



# Voices freshwater

2021 SERIES, ISSUE THREE

NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARIES  
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## U.S. Makes Investment in Water Systems: The Real Work Starts NOW

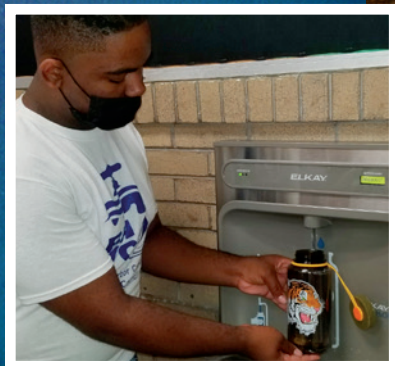
**A**fter decades of disinvestment in our infrastructure and water systems, the U.S. federal government passed a \$1 trillion Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act, investing in our nation's infrastructure, everything from roads to internet to public transportation and more. Although drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure are critical pieces of the funding only six percent will go towards water projects.

Now is when the real work starts—helping communities access the federal funding to solve persistent problems with drinking water and wastewater systems. Freshwater Future has already started! The All About Water convening in October focused specifically on how communities can access federal water funds that are coming

down the pipeline. (See more on page three, a recording of the session is available on Freshwater Future's YouTube channel.)

We believe it is critical that residents get involved to help their communities access the funding and ensure it is spent on what is needed most, whether it is replacing lead water pipes, cleaning up toxins in drinking water, providing safe alternative water supplies, upgrading treatment plants, etc. The next All About Water convening, in the first quarter of 2022, will help residents and community groups ensure their communities are able to access the funds, and make clear what their communities need most.

*Article continued on page 2*



Freshwater Future helps secure new water filtration stations in Benton Harbor Schools.







## The Real Work Starts NOW continued from page 1

Freshwater Future and our partners in the All About Water collaborative have been working hard to ensure that as this money flows from Congress, state and municipal processes are in place to ensure that funding can go to solving water problems where it is needed most. This includes training community groups to ensure their municipalities have the tools to access the funding and that community voices are at the forefront of identifying community needs. One of these structural pieces was providing a definition of “disadvantaged community,” since legislation has not done so.

Historically, rural and low-income communities have struggled to access federal infrastructure dollars that flow through states for a number of reasons including lack of staffing to complete the process of applying for funds, ability to provide or access required matching funds, lack of resident base able to repay funds when they are in the form of loans, and more. Provisions in the bills are now trying to remedy these disparities, including providing a certain amount of funds being available to “disadvantaged communities” only.

One or two federal funding initiatives can’t possibly solve all of the water needs. A few of the other threats Freshwater Future is concerned about include:

- Comprehensive approach to managing the thousands of PFAS chemicals as a family or group instead of one by one.
- Funding to remove all of the lead piping in public water systems.

- Support to help communities build long-term resilience to flooding and other climate threats.

If your community needs fall into one of the four water investments areas below, we encourage you to get involved and work with your municipality to ensure they are preparing to apply.

### Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act Anticipated Water Investments\*

1. Wastewater and stormwater projects are slated to receive nearly \$20 billion.
2. Drinking water projects will receive \$17 billion and an additional \$15 billion for lead service line replacement.
3. Addressing the toxic family of chemicals called PFAS is anticipated to receive \$10 billion.
4. Great Lakes Restoration Initiative will receive supplemental \$1 billion to support clean-up of toxic hot spots and environmental restoration.

*\*estimates only, subject to change*



The toxic family of chemicals used for waterproofing, fire fighting foams, and stain repellents are showing up in drinking water and surface waters. An anticipated \$10 billion from the infrastructure act will be divided to help communities dealing with this harmful pollutant in drinking water and surface waters.



The harmful algal blooms in Lake Erie are fed by phosphorus pollution from farms and to a lesser extent sewage from wastewater treatment plants. Funding from the infrastructure bill of nearly \$20 billion is anticipated to improve wastewater treatment and reduce phosphorus pollution.



## All About Water Convening Talks Federal Water Funding



**F**reshwater Future's All About Water convening in October was incredibly impactful. The focus was how communities can access federal water funds that are coming down the pipeline, what the processes require, and how residents and community groups can participate in the process. We are especially grateful for a community-oriented State Revolving Fund 101 session that helped provide the basics of how these federal funds pass to states and are then utilized by municipalities. The next convening discussing strategies and solutions is being planned for early 2022. Watch our weekly email newsletter for details on how to register for this upcoming event. Not receiving Freshwater Weekly? Go to our website to sign-up today.

*The All About Water Convening featured a slate of experts who walk participants through all facets of state revolving funds. Keynote speaker Omar Muhammad, a community advocate and activist since 2007 and the Executive Director for the Lowcountry Alliance for Model Communities (LAMC), discussed the need for community outreach in efforts to access these crucial funds.*



## Lake Erie Alive Unites To Reduce Toxic Algae

**L**ake Erie may be the smallest of the Great Lakes, but its importance to the physical, economic, and spiritual health in the central Great Lakes region is HUGE. Toxic or harmful algal blooms (HABs) fed by agricultural pollution threaten local fisheries, tourism and drinking water sources all around the lake. The blooms that look like green slime can kill pets, suffocate fish, stifle tourism, not to mention increase the cost of water treatment in communities downstream of agricultural areas.

The Lake Erie Alive initiative unites people and communities as they work together to protect and restore this treasured waterbody. Coordinated by Freshwater Future Canada, Canadian Freshwater Alliance, and Environmental Defence, Lake Erie Alive participants help by urging federal, state, and provincial governments and local communities to take actions to reduce the pollution. It also provides a way to celebrate this amazing Great Lake through social media.

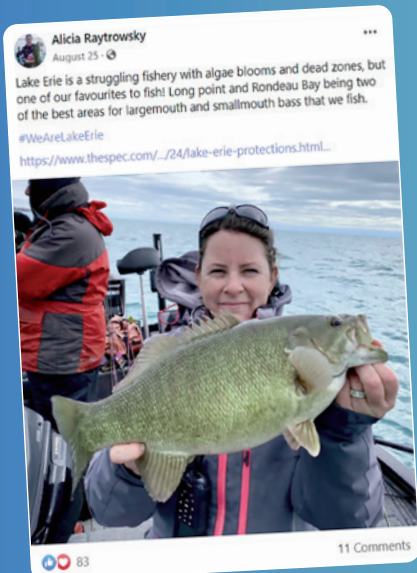


**LAKE ERIE ALIVE**

**LEARN MORE**  
[FRESHWATERFUTURECANADA.CA](https://FRESHWATERFUTURECANADA.CA)



This isn't the first time the health of Lake Erie was at a tipping point. Fifty years ago, Lake Erie was declared dead. A coordinated effort that resulted in new regulations and pollution reduction worked. The commitment to keep Lake Erie Alive is needed again. You can be a part of this effort to revive Lake Erie!





## Actions To Address High Lead Levels In Drinking Water

**A** crisis can bring out the best in people. Volunteers for the Benton Harbor Community Water Council (BHCWC) responded to the “do not drink the water” decree by helping to deliver upwards of 9,000 cases of water every week. The water was provided by the state after Governor Whitmer signed an executive directive on October 14 to “coordinate all available state resources to deliver safe drinking water to residents in Benton Harbor,” where lead levels have been high for over three years.

This action comes after years of struggle by Benton Harbor residents to be heard outside of their community in order to secure the resources needed to safeguard public health in the city from lead. Because no level of lead is safe, residents have needed alternative water, filters and educational information. Freshwater Future has been honored to work with residents and the BHCWC to ensure resources continued to be available in Benton Harbor to not only inform residents of the lead issue and how to protect their families, but also to work toward a resolution that returns the water system to providing safe drinking water, which is what every resident wants and should expect.

Recently a collaboration of more than 20 community and environmental groups, led by the BHCWC, Great Lakes Environmental Law Center, People’s Water Board and National Resources Defense Council petitioned the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to step in and

help Benton Harbor. This action and the attention it garnered, finally pushed the struggle into national and state focus. We thank all of those groups for their leadership in this effort. Reverend Edward Pinkney, President and CEO of the BHCWC stated, “after years of struggle to raise awareness, I am happy we were able to work together to achieve this declaration. The BHCWC and our allies will be here to ensure that these statements are followed with action to safeguard the health of the people of Benton Harbor.”

After three years of being out of compliance with the water standards set by the state of Michigan at 15 ppb of lead, massive attention from the public and the government is creating new found support for the BHCWC. The group has championed the work the past three years to ensure their neighbors’ safety and their access to clean and safe water.

Reverend Pinkney requested the state, on behalf of the BHCWC, to tell residents directly that the water is unsafe to drink currently, and therefore they should utilize bottled water for drinking, cooking, and making baby formula. Finally, the state under pressure made the announcement that residents should use bottled water on October 21. Governor Whitmer’s announcement invokes a sense of urgency to pool resources from the state to provide clean and accessible water.

## Water Filtration Stations Installed At Benton Harbor



**D**uring the late summer months, Freshwater Future worked with the Benton Harbor Community Water Council and Nalgene Water Fund to secure filtered water refill stations for all schools in Benton Harbor, MI. The work of the Water Council recently brought the first two of eight filter stations to the schools just as schools opened up for the fall semester. In addition, hundreds of reusable water bottles donated by the Nalgene Water Fund are being distributed to students so they can enjoy the water from the new filtered stations and a local Benton Harbor artist has

designed a sticker that’s helping to promote the importance of clean water to youth. Within the next few months, a total of 8 filtered water refill stations will be installed across all the district’s schools. Freshwater Future will take monthly samples from the water refill stations and test them for lead at the state-of-the-art Flint Community Lab to determine when filters need changing.

*Rev Edward Pinkney, President and CEO of the Benton Harbor Community Water Council demonstrates the Water Filtration System at Inauguration Ceremony held at the local high school in early September.*







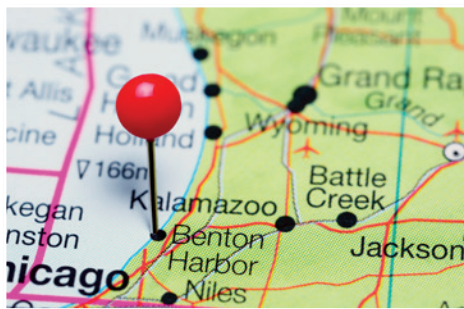
## Due To Benton Harbor Residents' Leadership

While the state Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy recently stated there is “in general an improvement overall,” we have seen no evidence of such improvement. We look forward to working with the state to understand where improvements to the lead situation exist and where there are opportunities to improve further.

Benton Harbor residents have continued to be resilient in their efforts to ensure the safety of fellow residents', and show no signs of giving up. “Benton Harbor residents have created solutions to educate and keep people safe in the community over the past three years, and those efforts should continue to lead this work. What will certainly help are the resources and the expertise the state can bring to bear on this problem,” said Benton Harbor City Commissioner MaryAlice Adams.

Residents working through the BHCWC have been steering the way making sure information, water and filters are distributed in the community by listening to the needs of the community. As the resources provided by the government are certainly positive, the resources they provide will be

most effective if they listen to and work with community groups like the BHCWC. Community groups are in the best position to continue to lead the good work from the residents' perspective. Working together to alleviate water insecurity can be an example of how the government and community collaborate for the most effective outcome for the residents living with unsafe water.



## High School



*Rev. Pinkney at All About Water Convening in 2019.*





Freshwater Voices is a joint production of Freshwater Future, a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization and Freshwater Future Canada, a registered Canadian charity.

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## Freshwater Future Canada Welcomes New Program Director

Freshwater Future Canada has a new program director, Andréa Dube. Andréa has over a decade of experience working on a variety of conservation programs with non-profit and government organizations in Ontario. These include developing and implementing watershed strategies, coordinating drinking water protection plans, creating community-based conservation programs, and delivering funding programs to increase the adoption of beneficial agricultural practices. Andréa has a BSc in Environmental Science from the University of Guelph in Ontario and a MSc in Environmental Studies from Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia. She lives in Guelph, Ontario, in the Lake Erie watershed, and enjoys hiking and paddling with her family.



Andréa Dube

## Thank You To Our Intern

Thank you to our policy intern Courtney Platt. Courtney is currently in her second year of law school at the University of Toledo College of Law. Courtney graduated from Youngstown State University in 2020 with a degree in Criminal Justice focusing on legal processes. She also had an opportunity to study chemistry for two years and researched water purification, sparking her passion for environmental law.

## Good-Byes And Welcomes To Board Members

Freshwater Future would like to extend our gratitude and appreciation for our retiring board members, Karen Reinbold, Melanie Welch, and Tom Knott, who have dedicated countless hours and energy to help govern our organization over the past decade.

Filling these big shoes are new board members Lisa Hardin and Lauren McConnell who will serve as co-treasurers. Lisa and Lauren, both from the Chicago area, bring a wealth of experience and skills to aid in our financial management. Welcome Lisa and Lauren!



Lisa Hardin



Lauren McConnell

## In Memory Of A.J. Birkbeck

We are saddened to learn of the passing of A.J. Birkbeck on November 1, 2021. A.J. was instrumental in forming the Michigan PFAS Alliance, a statewide organization focused on addressing PFAS contamination and legislative solutions. We were pleased and honored to award A.J. our Freshwater Future Hero Award in 2019 for his tireless efforts in protecting water resources. One of the many things that will live on in his legacy is the Michigan PFAS Alliance that he founded, which will continue to lead advocacy on this harmful pollutant.



A.J. Birkbeck



# Thank You to All of Our Donors from June 1 through October 31, 2021

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## WALK PADDLE & ROLL CHALLENGE

Thank you to the following donors who supported our 2021 Walk Paddle & Roll challenge through generous financial gifts. Thank you also to our Board and Staff, located across the region, who uplifted this year's challenge through a variety of healthy, fun, and environmentally-conscious personal challenges:

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# Congratulations To 2021 Freshwater Future Project Grant Recipients

Clean, safe and affordable water in the Great Lakes region requires successful on-the-ground efforts to protect and restore those waters from source to tap. Through our grants programs, we provide funding to help communities restore or protect their valued water resources—drinking water, lakes, rivers, wetlands, groundwater and shorelines. Our grants support community-driven projects that encourage permanent and broad-reaching change at the corporate, community or regulatory level.

- Coalition to Save the Menominee River, Wausaukee, WI
- Just Transition Northwest Indiana, Michigan City, IN
- Rescue Lake Simcoe, Aurora, ON
- Sterling Water Stewards, Sterling, NY
- Blue Mountain Watershed Trust Foundation, Collingwood, ON
- Friends of the Black River Forest, Town of Wilson, WI
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**C**onsider making a donation in honor of family and friends to Freshwater Future this holiday season. The recipient will receive a greeting card with acknowledgement.

RACHEL KRAMER | LAKE MICHIGAN | FLICKR.COM

## Freshwater Future's 2020 25th Annual Report Now Available

**F**reshwater Future's 2020 annual report highlights our year's work and demonstrates the strength and resiliency of our communities in the face of turmoil. Together, Freshwater with our partners from all over the Great Lakes region stepped up to redefine what impact meant, adapting to COVID-19, and furthering efforts to ensure drinking water is clean, safe, and affordable. The report is available for download online or to request a paper copy, please email [leslie@freshwaterfuture.org](mailto:leslie@freshwaterfuture.org)



**LEFT: Bay View, Michigan Scarrow Friday Forum Lecture Series** – Freshwater Future's Executive Director, Jill M. Ryan spoke to an attentive crowd of over 100 on July 9th. The lively discussion focused on Great Lakes water resource topics ranging from contaminants, water withdrawals, climate change and lake levels to Mackinac Straits Line 5.

**RIGHT:** Prior to the surge of the COVID-19 delta variant, staff, board, and members attending the Bay View enjoyed coffee and conversation on the porch of the Terrace Inn. Here, Ann Baughman, Associate Director catches up with board members Dr. Rob Letscher and Trent Stark.



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