



HPR's 2025 Annual Report to Members & Friends

HPR writes an annual report each year to provide an account of what has transpired over the course of the year in working to improve the Pine River. We hope you find the 2025 Annual Report informative.

Thank You! - to our HPR members and "[Friends of the Pine River](#)" for making 2025 a year filled with excellent initiatives in trying to restore the Pine River to a healthier state. Our priorities and projects were supported by your giving to HPR through your [dues](#) and [donations](#) that allowed us to truly fund projects that are helping our river, our residents and communities along our river.

2025 EGLE Dam Risk Reduction Grant Award – HPR co-authored a two year nearly \$300,000 grant with the City of Alma and GEI Engineering to conduct a "Feasibility Study" on what can be done with the ongoing degradation of the Mill Pond (backwater behind the State Street Dam). The backwater for the past two decades has experienced many issues including: shallowing from sediment flowing downstream from the Pine River; has become home to heavy vegetation growth and algal blooms during many months of the year; and through annual water testing has been found to be highly contaminated with excessive nutrients (nitrogen/phosphorous) and E.coli (bacteria from animal/human feces).

The impact of this ongoing degradation is significant as it has greatly reduced water recreation due to human health issues; negatively impacted park usage due to unsightliness; rendered city property on/near the river as unsellable; and has negatively impacted home/property values of those residents living near the river.

The "Feasibility Study" is to seek out what options exist to restore the Mill Pond, or seek other alternatives that might be favorable for recreation and park usage, protecting property values, and encouraging development along the river. A significant component of the grant will be informing and engaging the community through several conversations as to the grant findings and discussing what options are most favorable for the city and its residents.



Satellite Image of the Alma Mill Pond.

Wolverine Pipeline Oil Spill – HPR hosted two membership meetings in [January](#) and [March](#) of 2025 regarding the Wolverine Pipeline Oil Spill that occurred in Arcada Township. The pipeline puncture and leak occurred in a pipe buried below the surface of a county drainage ditch. It is believed that the damage to the pipe was from an excavator working in that area. Representatives of EGLE, Wolverine Pipeline, and the Gratiot drain commissioner attended the HPR meetings and provided explanations as to what may have happened regarding the pipeline leak, the quantity of oil released, and efforts to recapture the oil from spill. EGLE has signed off on the project asserting that the pipe replacement and cleanup were done properly and effectively.

2025 Summer Water Testing Program – HPR contributed \$8,900 towards Alma College’s efforts to conduct ongoing water testing throughout the watershed this past summer. Results of the water testing continue to show that the Pine River is still heavily contaminated however there was some improvement in specific areas particularly in the Lumberjack Park/Riverdale area.

Specific testing sites were selected to help determine the ever-increasing contamination in the St. Louis impoundment area specifically dealing with increased water vegetation and algal blooms. The college, HPR, and the Gratiot drain commissioner believe they may have located the reason for the increased contamination particularly occurring in Sugar Creek. It is hoped further investigation will continue to identify the location and reduce the contaminants.

Water testing information can be found here: <https://www.healthypineriver.org/information-and-education/>.

Septic Outreach – HPR has continued its septic outreach efforts to our rural communities and residents residing on/near the Pine River and its tributaries.

Residents of Riverdale, Elm Hall, Elwell, and Sumner have been assisted by our HPR septic liaison, Mikie VanHorn and her efforts at providing information regarding appropriate septic practices to nearly 400 residential homes in Gratiot County. Mikie has been working closely with the Mid Michigan District Health Department and the Gratiot Drain Commissioner, Bernie Barnes.

Education Outreach – This past year HPR sponsored a youth science team to compete in the “Pitch-er This!” competition sponsored by United Way of Greater Central Michigan. Our “Pine River Protectors” team led by retired middle school teacher Sara Miller, and comprised of Reagan Falor, Allison Sandro, Ainsley Falor, and Ella Johnson gave their “pitch” to judges regarding the importance of restoring the Pine River to a healthier state. Our girls team placed second in the competition and were awarded the full scholarship of \$5,000 for their efforts.

With the scholarship HPR will continue to develop education curriculum for Alma HS/MS students along with 4th/5th grade students visiting Forest Hills Nature Area.

Farming Community Engagement – HPR is once again engaging our farming community and county farm agencies in trying to better understand how best to reduce livestock contamination in our river and tributaries. HPR is working to support farmer efforts to have a sustainable and productive business as agriculture makes up a significant portion of our Gratiot economy. HPR has adopted a “WE” attitude that all parties should be interested and engaged in trying to restore the Pine River to a healthy state that positively impacts our future generations. Farmers have been long-standing “stewards” of our lands and we hope to honor and acknowledge that as we work together to improve our environment.

LEAPS & HPR Collaboration – HPR continues to sponsor the Alma College “Leaders for Environmental Protection and Sustainability” chapter and this past year collaborated on projects that involved Earth Day, spring cleanup at Forest Hills Nature Area, and assisting the Community Garden in preparing for a new growing season. Working jointly with these environmental studies students has enriched HPR’s efforts at reaching out to our younger generations and learning what role they hope to play in improving our environment.



LEAPS volunteering at the Gratiot Community Garden (source: www.instagram.com/almacollegeleaps/)

Vista Volunteers – HPR wants to give a special thank you to our two Ameri-Corp Vista Volunteers Maria Kolb and Zoe Palmer who were very active in HPR projects regarding; Pitch-er This!, Earth Day, grant assistance, fund raising, and HPR monthly meetings. Zoe has moved on to be a MSU Resident Hall Director, while Maria has entered graduate school overseas in the Czech Republic.

HPR’s Advocacy – HPR has continued to stay active and supportive of water and environmental issues by maintaining annual memberships in the Gratiot Area Chamber of Commerce; Michigan Environmental Council (state level), and River Network (national level).

Communication Efforts – HPR is once again working to find effective ways of communicating with our members and public. We are working to upgrade our [website](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#) social media accounts, and will continue to provide our quarterly newsletter for fall, winter, spring, and summer. Please let us know if there are areas we can improve communicate with you at healthypineriver@gmail.com.

HPR Board & Leadership – HPR has added four new members to our HPR board of directors including: Sara Miller (retired educator), Joshua Leppien (St. Louis Assistant City Manager, Dave Ringle, Alma Director of Public Services, and Dr. Ben Peterson, Advancement at Alma College.

Brittany Sommerville with a new career position has moved from HPR part-time director to HPR treasurer, and Dr. Peterson will co-chair HPR with Chuck Sandro. HPR is actively seeking out a part-time director in leading HPR.

HPR Monthly Membership Meetings – Each meeting HPR hosts is about learning and how to work towards a healthy Pine River, Upper Pine River Watershed, and our local environment. Please do not hesitate to let us know if you have a program topic or speaker that we would benefit from. We hope you will join us on the 2nd Thursday of the month at 7:00 p.m. at the Alma Public Library.



The Pine River at Superior Street in Alma, MI.