

The Watershed Reporter

Partnering to protect our water resources

December 2002

A Year-end Message from the Board of Directors and Staff of the FRWC

As this year comes to an end, it would be appropriate to provide each of you with a progress report on the FRWC. Much of this issue will be dedicated to that subject and a look forward to the coming years.

This past year has been one of discovery, growth and planning for the future. The Board of Directors and staff will utilize this year's experiences to help carry the FRWC into 2003. We have initiated a number of new programs and set the stage for healthy growth into the future.

Funding organizations are showing their confidence in the FRWC as a growing environmental non-profit that is on the right track for future progress. Partnerships will continue to be developed and enhanced throughout the watershed and beyond. Our ability to grow sensibly and in a targeted fashion is key to long-term success.

The past year's accomplishments and next year's plans are contained within this issue. We value our members and others opinions regarding our efforts to meet watershed community needs. Can you see yourself taking a small part in helping the FRWC be a better advocate for an improved environment?

At this special time of year, the Board of Directors and staff thank you for your continued support and wish you and your family a joyous holiday season.

The Year in Review

In March 2002, the FRWC hired its first employee, Executive Director, Glenn LeFeber, in a move that signaled the beginning of a transition from an all volunteer to a staff/volunteer organization. His background in environmental biology and marketing suited the needs of the FRWC. According to LeFeber, "The public reputation and potential for growth, of the FRWC, are two main reasons why I accepted the position".

The FRWC embarked on several new exciting projects that were aimed at increasing outreach capabilities and building organizational capacity.

In September, the first annual RiverFest was held in Flushing. This event achieved two goals. First, it created community exposure with a major (for us) public event. And, second, nearly thirty exhibitors supported our core belief of educating the public on a variety of watershed environmental issues. In addition to the exhibits, demonstrations, contests and family oriented activities were key components. It was gratifying to see that local sponsors were eager to become involved in several ways.

The success of this event illustrated to us that there is a broad-based core of support locally and that RiverFest 2002 would generate increased future interest

The Year in Review (con't.)

in these types of events throughout the watershed.

Shortly following RiverFest, the second new event, "Growing Partnerships", a fundraiser aboard the Genesee Belle, generated positive results for the first year. Support came from a diverse cross-section of the watershed including corporations, individuals and other environmental groups. As a benefit to those attending, the FRWC extended complimentary memberships through 2003.

Two other initiatives were aimed at building the FRWC's capacity for long-term growth and success. The FRWC relies on both monetary and volunteer support to accomplish its goals. To those ends, the first membership drive, which involved all FRWC members, including the Board of Directors, began in October to broaden support throughout the watershed. This drive fell short of projections and as a result, did not generate the needed resource capacity. However, it is imperative that the FRWC continue to actively pursue future membership campaigns. We must carefully examine our methods and expectations and designate membership growth as a long-term growth strategy. In a year of discovery, not all projects will meet goals and the key is to strive for continuous improvement.

The initial Board retreat produced the framework for a three-year strategic plan. Within the plan is the newly defined vision, mission and core beliefs combined with five major goals that provide the basis for future programs, projects and overall direction.

FRWC Vision:

The FRWC is the unifying advocate for environmental quality within the watershed.

FRWC Mission:

Partnering to protect, preserve and improve (the environmental quality) of our watershed.

FRWC Core Beliefs:

1. We are committed to improving and maintaining environmental quality within the watershed.
2. We are committed to environmental education.
3. We value input and participation from the entire watershed community.
4. We value a positive approach to problem solving.

Grants

The FRWC needs two types of grants to support its growth and development. Project grants are key to the development and implementation of mostly science-based initiatives, while capacity building grants are relied upon for general administrative purposes.

In 2002, project grants in cooperation with partners, Center for Applied Environmental Research, Genesee County Health Department and Genesee County Conservation District, were received the Watershed Initiative Network (WIN), the EPA and MDEQ (2).

General purpose, or unrestricted, grants have been awarded from the C.S. Mott

The Year in Review (con't)

Foundation, Highfield Foundation and the River Network. This type of grant expands our ability to function more efficiently, increase services and improve longer-term plans and worthiness.

Volunteers

Equally important to fund raising are the many volunteers that participate in FRWC projects. Throughout the year, important community projects a garner diverse array of interested citizens and others to assist with improving our water resources. It is estimated that more than 1600 volunteer hours were spent in 2002 on projects, meetings and other events focused on improving the environment. The Board of Directors and staff sincerely appreciate your help during 2002.

The Year Ahead

2003 will be a year of refinement and improvement. To put that in context, we will carry out current projects, but endeavor to do them better. We will work on the strategic plan to gauge its relevance and practicality. We will work on several new projects that will largely be in the planning phase for 2004 introduction. We will begin work on some projects if they are successfully funded.

The changes we envision for 2003 will help to build a stronger organization and provide more benefits to members and partners.

The FRWC will hire a part-time Program Coordinator to help build

outreach activities and take an active part in creating better “connectivity” to those who support our efforts. As part of the outreach plan, the FRWC will be more active in Lapeer and Oakland counties. Our goal is to establish “local issues” committees to advise us on how we can best expand programs into those areas. These committees will also help with project organization and implementation.

A longer-term project, the Flint River Watershed Institute (FRWI), will be researched with the help of UM Flint. The unique concept is to create Flint River watershed specific educational certificate programs, taught in a manner that requires little background to be meaningful, to a wide range of potential students, utilizing local educational facilities. FRWI would be designed to fill the needs of those requiring continuing education in their professions. There is also appeal to general public to participate for personal enrichment reasons and receive certificates for their work. It is envisioned that the FRWI would offer both science and non-science based courses.

Work to gain funding for a greenways project has occurred over the past few months with the FRWC partnering with CAER to spearhead the effort. Greenway projects are the creation of a green infrastructure to complement existing man-made development forming a balance between the two. This project will encompass Genesee, Lapeer and Shiawassee counties and will link to projects underway to the south and north of those counties. Phase I is a planning project to determine the possibilities for

The Year Ahead (con't.)

greenway corridors and will take about two years to complete.

Our expectations are to continue projects already in existence and would include the annual River Clean Up, semi-annual Stream Monitoring, RiverFest, Growing Partnerships, Earth Day and Project Green. As we extend the outreach capabilities of the FRWC, we intend to assist with planning and project design in Lapeer and Oakland counties. We are currently working with the Brandon Natural Areas Taskforce (BNAT) and Northern Oakland Headwaters Land Conservancy (NOHLC) to plan and conduct a RiverDay event in that area. As part of the Clean Water Act, the FRWC will be helping communities by assisting with required storm water educational effort and we are looking at beginning quarterly meetings to augment our educational programs.

Financial Stability

In a time when demand for funds outpaces the supply, the FRWC has made positive progress towards achieving sustainability. We will concentrate on the formation of more local partnerships and developing more sponsors and members that will help provide that sustainability.

Volunteer Recruitment

Earlier, it was stated that volunteers serving communities within the watershed contributed more than 1600 hours. In 2003, there is potential to increase that number 20% by engaging

Volunteer Recruitment (con't.)

new groups with community service goals and requirements. Volunteer recruitment will be a major focus to help extend our capabilities to serve watershed communities. Specific plans are being generated. For those of you who have volunteered in 2002, we offer our sincere thanks. We will need you again in 2003 and look forward to your continued support.

Acknowledgements

There are many organizations that have helped the FRWC to become established by offering their support in a variety of areas. Special recognition goes to those organizations and people who provided the financial support necessary to enable our growth and to CAER for its generosity in supplying office space, computer equipment, encouragement and counsel.

To our many volunteers who made the choice to give of their time and efforts to the FRWC, we sincerely appreciate your commitment to making a better environment possible.

Membership Meeting

The annual meeting is scheduled for January 11, 2003 at For-Mar Nature Center from 10:00 AM – 12:00 PM. Mark your calendars and plan to attend. Our guest speaker is from Michigan Natural Features Inventory.