inspire Watershed Stewardship

We promote healthy living with clean water and green spaces

Our volunteers and community invested in learning, sharing, and in hands-on fieldwork taking care of our environment. Volunteer work included leading tours for school field trips, monitoring and managing native and invasive plant species, habitat field days, citizen science monitoring, trash pick-up and nature walks.



Volunteer Stewards on the River Walk

Butterfly Monitoring Network

Since 2018, our partnership with the Michigan Butterfly Network, a citizen science butterfly monitoring initiative, has allowed our volunteers to gather vital data on local butterfly populations. In 2019, we had 14 volunteers monitor 10 routes and log 300 monitoring and training hours. Butterfly monitoring routes stretch from Lakeport to Algonac, and inland to Goodells and Grant Twp., and cover forest to coastal wetland habitats.

Conservation Stewards

We collaborated with MSU Extension to bring the Michigan Conservation Stewards program to St. Clair County for the first time. Twenty participants spent seven weeks in the classroom, online and in the field, and each contributed 40 hours of conservation-related community service to complete their certification. The Michigan Conservation Stewards program is a volunteer training program to teach science-based ecosystem management principles to help restore and conserve Michigan ecosystems. Congratulations graduates!



Volunteer Stewards on the River Walk



OptOutside Hike at Columbus County Park

OptOutside Hike

Over 100 people ditched Black Friday shopping on Nov 29 and grabbed their boots to take a guided hike through Columbus County Park's hills, wetlands and woodlands. Our hike offered a green alternative to holiday shopping and ended with a bonfire.

Remain a Trusted Environmental Leader

We share information rooted in science to support the health and well-being of our natural resources

St. Clair River Area of Concern

The Area of Concern program has evolved into an effective model for restoring the international St. Clair River. With our St. Clair River Canadian neighbors to the east, collective accomplishments are cleaning up the St. Clair River. The progress is rewarding to witness the amazing restoration and revitalization work underway.



Lake St. Clair Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (Lake St. Clair CISMA)

We cooperated with the Lake St. Clair CISMA, under the umbrella of Six Rivers Land Conservancy, for invasive species monitoring, training, reporting, and management. Our partnership with Lake St. Clair CISMA helps us stay current on the latest research, best practices, and emerging issues in invasive species management.

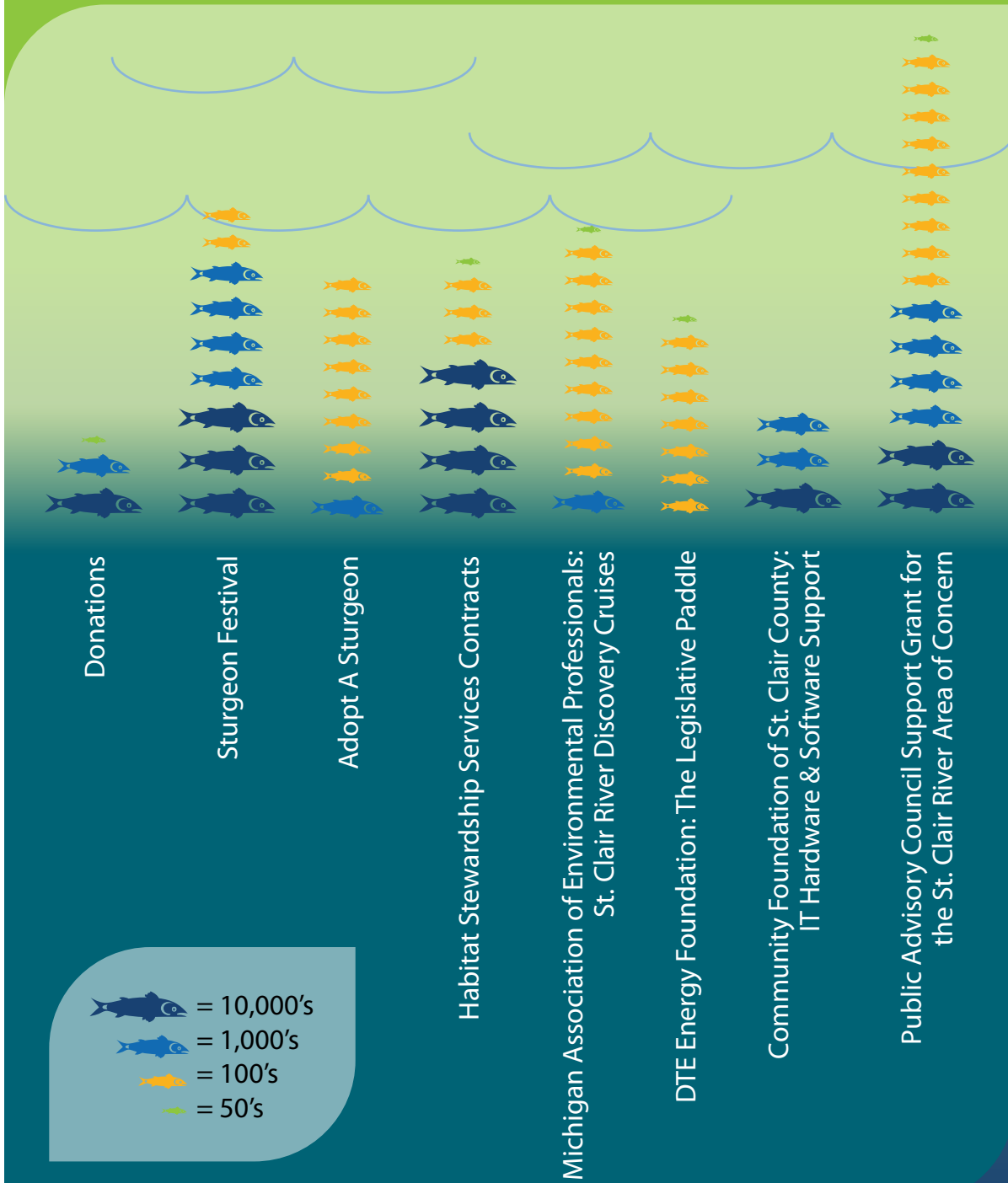


Volunteers remove Garlic Mustard at Fort Gratiot County Park

“Just wanted to let you know I enjoyed a very wonderful and informative walk along the Blue Water River Walk. The plants and flowers are beautiful and the butterflies were abundant. You're doing great work providing such a nice opportunity for people, such as myself, to enjoy nature. - Bob

2019 Financial Report

In 2019, we were generously supported by donations, contracts, grants and sponsorships. These investments help us inspire, educate and connect people to the outdoors and are an investment in making our region a better place for all. Your gifts have an immediate impact on the local environment, as families have the opportunity to learn how to care for our natural resources through stewardship and education, and we cultivate informed citizens capable of making decisions that protect our watershed. Thank you for your support.



Shout Out | Sponsors and Partners

Our success is made possible by our partner's and sponsor's contributions. We offer our sincerest gratitude to our generous sponsors and partners!



- Anchor Bay Scuba
- Blueways of St. Clair
- Blue Water YMCA
- Cargill, Inc.
- City of Port Huron Parks & Recreation
- Community Foundation of St. Clair County
- DTE Energy Foundation
- Domtar
- Eighth Day Media
- Friends of the St. Clair River Canada
- Great Lakes Fishery Commission
- Gregory A.D.
- Gun Lake Tribe (Match-e-be-nash-she-wish)
- Huron Lady II
- Lake St. Clair Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area
- Marysville Ethanol
- Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy
- MI Department of Health & Human Services
- MI Sea Grant
- Port Huron Museums
- SEA LIFE Michigan Aquarium
- SEMCO ENERGY Gas Company
- St. Clair County Community College
- St. Clair County Health Department
- St. Clair County Parks and Recreation
- St. Clair River Binational Public Advisory Council
- Sturgeon For Tomorrow
- St. Clair River / Detroit River
- Sturgeon For Tomorrow – Black Lake
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- United States Geological Service - Great Lakes Service Center

"I want to thank you for being the fiduciary for the DTE Energy Foundation grant for the Legislative paddle. The grant was a key piece to make the day successful! – Lori Eschenberg, Blueways of St. Clair

"Thank you so very much for donating 30 brand new pair of gardening gloves to Memphis Elementary School's Butterfly Garden and Outdoor Learning Center. They have already been put to good use by students this summer. – Monique



Friends of the St. Clair River
Michigan's Thumb Coast Watershed Organization
www.scriver.org



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