



FRESHWATER™
F U T U R E

ANNUAL
REPORT
2020-2021

MESSAGE

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND BOARD CHAIR

In 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic continued to cause crises and challenges for communities around the Great Lakes, and Freshwater Future responded to these increased needs by intensifying its work with community groups across the region to make sure water sources are accessible, safe and toxin-free so people can stay healthy during the pandemic and beyond.

Freshwater Future is well-positioned to continue to support and build on these community-based efforts, and we are honored to serve the role of elevating the voices of community-level groups. We are committed to helping people tell their stories, amplify their voices, and participate in democratic processes to create lasting change and develop leaders.

We firmly believe that communities can and will solve the problems they are faced with if they have the information, tools and support needed. Freshwater Future will continue to advocate for affordability policies at the local level, fight to end water shut-offs in cities across our region, help communities get funding to replace lead service lines and understand the extent of lead contamination in our water infrastructure, and protect rural communities against toxic pollution like PFAS in wells and surface water.

We're excited to be reaching more communities with enhanced tools and resources on keeping drinking water safe, training more youth to build tomorrow's leaders and scientists, helping more community water councils with effective outreach, and diligently pushing for policy solutions on water affordability, infrastructure upgrades, and climate impacts that protect our drinking water and waterways.

None of this vital work is possible without the commitment of our entire Great Lakes community. It is because of you that we're helping to ensure the healthy future of our waters for everyone in the region. Thank you for being part of our community!



JILL M. RYAN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



STEPHANIE SMITH
BOARD CHAIR



Over the last year, we've made significant progress on our 2019-2021 Strategic Plan goals of access for all, affordable rates, comprehensive monitoring of quality, transparency, decisions that prioritize equity, environment, and economy, safe waters for recreating, and resilience to climate impacts.

This comprehensive plan includes five vision themes with input from over 700 residents and member groups throughout the Great Lakes Region on the state of water in their communities, their hopes for the future, and the opportunities they see for improvement.

FIVE VISION THEMES
Revered
Safe
Clean
Accessible
Sustainable

SAFE

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

During the pandemic, Freshwater Future advocated for moratoria on water service shutoffs in Michigan, Ohio, New York, and Illinois ensuring millions in the Great Lakes Region had access to running water to protect public health.

COMMUNITY WATER COUNCILS

Freshwater Future continues to work closely with Water Councils to address drinking water safety, access and affordability in Benton Harbor, Flint, Detroit, Toledo, Chicago and Duluth. We've been providing technical support and capacity building to help communities conduct citizen science, inform and engage more people, and advocate for solutions to address lead in drinking water and other toxic contamination of water.

WATER COUNCIL SPOTLIGHT

BENTON HARBOR COMMUNITY WATER COUNCIL

In 2021, a collaboration of more than 20 community and environmental groups, led by the Benton Harbor Community Water Council, petitioned the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to step in and help the residents of Benton Harbor, Michigan, with elevated lead levels in drinking water. This action and the attention it garnered, finally pushed the struggle for safe water into national and state focus.



Freshwater Future worked with the Benton Harbor Community Water Council and Nalgene Water Fund to secure filtered water refill stations for eight schools in Benton Harbor just as schools opened up for the fall semester.

NO LEAD IS SAFE CAMPAIGN

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has set the health goal for lead in drinking water at zero because of the harmful impacts to health from exposure to this toxic metal at low levels. We created a helpful new lead informational toolkit to educate residents on NO lead is safe in drinking water, proper flushing and filter techniques and lead service line replacement safety.



WATER COUNCIL SPOTLIGHT **FLINT COMMUNITY LAB**

Through persistent outreach and community relationship building, the Flint Community Lab has steadily increased lead testing while expanding internship programs and STEM opportunities for youth who are historically underserved. Many Flint youth are now considering STEM careers to focus on environmental justice.

Training Student Citizen Scientists! In 2021, 16 Flint area high school students and 12 college interns participated in the program.



Over 2,000 locations have been tested and people now know resources are available to them to keep their families safe from lead in drinking water.

SUSTAINABLE

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

CELEBRATING WINS FRESHWATER HEROES

Our Freshwater Hero awards celebrate the work of everyday people jumping into action to solve some of the most pressing water issues across the Great Lakes region. These individuals and organizations represent a dedicated group of water protectors.

For more than 20 years, Michigan Citizens for Water Conservation (MCWC) volunteers have raised awareness about the impacts of water withdrawals and taken legal action to protect a nearby river and wetland in Mecosta, Michigan. Most recently, the group filed a court appeal against Nestle's request to increase water pumping from 150 to 400 gallons per minute. Our heartfelt thanks go out to MCWC for all of their dedication to protecting our water resources and being willing to stand in for our water resources in court.



Hold Erie Coke Accountable, a group of local residents in Erie, Pennsylvania, worked to ensure the Erie Coke Plant would be brought into environmental compliance during a permit renewal process. With growing pressure from agencies and these residents, Erie Coke abruptly ended its operations in 2020, protecting public health and the environment from polluted air and water emissions. We applaud Hold Erie Coke Accountable for their hard work to bring public health issues to the surface and their continuing work to ensure proper site cleanup.



& COACHING & CONSULTING

In fiscal 2021,
Freshwater Future
provided subsidized
consulting to more
than 40 community
organizations!

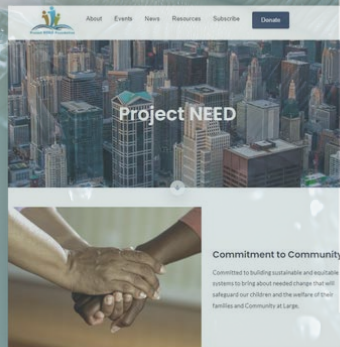
VOICE BUILDER

HELPING LOCAL VOICES BE HEARD!

Over the last year, we have made significant progress with our Voice Builder Project to help community water councils and community-based groups access robust digital tools for communications, fundraising and tracking to increase their capacity and build a foundation of power.

Our Water Watchers & Wellness consulting seminars helped increase capacity of groups and leaders through monthly organizational development seminars and self-care tools to 14 environmental and community leaders.

Feedback on Water Watchers & Wellness: Gwendolyn Winston, Wisdom Institute – *“Not only am I updating skills, learning new processes and protocols for nonprofits, the richness of the exchange between cohort members breathes life into the many “real time” ways that are open to us to build relationships and to recognize and experience the power of collective knowing. What an awesome surprise it is that Freshwater Future had the forethought to have woven space for us to be intentionally guided in mindfulness practices.”*



CLEAN

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

Grants Program

During fiscal 2021, we awarded more than \$395,000 through 47 grants to support community groups with resources and technology to shift their work from reactive to proactive, making drinking water safer and cleaner, thwarting extraction activities, preventing long-term environmental harm, adapting to climate change, and reaching thousands of residents and their families with information on how to stay healthy.



RESCUE LAKE SIMCOE
COALITION



FAMILIES RECLAIMING OUR ENVIRONMENT (FROE)

Since 1996, Freshwater Future has awarded nearly \$5 million in grants supporting 1,300 groups across the region to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of organizations working to protect and restore the water resources across our Great Lakes Region.

PROTECTING THE MENOMNEE RIVER

The Menominee River along the eastern border of Wisconsin and Michigan has rebounded since the cleanup of significant toxic industrial pollution that took decades of investment and work. Yet, a proposed open pit mine only 150 feet from the river's shore threatened the health of the Menominee River.

The Coalition to SAVE the Menominee River with funding support from Freshwater Future and the Menominee tribe contested these mine permits. In January 2021, a judge denied the wetland permit and a dam safety permit was overturned a few months later after a challenge from the Menominee Tribe.



HELPING CHICAGO RESIDENTS KEEP WATER ON

We helped establish the Chicago Water Alliance with residents on the south side of the city, focusing on lead issues, distribution of water for those disconnected, and pushing the City to establish processes for having water reconnected.

In early 2021, the Mayor of Chicago launched the Utility Billing Relief (UBR) program offering those qualifying a 50% discount on utility bills and providing bill forgiveness after one year of on-time payments. With our support and online tools, the Chicago Water Alliance is able to help hundreds of residents sign up for this program to ensure their water is turned on and stays on.

ACCESSIBLE

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

Your Voice Makes a Difference!

Protecting our drinking water and surface waters is not a spectator sport. Informing decision makers about issues and providing recommendations are cornerstones of democracy. Freshwater Future's take action online system is now faster and easier than ever before. Thousands have signed petitions and submitted comments using this system, and feedback has been overwhelmingly positive on how easy it is to submit petitions, letters, and comments to your decision makers on issues that are important to you.

KEEPING HAZARDOUS MATERIALS AWAY FROM OUR COMMUNITIES & OUR GREAT LAKES

Since 1929 the Ambassador Bridge has been off-limits to chemicals and hazardous materials, such as explosives. But proposed Michigan legislation would have lifted this ban putting our communities and waters at risk. Through our online system, advocates sent petitions urging state officials to not allow hazardous materials across the Ambassador Bridge. In December 2020, Michigan's Governor vetoed the proposal, protecting residents and water resources.

LIMITING PFAS IN OUR WATERWAYS

The more we learn about PFAS "forever chemicals," the more clear it is they are harmful to humans, wildlife, and the environment. In 2021, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency requested public comments to consider action limiting the dumping of PFAS into our rivers, lakes, and streams. Freshwater Future created an online petition that allowed hundreds of action takers to tell the U.S. EPA "Keep PFAS out of our water!"

WATER AFFORDABILITY PROGRESS

Our short-term goal remains to get water turned on and kept on, with the longer term goal of making water affordable.

During the pandemic, Freshwater Future helped get water service restored in cities across the Great Lakes Region through direct communication with legislators and community leaders, engaging residents to speak up and out to elected officials, and developing procedures for cities to use to turn water back on.

ALL ABOUT WATER

The All About Water collaborative group has recognized a \$188 billion need for drinking water and wastewater infrastructure upgrades within the Great Lakes Region. Freshwater Future and All About Water have already begun working with communities to access billions in federal water funds coming down the pipeline to ensure this historic funding gets where it's needed most and includes the water affordability pledge principles and a community-developed definition of "Disadvantaged Community."

A HISTORIC INVESTMENT IN WATER INFRASTRUCTURE

The U.S. Congress passed a historic pandemic relief bill known as the American Rescue Plan of 2021 that contains water utility related provisions including millions to states and tribes to provide assistance to residents for water utility bills and funds for drinking and wastewater infrastructure upgrades.

Freshwater Future reached out to our community partners urging them to begin conversations with local decision-makers, and we're helping disadvantaged communities, particularly in communities where many residents are already struggling to pay their water bills, press their local utilities and elected officials to apply for these dollars.

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

GREAT LAKES NETWORK

84 environmental organizations from Canada and the U.S. are Great Lakes Network members, with 125 individuals participating in Network activities. Subnetworks provide valuable research and information to the network for effective collaboration on emerging issues around the region.

#WeAreLakeErie

#WeAreLakeErie celebrates this amazing Great Lake through sharing photos and stories on social media. 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.





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Thank 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.

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(\$1,000 AND ABOVE)**

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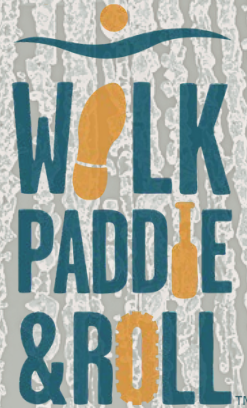
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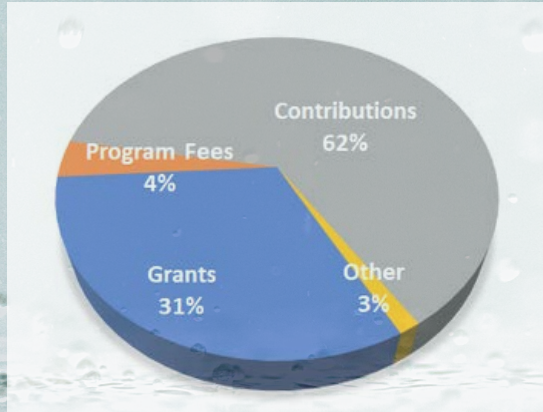


Our 2021 Walk Paddle & Roll fundraiser challenged our Board and Staff in raising awareness and funds to ensure safe and clean water resources across the Great Lakes Region through a variety of healthy, fun, and environmentally-conscious personal challenges. We raised close to \$9,600 of our \$10,000 goal! Thank you to all who supported this campaign!

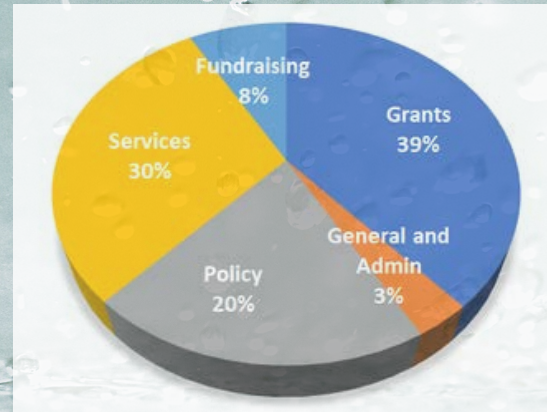
FINANCIAL INFORMATION

THANK YOU TO ALL OUR DONORS AND
CONTRIBUTORS FOR YOUR PART IN MAKING A
DIFFERENCE — **YOU MAKE THIS WORK POSSIBLE.**

INCOME



EXPENSES



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.



Freshwater Future is a catalyst for community action that helps move policies designed to safeguard the waters of the Great Lakes region. We are a collaborative and entrepreneurial organization that seeks perspective from diverse communities and individuals. We build partnerships and collaborations, work to ensure equity in the solutions we advocate, and value residents' knowledge and abilities in our work to protect and restore the health of all the waters in the Great Lakes region.

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