

FRESHWATER VOICES

2023 ISSUE 1



Leading the Way for WATER WORK

Every year, we recognize individuals and groups who are making a real difference in their communities to address threats to drinking water or lakes, rivers, wetlands, and shorelines that are vital to the health and well-being of the region's communities.

They dedicate time and energy to address threats to drinking water from coal ash landfills and PFAS. They share their creative talents and use the arts to bring people together to celebrate our precious waters.

We are inspired by this year's Freshwater Heroes who roll up their sleeves and get to work, showing us all that one person truly can make a difference. They are the ones who step up when others step back, and they inspire others to get involved, take action, and make a difference. They bring people together and create a sense of common purpose.

Their work is critical to ensuring that future generations can enjoy the same access to clean drinking water, healthy ecosystems, and vibrant communities that we do today. To all of the amazing heroes receiving Freshwater Hero Awards this year, we say thank you. **Thank you** for your dedication, your passion, and your tireless efforts to protect and preserve our natural resources. You are an inspiration to us all, and we are grateful for all that you do.

These passionate and committed Freshwater Heroes take on complex issues that threaten waters, like disposal and transport of nuclear power waste and large-scale factory fish farms.



Scan to watch the Hero Award celebration online!

Williams County Alliance rallies to prevent a proposed salmon farming operation in Ohio.



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Dodie Le Gassick with Environment North conducts an interview at a public event to share the risks of transporting waste from nuclear energy.

Environment North has been working for over 50 years to improve and protect the ecological sustainability and socio-economic well-being of Northwestern Ontario. One of their priority issues is the risks of a nuclear waste repository to the health of the environment and people.

The proposed Deep Geological Repository would potentially take all of the high level nuclear wastes from across Canada and bury it in Treaty Three Territory, within the watersheds of Northwestern Ontario. Working alongside other members of the We The Nuclear Free North Alliance, Environment North opposes the construction of the repository and has been working to educate communities about the issues and to

Environment North

provide a coordinated response to the Nuclear Waste Management Organization. A siting decision date for the Deep Geological Repositories has been delayed until 2024 as a result of the collaborative advocacy of many, including the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, and community engagement.

While the decision is postponed, Environment North is actively working to eliminate options to construct shallow repositories and push to have the proximity principle adopted to maintain waste close to where it is generated and reduce the risks of environmental hazards from transportation. Freshwater Future appreciates the advocacy that Environment North has brought to this issue for decades.

Just Transition Northwest Indiana



Advocates, including Just Transition NWI, rallied at EPA Region 5 headquarters in Chicago in December 2022 to deliver thousands of petitions on the coal ash loophole.

Just Transition Northwest Indiana (Just Transition NWI) was established in April 2020 after years of local organizing and advocating for the clean closure of the Northwest Indiana Michigan City power plant and the complete removal of toxic coal ash waste, which has been polluting the local water supply and threatening Lake Michigan. Just Transition NWI's Protect Lake Michigan Campaign, launched in 2021, has been a multi-pronged effort to safeguard groundwater and surface waters. The campaign has involved a range of activities, including securing municipal resolutions in Michigan City and the Town of Pines, organizing petition drives and amassing thousands of signatures, leveraging media coverage, and facilitating numerous forums and events to raise awareness about the issue.

Along with a coalition of local and national organizations, Just Transition NWI has been advocating for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to close a loophole in a regulation that allows inactive coal ash landfills, such as those in Michigan City, to remain indefinitely. The EPA is currently reviewing public comments to bring these inactive landfills under regulatory oversight.

Freshwater Future commends Just Transition NWI's efforts to engage volunteers and amplify the concerns of the surrounding communities about the environmental and public health risks posed by coal ash waste and the need to transition away from coal power.

Sterling Water Stewards

For the last few years, Sterling Water Stewards has sustained a people-powered fight against a threat to their public drinking water source – and won. In 2020, developers purchased a parcel of land adjacent to the local public wellfield in Sterling, New York to create a bulk water facility.

Karen Haas of Sterling Water Stewards said it is a “local legend that there is an indefinite amount of water in the aquifer,” – but many community members knew better. With support from Freshwater Future, Sterling Water Stewards worked with a hydrogeologist and an environmental lawyer to understand the threat private extraction posed to their drinking water. While their opponent had resources, Sterling Water Stewards were resourceful.



Top Left: Eric Hellquist, a member of Sterling Water Stewards, joined Freshwater Future to educate legislators in Washington, D.C. this past March about threats to drinking water.

They strategized to gain a moratorium on water withdrawal permits, rally voter support for local representatives who wanted to protect the public water system, and finally, collaborate with these officials to pass a protective zoning law that overlays the wellfield. Due to Sterling Water Stewards’ efforts, impacts from private extraction have been minimized. Freshwater Future commends the organization as they continue to look for additional solutions to safeguard its waters with state-level protections.



S.O. H2O members, Wisconsin League of Women Voters, Town of Peshtigo and City of Marinette council members meet with the Secretary of Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to discuss PFAS groundwater standards. . Left to right: Kayla Furton, Doug Oitzinger, Adam Payne, Cindy Boyle, Chuck Boyle, Jeff Lamont, and Den Cronmiller.

S.O. H₂O (Save Our H₂O)

When the drinking water in Marinette, Wisconsin, was found to be contaminated with toxic PFAS from a manufacturer of firefighting foams and its training facility, a group of residents organized S.O. H₂O (Save Our H₂O) to help get information out to their community.

Committed to ensuring safe drinking water for everyone, residents in the wake of the PFAS contamination, the group set up a Facebook page that provided a platform for sharing information, getting people to attend public meetings, and speaking out about the need to provide safe alternative water supplies.

Like many grassroots organizations, becoming experts on toxic chemicals and water contamination was not something any of the members had imagined doing in their life. Yet because of their involvement and persistence and working with decision-makers, they have made progress on their goal of getting surface water standards and drinking water standards for the State of Wisconsin.

The impacts of this contamination linger for many residents of Marinette and the neighboring community of Peshtigo in the form of health impacts. S.O. H₂O is persistently working to push for alternate water supplies for residents as well as the clean up of PFAS contamination that continues to be found in the community. Our hats off to the group for pushing for community protections.

USING ART AS ADVOCACY

Nathan Smith

For almost a decade, Nathan Smith, better known as Rasta Nathan Smith, a youth pastor, artist and active community member was well aware of the issue of high lead in Benton Harbor, MI's drinking water. When the call came to mobilize action from Benton Harbor Community Water Council's Reverend Edward Pinkney and Freshwater Future, Smith answered that call, eager to offer his talent in art and storytelling to help Benton Harbor residents stay aware of the ongoing lead contamination in their drinking water.

In a partnership with the Benton Harbor Community Water Council and Freshwater Future, Nalgene provided water filtration stations to remove lead in Benton Harbor Schools' drinking water. The partnership also provided over 2000 water bottles. Smith designed a sticker that would be featured on the water bottles, inspiring students to educate themselves about the lead in drinking water in their community.



Smith's inspiring sticker design encourages Benton Harbor students to care about their community's drinking water.



Beyond his graphic art, he created many visuals, including videos that have grabbed the attention of individuals all over the Great Lakes Region, not just in Benton Harbor. Smith's art created visibility for the issue. Smith continues to work with area youth, connecting them to resources and helping them access clean and safe drinking water. We commend Smith for amplifying the voices of young people and for being such a steadfast advocate of clean and safe water for all in Benton Harbor.



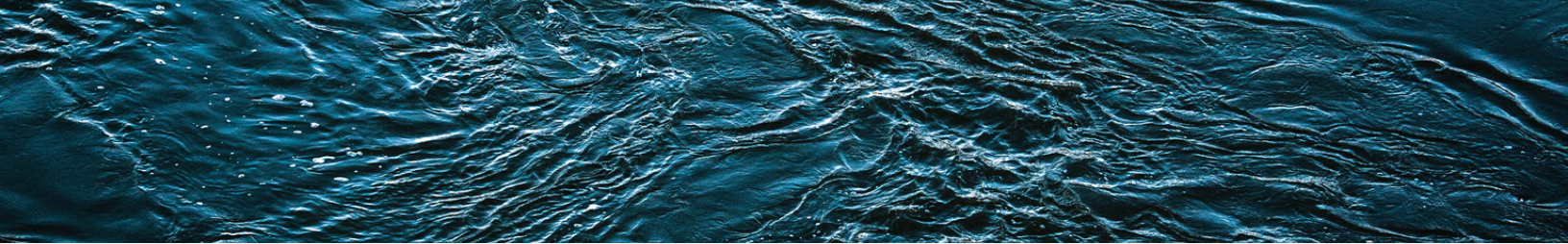
Jannan Cornstalk

Jannan Cornstalk, a citizen of the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians, is a fierce advocate for water rights and protection. She founded the Water is Life Festival in 2017 to celebrate the importance of water and to promote community efforts to protect it.

The festival showcases art, workshops, and music that aim to raise awareness of water-related issues and highlight responsibilities to Mother Earth.

Jannan's motivation to start the festival stemmed from her concern over the decaying Line 5 pipeline beneath the Straits of Mackinac. Over the years, the Water is Life Festival has grown in popularity, attracting attendees from across the Great Lakes region and beyond. The festival has become a powerful platform for artists, activists, and community members to come together, connect, learn, and collaborate in the fight for water justice.

Jannan's commitment to water protection extends beyond the Water is Life Festival. She is also a strong supporter of Indigenous-led efforts to protect water and land. Her dedication and passion for water protection continue to inspire positive change toward living in a holistic way with the water and protecting it from those who seek to exploit or endanger it. Freshwater Future appreciates all that Jannan brings to this world and her amazing positive spirit.



Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa



Wild rice, or Manoomin in Ojibwe, is sacred to the Anishinaabe people. When a proposed mine in Minnesota received a permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to destroy wetlands and habitat for wild rice during construction, the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa took action.

The Band objected to the permit based on the potential for toxic mercury contamination of fish and aquatic life. The permit is in direct violation of the Fond du Lac Band’s mercury standard that was established to protect the public health of the Band members who rely on native fish as a food source.

This is the first time we know of that a Tribe has exercised its right to object to federal permits. In addition, when the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency weakened water quality standards, the band took the only remaining option available, filing suit against the U.S. EPA to reverse the changes. With great respect, we honor the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa for their commitment to protecting the waters of the Lake Superior basin.

Williams County Alliance gathered in Bryan to protest a proposed genetically engineered salmon “farm” which would be located in Pioneer, a village in Williams County.

Williams County Alliance

The Williams County Alliance, a grassroots group dedicated to promoting a sustainable future in Ohio, formed in 2006 to address impacts from a proposed large poultry operation, which would have put an already overburdened watershed at risk from additional nutrient runoff. Founded by Lou Pendleton, Sherry Fleming, and Ann Longsworth Orr, this dedicated group of community activists continues to work to reduce water pollution. They fight multimillion-dollar corporations like the currently proposed GMO salmon farm factory, which would pose a threat to the area’s source of water, the Michindoh Aquifer, and the entire Great Lakes ecosystem.



By organizing public meetings that draw hundreds of attendees and working with neighboring communities, even across state lines, this group has become a hub for community action, and their efforts demonstrate just how effective and crucial people power can be. We applaud and thank the Williams County Alliance for their unwavering commitment to advocating for changes in laws that recognize community rights and the rights of nature.



Trent Stark

Trent Stark has served as a board member of Freshwater Future and Freshwater Future Canada for six years, including terms as Chair and member of the Finance Committee. Trent’s passion for water and belief in Freshwater Future helped encourage others to join, opened doors for the organization and brought in resources for the work. We have greatly appreciated Trent’s keen financial eye, business expertise and fun spirit. Thank you Trent!

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In Memory Of Amanda Jo Robinson

The Great Lakes lost an avid water protector with the passing of Amanda Jo Robinson. Amanda was the leader of the Pipe Out Paddle Up event to raise awareness of the risks of Line 5 in the Straits of Mackinac impacting the health of Lakes Michigan and Huron.



Photo courtesy Nikki Reid.

She volunteered significant amounts of time for this event with other groups dedicated to protecting and celebrating water. A talented artist, Amanda Jo enjoyed sharing her love of screen printing. At Freshwater Future, Amanda impressed us with her tenacity and creative problem-solving to do more than increase awareness but to push for long-term solutions. She effectively engaged people in water protection work and will be missed by many.

In Memory Of Edward “Ted” J. Frey, Jr.



The Great Lakes lost a strong supporter with the passing of Ted Frey in April 2022. His support of efforts to protect waters in West Michigan is only one part of his legacy. Ted had a huge impact on philanthropy and the nonprofit sector in Michigan. He was a mentor to Freshwater Future, providing advice on how to build a solid foundation for the organization and always encouraging innovative and entrepreneurial approaches to make a difference. We will miss Ted's guidance and forward thinking.

Welcome New Staff!



Alexandria
Ang



Anna
Bunting

Alex started as a Freshwater Future Communications Intern in February 2022 and now occupies a full-time position working as a Communications Associate to increase public awareness of Freshwater Future initiatives through social media strategies and digital storytelling. Alex is a recent graduate of Macalester College in Saint Paul, MN with a degree in Environmental Studies and Creative Writing.

After serving as an Environmental Fellow through the Yale School of the Environment in the summer of 2022, Anna joined the staff as Community Program Associate Intern in August 2022 and was promoted to Program Co-Director in December, focusing on water affordability, engaging Freshwater Future's network, and other policy initiatives. Anna holds a B.S. in Environmental Biology & Zoology from Michigan State University and recently completed their Master's in Environment and Sustainability at the University of Michigan.

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