

ANNUAL REPORT 2023

OCT 1, 2022 - SEPT 30, 2023





LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

As we look back over the past year, Friends of the Detroit River has continued to put the recent strategic planning process into action. We completed habitat restoration projects in the lower river, hosted our ever-important annual events, continued to move our trails program forward in partnership with Downriver Linked Greenways, and celebrated 20 years of our Detroit River Keeper program.

The strategic planning process helped Friends of the Detroit River set a long-term path to success. Though the pandemic made the planning a lengthy process, the benefits are long lasting. Strategic planning is important to any organization. For FDR, it has assisted in restructuring our staff, led to the creation of our five-year Diversity Equity and Inclusion plan, brought focus to fundraising efforts, and set a path to success to fulfill our mission for the Detroit River and the communities along its reach.

Friends of the Detroit River is very proud of the habitat restoration projects that have been completed along the river. The project protecting South Hennepin Marsh was completed this spring. This adds another fish nursery habitat which gives refuge to young fish that emerge from the many spawning reefs that have been constructed upstream. In addition to fish habitat, the marsh provides valuable habitat for other wildlife and rare aquatic wetland plants. The Sugar Island project is another important project that protects the island from erosion caused by Lake Erie storms and wave action. In addition to protecting the island from erosion, the Sugar Island project will also provide quiet water for fish and wildlife, such as mudpuppies and the thousands of ducks that find refuge in the lower river over the winter. In addition to the Detroit River Area of Concern habitat restoration projects, Friends of the Detroit River, in partnership with Downriver Linked Greenways, is continuing its progress with connecting downriver trails to the Iron Belle trail network. Engineering and design are complete, and the team is moving forward with community outreach and construction planning.

Our annual events were very successful this year, starting in February with the Shiver on the River. This year the Detroit Historical Society's Dossin Great Lakes Museum graciously allowed the Shiver to be held at their facility on Belle Isle. This created a great venue right on the river for attendees. Along with learning about the many important

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR CONT.

issues and activities happening along the river, over 400 visitors were able to learn about the river's maritime history through the museum's many interactive displays. Our artist in residence braved the cold wind off the river to allow visitors to observe as he painted a Detroit River winter landscape. Our Riverkeeper Dinner, held in April, celebrated 20 years of the Detroit Riverkeeper Program. The Riverkeeper Program has been a cornerstone of the Friends of the Detroit River organization. This important program is the eyes and ears on the river and support from our membership is important to keep this program moving forward.

Another successful Detroit River Water Festival was held on Belle Isle this September. Over two days, 800 fourth and fifth graders visited the island to learn about the importance of clean, fresh water and how to be stewards of these natural resources. Students learned about the water cycle, soil erosion, water chemistry testing and even had a chance to hop in a canoe with classmates to paddle through Lake Okonoka. This event continues to be a success and a big thanks goes out to not just the excellent staff but to our many volunteers, presenters and partners that helped educate these students on the importance of stewardship of the river.

We continue to be successful for several reasons. In addition to our very capable staff, FDR has a very passionate and motivated Board of Directors, many of whom have been with us for a number of years. We have had a very loyal group of members and friends who have supported us by volunteering and by donating generously to FDR over the years. We have been blessed with substantial support from area foundations such as the Erb Family Foundation, the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation, and the DTE Energy Foundation. We would like to thank all of the organizations, members, friends, and partners who have supported FDR this year and for many years past. We could not do it without you.

Sincerely,

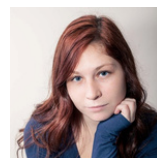
Matthew Shackelford

FDR TEAM



L to R: Sam Walsh (Office Manager), Bri Banko (Intern), Robert Burns (Detroit Riverkeeper), Tricia Blicharski (Executive Director), McKenzie Waliczek (Stewardship Director), Kaylee Peterson (Community Outreach Coordinator)

BOARD OF DIRECTORS



L to R: Matt Shackelford (Chairman), Mary Bohling (Vice Chair), Joel Sherrard (Treasurer), Kayla McRobb (Secretary)

Not Pictured: Laurine Griffin, David Howell, Tiffany Jones, Jane Mackey, Victoria Murphy,

FINANCIALS

From the NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) Partnership grants, \$5,712,976.80 was spent during our fiscal year on the following Great Lakes Restoration Initiative projects:

- Sugar Island
- Hennepin Marsh
- Celeron Island

FDR, in partnership with Downriver Linked Greenways, continues to work on projects funded by the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation with Match from Michigan Department of Natural Resources. The goal of this project is to link the Iron Belle Trail, which spans 48 counties and more than 2,000 miles statewide, to existing and newly-created trails and parks along the Rouge and Detroit Rivers. The total grant amount is \$1.9 million and includes other partners: Wayne County Parks, Michigan Department of Natural Resources Trails Section, and MotorCities National Heritage Area. The amount spent this fiscal year was \$257,105.

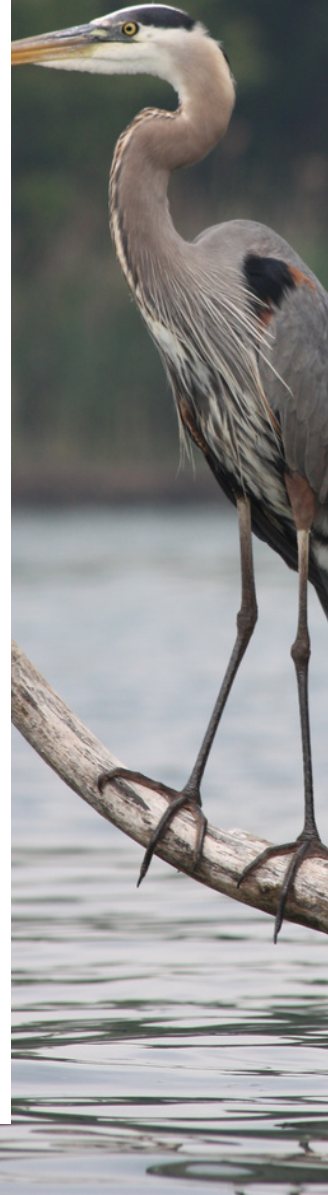
FDR received funds from the Erb Family Foundation for general operating support and the new stewardship program totaling \$201,629. FDR also received funds from EGLE and DTE Foundation totaling \$61,220

As part of a two-year grant with Buffalo Niagara Waterkeepers and Belle Isle Conservancy, FDR received \$18,421 to be used for staffing and cleanup related activities.

Lastly, FDR continues to be appreciative of individual donations and memberships that support the organization's non-grant related activities. Total donations and membership for this fiscal year totaled \$65,215.

Total General Operating Income: \$661,953

Total General Operating Expense \$481,184





RIVERKEEPER PROGRAM

This year, the Riverkeeper Committee continued to work towards its goals of protecting and improving the water quality, habitat and public access for all to the Detroit River. In April, the Riverkeeper Program celebrated its 20th year as a member of the Waterkeeper Alliance, with a program that highlighted a number of the accomplishments of the Riverkeeper Program since its inception in 2003.

Also in April, we held our annual Detroit River Cleanup event. This year, we were fortunate to have good weather and a great turnout of volunteers who were able to do cleanups at several sites around the Trenton shoreline area and a number of island sites around the lower Detroit River.

The Riverkeeper continues to serve as vice chair to the Detroit River Public Advisory Council (PAC), attending meetings and working on projects in an effort to eliminate the Detroit River Area of Concern's nine remaining Beneficial Use Impairments. We are working with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) to find partners to remediate contaminated sediments in the Detroit River and to provide public outreach efforts on projects currently underway, including the Upper Trenton Channel, Monguagon Creek, Ralph C. Wilson Jr. Centennial Park, and the old McLouth Steel sites.

This past year, we continued to give input to the remediation project that is currently getting underway at the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Centennial Park site in Detroit. Working with the PAC, recommendations were made to improve the emergent shoreline habitat and a request to include a fish spawning reef at the site, with both requests incorporated into the final design plans.

The Detroit Riverkeeper, working on behalf of the PAC, continues to monitor the cleanup of the old Trenton McLouth Steel site, by attending quarterly Community Advisory Group (CAG) meetings. The group was formed to help pass on information and bring public concerns to the agencies in charge of the site's remediation process. Phase I of the project was completed a couple of years ago with the removal of all the buildings. The next step will be Phase II, which will involve EPA's Superfund program taking over to do further contaminant assessments



RIVERKEEPER PROGRAM CONT.

with Phase II underway, EPA's contractors are currently in the process of collecting water and soil samples from existing and new wells that are currently being drilled on site to look for the extent of potential contamination in the soils around the site. The contractors will also be sampling sediments out in the river to determine the extent of possible contamination along the property's shoreline. This work will be done this fall. The results of this sampling process will determine if further contamination mitigation will be needed, and cleanup work completed at this site.

The Riverkeeper also continues to help EPA and EGLE get out on the river with several trips out to take a look at sites of interest. Helping local university students and staff get out on the river to do research is also an important component of our program. This summer we were able to get students and staff from the University of Detroit-Mercy out on the boat to collect water samples looking for PFAS on the Detroit and Lower Rouge Rivers.

The Riverkeeper continued periodic river patrols up and down the Detroit River as well as site visits to our habitat projects currently under way at Sugar Island and the recently completed South Hennepin Marsh project. While out on the water, the Riverkeeper is always keeping an eye out for unusual discharges from stormwater, combined sewer, and industrial outfalls located along the length of the river. The Riverkeeper continued to receive a number of pollution reports this past year, many of which came to us via our "Citizen's Reporting/River Watch Program."

The Riverkeeper would like to thank all of our FDR members who continue to forward pollution-related reports. Every report is followed up on and efforts are made to ensure that the responding agency follows through with the cleanup and measures are implemented so it will not happen again. The Riverkeeper Committee would also like to thank all of our members for their continued support, which is critical in helping keep our program going. We look forward to seeing everyone at next year's events.



RESTORING THE DETROIT RIVER

This year, the Friends of the Detroit River and the Detroit River Public Advisory Council (PAC) continued to make substantial progress towards the completion of the remaining habitat restoration projects that the PAC is directly responsible for overseeing in planning, design, and construction oversight. Of the dozen plus projects that were approved for construction by the EPA back in 2009, the Detroit River PAC had only 3 projects left to complete as of the first of this year.

The Sugar Island project in the lower Detroit River, which started construction in the summer of 2021, is nearing completion. Most of the work is done on the five outer shoals and the shoreline bank and habitat restoration along the island's southern end. Work is expected to be completed by next spring. When completed, the project will help stop the erosion on the southern end of this USFWS Refuge island. The new protective shoals constructed around this end of the island are now providing over 20 acres of in-water protected fish habitat. The emergent and above water portion of the shoals also provide new habitat areas for migratory water birds and local wildlife.

Earlier this spring, our contractor completed work on the South Hennepin Marsh habitat restoration project with the completion of an extension to the north end of the south shoal and the planting of shrubs and plant plugs on the north shoal. This project was designed to address the erosion of a length of shoal that was protecting an area of coastal wetland that runs along the Grosse Ile shoreline, just south of the Grosse Ile toll bridge.

Since the shoals and habitat features were installed, shorebirds, turtles and fish have been observed around the new shoals that help protect this 20-acre wetland area. All the rain that we had earlier this summer has helped the new plants and shrubs fill in nicely along the tops of the shoals.

The PAC continues to monitor the habitat projects that were completed on Belle Isle to hydrologically reconnect the Blue Heron Lagoon and Lake Okonoka to the Detroit River. Fish and wildlife monitoring conducted this year showed a marketed increase of wildlife use to the newly reconnected water system. Many fish species are



RESTORING THE DETROIT RIVER CONT.

coming in from the river to take advantage of the newly accessible habitat. Now, with a constant flow of fresh well oxygenated water from the Detroit River, there is no large algae problem or dead fish reports from low oxygen levels in Lake Okonoka this year.

The DNR's Flatwoods Forest project on Belle Isle, completed last year, was also reconnected to Lake Okonoka by the removal of a road and the creation of a connected habitat swale. This currently allows wildlife to freely move between the forest and the lake to help improve snake, amphibian, and turtle populations on the island.

The final habitat restoration project on the Detroit River AOC's project list is the Upper Riverfront Parks site, which is being overseen by the EPA and their design and construction contractors. This project is designed to cut incursions into two of the parks' hardened steel seawall shorelines and create several acres of in-cut wetland areas. This project will provide additional fish and wildlife habitat in the upper Detroit River. This project has been on hold while the City of Detroit, USACE and EPA work out a plan to address the flooding issues that occurred with the high-water levels from 2019-2021. Recently the PAC was informed that a plan to address the flooding problem may be close to being finalized, so our project could get underway in the next year or so. Once this final habitat project is completed, the Detroit River PAC expects to be able to remove the loss of fish and wildlife habitat and populations Beneficial Use Impairments from its remaining list of nine BUIs.

The PAC also continued to work with EGLE and EPA to further remediation projects designed to address legacy contaminated sediment issues, which resulted from the cumulative effects of unregulated industrial and municipal discharges to the Detroit River in past decades. Planning of future sediment remediation projects continues to move forward on the Upper Trenton Channel, Monguagon Creek and McLouth Steel sites.

STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

Through the most recent strategic planning process (2021-2025), stewardship programming and diversity, equity and inclusivity (DEI) were identified as key opportunities to strengthen the organization. In October 2021, Friends of the Detroit River (FDR) received \$330,000 from the Erb Family Foundation to improve stewardship capacity and its DEI. Within the first year of the program, FDR hired a full-time Stewardship Director to develop a Stewardship Plan and facilitate building FDR's stewardship programming. FDR also performed an organizational audit, identified DEI strategic priorities, attended DEI training courses, and developed a DEI Plan.

Over the past year, FDR's habitat and stewardship program areas were greatly strengthened by engaging with folks within the Detroit River basin and incorporating the needs and visions of the diverse communities that live, work, and recreate on or along the Detroit River and its tributaries. FDR hosted 26 community-based stewardship events and participated in 24 events hosted by partners since October 2022. Examples include, the annual Shiver on the River Eco Fair, the Master Rain Gardener Program, Clean Ups on Ecorse Creek and Belle Isle, Stewardship Workdays with youth-groups, and Mobile Boat Wash events to help prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species. In total, over 10,500 people were engaged in educational and hands-on stewardship activities.



ECORSE CREEK SUPPORT PROJECT

In July 2022, FDR received \$40,000 from Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy's (EGLE) Nonpoint Source Program through the Watershed Council Support Program to assist the Ecorse Creek Committee in identifying potential project locations that help meet goals of the Ecorse Creek Watershed Management Plan. Ecorse Creek is a tributary that flows into the Detroit River in the City of Ecorse. The creek has been impacting the water quality of the Detroit River at its discharge point and is impacting the ability to remove several Detroit River Area of Concern Beneficial Use Impairments, which FDR and the Detroit River Public Advisory Council are working to address.

Communities are integral to the visioning for enhancing the resilience of neighborhoods overburdened by environmental injustices. Proactive and equitable engagement in the local plans is key to fostering community support, which is why FDR provides meaningful engagement and capacity building to support leadership. FDR works to address barriers to community participation, so that efforts are inclusive of the priorities and needs of communities. Over the past year, FDR has:

- developed watershed support webpages and surveys in Arabic, English, and Spanish.
- collected community survey responses from 35 residents within the watershed.
- hosted and attended over 60 community meetings and events.
- identified 91 potential project locations in 10 watershed communities.
- partnered to host monthly cleanup efforts in the summer, removing 2,606 pounds of litter from the creek (since April 2022).



In September 2022, FDR received an additional \$40,000 from EGLE's Nonpoint Source Program to prioritize the potential projects in order of relative impact to communities and continue community engagement.



Left: Aerial view of Ecorse Creek flowing into the Detroit River.
Middle: Photo taken at a summer cleanup on Ecorse Creek.
Right: An Ecorse Creek outfall filled with debris.

FUNDRAISING & MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

Are you a Friend? If yes, **thank you for your support!** Your membership dues and volunteer hours helped FDR work towards fulfilling our mission to protect, defend, and improve the Detroit River through community-based stewardship and restoration, now and for future generations.

In 2022-2023, FDR's membership included:

- 43 individuals
- 72 families
- 58 students/seniors
- 12 nonprofits & organizations
- 6 businesses
- 2 River Guardians
- 51 lifetime members

As FDR's efforts grow, your support is as important as ever. This past year the team has dedicated significant time to building out our Fundraising and Development initiatives to ensure the organization's longevity and success. We have updated our Corporate Sponsorship Benefits to include things like team-building stewardship activities and networking opportunities with FDR board & team. We've also devoted time to strengthening relationships with long-standing donors. If you would like to become a member or donate to our mission, head to www.detroitriver.org/donate.

MEMBERS

- John & Marisa Anderson
- Doris Applebaum
- Mark & Vickie Ballentine
- Dawn Bartok
- Grace Ann Beebe
- Drs. John & Marilyn Belamaric
- Larry & Linda Bernhardt
- Nick Bitner
- Kathleen Boehm
- Barbara Burke
- Linda & Norman Campbell
- Michael & Myrna Capraro
- Mary Ellen Caruso
- Mary Lou Caspers
- Neil Chapin
- Barbara Coakley
- Tom Coles
- John Cook
- Terry & Kathy Cosgrove
- Melissa Damaschke & Chris Holt
- John & Rose Darin
- Jody & David DeMeyere
- Joe Derek
- Kenneth DiVito
- Sharon Dmochowski
- Carolyn Drew
- Mary Clare Duran
- Tim & Lou Ann Durand
- James Edwards
- Gerald Eisenshtadt
- Janice Ellison
- Rose Ellison
- Carly Evich
- Becky & Gary Eyster
- Ashley Fallon
- Rose Falwell
- Jeannine Finegan
- Larry Fleszar
- Pam & Jack Frucci
- Daniel Galeski
- Irene Gall
- Robert Gamble
- Judy Garf
- Alex Gilford
- Randall & Gianina Griffin
- Laurine Griffin
- George Haberer
- Pat Hammer
- Marie Handley
- Eric Harrington
- Gary & Sherry Havlik
- Erick Heilman
- Thomas & Phyllis Henderson
- Tom Henderson
- Fred Hoffman
- Joseph & Mary Hoshaw
- Eve Howell
- Alex & Lisa Hudy
- Beatrice Iho
- Emily & Jim Jackson
- Beverly Jaros
- Frank Jaros
- Robert Johns
- Dr. Christine & Bruce Johnson
- Precious Johnson-Arabitg
- Elizabeth Kaczanowski
- Peter Kantz
- Emi Kantzler
- Vyto Kaunelis
- Ralph & Celine Kinzler
- Harry Klenner
- Kevin Kose
- Eleanor Kostecki
- Carla & Bruce Kresslein
- John & Catherine Kret
- Tony Kuyava
- Bernard Labowitch
- Nicole LaFleur
- Philip Lahr
- Elizabeth Landers
- Bernard Labowitch
- Nicole LaFleur
- Philip Lahr
- Elizabeth Landers
- Stephen & Elizabeth Layman
- David & Nancy Lee

MEMBERS

- Burt Urbani & John Leon
- Susan LePage
- Patrick Livingston
- Patricia & Gary Lundy
- Mike & Pamela Mace
- Brian Maghran
- Bruce Manny
- Michelle McCrackin
- Gioconda & James McMillan
- Kayla McRobb
- Edythe C. McTaggart
- Robert McTaggart
- Patricia Meldrum
- Bruce Milkins
- Dr. Mary Minock
- Dr. Vincent & Deborah Mitek
- Dolores Montgomery
- Carol & David Morse
- Winifred Motherwell
- David Munro
- Frank Muylaert
- Tom Nashlen
- Emily Nietering
- Ed & Debbie Nykiel
- Daniel Okon
- Art Ostaszewski
- Wendy Pate
- Karen Johnstone & Jane Perrin
- Larry Peters
- Kaylee Peterson
- Dee Phillips
- Richard Porter
- R. Douglas & Susan Pretty
- Peter Pryce
- Brenda Richard
- James Rine
- Paul Robinson
- Peter Rock
- Reverend Joseph Romano
- Steve & Margaret Romanoski
- William & Phyllis Romanski
- Edward Roseman
- Scott & Marian Ross
- Kay D. Schloff
- Marcy Schultz
- John Serb, Edward Jones
- Matt Shackelford
- Stanley & Andrea Shaffer
- Joel & Sarah Sherrard
- Robert Shimmel
- Tim Sickon
- Don Skidmore
- Ursula Sliwka
- Carmen Sluter
- Rockne Smith
- Richard & Maria Snyder
- Alisa Sowders
- Karen & John St. Martin
- Jim Stone
- Mark Suchyta
- David Susko
- Nancy J. Sutherland
- Andrew & Darlene Swift
- Jon Swinkey
- Jerome "Bud" Swinkey
- Doug & Cresse Thiel
- Susan Thompson
- Roger Tuttleman
- Elena Tyler
- Mark & Mary Verge
- Stewart Vining
- McKenzie Waliczek
- Samantha Walsh
- Dr. Alan L. Watzon
- Micki Wegienka
- Rick Whitson
- Charles Wiegand
- Rose Wiggle
- Andrea Wilkins
- Lynn Wojtala
- Joseph Wright
- Ray Wysack
- Bruce Yinger
- Don Novak & Anne Zaragoza
- Keith & Lois Zook
- Richard & Karen Zyczynski

MEMBERS

Businesses & Organizations

- Belle Isle Nature Center
- Bovitz CPA
- Convent of Mary Reparatrix, Inc.
- Detroit Audubon Society
- Detroit Outdoors
- Downriver Bass Association
- Environmental Consulting & Technology, Inc.
- Essex County Field Naturalist Club
- Grosse Ile Yacht Club
- International Wildlife Refuge Alliance
- Law Office of Gregory L. Gilbert
- PEA Group
- Michigan Sea Grant
- Michigan Sierra Club
- Total Runner
- Wyandotte Beautification Commission

River Guardians

- Jeremy Caverly
- James Ferguson

Lifetime Members

- Jeannine Ansley
- Brian & Jodi Arp
- Meghan Benz
- Tricia Blicharski
- Sue Hanson & Charles Bristol
- James & Jacqueline Bromley
- Robert Burns, Jr.
- Walter Carter & Sheila White
- Vijaykumar Chilakapati
- John Colina
- Clarence Constantakis
- Michael Conway
- John Covert
- William Craig
- Courtney & Derek Dubyak
- Ronald Fodor

Lifetime Members Cont.

- Dr. Orin Gelderloos
- Paul Gloor
- Grosse Ile Bridge Co.
- Mildred & Jim Hill
- Norm & Christine Howe
- David Howell
- Huron Valley Sportfishing Club
- Mark Johnson
- Tim Karl
- Gregory & Nicole Karmazin
- Fred J. Karn
- Brian Kelly
- Barbara & Ernie Kitzner
- Mark Korneffel
- Douglas Ledbetter
- Martha Ledbetter
- Lydia Levinson
- Pam & Lance Lindell
- Jane Mackey
- Blair McGowan
- Richard Micka
- Victoria Murphy
- John Myers
- Michael Nye
- Raymond Pittman
- Stephanie Prechter
- Alvin & Harriet Saperstein
- Ruth Schmidt
- Terri Silcox
- Richard Skogland
- Paul Smoke
- Michael F. Sproul Sr.
- Vernie Dale, St. Michael Catholic Community
- Julie & Pat Sweeny
- Wloch Family

ADDRESS

20600 Eureka Road, Suite 250
Taylor, MI 48180

PHONE

(734) 288-3889

WEBSITE

www.detroitriver.org

EMAIL

river@detroitriver.org

FACEBOOK

www.facebook.com/friendsofthedetroitriver

INSTAGRAM

[frndsofthedetroitvr](https://www.instagram.com/frndsofthedetroitvr)

FRIENDS
of the
DETROIT RIVER



www.detroitriver.org