



# Innovating

## A Better Great Lakes Future



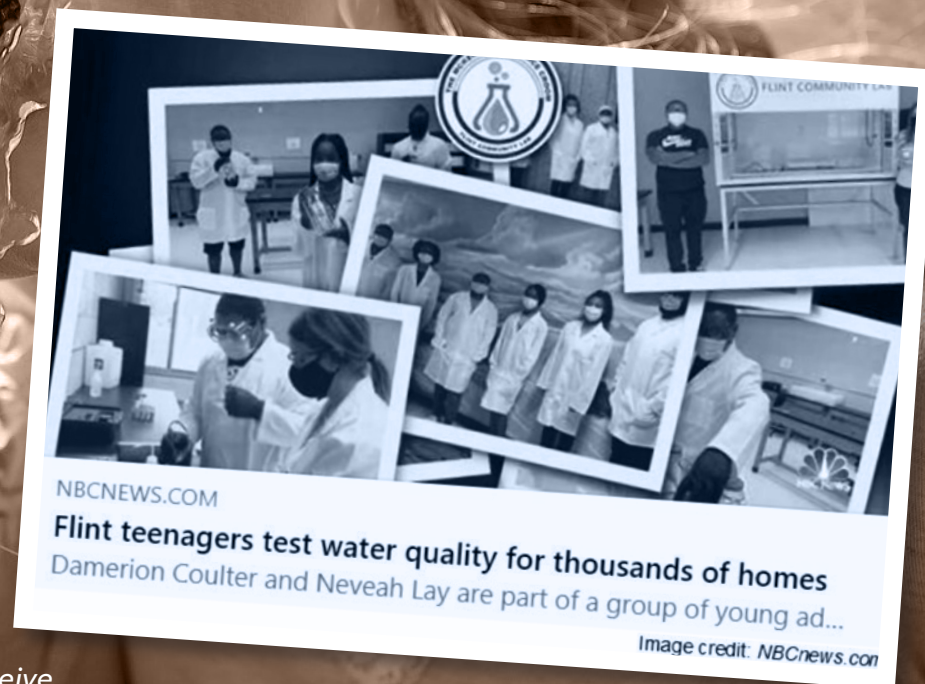
2019 | 2020 ANNUAL REPORT



# Ensuring The Healthy Future Of Our Waters

For over 25 years, Freshwater Future has supported over 2,000 citizens' groups in both urban and rural communities in the Great Lakes Region and provided over \$5 million in funding through more than 1,260 grants.

Our work has supported the protection of thousands of acres of wetlands and miles of shoreline. We have helped make communities more resilient to the impacts of climate change while reconnecting thousands of residents to running water and helped communities better understand the safety of their water.



*The Flint Community Lab continues to receive national recognition for its innovation in achieving community-led solutions.*

*We worked with our community partners to ensure over 500,000 people had their water reconnected or prevented it from being disconnected so they could wash their hands during the pandemic.*

# Message From The Executive Director And President

**T**his past year marked a major milestone for Freshwater Future—twenty-five years of service to Great Lakes communities. Over the last several decades we’ve made effective progress working collaboratively with partners, and the cumulative effect is a deep, vibrant network of thousands of organizations and community groups working together to protect the people and water resources of the Great Lakes Region.

Our mission and services are focused on building an effective Great Lakes water and people movement. We work with groups at the national, regional, state and local levels. As such, we facilitate communications across all these levels resulting in effective and innovative collaborative efforts.

In 2020, even as COVID-19 impacted the world, we used our ability to innovate to not just continue our services but ramp them up in response to pandemic-related water needs. For the first time, we convened the All About Water meetings virtually, garnering more participation than ever; celebrated the grand opening of the much-anticipated Flint Community Lab through virtual tours and events as well as publicity such as People Magazine and NBC Nightly News; assisted local communities in continuing critical Water Council meetings on priority drinking water issues; and assisted a myriad of organizations to grow their efficiency and effectiveness.

Rather than pulling back during the pandemic, we directed more resources into ensuring water service access so critical for hand-washing, educating residents on how to protect themselves from lead in their water and preventing new drinking water contamination through mine safety laws and so much more.

Freshwater Future’s strength has always been to drive and support collaboration. We know that complex problems are best solved by bringing together a diversity of voices and ideas, particularly those most impacted by the problem. Looking forward, we will continue to uplift our legacy of social impact by building capacity in the most vulnerable communities, making key moves to protect water in its place, and driving strategic water policy. We’re excited to bring in the next generation of water warriors, environmental scientists and advocates, and build and sustain a healthy Great Lakes Region for years to come!

Sincerely,



**Jill M. Ryan,**  
Executive Director

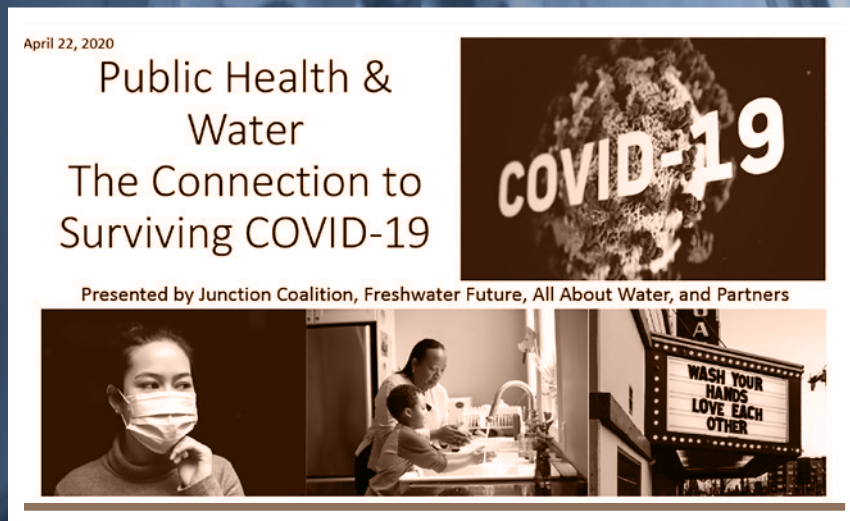


**Stephanie Smith,**  
Board President



# Communication And Connection— Embracing Online Technology

**W**hile the COVID-19 pandemic forced us to cancel in-person events, we used online platforms to stay connected and develop alternative virtual convenings. We also shifted our water work to support community partners' changing priorities to water access during COVID. This included modifying existing tools and technology such as the stormwater app and mobile QR barcode to support on-the-ground efforts to identify residents without water to provide water supplies and assist with reconnection.



*Freshwater Future staff used technology to get vital resource information to community partners during the pandemic.*

■ Freshwater Future staff are located all around the Great Lakes region, as a result we have used video conferencing and technology to connect for over ten years. This expertise has allowed us to assist our community partners as they adapt to the changes from the pandemic.



# Water Affordability

**A**s water contamination, aging infrastructure, replacing dangerous lead pipes and other factors dramatically increase the cost of water for families, Freshwater Future and our partners are pushing to ensure that affordable water is available to everyone. Freshwater Future has promoted innovative solutions to reduce the overall costs of providing and treating water for a sustainable future.

- Water is necessary for life and is a human right.
- Water affordability is a growing problem in the United States. Researchers have estimated that within the coming few years approximately 33% of the U.S. population will have water bills that are not affordable.



## 10-Point Water Affordability Plan

**The 10-Point Water Affordability Plan is a set of consensus principles developed by communities to formally address the crisis of unaffordable water service for all.**

**T**his past year, we worked closely with We the People of Detroit to share the 10-Point Water Affordability Plan to elevate these principles in policy discussions on water affordability. The University of Michigan Law Clinic

provided assistance and research on how the 10-Points could be incorporated into policies on affordability. We continue to work with partners at national, state and local policy tables to ensure the principles be included in policy language.

- During the pandemic, Freshwater Future used our responsive Take Action online portal to reach out to thousands of members and partners on water shut-off moratoria policies in our Great Lakes States. As a result, over 700 people took action and voiced support for keeping residents' water turned on and protecting public health.



**T**he All About Water initiative brings together funders, policy organizations and on-the-ground groups for learning and relationship-building to promote unified local, state, regional, and national advocacy efforts that improve water safety, access, and efficiency of water infrastructure.

■ The fall 2019 All About Water convening brought together 115 people to discuss water infrastructure safety and affordability.

■ The summer 2020 gathering included more than 150 people for a 6-session virtual series on water affordability, equity and justice, and solutions to move water affordability and public health decisions forward.



*Great Lakes Days in D.C.— Freshwater Future staff and All About Water partners visited Washington D.C. in March 2020, just prior to the COVID-19 shut down to educate elected officials. Community leaders met with members of the Congressional Black Caucus and the Latin Caucus to share stories and needs for drinking water safety, affordability and equity issues.*



# Taking Actions to Ensure Safe Drinking Water

**H**ealthy people and communities require access to safe drinking water.

Freshwater Future worked diligently this past year with leaders and communities to address threats such as lead contamination, PFAS and harmful algal blooms.

■ We believe everyone in the Great Lakes region deserves access to safe, clean drinking water.

## Flint Community Lab Celebrates Grand Opening

**T**he Flint Community Lab is the first of its kind in the world to provide a trusted community-based laboratory for residents for free water testing of lead and other pollutants.

Through generous financial support, the Flint Community Lab is now a space open to the entire community that unifies residents around a common issue—safety of water in their homes. Housed at the Flint Development Center, Freshwater Future has been honored to partner and help turn this innovative project into a reality. With the lab now fully functional, teams of students and volunteers will take and analyze water samples, survey homeowners, and provide filter, fixture and plumbing education providing information and trust for the community and workforce training for students.

■ In 2020, the Flint Community Lab gained national media attention and was recognized with the US Water Prize for Outstanding Cross-Sector Partnership.

*Shelly Sparks, Executive Director of the Flint Development Center where the Flint Community Lab is housed, holds the 2020 US Water Prize award.*



# Testing Program Offers Low-Cost PFAS Screening

A family of chemicals known as PFAS or perfluoroalkyl substances are used in firefighting foams, nonstick cookware, food packaging, stain and water repellents, and many other common products. These harmful chemicals can contribute to a number of health issues such as thyroid problems, kidney and bladder cancers, developmental delays in children and more.



*A group of Pellston, Michigan student scientists working with Freshwater Future detected high PFAS levels and discovered a large plume likely originating at the nearby airport. The state is now providing water and filters for homes and businesses with high PFAS levels. Other locations in Michigan and the Great Lakes Region have been identified with high PFAS and are causing governmental agencies to conduct testing and take action.*



*The Freshwater Future team partnered with the University of Michigan Biological Station laboratory in Pellston, Michigan to offer low cost PFAS screening tests. The lab processed over 400 samples to help residents across the country gain information about the safety of their water.*



# Water Councils

**T**he formation of Community Water Councils fits perfectly with Freshwater Future's mission to be a catalyst for community action that strengthens policies designed to safeguard the waters of the Great Lakes region. Through our programs and services we've supported Community Water Councils to address a variety of water issues during the COVID-19 pandemic, including lead contamination, water access, affordability, and toxic chemicals.



- During the pandemic, in partnership with Water Councils in Detroit, Chicago, Toledo, and Benton Harbor, we helped hundreds of people get water turned back on in their homes and provided funding and support to provide alternative water supplies to protect people's lives and public health.
- Thousands of people in partner communities across the Great Lakes have received education information on no lead is safe in drinking water, collecting samples, filter use, flushing, and on water services to directly help those in need.
- With Freshwater Future's help, Community Water Councils are organizing and stepping up in cities and rural areas to ask critical questions about the safety and affordability of their drinking water.
- In response to active resident involvement through the Toledo Water Council and other partners; the City of Toledo and the Department of the Public Utilities terminated water shutoffs due to nonpayment during the pandemic. The Toledo Water Council further pushed the City Council for tenant protections from landlords threatening to shut water off as a tactic to force evictions and requested the city adopt a debt forgiveness program for water customers to help make water affordability a reality for all residents.
- The Benton Harbor Community Water Council trained community volunteers about proper filter installation, use and maintenance; and helped to distribute hundreds of filters to residents. The group also stepped in to collect hundreds of water samples to help the City comply with requirements of the state and U.S. EPA lead and copper standards for drinking water.



# Great Lakes Network

**T**he Great Lakes Network (GLN) promotes collaboration between local and regional organizations to advance water policy in the Great Lakes region. The GLN extends resources, support, and communication across jurisdictional borders to identify opportunities and tackle threats together. Our community is home to an array of diverse perspectives and backgrounds that—when brought together—foster creative problem solving and innovation. Over 100 participants are invited to bi-monthly, virtual meetings where we identify opportunities to take action, share lessons and information across jurisdictions, and reflect on strategies.

- The Great Lakes Network partners are tackling big issues, such as stopping the Line 5 pipeline and proposed tunnel under the Straits of Mackinac. Groups are mounting pressure on both sides of the border to stop the use of this pipeline.
- The Great Lakes Network awarded 15 grants totaling \$31,500 to Great Lakes Network members. These grants support organizations working to stop destructive mining practices, reduce agricultural pollution flowing into our rivers and lakes, and provide education and create policies around affordable water.

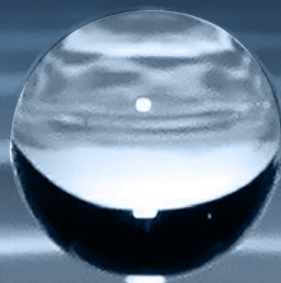


[www.greatlakesnetwork.org](http://www.greatlakesnetwork.org)



# Grants Programs

**F**reshwater Future helps create and strengthen community action on water issues through our grants programs. Our grants program has awarded \$5 million to over 1,260 groups.



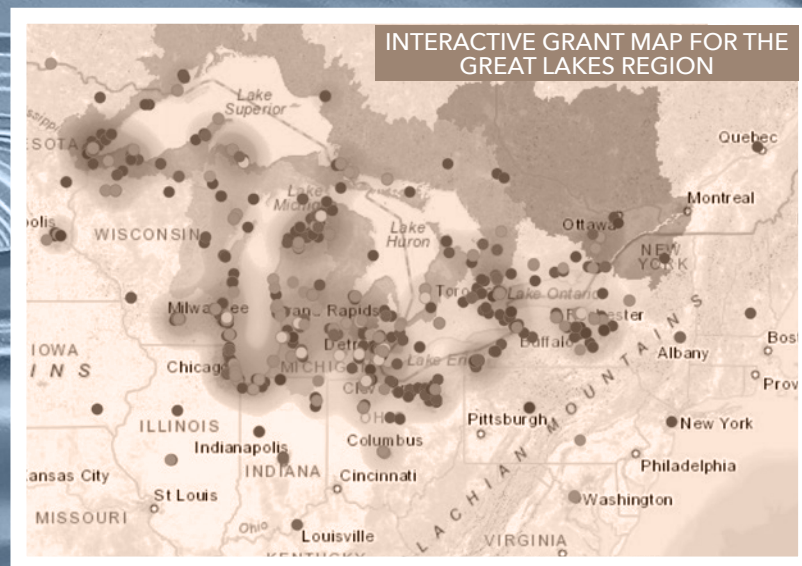
The projects we fund go beyond education and stewardship by providing people or institutions with the tools, resources, and information they need to implement lasting change.



*With support from the Freshwater Future grants program, Concerned Citizens of Butler and Beyond stopped a proposed 350 ton/day sludge composting facility from moving forward; protecting public health, the environment, and the local economy.*



*The Coalition to SAVE the Menominee River and Mining Action Group received grant funds to help their work to ensure a proposed mine can't harm the Menominee River, Lake Michigan and the surrounding area.*



*Explore our interactive grant map on our website to see the power and impact of people working to protect their drinking water and surface waters in the Great Lakes region.*



# Resident's Water Vision and Strategic Plan 2020-2022

In 2020, Freshwater Future published Resident's Water Vision and Strategic Plan 2020-2022 with input gathered from over 700 residents and our member groups on the state of water in their communities, their hopes for the future, and the opportunities they see for improvement.

Freshwater Future recognizes that the threats facing our waters require bold strategic actions. Over the next three years, our work will drive us toward achieving our vision of water as Revered, Safe, Clean, Accessible and Sustainable.

## The Five Themes:

### revered--

The law and popular culture will recognize the fundamental importance of water resources to human life, as well as their value outside of human use and consumption.

### safe--

Families can trust that their tap water, well water, and places of recreation are free of harmful contaminants and toxic chemicals.

### clean--

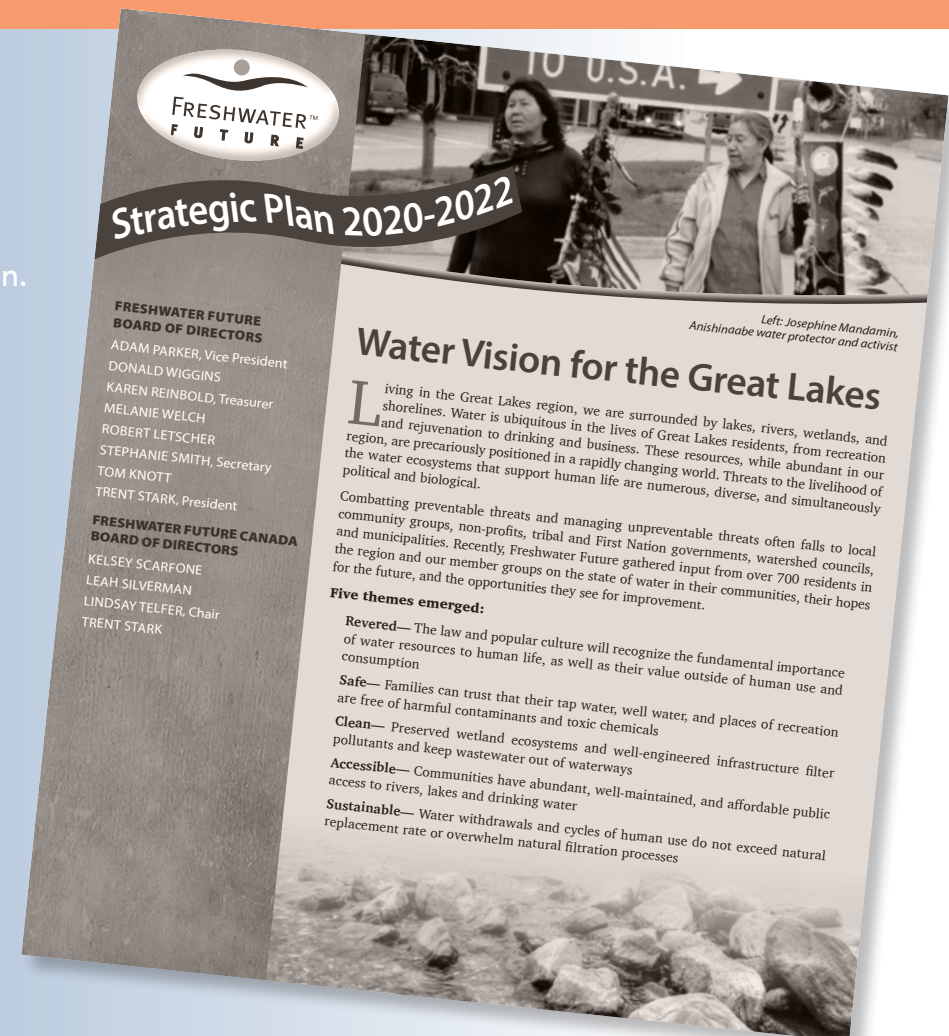
Preserved wetland ecosystems and well-engineered infrastructure filter pollutants and keep wastewater out of waterways.

### accessible--

Communities have abundant, well-maintained, and affordable public access to rivers, lakes and drinking water.

### sustainable--

Water withdrawals and cycles of human use do not exceed natural replacement rate or overwhelm natural filtration processes.





# Consulting Program Progress

In the last year, Freshwater Future's consulting programs helped grow the capacity of 30-plus local groups and leaders providing over 1,000 hours of technical service valued at \$100,000. While work plans were tailored to fit each organization's specific needs, common focus areas included: IRS federal 501(c)(3) filing; financial management and bookkeeping, Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan guidance, strategic planning, communication tools and messaging, and effective programmatic and issue planning. Freshwater Future staff also trained and assisted community organizations to test for lead in 60 homes in three cities. For local groups just getting started, we provided fiscal sponsorship to help them leverage grant dollars for their environmental justice work.



Staff enjoy time together for learning and planning prior to pandemic.



PHOTOS LEFT TO RIGHT: Weekly online staff meetings keep everyone updated on projects and issues around the Great Lakes Region. Staff member Alexis Smith engages with communities online about water affordability issues. Freshwater Future's Brandon Tyus uses video to remotely train volunteers on tap water sampling best practices. Staff and Board held a retreat in Novi, MI in the fall of 2019 for planning, brainstorming, and sharing.

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**T**hank you to our more than 400 individual donors and organizations who support Freshwater Future through generous financial gifts and taking actions to protect water resources in the Great Lakes Region. Our network of online subscribers has steadily grown to over 6,000 while our social media followers top 3,000.

## Thank you to the following contributors for their significant financial gifts

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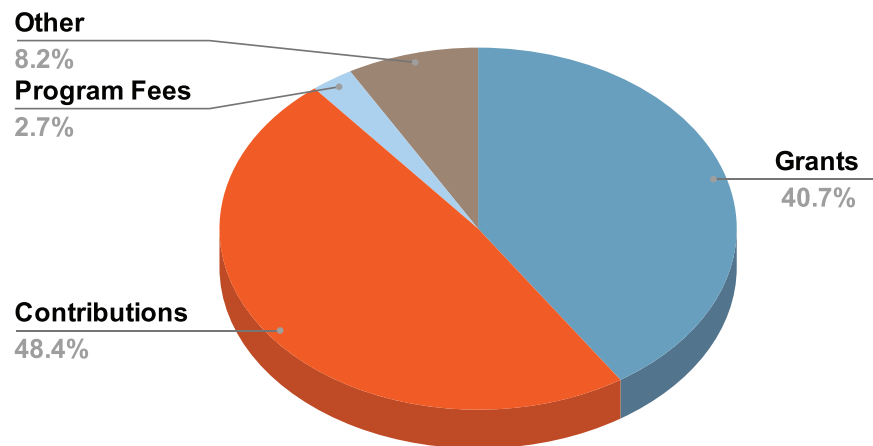


# Financial Information

*Thank You* to all our donors and contributors for your part in making a difference—you make this work possible.

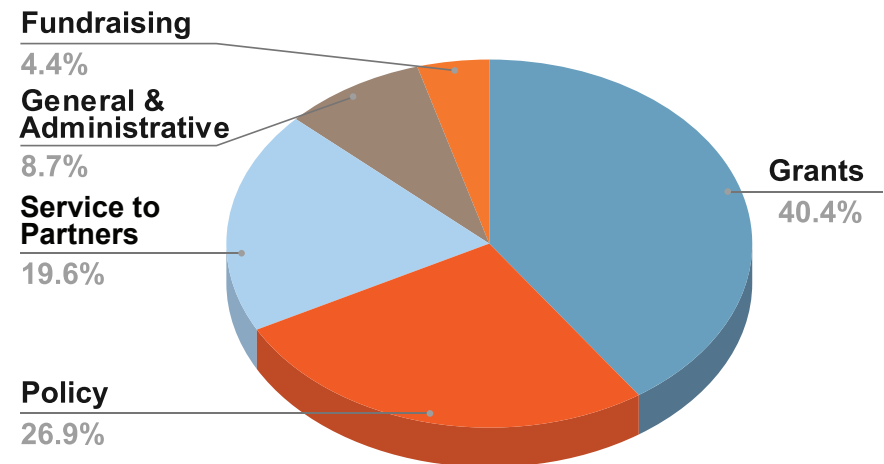
## INCOME

Fiscal Year 2019/20 Income Total – \$ 1,296,751



## EXPENSES

Fiscal Year 2019/20 Expense Total – \$1,114,072



Expense figures based on annual audited financial statements. Freshwater Future's most recently filed annual information returns (Federal 990) are available for review upon request and through GuideStar and our website



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