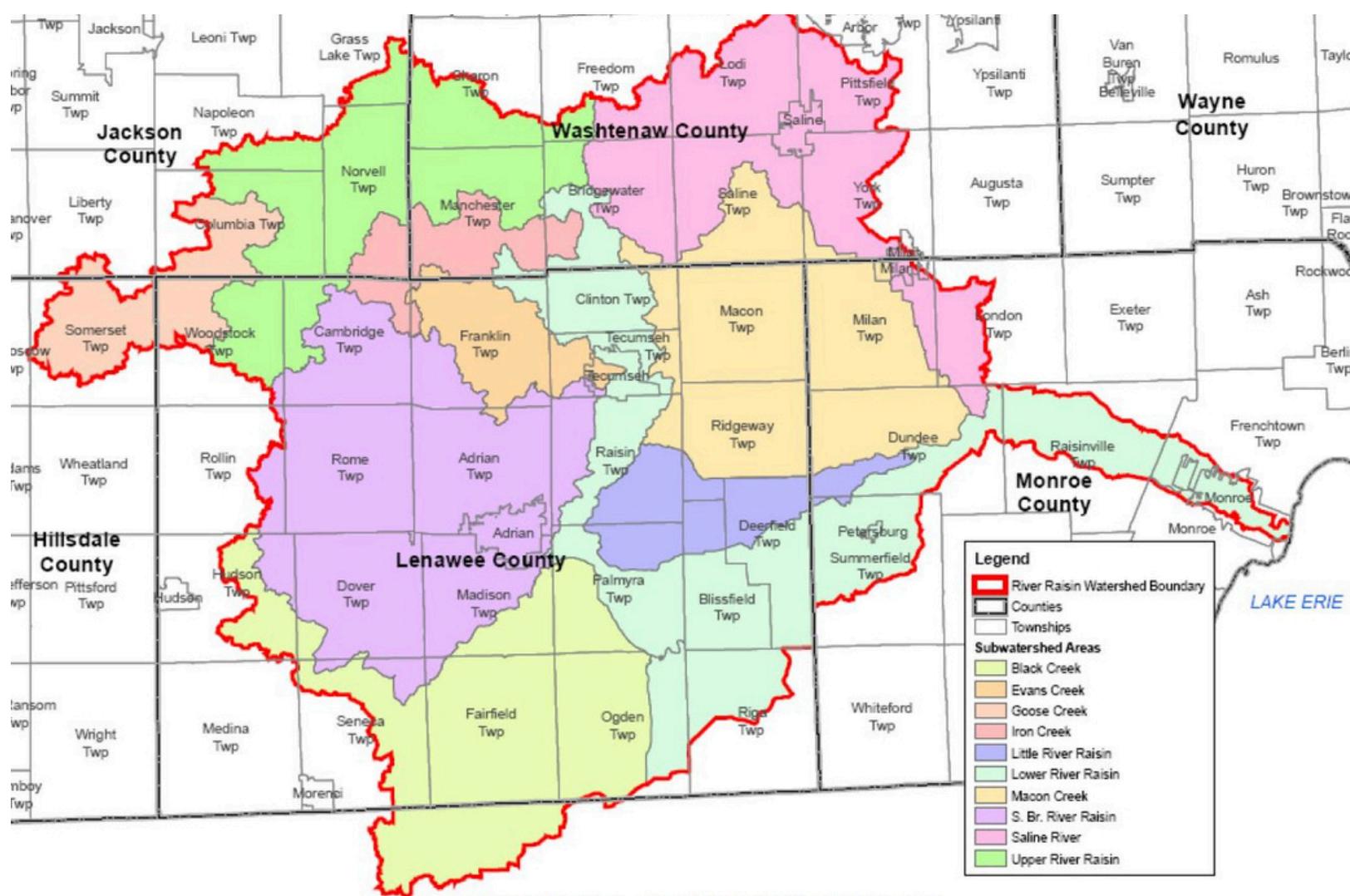


# The River Raisin Watershed Council 2023 ANNUAL REPORT



# 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

**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

**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  
Woodstock Twp.

**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

# LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR:

## Steve May

The River Raisin Watershed Council will be celebrating (50) years as an established non-profit that began September 13, 1974 and over the next (6) months we will be planning and preparing this historical chapter in our organization. RRWC looks forward to a full year in 2024 and celebrating our legacy.

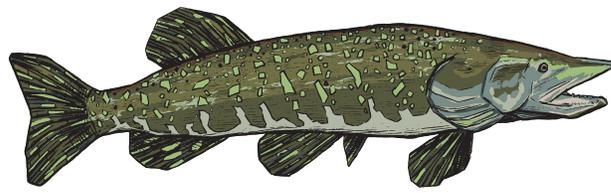


The past year of 2023 was full of events, fairs, festivals, cleanups, nature walks and lots of volunteer participation and this Fall and through 2024 will bring another exciting chapter to the Watershed. The River Raisin Watershed Council has begun working on a (5) year strategic plan from a generous grant from the Erb Family Foundation. Over the next (9) months RRWC will be working with Parallel Solutions to understand RRWC's current operational system and practices. Parallel Solutions will review previous strategic or operational plan(s), recent organizational assessments, program and event plans or summaries, program and event evaluations, board-approved budgets, financial reports, fundraising data or reports, member feedback surveys, annual staff work plans, an organizational chart, job or role descriptions, operating budgets and other financial information, annual reports, bylaws and other board policies, operating procedures, existing partnership agreements, communication materials, and representative copies of board and committee agendas and minutes.

Parallel Solutions will develop specific sets of questions for internal and external stakeholder interviews and will share the interview questions with the Executive Director and Executive Committee prior to conducting the interviews. Our consultant will develop a survey to be distributed to current RRWC members. This survey will be distributed via email by RRWC and will also be included by RRWC as an insert in one of its newsletters. The survey will focus on gathering and understanding members' motivations for being part of the RRWC community, why the RRWC matters, their experiences with the RRWC, and their hopes for the future. The goal will be to receive 100 completed surveys. For this to be successful, we need participation and create awareness that this is YOUR Strategic Plan !!

**Partner, Protect, Preserve ... OWN IT !!!**

# STAFF



Lydia, our Water Stewardship Coordinator, has transitioned to a full-time role! With her increased capacity, Lydia has already begun coordinating engaging monthly volunteer events and developing nature exploration education programs. We were also delighted to welcome Alyiah and Andrew as our summer seasonal interns! Both Alyiah and Andrew brought unique skills and enthusiasm to our team, and we enjoyed their help this past summer. Overall, this expansion allows us to better serve our community and further our mission. We're grateful for the support that made this growth possible, and we can't wait to see what the future holds!



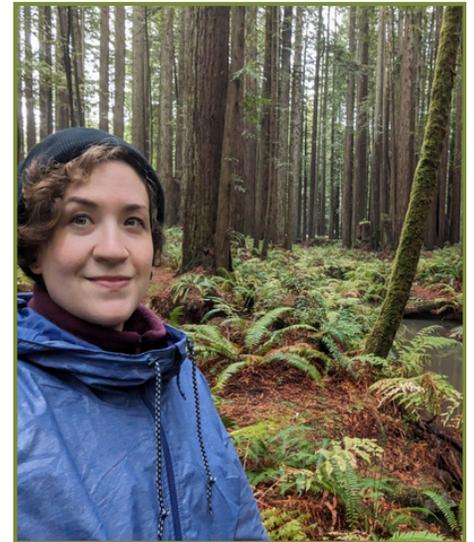
Executive Director-  
Steve May



Outreach Coordinator-  
Meija Knafl



Stewardship Coordinator-  
Lydia Lopez



Admin-  
Sarah (Benny) Woith



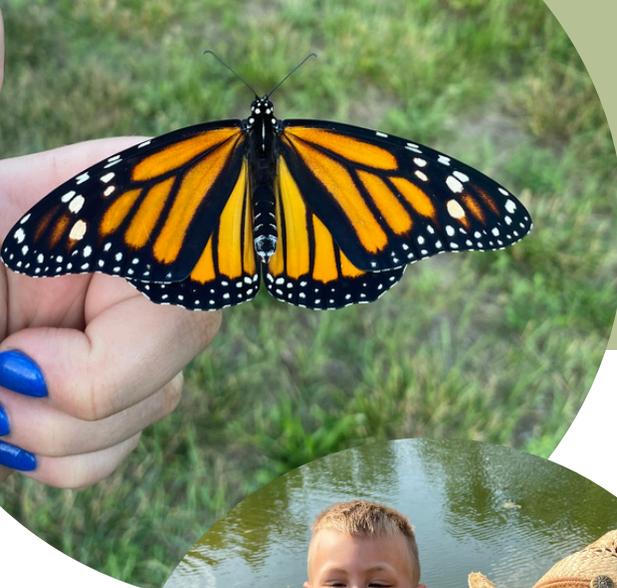
Assistant Admin-  
Isabelle Uganski



Summer Intern-  
Alyiah Fife



Summer Intern-  
Andrew Mullins



# REFLECTION FROM THE CHAIR:

## Navy Sheehan

The River Raisin Watershed Council (RRWC) is completing its 50th year focused on conserving all that the River has to offer to its communities: recreation, fishing, drinking water, industry, agriculture, habitat, and quality of life.

Staff, members, and volunteers are committed to maintaining and improving the river, so that surrounding communities can reap the benefits of this natural treasure. In 2024, the RRWC will continue working on vital projects:

Brooklyn Dam removal and a fish ladder at Vineyard Lake to open fish passage to the 44 miles of high-quality fishery upstream.

Farmer Led Group promoting conservation agriculture.

Outreach to schools with lessons in hydrology habitat and stewardship that reaches over 1000 students every year,

Rain Garden Classes that teach gardeners how to use native plants to treat runoff, recharge groundwater, and create habitat

Nature Explorers Program brings hands-on learning to kids, families, and adults, Bug collection and ID, to cost-effectively monitor water quality in the river, ... and much more!

The RRWC is grateful to received generous support from the ERB Foundation, the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts, the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy, the University of Maryland, the US Fish and Wildlife Service and numerous individual and corporate donors.



# Our Executive Committee



Chair - Harry Sheehan  
(Washtenaw)



Vice Chair- John Calhoun  
(Columbia Township)



Secretary- Sybil Kolon  
(Manchester Township)



Treasurer- KZ Bolton  
(Lenawee)



Member- Phil Kittredge  
(Cambridge Township)

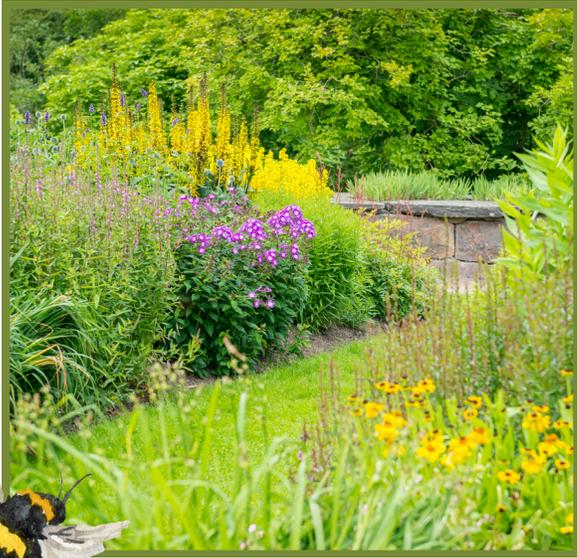


Member- Trudi Cooper  
(Sharon Township)

\*Not Pictured is Member- Dave Hoffman (Monroe County)\*

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.

# 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! RRWC offered a 101 course to kick off a full season of MRG courses beginning in 2024. Rain gardens within the River Raisin Watershed had not previously been mapped, until this past year. These gardens are now included on Washtenaw County's rain-scaping map for southeast Michigan.

## NATURE EXPLORATION PROGRAMS

Nature Exploration brings nature to the classroom for a little while and then brings the classroom back out to nature. These educational sessions include topics ranging from native seed collection; mushroom, and berry scavenging; rain gardening; owl prowling; beekeeping; worm-composting, and more, OH MY!!! These programs were made possible through a grant from EGLE and will continue into 2024, and hopefully for years to come following the end of the grant. Check out our website for more information.



## ADOPT-A-STREAM PROGRAM

For over 20 years, the River Raisin Watershed Council (RRWC) has proudly participated in the MlCorps Adopt-A-Stream program, diligently led by our incredible partners Dr. Carly Kratz (LISD Tech Center) and Dr. Jim Martin (Adrian College).

This year, to ensure efficient data collection and maximize impact, we strategically streamlined our monitoring efforts by focusing on a select number of key sites. Furthermore, the RRWC is exploring innovative monitoring techniques. Through collaboration with the Huron River Watershed Council, our staff received training on implementing a stonefly search in winter. This promising method could provide crucial information about the health of the ecosystem during a previously unmonitored period.



# FARMER-LED WATERSHED CONSERVATION GROUP UPDATE:



In alignment with FLG's mission, in 2023 we kicked off a new grant cycle, and our goals included:

- Expanding the knowledge and skill set of agri-business Certified Crop Advisors (CCA) regarding conservation practices
- Increasing outreach and communications to farmers and landowners to increase participation in incentive programs
- Retaining and growing the existing farmer-led conservation network
- Developing and implementing a comprehensive fundraising plan for the Western Lake Erie Basin - Farmer Led Group



## Farmer-Led Group's Mission Statement:

To connect and communicate with other farmers, to increase conservation on the farm to reduce the amount of nutrients and sediment flowing into Lake Erie.

One of the outreach and communications activities we'd love to share with you is our Best Management Practise (BMP) videos on YouTube (@farmer-ledwatershedconserv1136)! Want to learn more about cover crop, no-till, or two-stage ditches for flashy drains on your operation? Have you ever wanted to cash in on a harvestable buffer, or catch every drop of water from your tile in a recycling pond? Have erosion problems, and want to hear how a local row cropper utilized erosion control dikes to get rid of his erosion problems?

Join us on YouTube to learn all about these practices and more! Local experts from Southeastern Michigan invite us onto their land to see just how they make these practices work for them. These are operators who are second-, third-, and even fourth-generation landowners who have run their businesses for decades! Learn from their wisdom and experience, give these techniques a try, and let us know how they worked for you... maybe even film your own BMP video for our channel!

Finally, thanks to our partners for all their support! These wonderful folks include the Erb Family Foundation, The River Raisin Watershed Council, the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts, the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, and the Michigan Agricultural Environmental Assistance Program.



# Grant Highlights

## **ERB FAMILY FOUNDATION OPERATING SUPPORT GRANT:**

The River Raisin Watershed Council (RRWC) have secured 3 years of general operating support \$25,000 from the ERB family foundation, 2024 will be our third and final year! This critical funding has enabled us to expand our team and bolster our efforts to protect and manage the resources within our vital watershed. We are incredibly grateful for the continued support of our partners, and we look forward to making an even greater impact in the coming year.

## **ERB FAMILY FOUNDATION COMMUNICATIONS GRANT:**

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

## **THE MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF EGLE - OUTREACH AND EXPANSION:**

The \$40,000 Outreach Expansion and Fundraising grant provides a chance to implement the RRWC Marketing Playbook, create a development plan, initiate a business advisory group, purchase software for volunteer/member communications, and initiate a map-based data tool for the 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 secured a \$474,000 grant to develop report cards assessing the social and environmental health of five major rivers, including our very own River Raisin! These report cards will be 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 our 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.

**\*New Additions as of 2023\***

## **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**

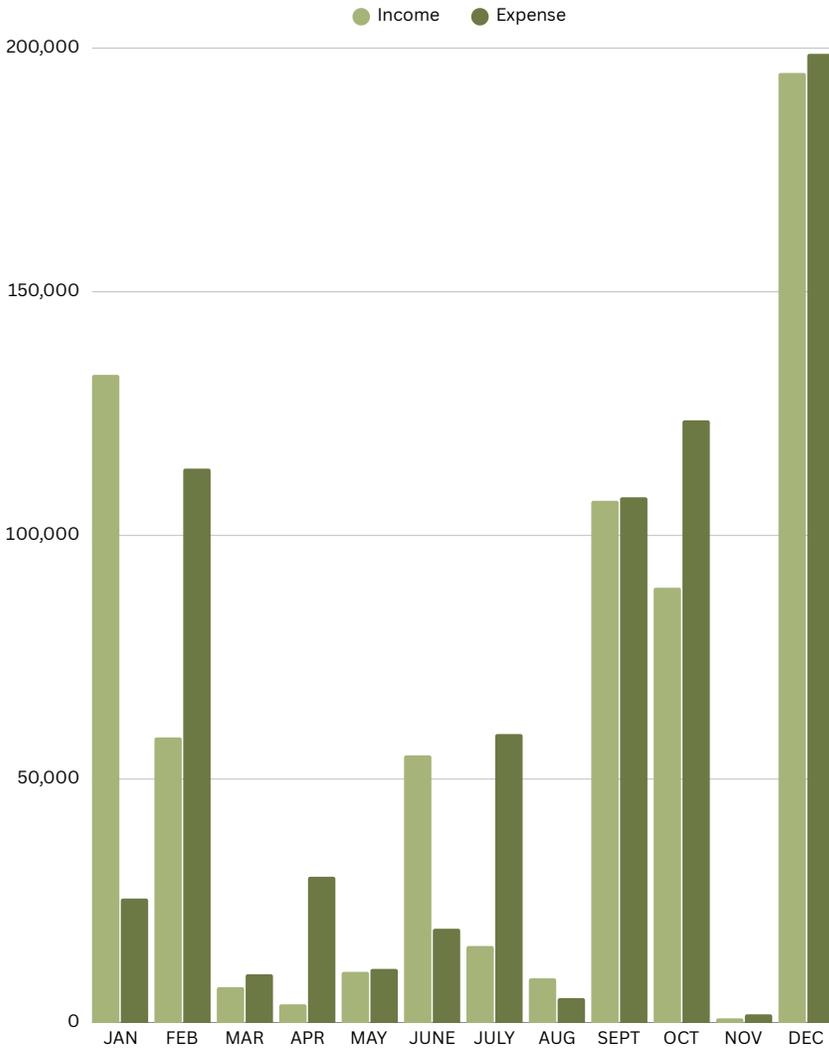
The River Raisin Watershed Council (RRWC) is leading the exciting project to remove the Brooklyn Dam, opening up 44 miles of the upper River Raisin. This multi-year initiative reached a significant milestone in 2023 with the successful completion of the mill pond drawdown. To minimize environmental impact, the project followed strict guidelines, allowing a maximum drawdown rate of 0.5 feet per day. However, project managers took extra precautions, opting for a slower rate of 0.17 feet per day over 39 days. This meticulous approach helped reduce the stranding of aquatic organisms and minimize sediment disturbance affecting downstream ecosystems. Prior to the drawdown, a comprehensive SCUBA survey mapped any potential mussel habitats. Thankfully, no mussels were identified, ensuring their safety. Throughout the drawdown, meticulous daily inspections and stranded organism surveys documented aquatic life. Identified organisms were measured, photographed, and carefully relocated to a suitable downstream section of the river, ensuring their well-being. The successful drawdown paves the way for the next phase of the project, marking a significant step towards restoring the natural flow and ecological health of the upper River Raisin. The RRWC remains committed to responsible and sustainable dam removal, prioritizing environmental protection and community engagement throughout the process.



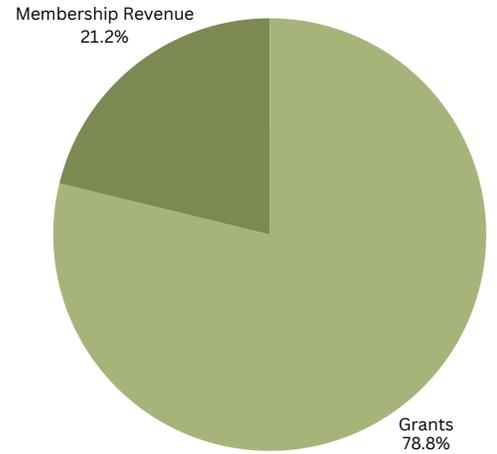
# 2023 FINANCIAL SUMMARY

**\*DISCLAIMER: THE ACCURACY OF THE INCOME & EXPENSES FOR 2023 ARE SUBJECT TO AUDIT.\***

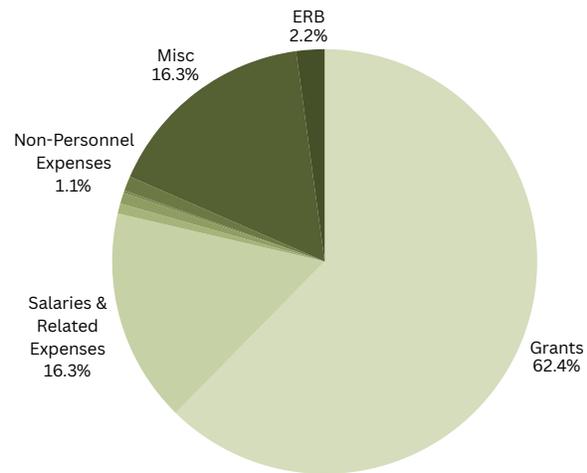
## INCOME V.S. EXPENSE



## INCOME



## EXPENSES



## INDIVIDUAL DONORS

Ilene Bennison  
 Maya Bobronikov  
 Jessica Bukrey  
 Julie Burgess  
 Leanne Czarnecki  
 Megan Deleeuw  
 Tim Husband  
 Meija Knafel  
 Sybil Kolon  
 Barb Krienke  
 Kathy Loomis

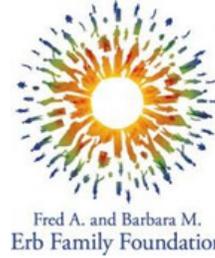
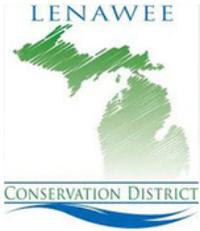
Shirley Ma  
 Steve May  
 Thomas McKarns  
 John Metzler  
 Cortaz Paige  
 Vinnie Petre  
 Harry Sheehan  
 Nancy Silverrod  
 Lee Walsh  
 Sarah Woith  
 Deborah Zakovich

The River Raisin Watershed Council wants to thank everyone who gave their time or a financial donation to our organization in 2023. Your support has helped us continue our mission to preserve, protect, and enhance the River Raisin, together.

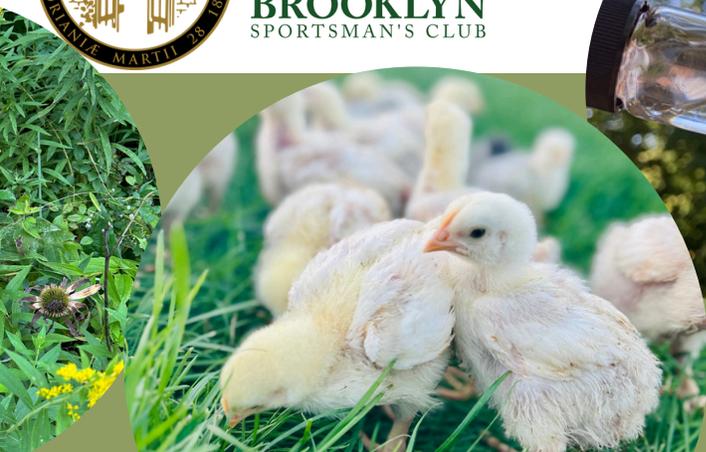
## CORPORATE DONORS

ERB Family Foundation  
 Wild Ones Oak Openings Region Chapter  
 Ad-Lib Coffee Shop  
 Musgrove & Company  
 Wacker Chemical Company

# PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS



Michigan Vernal Pools Partnership





*River Raisin*

WATERSHED COUNCIL

Partner · Protect · Preserve

**CONTACT US:**

Riverraisin001@gmail.com

517-264-4754

**VISIT US:**

Adrian Office:

Within Lenawee Drain Commissioners Office  
320 Springbrooke Ave. Adrian, Michigan  
Office Hours: By Appointment

Satellite Office:

804 N Evans St. Tecumseh, Michigan

Office Hours:

Monday & Wednesday- 12 pm to 6 pm

Tuesday & Thursday- 9 am to 12 pm

**FOLLOW US:**

Website: [riverraisin.org](http://riverraisin.org)

Facebook: @riverraisinwatershed

Instagram: @river\_raisin\_watershed\_council

Twitter: @RiverRaisinWC

Tiktok: @riverraisinwc

iNaturalist: @RiverRaisinWatershedCouncil

YouTube: @River Raisin Watershed Council