



River Raisin

WATERSHED COUNCIL

Partner · Protect · Preserve



2025 ANNUAL REPORT



PARTNER · PROTECT · PRESERVE.

River Raisin Watershed



The mission of the River Raisin Watershed Council is to inspire behaviors that promote stewardship, improve water quality, and encourage public participation to protect, preserve and enhance the River Raisin Watershed.

Encompassing a sprawling 1,072 square miles in southeastern Michigan, the River Raisin Watershed cradles a vibrant ecosystem before emptying into Lake Erie. Flowing for nearly 139 miles, the river serves as a haven for diverse fish and wildlife. Lush wetlands filter pollutants, while sprawling forests provide essential corridors for creatures great and small. Farms within the watershed support local food production and economic benefits. Just like many ecosystems, the River Raisin faces threats from agricultural and urban runoff, invasive species, and development.

Recognizing these challenges, the dedicated River Raisin Watershed Council (RRWC) works tirelessly to protect and restore this natural treasure, ensuring its continued beauty and ecological health for generations to come.

Municipalities

HILLSDALE COUNTY

Somerset Twp.

JACKSON COUNTY

Columbia Twp.
Napoleon Twp.
Norvell Twp.
Village of Brooklyn
Village of Cement City

LENAWEE COUNTY

Adrian Charter Twp.
Blissfield Twp.
City of Adrian

City of Tecumseh

Clinton Twp.
Cambridge Twp.
Deerfield Twp.
Fairfield Twp.
Franklin Twp.
Tecumseh Twp.
Madison Charter Twp.
Macon Twp.
Palmyra Twp.
Raisin Charter Twp.
Riga Twp.
Rollin Twp.
Rome Twp.
Seneca Twp.
Village of Blissfield

Village of Clinton
Village of Deerfield
Village of Onsted
Village of Onsted
Woodstock Twp.

MONROE COUNTY

City of Monroe
City of Petersburg
Dundee Twp.
Frenchtown Charter Twp.
London Twp.
City of Milan
Milan Twp.
Monroe Charter Twp.

Raisinville Twp.
Summerfield Twp.
Village of Dundee

WASHTENAW COUNTY

Bridgewater Twp.
Charter Twp.
City of Saline
Freedom Twp.
Lodi Twp.
Manchester Twp.
Pittsfield
Sharon Twp.
York Charter Twp.
Village of Manchester



Delegates

Alice Clark (Clerk)
Amanda Kirkpatrick (Clerk)
Amy Tesolin
Anita Straub
Carol Ladd (Clerk)
Cathy Zenz (Clerk)
Christopher McCallister
Cory Johnstone
Dave Rogers
David Hoffman
David Lamb
David Rhoads
David Smith
Don Rentschler
Doreen Escott (Clerk)
Doug Ingles
Edwin G. Scheffler
Gary Kastel
George Service
Gerry Donaldson

Harry Sheehan
Irma David
Janice Scoville
Jim Isley
Jimi Seeger
John Calhoun
John Gould
John Hummer
Josh Kofflin
Kelly Marion (Clerk)
Kim Meltzer
Laurie Fromhart
Marcy Griffin (Clerk)
Matt Carpenter
Matthew Knoblauch
Mike Ayre
Mike Gunter
Mike Herr
Olga Mancik
Patricia Valliencourt

Peggy Taylor-Albaugh (Clerk)
Phil Kittredge
Richard Janssens
Robert Clark
Roger Lewis
Ronald J. Cousino
Roxann Sweet
Rudy Layher
Sarah Gilmore
Sharon Rodriguez (Clerk)
Stella Kirby
Susan Whitehead (Clerk)
Suzette Burk (Clerk)
Sybil Kolon
Theresa Tupacz
Tim Miles
Trudi Cooper
Wendy Mullane (Clerk)
Zack Cooley

RRWC Staff

2025 marked a year of transition for the River Raisin Watershed Council (RRWC) staff. We extend our deepest gratitude to Steve May for his years of dedicated service as Executive Director and wish him the very best in his retirement at the end of 2024. We are excited to welcome Sean Dennis as our new Executive Director, beginning his leadership in January 2025. We were also pleased to continue strengthening our team, with the addition of Blake Mehlhose as a seasonal intern in October and Morgan Ringel as Volunteer Coordinator in December. These transitions reflect both a fond farewell to valued leadership and an exciting infusion of talent and enthusiasm as we continue our work to protect and preserve the River Raisin Watershed.



Executive Director
Sean Dennis



Stewardship Coordinator
Lydia Lopez



Administrative Coordinator
Benny Woith



Administrative Assistant
Ivy McClelland



Watershed Ecology & Education Consultant
Carley Kratz, Ph.D.



Intern
Blake Mehlhose
(started October 2025)



Volunteer Coordinator
Morgan Ringel
(started December 2025)

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR:

Sean Dennis



It's hard to believe it's been just over a year since I embarked on this journey as Executive Director. It feels much longer – and I mean that in the best way.

In 2025, I dipped my toes into a world I knew very little about. It's a running joke in our office that I once couldn't tell the difference between an owl and a mourning dove. I can now. More importantly, I've vastly deepened my knowledge of our organization, watershed issues, and what it truly means to steward our geographical resources. That knowledge shapes everything – from how I craft budgets and lead our staff, to how I carry the responsibility of leading an organization that is itself a steward of something remarkable.

But enough about me. RRWC is on a journey. Much like the River Raisin flows from its headwaters to Lake Erie, we are moving steadily toward the fulfillment of our mission. It takes time – and I won't pretend we checked every box in 2025 or that we'll check every box in 2026. But we made real progress. We saw growth in our programs, increased efficiency in our operations, and incredible stability in our leadership and staff.

From our first-ever Native Plant Sale, which drew over 200 people from across the region, to our Winter Owl Prowl with 160+ attendees, our programs saw genuine success. Hundreds of students were reached through educational presentations and community partnerships. These aren't just numbers – they represent people connecting to this watershed in ways that last.

The wins and lessons of 2025 have set us up well. Renewed partnerships, committed financial supporters, and a talented team give me real confidence heading into 2026. But organizational strength alone won't carry us there. We need you – volunteers, monthly donors, and people who believe this river is worth fighting for.

If you're reading this annual report, you're already one of those people. So consider this a personal ask: please partner with us. Your support is vital, and we are so glad you're part of this.

Here's to what lies ahead.



REFLECTION FROM THE CHAIR:

Harry Sheehan



In 2025, the RRWC saw continued growth in our programs and events in the community.

If you were one of the 450+ people that volunteered or came out for our Adopt-a-Stream or Nature Explorers Programs, Rain Garden Class, Farmer Led Group, or if you gave a hoot at the world-famous Owl Prowl, you have contributed to the protection of the River Raisin Watershed and all its critters, indoors and out.

If you contributed financially or bought something at our native plant sale, you took the next step to support this programming for future generations. Thank you!!!

If you are a farmer in the MAEAP program or practicing conservation agriculture, thank you, too!

If you were among the 54 dues-paying member governments, we appreciate you!

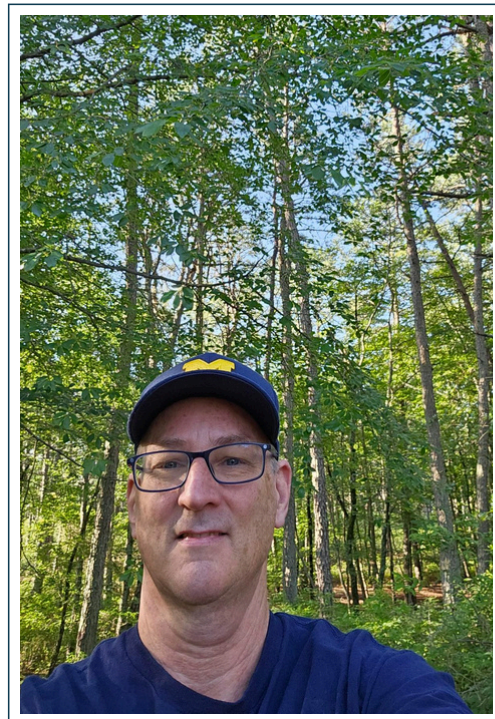
If you haven't yet signed up for our expanding menu of programs, I encourage you to get yourself and your family out to collect damselflies, sing with the frogs, forage the woods, join a cleanup, learn how to bee keep, or buy some merch at rrwc.printful.me

2025 saw continuity in our budget and staffing. Our revenues have grown slightly to keep pace, and our amazing staff have worked hard to protect Michigan's best river - Sean, Lydia, Benny, Ivy and consulting expert Dr. Carly Kratz. Great Job!!!

God willing and if the creek don't rise, 2026 will bring the long-awaited Brooklyn Dam restoration. It turns out environmental permitting and historic preservation come with some bureaucracy. We're on the final stretch, I promise. You can learn more at www.riverraisin.org/brooklyn-dam. RRWC is also helping with public engagement for the Monroe Dam #4 removal, scheduled for 2026/2027.

The future brings many challenges and a realignment for some of our long-term partners at the State and Federal level. Thankfully, we have the support of an expanding coalition and are especially grateful to the Erb Family Foundation for their long-term support, most recently in developing our strategic plan. Based on input from many of you, the strategic plan identifies priorities going forward including, expanding water quality protection programs, improving access to the river and natural areas, and strengthening member government collaboration.

I'll check back with you next year to tell you how we did.



Our Executive Committee



Chair | Harry Sheehan
(Washtenaw County)



Vice Chair | John Calhoun
(Columbia Township)
Stepped Down in January 2026



Vice Chair | Stella Kirby
(City of Petersburg)
Appointed January 2026



Treasurer | Mike Ayre
(Lenawee County)



Secretary | Sybil Kolon
(Manchester Township)
Stepped Down in January 2026



Member | Phil Kittredge
(Cambridge Township)
Appointed Secretary January 2026



Member | Matt Knoblauch
(Blissfield Township)
Joined January 2026



Member | Robert Clark
(City of Monroe)
Joined January 2026



Member | Dave Hoffman
(Monroe County)

Event Highlights

NATIVE PLANT SALE - Spring 2025



In May 2025, the River Raisin Watershed Council hosted its Native Plant Sale and welcomed an incredible turnout from across the community. Gardeners, landowners, and native plant enthusiasts gathered to shop, learn, and connect over a shared commitment to supporting the local environment. With three local native plant vendors offering a wide selection of species, hundreds of native plants found new homes throughout the watershed.

The event was more than just a plant sale, it became a true community celebration. Over 15 partner organizations joined us to table and share resources related to conservation, native gardening, water quality, and habitat

restoration. These organizations provided valuable information and guidance to attendees looking to make more environmentally friendly choices in their landscapes and communities.

Guests also enjoyed live music from Bob Bransky, food from Pita Delight, and beverages from the Musgrove and Company beverage cart, creating a lively and welcoming atmosphere for visitors of all ages. The event provided an opportunity for residents to learn more about native plants, connect with local conservation partners, and take tangible steps toward improving habitat in their own yards and neighborhoods.

Native plants play a critical role in supporting pollinators, improving soil health, and protecting our waterways. Because they are adapted to the local climate and soil conditions, native species typically require less watering and maintenance than non-native plants while providing essential habitat for birds, butterflies, and beneficial insects. By incorporating native plants into their landscapes, residents can help strengthen the health and resilience of our watershed.

Due to the overwhelming success and community enthusiasm surrounding the event, the Native Plant Sale will continue as an annual tradition! Helping residents grow healthier habitats while strengthening connections across our watershed community.



Program Highlights

NATURE EXPLORATION PROGRAMS

- Our Nature Exploration Programs continue to connect community members of all ages with the outdoors through hands-on learning and unique experiences. This year's Owl Prowl welcomed more than 160 attendees who gathered to learn about owls and enjoy an evening exploring the natural world together.
- We also hosted a Women's Chainsaw Class, empowering participants with the skills and confidence to safely operate a chainsaw through a hands-on demonstration.
- For younger nature enthusiasts, the Petersburg Nature Summer Camp brought together more than 30 kids for four half-day sessions focused on fishing, native plants, water quality, and local wildlife, helping inspire the next generation of environmental stewards.



ADOPT-A-STREAM PROGRAM

- The Adopt-A-Stream program remains a cornerstone of watershed monitoring in our community, with over twenty years of continuous data collection helping track the health of local waterways.
- This year, Dr. Carley Kratz joined the River Raisin Watershed Council team, officially, as Watershed Ecology and Education Consultant, continuing her leadership of the Adopt-A-Stream program. Through this program, volunteers and students help monitor stream conditions and collect water quality data while building a deeper connection to the watershed.
- Together, these efforts support long-term environmental monitoring while fostering community stewardship of our local streams.



MASTER RAIN GARDENER

- The Master Rain Gardener Program continues to educate students and community members on stormwater management and sustainable landscaping, fostering hands-on skills that help protect our local waterways. Last year, we partnered with Washtenaw County Water Resources to teach students in Manchester and expanded into a new classroom setting at the LISD Tech Center, engaging horticulture and natural resources students directly in practical, experiential learning.
- In addition to in-person instruction, we offer this program virtually, collaborating with over 10 local conservation organizations. These online sessions reach more than 100 students annually, providing guidance on designing and maintaining rain gardens, understanding local water systems, and implementing strategies that reduce runoff and support healthy ecosystems. By combining classroom, field, and virtual experiences, the Master Rain Gardener Program equips the next generation of stewards to take action for cleaner, greener communities.



Grant Highlights

ERB FAMILY FOUNDATION OPERATING SUPPORT GRANT

The River Raisin Watershed Council (RRWC) secured 3 years of general operating support in the amount of \$60,000 per year from the ERB Family Foundation; 2025 was the first year of the grant. This critical funding enables us to expand our team and bolster efforts to protect and manage the resources within their vital watershed. We are incredibly grateful for the continued support of the Erb Family Foundation and look forward to making an even greater impact.

EGLE EXPANDING PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND EQUITY GRANT

The River Raisin Watershed Council secured a \$40,000 Public Equity and Engagement grant from EGLE to empower residents in making informed decisions and implementing practical solutions for cleaner waterways and a healthier community. This project is achieving its goals by developing and delivering presentations, activities, and experiential learning opportunities to over 1,000 residents, both in classrooms and outdoors. A significant component involves training 75 Master Rain Gardeners with the aim of constructing 30 new rain gardens. Crucially, these initiatives are expanding outreach efforts to include disabled residents, renters, and Spanish-speaking communities, ensuring a broad and inclusive impact across the River Raisin Watershed.

EGLE - SALINE MACON WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PLAN:

The River Raisin Watershed Council (RRWC) secured a \$140,000 Watershed Management Planning grant from EGLE for the creation of a watershed management plan for the Saline-Macon sub-watershed positioned within the northeastern portion of the River Raisin Watershed. Project partners include LimnoTech and the Conservation Districts of Lenawee, Monroe, and Washtenaw.

MICORPS - ADOPT-A-STREAM EXPANSION GRANT:

RRWC received a \$3,000 Macroinvertebrate Sampling Maintenance Grant from MiCorps. Our funds were utilized to enhance our monitoring efforts with revamped instruments and tools and provide stipend funding for our outside-the-organization expert contractors. Updated equipment included D-nets, sanitation supplies and storage bins for materials, making equipment transportation much easier.

MONROE ENVIRONMENTAL FUND - PETERSBURG SUMMER CAMP:

RRWC was given a \$3,000 grant from the Monroe Environmental Fund to support a Nature Camp held in Petersburg MI. Funds were used to purchase equipment and supplies needed for the camp including microscopes, a picnic table, kid sized waders, and fishing poles. More information regarding the camp itself can be found above.

MICHIGAN DNR- BROOKLYN DAM CONNECTIVITY PROJECT

Thanks to a \$1.075 million grant, the River Raisin Watershed Council (RRWC) is making significant progress on a project to revitalize the river and protect its inhabitants. We're working on partially removing the outdated Brooklyn Dam and creating a fish ladder at the Nooney Dam. This will unlock 44 miles of pristine headwater tributaries, allowing fish to thrive and the ecosystem to flourish. The Brooklyn Dam, lacking power or recreation value, poses a potential threat due to its age and lack of maintenance. This project addresses that risk while restoring the river's natural flow and biodiversity.

EGLE - EXPANDED PROGRAMS & CAPACITY BUILDING:

RRWC received a \$40,000 watershed council support grant from EGLE to expand programs and capacity building. This project will take place across the entire River Raisin Watershed, engaging more than 30 municipalities, including townships, villages, cities, and counties. Building on the access-site identification and community engagement work initiated under our current EGLE Watershed Council Support grant, this project aims to strengthen municipal relationships, expand watershed-based education, and identify actionable conservation and public access opportunities at the local level. Key objectives include meeting with municipal leaders to discuss watershed priorities, delivering place-based education programs for students and community members. What makes this project unique is its focus on direct, relationship-centered outreach, meeting municipalities where they are and tailoring support to the needs, interests, and challenges of each community. Rather than proposing one-size-fits-all activities, the project creates a customized, watershed-wide network of partners who are better equipped, better informed, and more connected to the River Raisin and its stewardship needs.

US FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE- FORESTS TO FAUCETS

The US Fish and Wildlife Service awarded the River Raisin Watershed Council a \$50,000 grant to span three years, 2025 was the last of three years. This grant funded the implementation of trees into the watershed as trees are a river's best friend, and forests help with the water quality of lakes in surrounding areas. They capture and slow runoff, create soil structure, build nutrients across the landscape, provide shade, and stabilize banks. They also tend to raise residential property values.

Project Highlights

UPPER RIVER RAISIN CONNECTIVITY PROJECT



Significant progress continued in 2025 toward restoring connectivity and improving the ecological health of the upper River Raisin.

Design & Engineering Progress

- Engineering design and hydraulic modeling advanced throughout the year, including analysis confirming that the project will not increase flood elevations for nearby properties. Design work reached the 90% stage and includes plans for a fish passage structure downstream of Nooney Dam to improve aquatic connectivity.

Permitting & Environmental Review

- State and federal permit applications were developed and submitted in 2025. The Environmental Assessment was updated to meet new federal requirements and made available for public review. The project later completed the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) public notice period without receiving comments and entered final technical review, with permit issuance anticipated in early 2026.

Partnerships & Coordination

- Coordination continued with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to finalize a Memorandum of Agreement ensuring minimal impacts to nearby historic resources. Project partners also continued outreach with adjacent landowners, securing multiple construction agreements needed for the project and continuing discussions with remaining property owners. Coordination with the Jackson County Drain Commission also continued regarding the proposed fish passage structure.

Monitoring & Preparation for Construction

- Real-time monitoring of Vineyard Lake water levels continued to document natural fluctuations and confirm that the project will not affect lake elevations. To maintain the planned construction schedule, seasonal tree clearing north of Mill Street began in late 2025 in accordance with state guidelines to avoid impacts to bat habitat.

Looking Ahead

- Construction for the Brooklyn Dam removal and stream restoration is currently planned for summer 2026, pending final permits and completion of project agreements.
- A fish ladder at Nooney Dam will follow in 2027.

Project Highlights

SALINE MACON WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PLAN



The Saline–Macon Watershed Management Project focuses on improving water quality in a priority tributary of the River Raisin, targeting E. coli and phosphorus. These pollutants contribute to nutrient loading in Lake Erie, which drives harmful algal blooms in the Western Basin.

The project will develop a comprehensive Watershed Management Plan that identifies pollutant sources, evaluates potential solutions, and prioritizes management actions tailored to the watershed. Key goals include supporting long-term water quality improvements, protecting aquatic life, and promoting public awareness of local water quality issues.

Project Objectives:

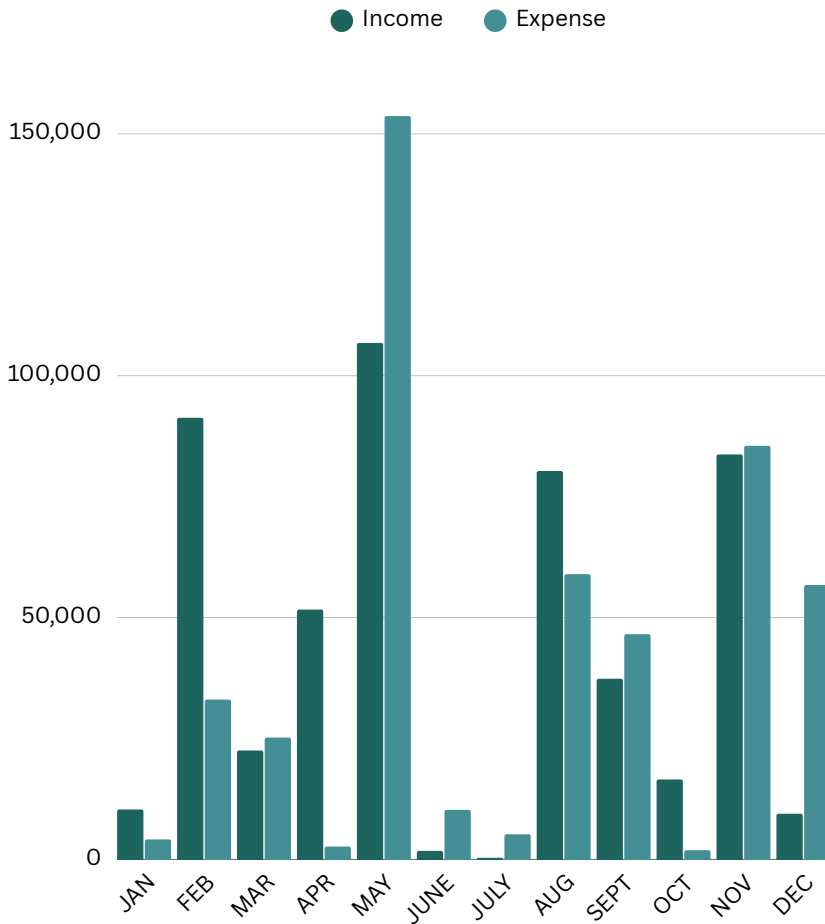
- Identify Critical Source Areas and pollutant pathways contributing to elevated E. coli and phosphorus.
- Assess livestock operations and on-site disposal systems using services from Washtenaw County Conservation District and LimnoTech, including analysis of E. coli and microbial source tracking data.
- Perform tillage and residue surveys in two HUC-12 subwatersheds to quantify phosphorus sources, develop a water quality monitoring strategy, and capture spatial and temporal variability in phosphorus concentrations.
- Develop a management action implementation strategy for both E. coli and phosphorus sources that is practical, watershed-specific, and acceptable to local stakeholders.
- Engage stakeholders through focus groups, steering committee meetings, and feedback sessions to ensure the WMP reflects local priorities and encourages adoption of best management practices.
- Complete community outreach, education, and knowledge-sharing program to raise awareness of water quality issues, solutions, and BMP opportunities, leveraging resources from EGLE, partner organizations, and local conservation groups.

Through these objectives, the project builds on existing strategies from Michigan’s domestic action plan for Lake Erie and prior watershed plans, providing a clear roadmap for improving water quality and reducing pollutant impacts across the Saline–Macon Watershed.

2025 Financial Summary

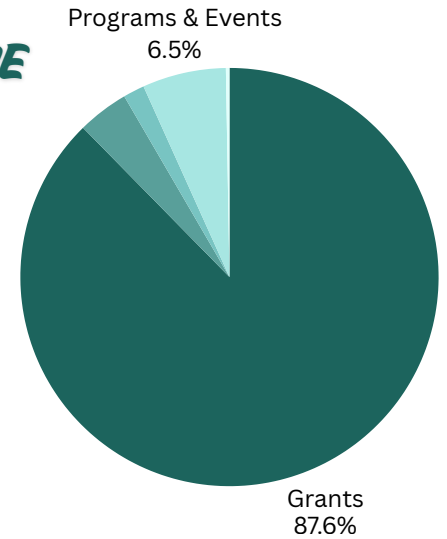
DISCLAIMER: THE ACCURACY OF THE INCOME & EXPENSES FOR 2025 ARE SUBJECT TO AUDIT.

INCOME VS. EXPENSE



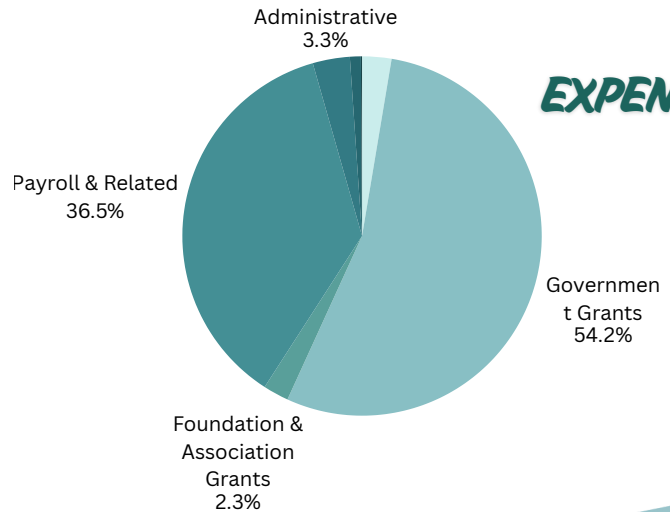
- Grants
- Municipal Membership
- Donations
- Programs & Events
- Other Income

INCOME



- Programs
- Government Grants
- Foundation & Association Gr...
- Payroll & Related
- Administrative
- Fundraising
- Cost of Goods Sold

EXPENSES



In 2025, the River Raisin Watershed Council reported total income of \$481,720 and total expenses of \$483,833, resulting in a net deficit of \$2,113.

This reflects program expenditures associated with implementation projects during the year.

Thank You to Our Donors!

The River Raisin Watershed Council wants to thank everyone who gave their time or a financial donation to our organization in 2025.

Your support has helped us continue our mission to preserve, protect, and enhance the River Raisin, together.

INDIVIDUAL DONORS

Matthew Albert
Nancy Austin
Mike Ayre
Kelcey Baker
Brianna Barth
Ilene Beninson
Nik Berzkalns
John Calhoun
Jackson Cenusa
Robert Clark
Trudi Cooper
Rita Cuevas
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Autumn Wellman
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Jordan Wright
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CORPORATE DONORS

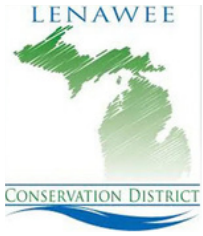


FRED & BARBARA
**Erb Family
Foundation**



NISWANDER
ENVIRONMENTAL

Partner Organizations



Michigan Vernal Pools Partnership



PARKS & RECREATION
WASHTENAW COUNTY
Michigan





River Raisin

WATERSHED COUNCIL

Partner · Protect · Preserve

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Tecumseh, Michigan
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FOLLOW US:

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Tiktok: @riverraisinwaters

LinkedIn: River Raisin Watershed Council

iNaturalist: @riverraisinwc

YouTube: @riverraisinwc

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Code.

