

FRESHWATER VOICES



2023 ISSUE 2

THE "LONG GAME" Tackling Water Challenges in the Great Lakes Region

This Issue:

Water
Affordability
PAGE 2

Infrastructure
Funding
PAGE 3

Mining
PAGE 4

App Helps
Address Flooding
PAGE 5

New Board & Staff
PAGE 6

Thank you Donors
PAGE 7



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Jill M. Ryan
Executive Director

As problems tighten their grip on our freshwater, there's growing worry about what lies ahead for the Great Lakes Region. Our strategy is clear: we must focus on the "long game." While quick fixes might offer temporary relief, they can compound problems in the long run.

Our commitment to the "long game" is evident in everything we do. From developing science-based policies that tackle persistent freshwater issues across local, state, and federal levels such as assisting communities in utilizing State Revolving Fund (SRF) programs, the priority is sustainability and positive change. (See page 3)

Our grant programs are also integral to our vision. By supporting advocacy initiatives and effective actions benefiting communities, public health, and the irreplaceable Great Lake water resources, we empower advocates to generate real and lasting impacts.

A recent triumph illustrates the power of our approach. After a five-year legal battle, Freshwater Future grantee WaterLegacy, along with allies such as the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, emerged victorious. The Minnesota Supreme Court's ruling against PolyMet's water pollution permit reinforces the need for transparent regulations and accountability. (See page 4)

Our commitment to creating sustainable results extends to our consulting and coaching services. Drawing on our combined 100+ years of experience, we have been supporting grassroots groups since 1996. Our newest program, Water Watchers & Wellness seminar series not only imparts knowledge but also fosters outcomes that stand the test of time, covering crucial areas like planning, finances, communication, and technology.

Through comprehensive efforts and collaboration with stakeholders, Freshwater Future is actively shaping the future of the Great Lakes. Our goal is nothing short of a sustainable tomorrow for the region, and we are committed to turning this goal into a reality. The "long game" we play is forging a promising path for the freshwater future of the Great Lakes. Thank you for your ongoing support towards a healthier, more vibrant future.

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**DONATE
TODAY!**



We need your help because everyone deserves safe, clean water resources from source to tap. You can make a big difference today by donating to Freshwater Future's Walk Paddle and Roll Challenge! Through October, Freshwater Future's Board and Staff are taking on activities around the Great Lakes Region to raise \$8,000.



SCAN ME



Ensuring Safe and Affordable Water for All

Michigan's Journey Towards Water Affordability

Freshwater Future has been working on water affordability issues in Michigan for more than a decade. One of the key challenges communities face is the rising cost of water. The average cost of water in Michigan has nearly tripled since 1980, and this has made it difficult for many families to afford their water bills. This is especially true for low-income families and families of color. These families are more likely to live in areas with outdated water systems, and they are also more likely to be struggling to make ends meet. Unfortunately, when families cannot pay their water bills, water systems usually shut the family's water off. Shutting off water to residents in communities is a public health issue that can spread diseases and viruses such as COVID-19.

At Freshwater Future, we firmly stand by the belief that clean, safe, and affordable water should be accessible to everyone, irrespective of their income or where they live. To realize this vision, we've helped create the Water Equals Life (WEL) Coalition, a collective of local, statewide, and national organizations that all recognize the vital importance of water in sustaining life and fostering healthy communities. The founding members of the WEL Coalition, alongside an increasing number of partner groups, include Freshwater Future, We the People Detroit, and the National Wildlife Federation (NWF).

On a mission to address the crisis head-on, the WEL Coalition aims to create a water affordability program, guided by a set of agreed-upon principles, to ensure access to clean, safe, and affordable water for all residents in Michigan. Ultimately, these will inform policies and legislation that will protect families from dangerous and cost-inefficient shutoffs, while allowing them to pay a bill they can truly afford. This isn't assistance. This is affordability.

The WEL Coalition is committed to continuing its work until everyone in Michigan has access to clean, safe, and affordable water. The coalition believes that water is a human right, and it is working to make sure that everyone has the right to this essential resource.



KEY POINTS FOR WATER AFFORDABILITY LEGISLATION

- **Ensure Universal Access:** Guarantee every individual has access to clean, safe, and affordable water
- **Implement Income-Based Rates:** Mandate that water systems apply income-based rates to eligible customers capped at 3% of income, making certain that everyone pays a bill they can afford, including tenants
- **Restrict Water Shutoffs:** Limit instances in which water utilities can disconnect a customer's water service
- **Facilitate Debt Forgiveness:** Provide a process for customers to receive forgiveness of their water debt

To learn more about the WEL Coalition and take the water affordability pledge, visit welcoalition.org



SCAN ME



Helping Communities Tap into SRF Funding

Is your community raising water rates to cover the costs of improving local water infrastructure?

Water infrastructure in the United States is aging and failing. Many communities are facing massive payments to keep their drinking water systems safe and water bills affordable. Besides relying on local ratepayers, Drinking Water State Revolving Funds (DWSRF) are the primary source for funding local water system and infrastructure projects.

After more than 40 years of federal disinvestment in water infrastructure spending, Congress passed an infrastructure bill in 2021 that substantially increased funding for SRF for five years. This funding, with a special focus on disadvantaged communities, is a game-changer. Freshwater Future is at the forefront of advocating for the federally-funded DWSRF to help communities upgrade their water infrastructure and address issues such as lead pipe replacement, wastewater treatment upgrades, and flood mitigation.

Freshwater Future is working to ensure that all communities have the opportunity to access these critical funds. We believe it is vital 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, or upgrading treatment plants.

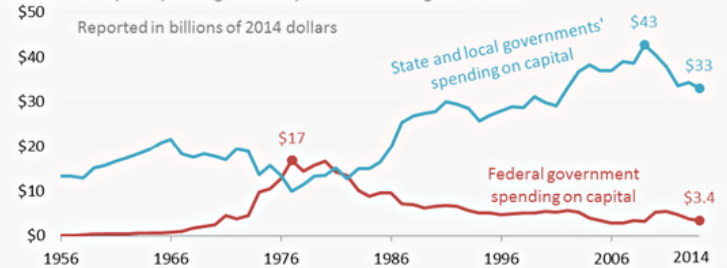
Freshwater Future and Community Partners Take On GREAT LAKES DAY 2023!



Great Lakes Day in D.C. in March brought four groups from across the region to Washington, D.C. to speak directly with their legislators to educate them on the local impacts of federal water policies. *Pictured from back left to bottom right: Dr. Eric Hellquist, Shannon Abbott, Cassandra Floyd, Anna Bunting, Kristen Haitaian, and Alexis Smith. Not pictured: Jeff Whitelow*

Spending on capital infrastructure for water and wastewater utilities has increasingly been provided by state and local governments while federal spending on capital infrastructure declined since the 1980s

Over 90% of capital spending occurs by state and local governments



Graphed by the Environmental Finance Center at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

Source: Congressional Budget Office supplemental data for the *Public Spending on Transportation and Water Infrastructure, 1956 to 2014* report (March 2015). Displays public spending on supply systems for distributing potable water as well as wastewater and sewage treatment systems and plants. Real spending is shown after adjusting nominal spending to their 2014 dollar equivalent using infrastructure-specific price indexes.

Freshwater Future's team provides and connects advocates to essential technical assistance to help communities access DWSRF funding. We also empower community leaders with the knowledge and skills needed to advocate effectively for water issues at the local level. We're working with community groups such as the Benton Harbor Community Water Council to help secure SRF funds for water infrastructure improvements.

We've made significant progress in advocating for increased SRF funding and making it more accessible to environmental justice communities. For example, in Illinois, we worked with partners to improve document accessibility and to change the definition of disadvantaged communities for lead service line replacement. This has made it easier for these communities to apply for and receive SRF grants. Freshwater Future and its partners are making a tangible impact. Our advocacy for increased SRF funding is securing resources that communities desperately need to safeguard water quality, public health, and economic vitality.

LEARN MORE ABOUT SRF - FRESHWATER FUTURE'S STATE TOOLKITS



Each state toolkit provides information on the SRF program and how community groups can advocate for their municipality to apply for funds and develop successful project plans.

Scan the QR code to download:

- Advocacy Guide for Community Members
- Advocacy Guide for Organizations
- State Policy Toolkit

SCAN ME





Freshwater Future Helps Upper Great Lakes Communities Fight Back Against Harmful Mining Projects

Mining operations in the Upper Great Lakes region have a long history. Recently, there's been a resurgence in the mining industry, with new proposals for mines and expanded operations. Growing demand and increasing value of metals are driving this renewed interest. Modern mining methods have not lessened the significant environmental harm caused by mining. Methods like open-pit mining and fracking can be especially damaging, polluting air and water, damaging wildlife habitat, and destroying forests. This pollution can contaminate drinking water and make lakes and streams uninhabitable for aquatic life.

Community organizations are crucial in protecting the environment from harmful impacts by getting involved in reviewing and commenting on mining projects, watchdogging regulatory enforcement, and advocating for policies that reduce mining's environmental impact.



Supporting Community Groups - A Commitment to the Long Haul

Before a mining project can start, it must undergo a significant planning and permitting process that often takes decades. Freshwater Future supports community groups during this process through our Project Grants program. We provide funds for organizations to hire field experts, prepare comments, and educate residents about the threats posed by a mine.

One such organization benefiting from our Project Grants is WaterLegacy, which has fought to protect water resources from an open-pit copper nickel mine in northern Minnesota for over 14 years. After a five-year legal battle, WaterLegacy and allies, including the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, emerged victorious. The Minnesota Supreme Court finally declared the approval of PolyMet's water pollution permit by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) "arbitrary and capricious." The court's decision reiterates the need for regulatory transparency and holds the MPCA responsible for upholding regulations.

By playing the long game, WaterLegacy was able to set a new precedent and hold agencies accountable, which will have far-reaching and lasting effects. Freshwater Future understands the impact that groups can have when they are able to achieve long-term sustainability.

Coaching and Consulting Grants - A Vital Resource for Community Groups

Working to protect water resources from mines can be exhausting—tracking permits, dissecting laws and regulations, submitting letters and comments—plus keeping a local organization functioning. We understand how difficult it is to keep up and the need for community groups to stay strong.

Freshwater Future plays a vital role in ensuring the long-term sustainability of community groups through our Coaching and Consulting Grants. These grants support organizations in establishing a robust foundation, enabling them to sustain their efforts over the long run. We achieve this by assisting with strategic planning, budgeting, identifying potential funding sources, and setting goals.

Through grants, consulting services, and policy networks, Freshwater Future helps groups have an enduring presence, standing by them throughout the duration of their fight against detrimental mining impacts.



Flood Focus App Helps Detroit Neighborhoods Advocate for Community-Driven Solutions to Flooding

It doesn't take much rain to cause flooding in certain Detroit neighborhoods. The Flood Focus App, created through a partnership between Freshwater Future and Earth Economics, is helping Detroit neighborhoods collect data and map flooding in order to identify solutions.



One such neighborhood is West Grand Boulevard. The West Grand Boulevard Collaborative (WGBC) used the Flood Focus App to document and investigate flooding on the road adjacent to the Detroit Public Library Duffield Branch. WGBC is now working with Freshwater Future to address blockages of storm drains from poor maintenance and construction. Furthermore, they're advocating for sustainable, green infrastructure solutions to re-invision paved medians into bioswales. This not only addresses flooding but also enhances the area's aesthetics and sustainability.

The Flood Focus App is a potent tool for advocating for community-driven solutions to flooding by showcasing positive outcomes to residents and decision makers. As we work with communities, we envision a future where flooding is manageable, and Detroit neighborhoods thrive even during heavy rainfall. This app helps communities take charge, pinpoint flood-prone areas, and propose sustainable solutions advancing resilience one step at a time.

2023 Grant Recipients

Freshwater Future is proud to support the following organizations:

SPRING PROJECT GRANTS

Association for the Wolf Lake Initiative
Canandaigua Lake Watershed Alliance
Chautauqua-Conewango Consortium
Manistique Community Treehouse Center
Jefferson-Chalmers Water Project
Just Transition Northwest Indiana
Lake Superior Watershed Conservancy
Michigan Citizens for Water Conservation
Michigan Hydro Relicensing Coalition
National Parks of Lake Superior Foundation
Seneca Lake Guardian
Upper Manistee River Association
Water is Life Festival
West Grand Boulevard Collaborative
Williams County Alliance

COMMUNICATIONS GRANTS

National Wildlife Federation, Great Lakes
Regional Center
Citizens for a Safe & Clean Lake Superior
Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities
Illinois Environmental Council
Saginaw Community Alliance for the People

GREAT LAKES NETWORK GRANT

Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition

NEW YORK DRINKING WATER ADVOCACY GRANTS

Water Insecurity Correction Coalition, Inc.
TIMBER
Sterling Water Stewards

SPECIAL OPPORTUNITY GRANTS

Benton Harbor Community Water Council
Concerned Residents of Core City
Flint Community Lab
Project NEED Foundation

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

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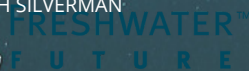
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A Warm Welcome to Our New Board and Staff

Bettina Marshall

Bettina Marshall, is a Chicago-based professional with a history of impactful contributions to non-profit organizations. Bettina's expertise in people and culture management, notably in HR compliance and best practices, adds significant value. Her commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging aligns perfectly with our values. Bettina's educational background, including a Master's in Public Administration and a Human Resources Certificate, brings a wealth of knowledge to our board.



Brenda Price



Brenda Price is the Associate State Director at AARP Michigan. Brenda's passion lies in advocating for AARP Members and those aged 50+, striving for a life of choice and fulfillment as they age. With extensive experience in the nonprofit sector and a commitment to developing emerging leaders, Brenda's experience will be invaluable.

Pam Nyberg

Pam Nyberg is the Senior Director of Experience Design at Ascension Health. With over 25 years in human-centered design, innovation strategy, and design management, she has steered projects for global corporations and consultancies, leaving an indelible mark. Currently pursuing an MS in Sustainable Management, Pam's dedication to sustainable solutions resonates with our mission.



Nicole Schuman



Nicole Schuman, a former educator with a Bachelor's degree in Education, has transitioned her passion for teaching into advocating for environmental conservation and sustainability. As the Database Associate for Freshwater Future, she's focused on our database to maximize our impact. Outside of work, Nicole cherishes outdoor adventures with her family—camping, kayaking, hiking, and exploring the wonders of zoos, museums, and state and national parks. We're thrilled to have her drive and dedication at Freshwater Future!

Thanks to Our Summer Interns



Freshwater Future hosted Environmental Fellows Mya Shiloh and Nicholas Stewart from the Yale School of the Environment, offering vital career-building opportunities to underrepresented students in the environmental sector.

Mya Shiloh, holds a B.A. in Environmental Studies and a minor in Environmental Impact Analysis and is currently pursuing a Master of Science at San Jose State University. Her research focuses on identifying racial disparities within environmental pedagogy at the college level and showcases her dedication to environmental justice.

Nicholas Stewart, a Jamaican-American scholar, holds a BS in Geology and is pursuing an MS in Environmental Policy and Planning at Tufts University. His academic journey has taken him across different countries, delving into water crisis studies and advocacy planning.

Both Mya and Nicholas contributed their valuable skills and knowledge to various projects at Freshwater Future this summer. Mya assisted the Flint Water Lab in data management, outreach, and supporting Freshwater Future's stormwater app Flood Focus in Detroit communities. Nicholas was involved in researching restoration and justice work in the Great Lakes Areas of Concern through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.

THANK YOU to All of Our Donors

APRIL 1 - AUGUST 31, 2023

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ORGANIZATIONS

Blue Heron Headwaters Conservancy
Community Treehouse Center Detroit
Environment North
Families Reclaiming Our Environment
Keep Water Affordable
Kent Environmental Council
Lake Erie Waterkeeper
Nutcuse Vegan
Pointes Protection Association
Saugatuck Dunes Coastal Alliance
Save Our Water
Water Is Life Festival
West Grand Boulevard Collaborative
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FLINT COMMUNITY LAB

Ecoworks
Joyce Foundation
United Way of Genesee County

WATER IS LIFE FESTIVAL

Bay Mills Indian Community
Blissfest Music Organization
For Love Of Water
Great Lakes Business Network
Happy Karma Hemp
Honor The Earth
League of Women Voters Lake Michigan Region
Madigan Consulting
Meijer
Michigan Environmental Justice Coalition
Northern Michigan Environmental Action
Council
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Jordan Shananaquet
We The People Of Detroit
Women's Earth and Climate Action Network

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Summer Burk
Nancy Staley
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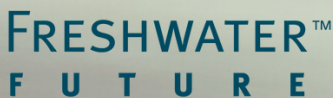
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SCAN ME

Freshwater Future is excited to announce that Greta Van Fleet is collaborating with Founders Brewing Company to create the 4 Giants Starcatcher Haze IPA. For every pint or package of Starcatcher Haze sold, \$1 will be donated to Freshwater Future, up to \$20,000. We are thankful for this partnership and the support it brings to our mission of protecting water.



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SCAN ME



Superior Coffee Roasting Co. in collaboration with Freshwater Future and the Flint Community Lab are offering a lead water testing kit for \$40 with the added bonus of receiving a complimentary bag of coffee. You can purchase the kit through Superior Coffee Roasting Co. The kit includes testing supplies, instructions, and a box with free return shipping to the Flint Community Lab, where your water sample will be tested for lead. After analysis you will receive a report from the Flint Community Lab.