



Photo by Annabelle Robinson



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River Raisin

WATERSHED COUNCIL

Partner • Protect • Preserve

2024 ANNUAL REPORT

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

Brad Benzing
Don Tappan
Amanda Riska (Clerk)

Bob Jenson
John Calhoun
Cathy Zenz (Clerk)
John Hummer
David Lamb
Marilyn Kremer
Irma David
Carol Ladd (Clerk)
Karol Bolton
Mike Herr

Gerry Donaldson
Sarah Gilmore
Christopher McCallister
Matt Carpenter
Alice Clark (Clerk)
Jim Isley
Mike Ayre

Phil Kittredge
Sharon Rodriguez (Clerk)
Susan Whitehead (Clerk)
Suzette Burk (Clerk)
Annette Roesch (Clerk)

John Gould
George Service
Roxann Sweet
Ronald J. Cousino
James Holeman
Jimi Seegert
Harry Sheehan
Laurie Fromhart
Rudy Layher
Jan Godek
Sybil Kolon

Patricia Valliencourt
Craig Lyon
Kelly Marion (Clerk)
Dawn Krause

Trudi Cooper
Chuck Tellas
Dave Rogers
Doreen Escott (Clerk)
David Richards
Al Navarro
Danielle Gross
Peggy Taylor-Albaugh (Clerk)
Natalie Thompson
Buck Alar
David Hoffman
Gary Lazette
Dave Uhl
David Smith
Joanne Darling
Olga Mancik
Martha Churchill
Richard Janssens
Robert Clark
Charles & Cherri Haddix

A LEGACY OF WATERSHED PROTECTION IN THE RIVER RAISIN

Steve May

After nine years of dedicated service, Stephen May has retired from his position as executive director of the River Raisin Watershed Council, leaving behind a legacy of impactful advocacy and environmental stewardship. May, a longtime champion for the health of the River Raisin Watershed, brought a wealth of experience to his role, particularly from his previous tenure as Lenawee County's drain commissioner.



May's commitment to watershed protection extended beyond administrative duties. He actively engaged with various stakeholders, fostering crucial collaborations with organizations such as the Lenawee Conservation District. These partnerships were instrumental in implementing initiatives aimed at improving water quality throughout the watershed. Notably, May recognized the importance of working directly with landowners and agricultural producers. He dedicated efforts to educating and encouraging farmers to adopt conservation practices, promoting sustainable land management that benefits both the environment and the community.

Throughout his career, May demonstrated a deep understanding of the complex challenges facing the River Raisin Watershed. His expertise, honed through years of public service, proved invaluable in guiding the watershed council's efforts to protect and preserve this vital natural resource. His leadership has left a lasting impact, ensuring the River Raisin Watershed remains a priority for environmental protection in Michigan.

Sean Dennis: WELCOMING A NEW LEADER



We are delighted to welcome Sean Dennis as our new Executive Director. Bringing a wealth of experience from his previous role at the Greater Lenawee Chamber of Commerce, Sean's proven project management skills and regional connections will be invaluable as we advance our mission. His blend of enthusiasm and business savvy will be instrumental in leading our initiatives, including instream monitoring, the Brooklyn Dam project, and farmer-led conservation programs, ensuring the continued protection and preservation of the River Raisin Watershed.

RRWC Staff

2024 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 we 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 early 2025. We also said farewell to Isabelle Uganski and Meija Knafl, and thank them for their contributions to our team. We were pleased to welcome Ivy McClelland as our new Administrative Assistant in July 2024. These changes bring both a fond farewell to valued colleagues and an exciting infusion of new perspectives and energy as we continue our work to protect and preserve the River Raisin Watershed.



Executive Director
Steve May



Stewardship Coordinator
Lydia Lopez



Administrative Coordinator
Benny Woith



Administrative Assistant
Ivy McClelland
[Started July 2024]



Outreach Coordinator
Meija Knafl
[Left October 2024]



Administrative Assistant
Isabelle Uganski
[Left June 2024]



Summer Intern
Kyler Melmoth



Summer Intern
Levi Makula

REFLECTION FROM THE CHAIR:

Narry Sheehan

The year was highlighted by a 50- Year Anniversary Gala celebrating the River Raisin Watershed Council's humble beginnings in 1974! The evening was well attended, joyful and inspirational. Five decades later we celebrate the Council's ongoing collaborative effort with 54 local governments, partners and the community.

From Farmer Led Conservation to Adopt-a-Stream Sampling we concentrate on conservation practices and measuring our progress. These are both long-term commitments.

We are fortunate to have gotten support from Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) for Nature Exploration, which brings kids, families and individuals into the wild and back to the classroom to learn about the river and its creatures.

With EGLE's continued help, we taught our first Master Rain Gardeners class and have committed to many more, so gardeners can contribute to water quality protection.

On a landscape scale, reforestation is taking root with help from USFS Forests to Faucets Program. We distributed 4,803 trees to residents of the watershed this year, with more to come.

We continued to focus on planning in 2024. We developed most of our Strategic Plan with Erb Foundation support. That effort is revelatory and will conclude in early 2025. Externally, we completed a watershed plan for the Upper Wolf Creek sub-watershed and are hoping to develop more as a foundation for implementation projects. The River Raisin Report Card from the University of Maryland suggests great successes in the watershed, but more work needs to be done.

The year brought us closer to multi-million-dollar efforts to remove dams in the Village of Brooklyn and Dam #4 in Monroe.

It was a year that saw board and staff turnover. As Executive Director Steve May's name was synonymous with the RRWC. After many years with us, and a decade at the helm, Steve retired. We are fortunate to have had a seamless transition with Sean Dennis starting at the beginning of 2025.

We've been just as fortunate to have had Meija Knafl leading our outreach efforts in 2024. She left after a successful tenure and her colleague Lydia Lopez stepped into an expanded role. In addition, two board positions turned over in 2024 and we are grateful for those who served, and those who stepped up.

We look forward to continued growth, community building and success in protecting the River that binds us together.



Our Executive Committee



Chair | Harry Sheehan
(Washtenaw)



Vice Chair | John Calhoun
(Columbia Township)



Secretary | Sybil Kolon
(Manchester Township)



Treasurer | KZ Bolton
(Lenawee)
Stepped Down December 2024



Member | Phil Kittredge
(Cambridge Township)



Member | Trudi Cooper
(Sharon Township)
Stepped Down October 2024



Treasurer | Mike Ayre
(Lenawee)
Joined in 2025

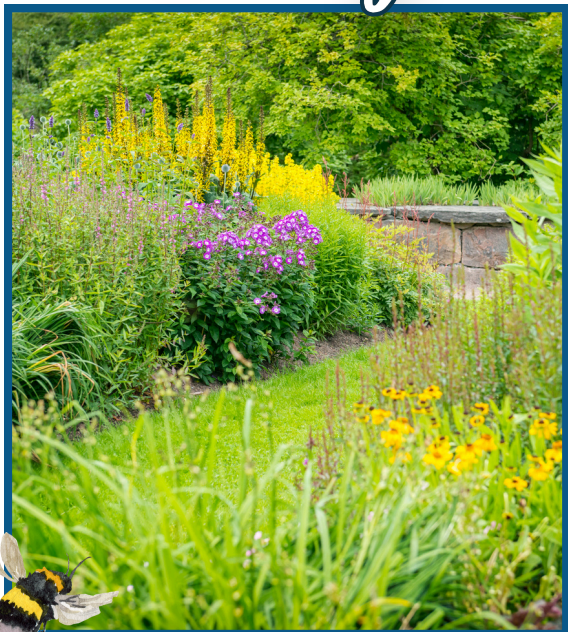


Member | Stella Kirby
(City of Petersburg)
Joined in 2025



Member | Dave Hoffman
(Monroe County)

Program Highlights



MASTER RAIN GARDEN PROGRAM

The Master Rain Gardener program (MRG) made its debut in the River Raisin Watershed in 2023. The MRG program helps you design your rain garden step-by-step during class and become a neighborhood expert! This program is a cornerstone of watershed protection efforts across Southeast Michigan and is expanding its reach into Lenawee County, thanks to a significant grant from the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE). This funding will enable the River Raisin Watershed Council to bring this vital educational initiative to a wider audience, empowering residents to actively improve water quality through the creation of rain gardens.

It provides comprehensive training on rain garden design and implementation and has proven highly effective in reducing stormwater runoff and non-point source pollution. Participants learn essential skills, from site assessment and plant selection to construction and maintenance, culminating in the planting or adoption of their own rain garden. Successful completion of the program earns participants a Master Rain Gardener certification.

This expansion into Lenawee County marks a significant milestone. The first class in Lenawee County began in September 2024, offering local residents a unique opportunity to learn how to create beautiful and functional rain gardens that benefit their community. Furthermore, in 2025, the River Raisin Watershed Council will be offering a specialized Master Rain Gardener class tailored specifically for high school students in Lenawee County. This initiative aims to engage the next generation in environmental stewardship and equip them with practical skills to protect their local waterways.

The Master Rain Gardener program is a collaborative effort, and the River Raisin Watershed Council is proud to be at the forefront of its expansion in Lenawee County. By empowering individuals to take action in their own backyards, the program is making a tangible difference in the health of our watersheds.



Program Highlights

NATURE EXPLORATION PROGRAMS

Our Nature Exploration program had a fantastic year in 2024, offering an expanded array of engaging classes that brought the wonders of nature to life! From native seed collection and fascinating fungi forays to rain gardening workshops, captivating owl prowls, the buzz about beekeeping, and so much more! These enriching educational sessions were initially made possible through a generous grant from EGLE, which concluded in 2024. We are thrilled to announce that due to the program's success and community interest, Nature Exploration will continue as a vital part of our regular programming. Explore the full schedule and discover upcoming classes on our website!



ADOPT-A-STREAM PROGRAM

Continuing a tradition of over two decades, we proudly participated in the MCorps Adopt-A-Stream program throughout 2024. Our invaluable partnership with Dr. Carly Kratz (LISD Tech Center) and Dr. Jim Martin (Adrian College) remained strong, their expertise continuing to guide our monitoring efforts. Building on our commitment to efficient and impactful data collection, in 2024 we implemented a strategic shift to monitoring seven key sites annually. To ensure comprehensive long-term data across the watershed, these seven sites will follow a rotating schedule, with a distinct set of locations monitored in even and odd-numbered years.

FARMER-LED CONSERVATION GROUP (FLG)

Building on the momentum of our new grant cycle, the Farmer Led Group (FLG) continued its vital work in 2024 with a strong focus on growth and impact. Our ongoing goals included expanding the knowledge and skill set of agri-business Certified Crop Advisors (CCA) regarding conservation practices and significantly increasing outreach and communication to farmers and landowners to encourage greater participation in incentive programs. We remained dedicated to retaining and expanding our existing farmer-led conservation network, recognizing the power of peer-to-peer learning. We are also actively working to expand our online resources, providing farmers with easily accessible information and tools on our website to support conservation adoption.



RIVER RAISIN WATERSHED REPORT CARD



Watershed report cards are powerful tools to describe ecosystem status, increase public awareness, and inform and influence decision makers to improve the health of a watershed.

This is the first River Raisin Watershed Report Card. It is the collective effort of dozens of stakeholders throughout the River Raisin watershed. Indicators in the report card were selected to assess the health of six different values in the watershed: *Water, Economy, Ecosystem, Human Health, Infrastructure, and Recreation.*

Our latest report indicates a moderate overall health score (C, 54%), making River Raisin the 2nd best in the region. Key findings highlight the ongoing challenges of nitrogen pollution from non-point source runoff and the need for continued efforts to mitigate its impact.

The report also acknowledges the vital role of agriculture in our region while emphasizing the importance of sustainable practices to protect water quality. This report card serves as a valuable tool to track our progress and guide future initiatives for a healthier River Raisin watershed.

To explore the complete Watershed Report Card and learn more about the health of the River Raisin watershed, we encourage you to visit our website at:
<https://www.riverraisin.org/watershed-report-card>

There, you'll find comprehensive details and additional resources, including assessments of how our watershed supports our communities, economy, and natural ecosystems.



Grant Highlights

ERB FAMILY FOUNDATION OPERATING SUPPORT GRANT

The River Raisin Watershed Council (RRWC) had secured 3 years of general operating support of \$25,000 from the ERB Family Foundation; 2024 was their third and final year. This critical funding had enabled them to expand their team and bolster their efforts to protect and manage the resources within their vital watershed. They were incredibly grateful for the continued support of their partners and looked forward to making an even greater impact.

ERB FAMILY FOUNDATION COMMUNICATIONS GRANT

In addition to their Operating Support grant, the Erb Family Foundation generously awarded them a \$10,100 Watershed Stewardship Communications grant. This two-year grant, spanning 2023 and 2024, fueled their efforts to amplify their social media presence and engage even more people in protecting their vital watershed. They were incredibly grateful for this support, which allowed them to reach wider audiences and make a bigger impact on their shared environment.

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.

THE MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF EGLE - UPPER WOLF CREEK WATERSHED

The River Raisin Watershed Council (RRWC) joined forces with the Loch Erin Property Owners Association thanks to a \$100,967 EGLE grant to investigate the Upper Wolf Creek watershed. Early water samples hinted at worrying levels of phosphorus and E. coli, potentially exceeding state guidelines, flowing into Loch Erin, this grant funds sampling done on the lake, in addition to the building and implementation of a watershed management plan.

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND WATERSHED REPORT CARD

The University of Maryland had secured a \$474,000 grant to develop report cards assessing the social and environmental health of five major rivers, including the River Raisin. These report cards were like "health checks" for the watersheds, using clear indicators to understand their well-being. As part of this project, the RRWC actively participated in meetings to shape the environmental indicators specific to their area. Regional meetings were held to share the findings and gather input.

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.

THE MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF EGLE - NATURE EXPLORATION:

RRWC received a one-year grant from EGLE for \$40,000 to go towards expanding the organization's nature education programs. More information regarding these programs can be found in the "Nature Exploration" section in the program highlights.

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. This grant funds 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. Trees will be available at various locations throughout the watershed starting with the Washtenaw County Conservation District's Spring Tree and Shrub Sale.

Project Highlights

UPPER RIVER RAISIN CONNECTIVITY PROJECT

Significant progress was made in 2024 to enhance the River Raisin's health and connectivity:

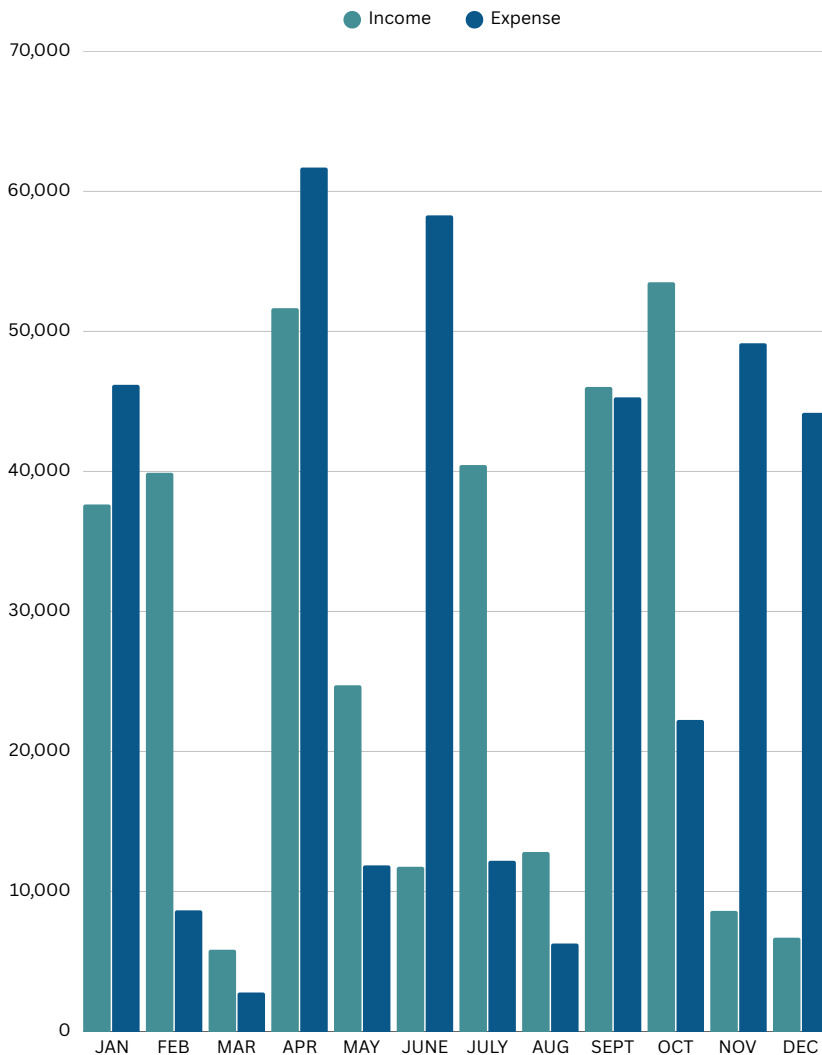
- **Stream Redesign Complete:** Natural Channel Design finalized for the river through the former dam area to Mill Street. Construction planned for 2026, pending permits.
- **Landowner Outreach:** Public meetings held and a monthly newsletter launched to keep stakeholders informed.
- **Impoundment Dewatering & Monitoring:** Dam impoundment slowly dewatered in late 2023 with fish and mussel surveys and relocations conducted. The area was monitored and revegetated in 2024.
- **Vineyard Lake Monitoring:** Continuous water level monitoring system installed to track changes during project phases.
- **Historic Preservation Done:** All historic preservation requirements successfully completed.
- **Mussel Relocation Survey:** Survey of the 2022 relocation site found surviving mussels, including threatened species, indicating a successful effort despite low recapture rates.



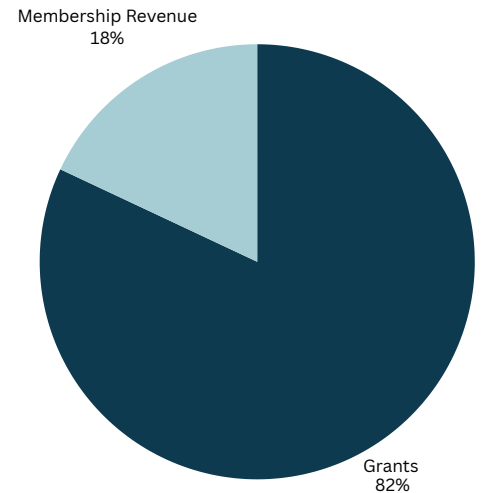
2024 Financial Summary

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

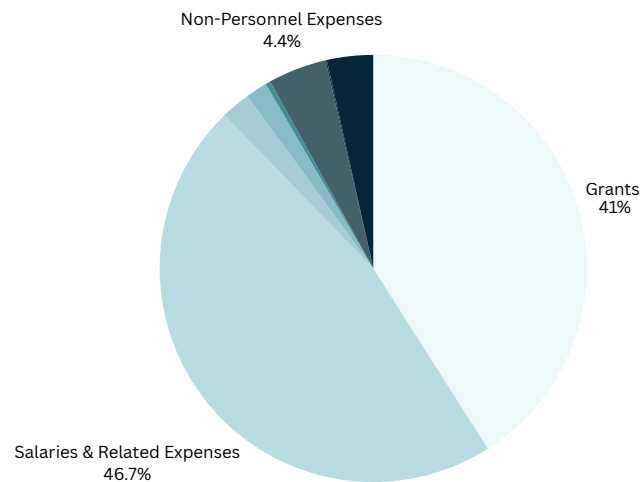
INCOME VS. EXPENSE



INCOME



EXPENSES



INDIVIDUAL DONORS

Matthew Albert	Mike Herr	Anthony Palazzolo
Nancy Austin	Emily Hodge	Maripat Perkins
Ilene Beninson	Charlie Hunt	Joyce Peterson
Dan Bloing	Jim & Laurie Isley	Anthony Pitts
Autumn Bough	Thomas Karnes	Kristina Ryan
Sarah Brabbs	Marty & Hedi Kaufman	Robin Ryan
John Calhoun	Sylvia Kay	Robert & Janice Salsberry
Julie Conley	Stella Kirby	Amanda Sanchez
Eric & Trudi Cooper	Philip & Linda Kittredge	Anna Avie Savage
Leanne Czarniecki	Sarah Lancaster	Laura Schraeder
Terra Deaton	Peter J Loughney	Crystal Schumacker
Megan DeLeeuw	Thomas Magnes	Joseph Schurr
Caroline Depp	Thomas McKarns	Harry Sheehan
Laura Dodd	Stephen May	Dr. Sherman & Julie Shultz
Kimberly A Garner	John Metzler	Amy Tesolin
Kay Garrison	Pamela Michaels	Linda Verhun
Teri Gutierrez	Ellen AP Molony	Lee Walsh
Randal Hawkinson	Tonia Morgan	Emily Wollan
Natalie Haynes		Huayun Xu

The River Raisin Watershed Council wants to thank everyone who gave their time or a financial donation to our organization in 2024. Your support has helped us continue our mission to preserve, protect, and enhance the River Raisin, together.

CORPORATE DONORS

Adrian Animal Clinic
Brooklyn Sportsmans Club
ITC
Erb Family Foundation
Resources Commissioner

Partner Organizations





River Raisin

WATERSHED COUNCIL

Partner • Protect • Preserve

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Within Lenawee Drain Commissioners Office

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Satellite Office:

804 N Evans St. Tecumseh, Michigan

Office Hours:

Tuesday | 9 – 12 am

Thursday | 3 – 6 pm

Every other Saturday | 10 – 1 pm

FOLLOW US:

Website: www.riverraisin.org

Facebook: @riverraisinwatershed

Instagram: @river_raisin_watershed_council

Tiktok: @riverraisinwc

iNaturalist: @RiverRaisinWatershedCouncil

YouTube: @River Raisin Watershed Council