

GREAT 2009 Annual Report

GREAT has experienced a third year of membership, participation, and event growth. Our membership grew from 135 to 144, doubling since 2006. We again averaged 46 participants on monthly paddle trips with a record high of 81 on the August paddle through downtown ending at the Elks Club. GREAT's most important event, the Annual Clean-up had a record 113 participants (63 Career Center ROTC youth). Volunteers worked on a record seven miles of the river, including previously untouched, trash laden sections north of Jackson.

In addition to our eight major events, GREAT also helped with Big Brother/Big Sister Paddles, Fitness Council Paddle to Work, and a State Park Anniversary paddle demonstration. In fulfilling our UGRIP (Upper Grand River Implementation Project) match grant requirements, GREAT assisted with the Huntoon Creek Clean-up, (near Leslie) in the Portage River watershed which empties into the Grand River in Jackson County. After brought to our attention by Summit Twp. citizen, Mike Trudall, we conducted a "mini" clean-up of the Hinkley Bridge Mill Race in Vandercook Lake. Using some of our match funds, GREAT sponsored with Dahlem Nature Center and the JISD, Project Wet curriculum training for local secondary teachers. GREAT board members have attended The Nonprofit Network training sessions, are involved with developing the Watershed Alliance's new plan for the Upper Grand River, planning for Expedition 2010 (every ten year state event to paddle the 260 mile length of the river to Lake Michigan), and the River Art Walk project.

The board has continued to build on recent successes with an expanded GREAT web site, use of e-mails (89% members), and sending the Newsletter as a PDF for those requested (51%). This year, GREAT has redesigned the brochure to provide general information about GREAT's mission and activities. Each year a brochure insert will have the event calendar. These changes have resulted in better targeted communications with reduced costs.

Membership revenues fund operations while savings are kept for long term needs such as equipment purchases, major repairs, big projects, and emergencies. However, GREAT's 2009 conservatively constructed budget had a small surplus even though a deficit was projected. Membership growth, especially at the sponsor level closed this gap. While trip participation numbers are strong, only forty percent of GREAT members attend at least one of our public paddles. Therefore, it seems most GREAT members join because they strongly support GREAT's effort to improve the local water environment and educate the public. Our outstanding newsletter is a membership benefit with very informative environmental and paddling articles and GREAT's related activities.

A disconnect between the board and members has been decreasing with use of a data base of how they can and wish to help. Last summer, this resource was tapped to remove the tree debris which has clogged over ten miles of the straightened Grand River north of the city. It is our intent to continue to work at this which will make trash removal easier, expand the paddle navigability of the river, and make passable for Expedition 2010.

Lately the board had to address unexpected increased insurance coverage issues (chain saw use, directors and officers). Even though the Michigan Legislature passed and the governors signed GREAT's proposed land swap with the state four times in the last ten years, it was again rejected by the Attorney General's office because of drafting inadequacies involving a disputed claim on part of it. A new promising strategy is being developed.

The GREAT board has set the 2010 goals as:

1. Develop a plan GREAT's Twentieth Anniversary 2010-2011
2. Improve the navigability of the Grand River north of Jackson for Expedition 2010
3. To improve GREAT's outreach to the community and public.

Respectfully submitted,

Jim Seitz
President