



HPR Quarterly Newsletter (Oct. – Dec., 2023)

Cancelled October HPR Membership Meeting – Our apology for the cancellation of this month's membership meeting. We did not have a speaker for our program and found that although there is much happening and lots to read about, we could report that in our newsletter just as easily as hosting our monthly meeting. We hope you understand. Our next meeting will be on Thursday, November 9th at the Alma Public Library at 7:00 p.m. Hope to see you there!

HPR moving forward – In our July 13th membership meeting HPR voted to expand its projects and priorities and also seek the hiring of a part-time director. This decision to expand our involvement is detailed in much of this newsletter. We believe we are moving forward on many fronts and sincerely believe this will help efforts with both our river and tributaries along with our communities throughout Gratiot County.

Alma College Water Testing took on an expanded role – At the request of HPR Dr. Borrello and his interns expanded their summer water testing routine significantly to meet some specific needs in understanding the water quality and contamination levels of both the Alma and St. Louis impoundments (reservoirs behind the dams); water testing of both Horse and Sugar Creek feeding into the St. Louis impoundment; and testing the Pine River in intervals from the head waters in Mecosta County all the way down to the St. Louis dam. HPR funded this expanded water testing effort. Dr. Borrello and his interns presented their findings at our September membership meeting and **we will be posting the testing results on our HPR website in the near future.**

Municipalities partner with HPR and provide financial support – HPR has been working closely with our Gratiot County Commissioners, and the city commissioners of Alma and St. Louis and appreciate the collaboration and the financial contribution each has made to HPR in continuing our efforts to improve our river.

Through water testing and research we are working to provide direction for our communities as each tries to deal with the contamination from excessive nutrients, E.coli, sedimentation drop, and unsightly vegetation growth and Algal blooms/mats. These concerns have negatively impacted the recreational use of our river, impacted development opportunities, negatively impacted property values, and posed health risks to those individuals who come into contact with our river waters. HPR is working on numerous fronts to help discover viable options that may improve our river and keep it from further degradation.

HPR hires a part-time Director – Near the end of September HPR began a search for a part-time director to oversee the expanded work HPR has committed to. For nearly 8 years HPR has been a totally voluntary

organization. With the commitment to new priorities and projects HPR believed it to be time to bring on board a director whose passion and expertise will help lead HPR into the future. HPR was able to hire Brittany Sommerville, an Alma College graduate, and former resident of Alma. For the past few years Brittany has been residing in Harrison, MI and working as a ranger at Wilson State Park. Brittany will begin her work with HPR in mid-October.

HPR receives help from a number of grants awarded this summer and fall – HPR received a grant award from the *Gratiot County Community Foundation* in helping fund water testing, research, and plan development in seeking viable options that may help with restoring the Pine River to a healthier state. This is a one year grant and the water testing component has been completed, while both the research and plan development is ongoing.

HPR also received a grant from the *Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy* to work on improving septic services in our rural communities that the Pine River passes through; developing a Farm Engagement Committee composed of area farmers and county farm agencies to work on reducing contamination through proven farm practices; and developing an Outreach program that will help develop materials and presentations to better inform and educate our citizens of the struggles the Pine River is facing and how we can become better stewards of our waterways.

HPR also received financial support from the *Michigan Nonprofit Relief Fund* designed to assist small 501c3 “not for profit” organizations like HPR who were negatively impacted by Covid 19 particularly if they were not able to meet during that period of time.

These grants have assisted HPR greatly in stepping up their efforts to fund more water testing, research, and consulting where greater expertise is needed.

HPR Septic Liaison is working in the field - Our septic liaison Mikie VanHorn continues to work with our rural communities and residents on/near the Pine River to help them understand if their septic system is working properly. Mikie coordinates with the Mid-Michigan District Health Department septic records with current property owners to make sure records and property information align and she provides guidance in regards to septic system practices and who to contact if needing a contractor.

LEAPS, the Alma College Environmental Group joins HPR – one of HPR’s major priorities is to bring environmental awareness to our younger generations. Recently we partnered with LEAPS, a chapter of students enrolled at Alma College who are environmental activists and who many are studying the environmental sciences. Charlotte Howald is the chapter president and Shadain Pink is our new LEAPS representative working closely with HPR. This is one of the most exciting partnerships HPR has entered in and promises to be a long standing relationship that should benefit our river and environment for years to come.

Bylaws change leads to stronger HPR board – at our September meeting the membership voted on a Bylaws change to HPR’s governance documents. This approved change adds greater expertise to our board by including the following organizations with representation on the HPR board; Alma College, LEAPS, Gratiot Conservation District, and Triterra our local environmental company. These representatives bring much expertise to our board and will be helpful in HPR plotting our future projects, priorities, and direction.

HPR Seeks to Exand Funding Commitments – when HPR decided to take on greater projects/priorities and hire a part-time director we understood that we would need to increase our funding levels as we become more involved on many different levels. Over the last several months HPR has been working with the Greater Gratiot Development Inc. office, Gratiot Area Chamber of Commerce, United Way, Gratiot County Community Foundation, and the cities of Alma and St. Louis to research possible funding avenues that can support HPR and their involvement and advocacy. We have made much progress beginning with funding support from our

local cities and county governments. We continue to investigate other ways to seek funding support, so stay tuned as we will need the support of our members and community organizations and businesses too.

HPR is working to open the Honeyoye Creek/Pine River Confluence – although this process has been slow we believe with Triterra completing recent testing on the HC/PR confluence that we are nearing a time when we can approach our county drain commissioner in seeking a permit from EGLE to open this plugged area so Honeyoye Creek which is the end of county drain 96 will again flow properly and lessen the backwater buildup that has caused flooding, bank erosion, and heavy sedimentation.

The 2024 EGLE Non Point Source 319 grant – HPR filed a Notice of Intent for this grant opportunity and has recently received an invitation by EGLE to submit a Request For Proposal which is the next step in seeking a grant award. We will be researching the requirements to be eligible for this grant in the near future to determine if HPR will have a strong grant proposal that would receive serious consideration.

Is HPR making a difference? Here is what has been happening in the last few months!

- Rural Septic Service Support is soon to begin with Elm Hall, with Sumner on deck
- Ongoing Water Testing for Alma and St. Louis, tributaries, impoundments, Pine River watershed
- Priorities work – confirming issues and finding solutions as we research the (Alma Dam and impoundment; St. Louis impoundment & tributaries; HC/PR Confluence application process
- Improved grant funding & support – HPR was awarded 3 of 4 grants this past few months and is considering a 2024 EGLE NPS 319 grant
- We have added much strength to our HPR team including; HPR Director position, LEAPS @ AC, grant researchers, Vista Volunteer, and new representatives on the HPR board.
- Helpful funding support by municipalities – as HPR continues its efforts to serve our communities
- Restarting our Farm Engagement Committee with farmers and farm agencies
- Putting the groundwork and framework to a “Friends of the Pine River” funding campaign
- Our HPR membership who cares for our waterways and environment through their meeting attendance, membership contributions, and volunteerism. Thanks so much!! See you at our November 9th meeting.

HPR is the lead organization working to improve our river and waterways!

If we do not do it, who will?

And....if not now, when?

What will our legacy be to our future generations?

