



Voices freshwater

Ensuring the Healthy Future of Our Waters

2015 Series, Issue Two

IN THIS ISSUE

This issue of Freshwater Voices focuses on restoring the health of our Great Lakes. Toxic pollution, habitat destruction, invasive species and polluted runoff are just a few of the threats that have made restoration a priority for our waters.

Successfully restoring the health of our Great Lakes requires work at many different levels—from local to international.

We hope the stories, updates, and highlights included will inspire you to take one or more of our suggested actions (Page 5) to support restoration.

Thank you for being a part of Great Lakes Solutions Movement.

GREAT LAKES RESTORATION: LOCAL LEVEL



Local Citizen Action + State and Federal Partners = Cleanup of White Lake Area of Concern

Tanya Cabala, Community Environmental Activist

It was 1989 when I learned that where I lived, in the White Lake area, Muskegon County, Michigan, had some fairly serious historical pollution problems. The pollution wasn't new, but it was news to me and I was sad to see White Lake and our charming scenic area through a different lens.

At the time, I had concerns about a proposed landfill expansion. That was my first foray into the world of environmental activism and through it I met a wide variety of community-minded people and began to learn more, in particular, what had happened as part of our chemical manufacturing era.

I was a young mother with two young toddlers. On their behalf and out of love for my community, I decided to get involved. I wanted to show my son and daughter that I didn't ignore our problems and that I would do what I could to find solutions.

At the time, I never would have imagined that the next 25 plus years would be very different than the life I had imagined as an elementary teacher. Instead I would be passionately involved in a long-term and wide-ranging community effort to clean up my community's historical pollution and it would lead to a new lifelong career and broader involvement in the environmental arena. My interest and volunteer work led to a position with the Lake Michigan Federation (now the Alliance for the Great Lakes), and subsequently my own business, as a consultant and freelance writer, working for Great Lakes, state, and local environmental and community organizations.

I am pleased to share the story and lessons of how citizens helped to restore the health of their lake, earning back its title, "White Lake the Beautiful."

Continued on page 3





DIRECTOR'S NOTE:



Opening Our Eyes

*Jill Ryan,
Executive Director*

This issue of Freshwater Voices on restoration has me thinking back to when all of this restoration work started. Before we could even come to grips with the fact that the Lakes had to be restored, we had to admit that they were not in good health—wetlands destroyed, pollution fouling water, sediments still full of toxins from decades gone by.

While many of us work to prevent such issues at the local level on a daily basis, ten years ago, when I (and I'm sure others) read, "Prescription for Great Lakes Ecosystem Protection and Restoration: Avoiding the Tipping Point of Irreversible Changes" I was shocked. Yet, at the same time, there was a freeing moment that allowed us to move into the work of both protecting and restoring our amazing water resources.

In your work you likely see similar situations, where a community has to face the issue head-on before it can begin the job of solving the problem. I hope this issue provides you with some inspiration and ideas about how you can move from 'oh no, we have a problem' to 'here is how we are going to begin to solve our problem together.'

"The work of restoration cannot begin until a problem is fully faced."

Dan B. Allender



It's Not Easy BEING GREEN (for Lake Erie)

GREAT LAKES RESTORATION: BI-NATIONAL LEVEL

Last August, nearly half a million Toledo-area residents couldn't drink or even use their water. All because harmful algae bloom in Lake Erie resulted in the water being unsafe to use for several days.

Lake Erie isn't the only Great Lake having harmful algae blooms—Lake Michigan, Lake Huron, and Lake Ontario all have the blue-green algae blues.

Nearly every summer for the past 10 years, Green Bay in Lake Michigan has had algae blooms that create dead zones or areas without adequate oxygen, harming fish and other water dwellers.

Even the shoreline of the near pristine Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore in Lake Michigan experienced huge amounts of dead algae in the near shore area. This has been a breeding ground for toxic algae resulting in avian botulism and hundreds of loons and other waterfowl dying.

Lakes Huron and Ontario are not exempt from the impacts of phosphorus pollution: both lakes have experienced beach closings and loss of tourism dollars in recent years due to nuisance algae blooms.

On a positive note, we know the solution to getting our lakes back to being blue. Reducing phosphorus pollution can help solve the problem.

Leaders from Michigan, Ohio and Ontario signed an agreement to significantly reduce phosphorus pollution over the next 10 years to Lake Erie. On behalf of Lake Erie we say Thanks to the Governors of Ohio and Michigan and Premier of Ontario for agreeing to collaborate and commit to help Lake Erie.

Environmental, conservation, governmental and farm groups in the US and Canada are already meeting and working together to identify a range of solutions to tackle this complex issue.

Freshwater Future, the only bi-national nongovernmental organization working in the Great Lakes, is pleased to be coordinating and facilitating the collaborative efforts of organizations on this issue. To support this role The Erb Family Foundation provided funding to help the Great Lakes Network partners get the ball rolling on the priority solutions to address Lake Erie's harmful algae.

Over the next two years, we will bring together the players to work together to reduce phosphorus pollution.

Citizens will play a key role in getting the best solutions in place. If you want to be up to date on our work on Lake Erie, join on our Lake Erie Alive email list, please sign-up on our website.

REPEATING HISTORY OR NEW PROBLEM?

The phosphorus pollution today is different than it was in the 1970s. The invasive mussels—both zebra and quagga promote algal growth because they enhance the conditions algae need to grow: 1) increase water clarity so that the sunlight algae need to grow can penetrate deeper into the lake; 2) their waste provides nutrients for more algae growth; and 3) they provide a surface for algae to attach and grow.

Climate change is also influencing the growth of harmful algae—such as warmer water that supports more algae and extreme rain events that dump larger amounts of pollution.

Finally, wetlands which act as our lakes natural filters, are being lost to development. Without them, more nutrients can make it to our lakes and rivers. Lake Erie has lost more than 80% of its coastal wetlands since European settlement.



White Lake Area of Concern continued...

The White Lake area, in Western Michigan along the shoreline, was a sleepy, but scenic resort area when it innocently embraced the chemical manufacturing era in the 1950s. The people who lived there appreciated the well-paying jobs and newfound prosperity, but ended up paying a steep price when pollution from some of the companies damaged White Lake and put it in the national spotlight as a poster child for pollution, just 20 years later, in the late 1970s.

Fortunately in the 1970s, citizen activists raised awareness about the pollution issues, rallied the community and got cleanups underway.

But problems remained. In 1985, White Lake was designated an Area of Concern, a “toxic hotspot,” by both State and Federal agencies as well as the International Joint Commission, because of the extent of the pollution. It was one of 43 in the Great Lakes (see more on page 2). A Remedial Action Plan (a cleanup plan) was done in 1987, but unfortunately just sat on a shelf gathering dust.

Thankfully, citizens stepped up again and made sure the cleanup happened. They organized residents and established the White Lake Public Advisory Council (PAC) in 1992 to work with local, state, and federal partners to finish restoring White Lake to health.

It was not always “smooth sailing.” One low point for me was around 1995, after several years of initial work by the PAC. We were energized and prepared to continue our commitment, but state and federal support languished. The message we heard from government officials at the time was “you’re on your own.”

- 1950s Chemical manufacturing era begins
- 1970s Pollution discovered
- 1972 U.S. and Canada adopt Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, requiring Remedial Action Plans for Areas of Concern or “toxic hotspots”
- 1985 White Lake designated an Area of Concern (toxic hotspot)
- 1987 Remedial Action Plan completed for White Lake
- 1992 White Lake Public Advisory Council is formed, a group of residents to work with local, state, and federal partners on cleanup
- 1997 Freshwater Future grants funds to White Lake for strategic plan and habitat restoration project
- 2010 \$2 million Great Lakes Restoration Initiative grant awarded to White Lake for lakewide shoreline habitat restoration
- 2014 White Lake celebrates restoration success/delisting as an Area of Concern



With determination, the PAC continued to monitor polluted sites and hold public meetings to spur action and effective cleanups. The group engaged citizens and was the “squeaky wheel” to ensure continued progress. Freshwater Future helped the PAC in 1997 with a grant for strategic planning and implementation of a habitat restoration project. Essential local partners included the Muskegon Conservation District and GVSU Annis Water Resources Institute.

The first year the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative had available funds, 2010, toxic hotspots were a priority and White Lake was ready and first in line to apply, obtaining over \$2 million to address lakewide habitat restoration. This project would boost the Area of Concern significantly to delisting.

After nearly two decades since its designation, on October 30, 2014, White Lake was officially delisted as an Area of Concern by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the PAC held a huge celebration. Everyone involved—residents, politicians, government officials, activists, and young people—gathered at a local coffee house to recognize the hard work and effort of many to clean up White Lake. We ate, laughed and celebrated, but the next day, got back to work and began identifying the next steps to continue additional improvements, maintain citizen stewardship, and keep White Lake healthy.

The most important lesson I learned was that citizens, like me and you, are truly the key to success of these types of efforts and it take different types of people playing different roles to work out solutions. When I look back on all of my environmental work, being involved in cleaning up White Lake has been one of the most rewarding initiatives—it was a success, truly a community effort, changed our future for the better, and laid a solid foundation for future stewardship,

Tanya Cabala is a lifelong resident of the White Lake area, in Muskegon County, Michigan, and has been an environmental and community activist for over 25 years, working to restore White Lake and aiding efforts to protect the Great Lakes. She is also an elected city council member, freelance writer, and consultant.



GREAT LAKES RESTORATION: FEDERAL LEVEL

Progress on restoring our Great Lakes is happening. But there is a backlog of restoration needs that went unfunded for years and emerging threats continue to arise such as the algal blooms. The need to continue funding work that restores, protects and enhances our lakes will remain for many years to come.

The successes of the Healing Our Waters coalition emphasizes that through collaboration and working together—we can really accomplish more, faster. We say, “Yeah for Teamwork that is helping our Great Lakes.”

Collaboration Power: \$1.9 Billion for the Great Lakes

As you navigate through the rest of your life, be open to collaboration. Other people and other people’s ideas are often better than your own. Find a group of people who challenge and inspire you, spend a lot of time with them, and it will change your life. *Amy Poehler*

Restoring the health of our Great Lakes—Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Superior and Erie—requires working together, collaboration, or in simple terms—teamwork. It was 2004, when the Healing Our Waters—Great Lakes Coalition was formed with the goal to secure a sustainable Great Lakes restoration plan and the federal funding needed to implement it.

Eleven years later, the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative has invested \$1.9 billion in the eight-state Great Lake region and funded 2,500 restoration projects. As a result, over 1,900 river miles have been cleared of barriers to fish passage. Additionally, Great Lakes region is the only area in the country to show gains in wetland acreage. So far, over 113,000 acres of wetlands and habitat have been restored, protected, or enhanced with funding from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative funds.

The Healing Our Waters coalition, commonly referred to as HOW, has more than 125 environmental, conservation, and outdoor recreation organizations, as well as zoos, aquariums, and museums. When it was first organized there was no widely agreed upon plan to restore the Great Lakes and there was certainly no dedicated funding source.

Teamwork—as cliché and corny as it sounds—has made a huge difference for the health of our Great Lakes. In 2005 the *Great Lake Regional Collaboration Strategy to Restore and Protect the Great Lakes* was developed and with its active presence in Washington, D.C., the HOW coalition educated federal public officials about the importance of restoring the Great Lakes. Four years later, President Obama promised

and created funding for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI). It took 125 organizations working together to get results!

Freshwater Future’s roll has included providing financial help to groups on the ground doing the work—building their capacity to secure the large federal grants set aside for GLRI and our Executive Director, Jill Ryan, serving as a past co-chair of the Healing Our Waters Coalition.

One of HOW’s priorities was to get funding to enable local groups to complete restoration projects especially in selected priority areas that were toxic hot spots.

To help local groups capture and leverage federal funds, Freshwater Future, with funding support from HOW, operates the Priority Area Implementation Program. The Implementation Program provides small grants to build the capacity they need to obtain federal dollars for the

most important restoration projects. In addition, the Implementation Program offers community engagement grants which allows local groups to engage the community in state or federal fun restoration projects, building needed buy-in for restoration projects.

Since 2010, Freshwater Future has granted \$682,064 to help local and state groups get federal grants for restoration projects. The 2010-2012 HOW grantees alone have leverage \$8,576,013 in GLRI funds and \$18,984,286 overall (includes other federal and state grants?). Thanks to the Frey Foundation, additional Implementation Grants are now available for groups in Western Lake Michigan. Want to find out more, go to our website, www.freshwaterfuture.org.

Success by the Numbers:

- 2,500 restoration projects
- \$1.9 billion awarded in the eight-state Great Lakes region
- 113,000 plus acres of wetlands and habitat restored
- 125 organizations from different sectors working together



Healing Our Waters: Success Story Minnesota Land Trust Restores Radio Tower Bay



Minnesota Land Trust used funding from Healing Our Waters grants to secure federal funds working on restoring the lower St. Louis River Area of Concern.

Between 1880 and 1895, two saw mills operated on the banks of Radio Tower Bay along the St. Louis River estuary in Duluth. Saw dust and lumber waste were dumped into this 29 acre Bay, literally filling it in so that the depth overall became only one-foot deep. As a result, few fish could survive the conditions and the area was identified as a priority for restoration site as part of the Lower St. Louis River Area of Concern’s Remedial Action Plan.

This summer, the Minnesota Land Trust assisted the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources with a project to remove over 115,000 cubic yards, more than 5,000 truckloads, of waste industrial material



Radio Tower Bay before the project started, evidence of the saw mill remnants that decreased the overall depth of the St. Louis River estuary to one foot.

from the Bay. This fall they will restore native wild rice beds to a portion of the bay. The highly organic removed material is chipped and composted and will be reused as soil amendment on upland forest restoration sites.

Daryl Peterson with the Minnesota Land Trust shared, “In the winter the Bay would freeze solid providing very little fish and wildlife habitat value. Now, we expect the river bed to naturally revegetate and provide the food and resting places the fish need.”

A \$7,000 HOW grant from Freshwater Future used by Minnesota Land Trust and their partners—Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa and the St. Louis River Alliance—leveraged over \$9 million in grant funding for their projects.

Congratulations to Recent Healing Our Waters Grantees:

- Center for Environmental Initiatives
- Clinton River Watershed Council
- Huron Pines
- The Greening of Detroit
- Ducks Unlimited
- Western Reserve Land Conservancy
- Minnesota Environmental Council
- Friends of Detroit River



The upland stockpile location of the material gathered from the river. It is being dewatered and is being stored until it can be reused.

You Are Part of Restoring The Great Lakes!

What you can do at home: Reduce pollution and algae blooms by either not using fertilizer or getting your lawn tested for the exact right fertilizer and apply only as necessary.

What you can do in your community: Have an idea for restoration work that needs to be done? A lot of Great Lakes restoration work is started by people like YOU who bring ideas forward. Get involved and talk to your local unit of government or give us a call about what you think needs to be done.

What you can do at the state/provincial or federal level: Let elected officials know you want them to take actions to restore the Great Lakes and thank them if they took action. We made it easy for to do with a form on our website.

As always, by donating to Freshwater Future you are supporting Great Lakes restoration efforts across the region too!



Walk, Paddle and Roll Funds, Fundraising Skills and Fun!

What organization doesn't need some extra funds? Not any that we know! Take part in Freshwater Future's online fundraiser, Walk, Paddle and Roll, and you will get the following:

- Funds raised quickly and easily online
- Help crafting your fundraising message
- Training to do online fundraisers for the future
- A chance to have some fun!

How does it work? Your organization can create a team page and have an unlimited number of team members to raise funds for your organization and Freshwater Future. We will give you up to 75% net of the funds you raise. The 25% we keep is used to offset fees and expenses.

You'll get help setting up your team website and individual websites, including writing an effective fundraising ask for your organization (this can help with future fundraising work too!).

Freshwater Future sends out thank you's to your donors and provide you a list of all your donor's information.

Interested? Want to Learn More about Walk, Paddle and Roll? Join in the webinar on Month, Date at Noon.

Mark Your Calendars:

Freshwater Future Chosen As September Charity Partner

Freshwater Future is excited to be Flowers for Dreams' September 2015 charity partner! This Chicago-based flower company offers hand-curated bouquets, sourced daily at local markets to create fresh, unique designs for every customer. Their bouquets come wrapped in recyclable material and vases range from reclaimed wood to vintage tins.

Here's the best part: Every purchase benefits a charity, and in September, it's Freshwater Future! We'll receive 25% of all proceeds from September sales.

To learn more and order flowers for your friends in the Chicago area, visit flowersfordreams.com.



Thank You to All of Our Donors from February 1, 2015 through June 30, 2015



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