

**WASRD**

WEST MICHIGAN SHORELINE  
REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION



Annual  
Report  
2017



## **WMSRDC Board**

James Rynberg, Chairperson, Mayor of City of Fremont

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Benjamin Cross, Muskegon County Commissioner

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Joseph Lenius, WMSRDC

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Rillastine Wilkins, Muskegon County Commissioner

Crystal Young, West Shore Community College

James Rynberg, Chairperson  
Mayor, City of Fremont

Erin Kuhn, Executive Director

“new  
initiatives”

## Leadership Message

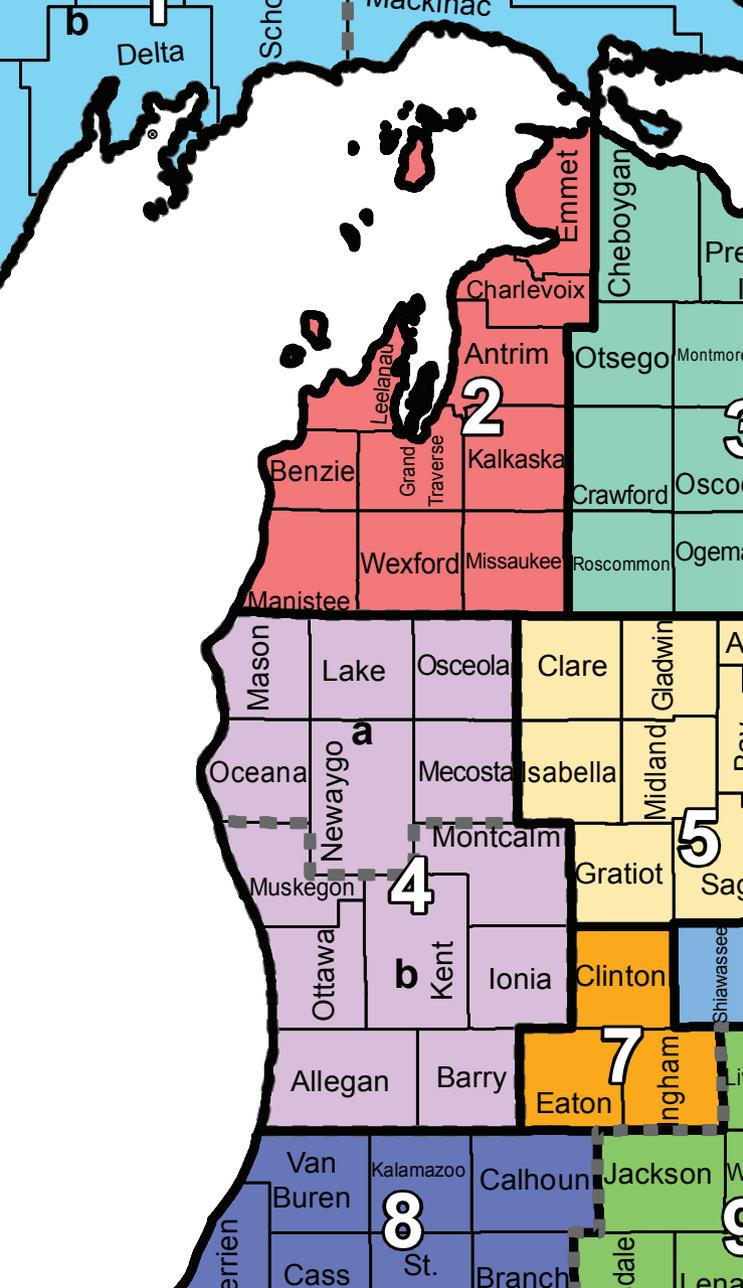
2017 brought new initiatives and new partnerships to the West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission. The Commission is blessed with an outstanding staff that is highly respected across the region and with a board that is extremely supportive. This has allowed the agency to successfully service members not only through existing programs, but also through the new partnerships and initiatives that are highlighted throughout this annual report.

WMSRDC successfully applied for and was awarded four environmental grants from various state and federal agencies. One of the grants includes the detection and treatment of the Hemlock Woolley Adelgid, an invasive species migrating north along the Lake Michigan shoreline. This grant includes a partnership with the Ottawa County Conservation District for work in the counties of Ottawa, Muskegon, and Oceana. The Commission also continues to work with the West Michigan Beach Towns Organization on the development of a corridor management plan for the West Michigan Pike Pure Michigan Byway.

On a state level, WMSRDC, working with the Grand Valley Metro Council, has been a key leader in the Governor’s 21st Century Infrastructure Asset Management Pilot. In addition, transportation staff has been working with a sub group of the Michigan Transportation Planners Association and the Michigan Department of Transportation on the state-wide implementation of federally required Transportation Performance Measures.

Lastly, two staff members have been appointed by Governor Snyder to serve on state committees. Kathy Evans is serving on the State’s Environmental Justice Committee, and Erin Kuhn is serving on the State’s Port Advisory Committee.

The continued success of WMSRDC can be attributed to the expertise of the staff, the direction and leadership of the board, and many outstanding local, state, and federal partners. We are thankful to all for another outstanding year and look forward to a new year of partnerships and working in west Michigan.

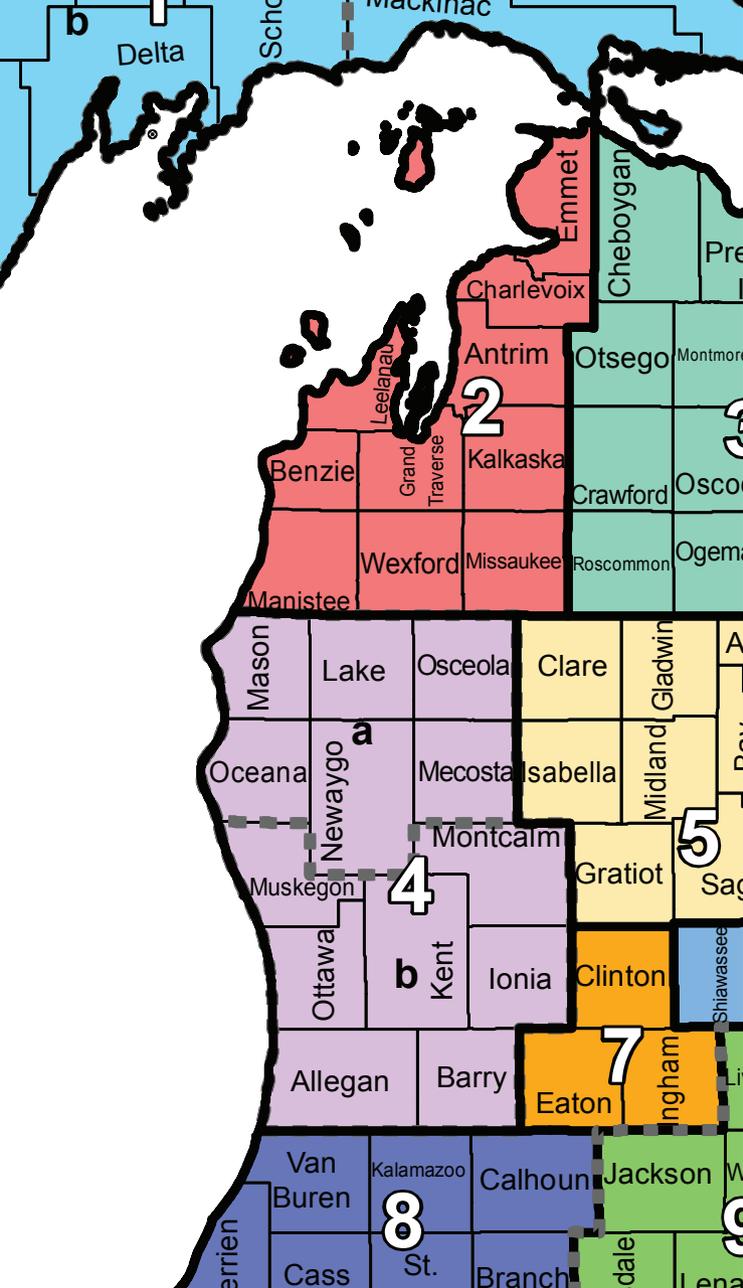


# Regional Collaborative Efforts

WMSRDC remained an active partner in the **West Michigan Prosperity Alliance (WMPA)** which had another robust and successful year. The group continued to meet and support previously identified priority projects and engaged in new initiatives during 2017. Some of these projects are the Sustainable Funding Strategy for West Michigan Watersheds, Regional Utility Project, Hardy Dam Trail, Connected Communities Engagement Program, and the Grand River Revitalization and Rapids Restoration Effort. Two of the new initiatives of the WMPA include the unveiling of the West Michigan Regional Dashboard and providing mini grants to small communities for their participation in the Governor’s 21st Century Infrastructure Asset Management Pilot. This fall, the WMPA also prepared a grant application seeking funding for a fourth consecutive year. In the upcoming year, the WMPA plans to continue its collaborative efforts to lend political & philanthropic help to fund projects of regional economic significance; as well as directly fund ongoing and new project initiatives.

**The West Michigan Dashboard** was a major initiative of the West Michigan Prosperity Alliance in 2017. The Dashboard was funded by the WMPA and designed by a team of data gurus led by The Right Place. It was unveiled in February at a press conference featuring Lt. Governor Brian Calley. The Dashboard includes 34 economic, environmental, and social indicators. Since its launch, the Dashboard has been extremely successful and useful. In less than one year, there were nearly 5,000 visits to the site from all over the State of Michigan, virtually every state in the nation, and 34 countries across the globe. To view the West Michigan Regional Dashboard visit [www.wmdashboard.org](http://www.wmdashboard.org).

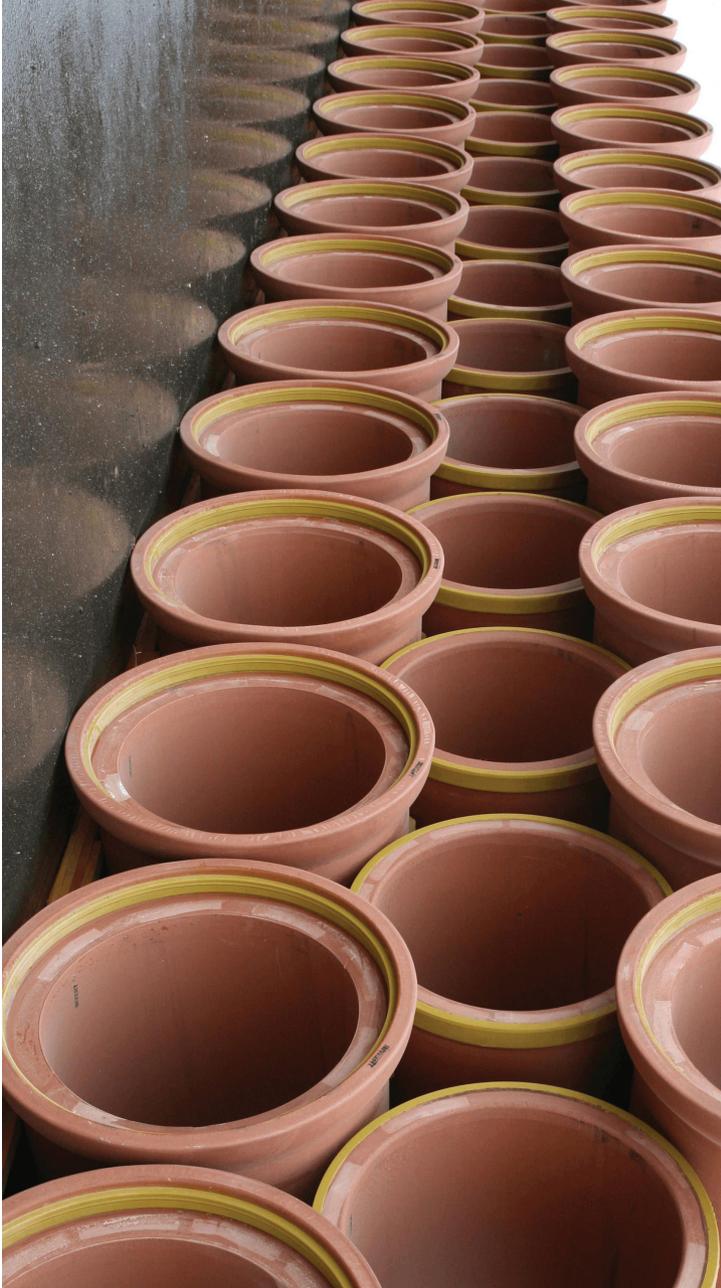
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# Regional Collaborative Efforts (continued)

The **West Michigan Watershed Collaborative** reached a milestone in 2017, with the identification of a sustainable funding mechanism that promises to improve West Michigan rivers, lakes and streams. Working with diverse watershed stakeholders, the WMWC identified a voluntary, per parcel contribution as a preferred mechanism for generating local funds to implement watershed management plans. The plans would otherwise be subject to competitive grant funding. Sustainable funding will greatly advance water quality initiatives in West Michigan. Further development of the funding strategy will be underway in 2018.

WMSRDC remains an active participant in the **Region 4 Northern Collaborative**, which includes the counties of Lake, Mason, Newaygo, and Oceana. The Collaborative stems from a **Leaders in Economic Alliance Development (LEAD)** planning process which was facilitated by USDA Rural Development and MSU Extension in 2016. WMSRDC provides support through staff membership on the three Collaborative subcommittees, by providing communications support through the bimonthly WMSRDC newsletter, and by dedicating a project page to the Collaborative on the WMSRDC website. One of the more promising Northern Collaborative projects in 2017 arose from the Regional Recreation Strategy subcommittee. A \$35,000 grant from the Michigan Department of Agriculture & Rural Development was paired with \$15,000 local match to examine how future development of recreational trails can be coordinated across the region to help access funding opportunities and to encourage inter-county connectivity. WMSRDC provided GIS support to develop a baseline for the Recreation Committee’s work to leverage motorized and non-motorized trails in the region.



# Asset Management Pilot

On April 3, 2017, Governor Snyder formally created a Regional Infrastructure Asset Management Pilot program. The Governor also announced agencies and communities in southeast and west Michigan to be included in the process of integrating drinking water, stormwater, sanitary sewer, and transportation assets in a comprehensive data base that will eventually be used to support integrated planning efforts across these asset classes.

WMSRDC and Grand Valley Metro Council are leading the year-long pilot effort in the 13-county West Michigan area. The Southeast Michigan Council of Governments is leading the effort in the southeast Michigan pilot area.

The mission of the pilot is to:

- Build a culture of asset management across the state.
- Develop consistency across asset owners in asset standards and management practices.
- Create mechanisms for coordinated planning and communication across asset owners and types statewide.
- Develop a system that will support our understanding of assets and enable us to make informed decisions at a local, regional and state level.

The two pilot regions, the Governor's office, and various state departments have brought together nearly 40 subject matter experts to help define the process of collecting data, began collecting the data from well over 100 local units of government (including small, large, urban, and rural), and began formulating strategies to better coordinate future construction projects between the public and private utility providers. Next steps include analysis of the collected data, hosting utility summits in each pilot region, and preparing the final report. The Pilot project will be completed in April 2018.



## Economic Development

The WMSRDC Region's economic development plan, the **Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)**, was completely redesigned to improve its utility and impact. Content of this CEDS cascades directly from a regional SWOT Analysis. The Action Plan is uniquely tailored to the region's economic strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The document features a compact layout and is more visually attractive than previous editions. The CEDS is a strategy-driven plan for regional economic development, and is the result of a regionally-owned planning process designed to build capacity and guide regional prosperity and resilience. The CEDS is required to maintain the region's designation as an Economic Development District (EDD) by the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA). This designation enables communities within the district to remain eligible for EDA assistance.

WMSRDC secured the renewal of its **3-year planning grant from EDA**. This funding will support the WMSRDC Economic Development program from 2017 through 2019. The primary purpose of the grant is to manage and implement the CEDS. Additional activities include: technical assistance to local governments; maintaining the WMSRDC Industrial and Business Park Inventory; and integrating economic development with other regional planning programs such as environmental, transportation, and community development.

In fall 2017, **Muskegon Community College** welcomed its first students to its new applied technology center, known as the Carolyn I. and Peter Sturuss Technology Center. In 2015, WMSRDC helped connect the college with EDA, which contributed a \$2.5 million grant to the project. The facility is expected to strengthen the local workforce through educational programs such as CAD, engineering, materials, welding, robotics, and machining. It also activates idle commercial properties in Downtown Muskegon, which will support further revitalization of the area.



# Metropolitan Transportation Planning

The **West Michigan Metropolitan Transportation Planning Program (WestPlan)** is the federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for the Muskegon and Northern Ottawa County areas. The MPO program addresses a multitude of transportation projects such as resurfacing and reconstructing existing roads, safety and bridge repair projects, air quality related projects, and non-motorized projects. Also included in the planning program is transit planning for the Muskegon Area Transit System and Harbor Transit in northern Ottawa County. Details about specific projects are found in the MPO's Long Range Transportation Plan (LRP) and the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP).

2017 was the first year working under the newly developed **FY2017-2020 TIP**, which was approved by state and federal agencies in October of 2016. The TIP is a federally mandated document that houses all of the federally funded transportation projects that will be funded during the designated timeframe. The current TIP includes approximately 131 projects and it is expected that more will be added as funding becomes available. Approximately \$96,077,613 in federal, state, and local funding is expected to be spent on projects programmed in the current TIP.

MPO staff began the process of developing the **FY2020-2023 TIP**. Staff has been working with MDOT to develop network models and updated socio-economic data for that process. This same data will be used for the MPO Long Rang Plan which will also be developed during FY2018. A big change to these documents during development will be the addition of Performance Based Planning, which is mandated in the latest federal transportation bill.

With some assistance from WMSRDC, **The Fred Meijer Berry Junction Trail** project was partially completed in FY2017, and will be finished in the summer of 2018. The trail will ultimately link Whitehall and North Muskegon with a non-motorized trail.

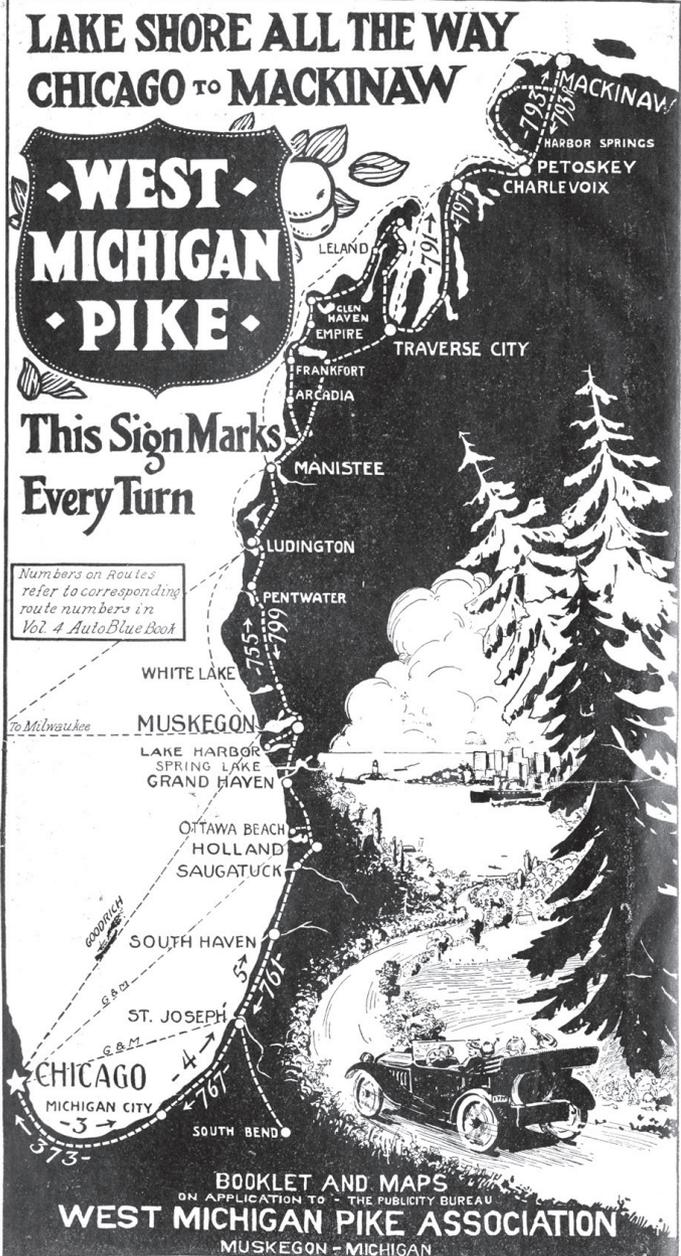


# Regional Transportation Planning

WMSRDC purchased two **traffic counters**, along with traffic count software, for the Newaygo County Road Commission in October 2017 through the WMSRDC's Regional Transportation program. Traffic counters were purchased by WMSRDC for the other four counties in the Region in earlier years. While it makes financial sense to hire a consultant to conduct traffic counts in urban areas, the same approach is not always feasible in rural and relatively smaller geographic areas. This traffic counter purchase assists not only the road commission, but MDOT and WMSRDC as well. Traffic counts are used by the road commission and other local road agencies when planning for improvements and construction, and MDOT and WMSRDC use these counts for planning purposes. In addition, MDOT requires up to date traffic counts when agencies submit applications for funding or requests for changes in road classification.

WMSRDC assisted the five-county **Rural Transportation Task Force** as they continued to meet in 2017. The task force receives approximately \$2.9 million of federal funding as well as a little over \$340,000 in State funding per year. Typical projects include road construction, road maintenance, and transit bus purchases. Projects are chosen at the individual county level prior to approval at the five-county task force.

In October, regional staff completed the annual process of collecting data for the **Asset Management Program**. Asset Management is a ranking based on an inventory of each local road network within the region. It provides data that allows transportation officials to monitor, plan, and strategically improve the road network. In past years, WMSRDC staff, along with MDOT and a county road commission employee, collected this data for approximately half of all the federal aid roads within Region 14. This year WMSRDC was able to rate 100% of the Federal Aid eligible roads within the five counties. In addition to rating the Federal Aid roads, WMSRDC staff will also rate a municipality's local roads on occasion. During 2017, staff rated local roads for the City of White Cloud.



# Regional Transportation Planning (continued)

WMSRDC continued to work with the Muskegon County Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) and other west Michigan CVB's during 2017 with the creation of a Corridor Management Plan for the West Michigan Pike. WMSRDC is writing the plan, providing coordination services for public and committee meetings, and is acting as a fiduciary agency for the committee. In 2017, WMSRDC and the Beachtowns Association have identified attractions along the Pike and ranked them for their level of visitor readiness. In addition, staff has produced the majority of the GIS maps needed for the plan. These include maps for the designated route, the historic route, and attractions along the length of the Pike. Next steps include identifying goals, strategies, and action items for ways to enhance the Pike experience. The West Michigan Pike was designated in 2016 as Michigan's newest Scenic Byway. This route follows US-31 from the state's southern border to US-10 near Ludington. Traveling through Berrien, Van Buren, Allegan, Ottawa, Muskegon, Oceana, and Mason counties, the route is 184 miles long. The main goals of the designation are to promote tourism and the history of the area. The Pike was originally developed between 1911 and 1922 as a way to promote tourism in West Michigan.

Four TrafX infrared trail counters, along with traffic count software, for use within the Region were purchased by WMSRDC in 2017. These infrared traffic counters can be used to count general traffic on trails and so could be used to count hikers, bicyclists, and even snowmobilers. The traffic counters were purchased through the WMSRDC's Regional Transportation program. These counters will be available for the members of the Regional Commission to borrow for use on their trail systems. In addition, Commission staff will be using them to collect data on existing trails to better measure trail usage. The collected data will be useful when planning for future expansion of the trail system in the region.



## Homeland Security

During 2017, WMSRDC continued to serve the Region 6 Homeland Security Planning Board as fiduciary. The Region 6 Board consists of emergency managers representing 13-counties and two cities, as well as representatives from public health and citizen corp. As fiduciary, WMSRDC aids in the administration of exercises, training, and in the purchase of equipment designed to prepare and protect the citizens of West Michigan from potential terrorist incidents.

WMSRDC is in the process of administering the 2015 Homeland Security Planning Grant which will close in May of 2018. In addition, the 2016 Homeland Security Planning Grant was opened. Priorities for the Region 6 Homeland Security Planning Board through these grants continue to include interoperable communications, thermal imaging, target hardening, and active shooter exercises.

Additional responsibilities of WMSRDC as fiduciary include attending the annual Fiduciary Training held during the month of May of each year in Grand Rapids, the preparation of the Biannual Strategy Implementation Report (BSIR) due to the Michigan State Police Emergency Management Homeland Security Division every January and July, and an annual inventory of equipment purchased with homeland security funds that is due in October.



## Local Government Services

In the fall of 2016, WMSRDC began the process of assisting **Blue Lake Township** with updating the township's master plan and recreation plan. These planning documents will communicate the community's vision for the future of Blue Lake Township over the next 5 to 20 years. Both plans must be reviewed, and updated as needed, every five years. By working on the plans concurrently, the cost to prepare the plans was reduced, and certain elements of the plans were effectively coordinated. The Blue Lake Township Community Recreation Plan was completed and adopted by Blue Lake Township in November 2017. The planning process for the Blue Lake Township Master Plan is expected to be complete in early 2018.

WMSRDC assisted the Newaygo County Parks & Recreation Commission with updating the **Newaygo County Recreation Plan**. This process included a series of public meetings held at parks throughout the county. Once the plan is adopted by the Newaygo County Board of Commissioners and accepted by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the Parks & Recreation Commission will be eligible to apply for recreation improvements funding through the DNR through the year 2022. Also in 2017, WMSRDC began assisting Newaygo County with preparing a strategic plan for county wide recycling. This plan, which is expected to be presented to the county in early 2018, will be used to help Newaygo County establish a sustainable level of recycling services to its residents.

WMSRDC continues to assist local governments and landowners with efforts to enhance local water trails, access sites and amenities for non-motorized paddling. In addition, WMSRDC and other regional partners are continuing to work toward a National Park Service National Recreation Trail designation for the **Lake Michigan Water Trail**, which includes the communities, rivers and harbors along Michigan's west coast and upper peninsula.



## Habitat Focus Area

WMSRDC was awarded a 3-year, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) **Habitat Focus Area (HFA) grant** to integrate science, natural resource management and stakeholder input for restoration and adaptive management in the lower Muskegon River and the Muskegon Lake Area of Concern. Grand Valley State University's Annis Water Resources Institute's role is scientific monitoring. Natural resource managers and stakeholders will use the information to perform restoration and management. Habitat focus area objectives are 1: Habitat restoration and protection; 2: Improve ecosystem and economic health; and 3: NOAA support of long-term stewardship.

Also within the Muskegon HFA are ongoing projects, including the **Muskegon River restoration at Muskegon County's Veterans Memorial Park**. This project restored connectivity for fisheries and improved water quality and wetlands at a historically significant parkway on a causeway that connects the cities of Muskegon and North Muskegon. Aesthetics of the park were improved and native trees were planted to mimic the historic, 1934 landscape architecture design. The Northside Lions, veterans and other community volunteers provided added value by restoring other features, including two pedestrian bridges, World War I cannons and memorial markers.

WMSRDC also completed **a 40-acre wetland restoration, water quality improvements and fisheries connectivity on Bear Creek**; investigation and design to improve 7.6 acres of Muskegon Lake sturgeon habitat with the removal of sawmill wood waste; and the investigation and preliminary design for the restoration of an additional 53 acres of wetland with fisheries connectivity on the lower Muskegon River.



# Resilience Planning

WMSRDC worked with the Muskegon River Watershed Assembly (MRWA) and the Muskegon Conservation District on a **U.S. Forest Service Great Lakes Restoration Initiative grant to prevent stormwater runoff** by planting trees in urban areas. 176 large trees were planted along Muskegon Lake and Ryerson Creek in the cities of Muskegon and North Muskegon. The MRWA planted trees in Big Rapids and Bridgeton Township. The trees are soaking up and filtering stormwater before it can run off into storm drains, wetlands and waterways. WMSRDC will plant an additional 97 trees and 1,365 saplings in 2018.

Also in 2017, a U.S. Forest Service **Great Lakes Restoration Initiative grant was awarded to WMSRDC to improve forest resiliency** within the Lake Michigan coastal zone in Muskegon, Oceana and Mason counties. Partnering with Michigan DNR, Mason/Lake Conservation District, and the City of Muskegon, the project will replace 3,515 trees that have been damaged or destroyed by Emerald Ash Borer, oak wilt, Hemlock Woolly Adelgid, straight line winds, and other reasons.

WMSRDC was awarded a **Great Lakes Restoration Initiative grant** to combat the invasive Hemlock Woolly Adelgid, which is attacking Hemlock trees along Lake Michigan. WMSRDC and partners from the Ottawa Conservation District and West Michigan Conservation Network will perform surveys within Muskegon, Ottawa and Oceana counties. The project will detect the presence of this invasive and harmful bug and treat affected trees. Local residents and volunteers will learn how to identify infected trees and how to report or treat them. This grant is crucial in helping to slow the spread of the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid.

2017 saw the completion of WMSRDC's **Non-Native Invasive Species Removal grant**. EPA's Great Lakes Restoration Initiative funded this multi-year project to address invasive species concerns in coastal wetlands and adjacent uplands surrounding Muskegon and Bear lakes. The project included three annual plant surveys, treatment of over 129 acres of non-native invasive species, training of 67 landowners and volunteers in monitoring and control methods, involvement of 619 students in experiential learning experiences, planting over 1,000 native plants, updating the Muskegon Lake Biodiversity and Phragmites Management Plan, fostering partnership participation and networking, and initiating a stakeholder driven organization to guide invasive species management beyond 2017. This project will aid with the delisting of Muskegon Lake as an Area of Concern.

WEST MICHIGAN  
CLEAN AIR  
ACTION!



## Information & Communications

WMSRDC continued to be an active partner of the **West Michigan Clean Air Coalition (WMCAC)**. Formed over twenty years ago, the WMCAC remains a strong partnership of business, academic institutions, government agencies, industry, and non-profit organizations in Muskegon, Kent, and Ottawa counties. These partners continue working together to achieve cleaner air in the region through the education and promotion of voluntary emission reduction activities. Among other outreach activities, an extensive television public education campaign continued in 2017 highlighting voluntary actions people can take on Clean Air Action Days.

WMSRDC also continued to fulfill its duties as a **U.S. Census Bureau Affiliate** by striving to keep the WMSRDC website up to date with the latest links and most recently released data from the Census Bureau and other data products.

Through the **Federal Project Review System**, WMSRDC continued to review federal/state grant assistance applications to coincide with local and regional goals and policies. WMSRDC's newsletter continues to be published bimonthly and includes updates and information on WMSRDC's projects and programs. Individuals and groups also have the option of following WMSRDC on Facebook.

WMSRDC also continues to maintain an informative and up-to-date website. The website includes meeting schedules, numerous documents, current project information, and interactive maps. The goal of the WMSRDC website is to be informative, easy to navigate, and timely.

## WMSRDC Staff

Erin Kuhn, Executive Director

Stephen Carlson, Program Manager

Syndi Copeland, Executive Assistant

Kathy Evans, Program Manager

Joel Fitzpatrick, Program Manager

Amy Haack, Program Manager

Brian Mulnix, Program Manager

Gale Nobes, Environmental Planning Technician

Christia Seals, Finance Manager

Jamie Way, GIS Specialist

## Audited Statement of Revenues, Expenditures and Changes in Fund Balance for the Years Ended September 30, 2017 and 2016

2017	2016
<b>REVENUES</b>	<b>REVENUES</b>
Intergovernmental Revenues	Intergovernmental Revenues
Federal                    \$5,787,191	Federal                    \$6,712,766
State                        154,491	State                        202,596
Local                        313,223	Local                        250,117
<b>Total Revenues            6,254,905</b>	<b>Total Revenues            7,165,479</b>
 <b>EXPENDITURES</b>	 <b>EXPENDITURES</b>
Current	Current
Land Use Planning        31,050	Land Use Planning        27,533
Economic Development   123,076	Economic Development   294,657
Transportation Planning  627,663	Transportation Planning  657,817
Local Planning                0	Local Planning                7,541
Environmental Clean-up   4,437,644	Environmental Clean-up   4,997,616
Homeland Security        989,885	Homeland Security        1,199,570
<b>Total Expenditures       6,209,318</b>	<b>Total Expenditures       7,184,734</b>
 Net Change in Fund Bal.    45,587	 Net Change in Fund Bal.    (19,255)
 Fund Bal. at 10/1/15        277,598	 Fund Bal. at 10/1/14        296,853 as restated
Fund Bal. at 9/30/16       323,185	Fund Bal. at 9/30/15       277,598



**West Michigan Shoreline  
Regional Development Commission**

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