

annual report

20

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WEST MI
SHORELINE

Regional Development Commission

mission statement

The Commission's mission is to "promote and foster regional development in West Michigan through cooperation amongst local governments and regional partners."

Why/How/What Statements

The following statements were developed by the Commission staff in the spring of 2020 as an organization-wide project to expand upon the Commission's mission statement. "We" in the statements refer to the Commission and its staff.

WHY do we do what we do?

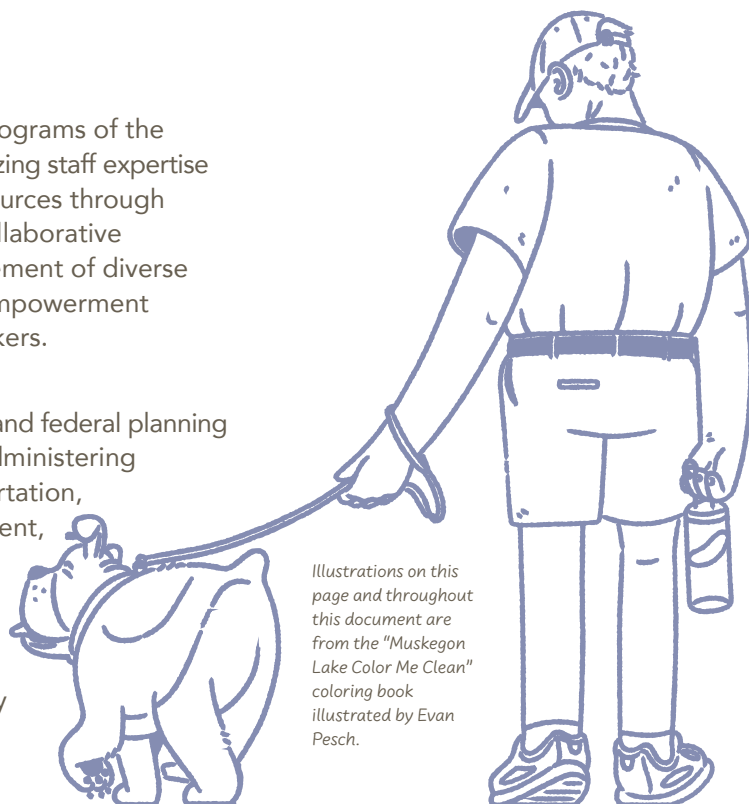
We believe that West Michigan is an amazing place with tremendous opportunity, and that regional planning improves the quality of life for all West Michigan residents. Therefore, we are passionate about helping the region reach its full potential and committed to do our part to make a difference in the place we call "home."

HOW do we do it?

By leveraging the programs of the Commission and utilizing staff expertise to provide local resources through cross jurisdictional collaborative partnerships, involvement of diverse stakeholders, and empowerment of local decision makers.

WHAT do we do?

Perform local, state, and federal planning functions through administering programs in transportation, economic development, environmental, and local government services that provides funding and project eligibility to our region.



equity statement

The Commission defines equity as the intentional inclusion of everyone in society. Equity is achieved when systemic, institutional, and historical barriers based on race, gender, sexual orientation, and other identities and abilities are dismantled and no longer predict socioeconomic, education, and health outcomes.

The Commission recognizes structural racism and other forms of oppression have contributed to persistent disparities which the Commission seeks to dismantle within its region. The Commission strives to engage community members, especially

those whose voices have traditionally been marginalized. The Commission works with local governments, residents, and public and private partners to provide resources, support, and opportunities that create prosperous and thriving communities for all citizens.

The Commission also strives to provide a work environment that recognizes individual differences, is free from discrimination, and is respectful of the rights and dignity of all individuals. The Commission has built its reputation on the

foundations of excellence and integrity, and expects its employees to exhibit behaviors consistent with these standards.

Therefore, the Commission commits to leveraging our resources and assets to create more equitable communities through the programs it administers, as well as to develop racially conscious partnerships and processes that anticipate unintended outcomes to ensure the inclusion of all people in the region and organization.

director's message

For the most part, the world has returned to a sense of normalcy after two years of uncertainty, which feel like a blur. 2022 was another year of uncertainty and challenges while navigating the on-going pandemic, rounds of new government funding packages, and continuing partnerships through the region. The word that comes to mind as I reflect on fiscal year 2022 is "bittersweet." We had some major accomplishments to celebrate and goodbyes that were difficult.

One of the hardest and most challenging parts of the year was the passing of Greg Mund, a longtime contract employee in WMSRDC's Environmental Program. Greg was a pivotal contributor to the efforts of delisting Muskegon Lake as an Area of Concern and a champion of environmental conservation. His contributions to environmental stewardship in West Michigan will not soon be forgotten. One of Greg's last "big" ideas was the "Muskegon Lake – Color Me Clean" coloring book. This book will assist in the long-term education and stewardship of Muskegon Lake. The coloring book is dedicated to Greg, and we are sad that he was not able to see it completed. WMSRDC will strive to carry on his legacy through our continued restoration efforts.

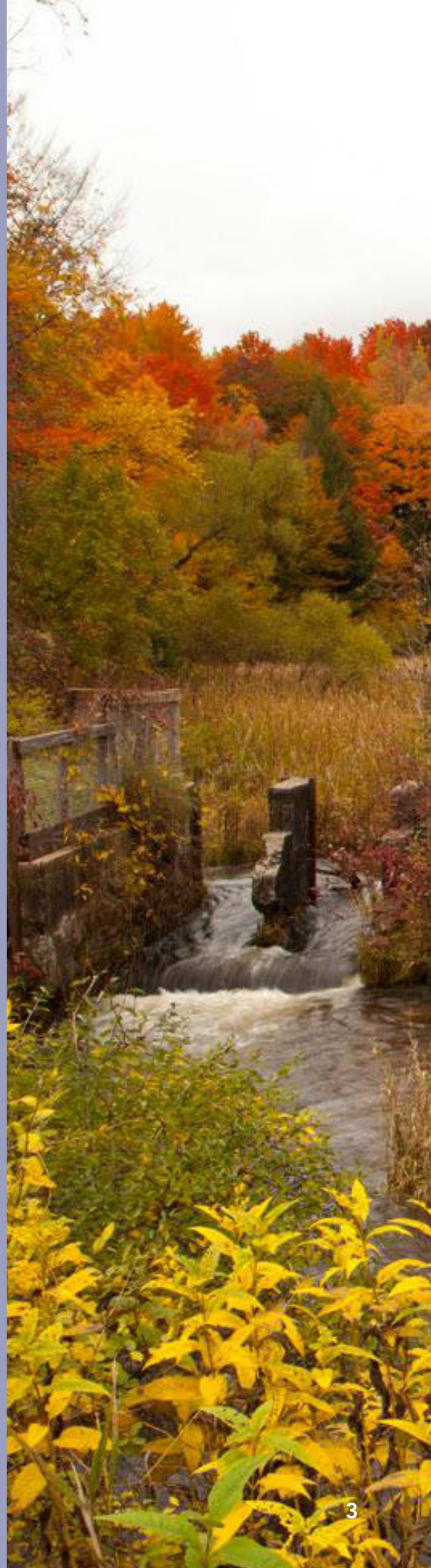
Another bittersweet part of the year was the recent retirement of Amy Haack, WMSRDC's Air Quality and Information & Communications Program Manager. Amy worked for the Commission for nearly 29 years and helped build the Clean Air Action program. Amy was an active member of the West Michigan Clean Air Coalition, recent Chair of the Specialized Services Committee, and recent Chair of the Muskegon County Environmental Coordinating Council. In her final project, she was the mastermind behind the new clean air PSA coming this summer to major television stations and social media in West Michigan. We wish Amy the best as she starts a new chapter of her life.

A major highlight of the year was the Environmental Protection Agency's announcement that all management actions have been met towards the delisting of Muskegon Lake as an Area of Concern in May 2022. WMSRDC also received the 2022 NADO Impact Award for several projects completed at Muskegon Veteran's Memorial Park. WMSRDC was honored to be the only organization in Michigan to receive this prestigious award. Another achievement was a letter sent from Governor Gretchen Whitmer to the NOAA Administrator this past fall officially requesting the designation of a National Estuary Research Reserve in West Michigan. WMSRDC and Grand Valley State University have been working in partnership with the State towards this designation. The letter was a major step towards that designation, and we look forward to continuing championship of this effort.

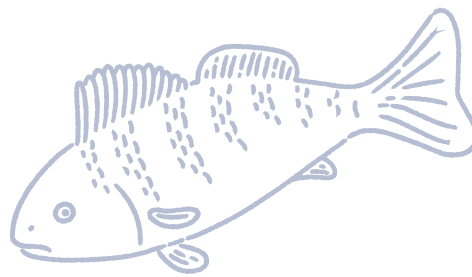
Finally, WMSRDC went through a complete overhaul of the organization's by-laws which proved to be a productive exercise in board governance and organizational development. The board unanimously approved the new and improved by-laws this September.

Yes, 2022 was a bittersweet year. However, I feel the continued support from the Board of Directors and dedication from the staff have made it more sweet than bitter. The challenges and accomplishments have pushed us to forge ahead into another year of unknowns without hesitation.

Erin Kuhn, Executive Director



environmental



Lake Michigan Rivers and Coastal Wetlands Regional Partnership

In 2020, WMSRDC entered the Lake Michigan Rivers and Coastal Wetlands Regional Partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). This partnership offers up to \$14 million for fish passage and stream habitat restoration projects through 2025. In 2021, three projects were selected for funding. 2022 saw each of the projects move forward towards the end of the engineering and design phase. The Little Cedar Creek implementation phase will replace two road stream crossings in the Little Cedar Creek watershed and has already restored 500 feet of in-stream habitat. The White River project will replace three road stream crossings in Swinton Creek and one in Cushman Creek and restore 1,000 feet of in-stream habitat in Swinton Creek. The Stony Creek project at Marshville Dam Park includes dam remnant removal, removal of two old bridges and three culverts, a bridge replacement, and 500 feet of in-stream habitat replacement. Project partners for the three projects include Muskegon County Road Commission, Oceana County Road Commission, Grand Valley State University Annis Water Resources Institute, Conservation Resource Alliance, Oceana County Parks, watershed groups, and private landowners.

Muskegon Lake Area of Concern

All the hard work and dedication that has gone into the Muskegon Lake AOC was highlighted at the Annual Great Lakes Area of Concern Conference held in Muskegon in May. The conference was a huge success and allowed WMSRDC to share the efforts taken to restore important aquatic resources.

2022 saw the close and final reporting for six projects under WMSRDC's partnership with the Great Lakes Commission and NOAA through funding from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI). These projects included ecological monitoring at previously restored sites around Muskegon Lake, the development of a fluid long term maintenance plan for Muskegon Lake on the Muskegon Lake Watershed Partnership website, restoration at Heritage Landing to repair erosion damage completed in 2020, restoration at Vets Park for fish habitat and hydrologic reconnection completed in 2020, and the Lower Muskegon River (LMR) and Amoco restoration projects completed in 2022. At LMR, an old celery farm was restored to wetland habitat, then reconnected to the river restoring 53 acres of lost riparian wetland. At the former Amoco Tank Farm, a concrete wall was removed to restore fish habitat and reconnect the coastal wetland to Muskegon Lake. Projects continuing in 2023 include

long term monitoring of the Amoco site, a shoreline restoration project at the Boys and Girls Club, and the wrap up of efforts at the Muskegon Lake Nature Preserve, which included over 17 acres of habitat restoration and enhancement for the benefit of the public and to meet the needs of the AOC.

Reforestation for Restoration, Resilience, and Recreation

WMSRDC completed a grant with the Muskegon River Watershed Assembly and the USFS to plant about 400 trees and 40 seedlings within the Muskegon River Watershed. WMSRDC partnered with the cities of Roosevelt Park, Fremont, and Muskegon along with Cedar Creek and Dalton Township to select locations for the plantings. The trees will control up to 28,000 gallons of stormwater within the Muskegon River Watershed.

As a partnering member of the MLWP, WMSRDC has been awarded funding for Muskegon Lake Watershed Partnership Student & Neighborhood Engagement from EGLE under Watershed Council Support. The project will include partnering with schools and neighborhood associations in the Ryerson and Four Mile Creek watersheds to implement a student-led tree planting and water resources improvement for Muskegon Lake Watershed.

Grand Valley State University
students conducting fish surveys at
Little Cedar Creek, Twin Lake, MI

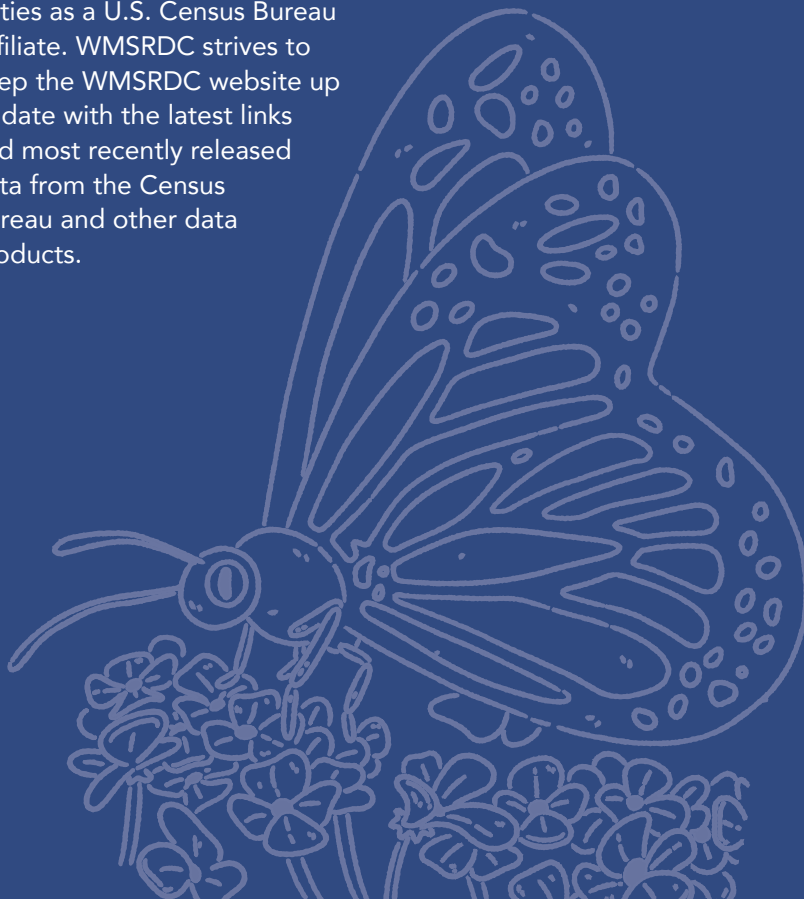
air quality and communications

Clean Air Action

WMSRDC continued to be an active partner of the West Michigan Clean Air Coalition (WMCAC). Formed over twenty-five 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 work 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 2022 highlighting voluntary actions people can take on Clean Air Action days. During the 2022 season actions were taken to produce a commercial with meteorologists from each local television station network (WZZM TV 13, WOOD TV 8, and WXMI Fox 17) in the West Michigan viewing area. WMSRDC staff came up with the concept, wrote the script, and garnered participation from the three television stations. This commercial will be used to promote the actions that should be taken during Clean Air Action days and aired on each station involved, streaming television, and social media, etc. The annual Clean Air Action kick-off picnic was held at Johnson Park in Grand Rapids on June 23. Staff at WMSRDC also contributed to help plan WMCAC Steering Committee meetings and served as President of the Muskegon County Environmental Coordinating Council. Longtime Air Quality and Communications Program Manager, Amy Haack retired from her position at WMSRDC at the end of 2022 after nearly 29 years of service.

U.S. Census Affiliate

WMSRDC continued to fulfill its duties as a U.S. Census Bureau Affiliate. WMSRDC strives 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.



economic development

The WMSRDC economic development program exists to promote and foster regional economic prosperity and resilience through the preparation, maintenance and implementation of the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). In 2022, WMSRDC continued its mission through implementation of the CEDS. The CEDS Strategy Committee convened quarterly to share economic news and events throughout the region, and WMSRDC staff also utilized the CEDS Committee to distribute information regarding potential funding opportunities and resources.

A core component of the WMSRDC economic development program is to provide economic development technical assistance to local communities. This includes helping communities navigate the EDA grant application process; from vetting ideas, to crafting applications, to accepting and managing grants. WMSRDC assisted numerous communities in pursuit of EDA funding opportunities in 2022. Success was found in helping the City of Hart receive an EDA award to improve wastewater infrastructure, and in helping Oceana County receive a grant to study the Oceana County workforce training and economic diversification. With additional project applications nearing submittal at the end of 2022, WMSRDC will continue providing economic development assistance to local communities in 2023 and beyond.

CARES Act Planning Grant

In 2020, WMSRDC accepted a special EDA planning grant to help the region respond and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. Efforts under this grant concluded at the end of 2022. The following accomplishments were reached through this funding: office upgrades to help adapt to working conditions resulting from the pandemic; a regional economic pandemic response and recovery plan; hire additional staff, and initiate broadband planning and technical assistance efforts. More specifically, WMSRDC made a concerted effort to coordinate and facilitate broadband planning throughout the WMSRDC region. County-level broadband representatives were identified, and an ad-hoc regional broadband committee was organized to encourage local networking between counterparts and facilitate the exchange of information regarding broadband opportunities and resources as they become available. WMSRDC will carry forward broadband planning and facilitation into 2023 under the Commission's usual economic development planning and technical assistance activities.



World's Largest Brown Trout Sculpture located in the Brown Trout Sculpture Park, Baldwin, MI



rural transportation

Asset Management

In a typical year, WMSRDC staff, along with MDOT and a county road commission employee, collects condition information for approximately half of all the federal aid roads within Region 14 as well as northern Ottawa County. The data collection effort requires the collection of three items: road condition rating, surface type, and the number of lanes.

After two years of disruptions caused by COVID-19 restrictions, the data collection process returned to a more normal manner in 2022. WMSRDC staff successfully completed ratings on 100% of the federal aid eligible roads within Lake, Mason, Oceana, Newaygo, Muskegon, and northern Ottawa Counties.

In addition to rating the Federal Aid roads, WMSRDC staff also rated several municipality's local roads.

During 2022, staff rated local roads for the City of Whitehall, City of Montague, City of Grand Haven, and the City of Roosevelt Park.

Four staff members attended the fall Asset Management Conference which was held in Traverse City on September 28. Highlights included presentations on asset management best practices as well as discussions on using asset management for sustainability and resiliency.

Rural Task Force Update

2022 was a busy year for the Region 14 Rural Transportation Task Force. The committee had met in December of 2021 to choose projects for fiscal years 2023-2026. These projects totaled approximately \$3.5 million of federal and state funding that the committee receives each year. With the passage of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), the committee received significantly

more funding. Committee members met multiple times in the spring to allocate this money to important transportation projects.

The Region 14 Rural Transportation Task Force met once again in December 2022 to finalize projects for FY2023. With the new funding provided through the BIL the Task Force receives approximately \$5 million in combined federal and state funding per year.

Typical projects include road construction, road maintenance, and transit capital purchases. The West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission (WMSRDC) assists in the administration of the Rural Transportation Task Force for the counties of Muskegon, Oceana, Newaygo, Lake, and Mason.



Tour of Veteran's Memorial Park, Muskegon, MI

metropolitan planning organization

2022 Metropolitan Transportation Planning Program

The West Michigan Metropolitan Transportation Planning Program (WestPlan) is the federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for Muskegon County and parts of Northern Ottawa County. The MPO is responsible for the planning and programming of projects and studies throughout the MPO area and administers a comprehensive transportation planning program to assist in planning for state and federal transportation funding for road and transit improvements. Formed under federal legislation in 1973, the MPO continues to exist under ever changing federal transportation bills. Member road and transit agencies are represented through the MPO Technical and Policy Committees, which make up the structure of the MPO while WMSRDC serves as staff to these committees. Through these committees, along with valuable input from the public, the MPO develops long and short range plans that improve and enhance the transportation network in the region and beyond to neighboring MPO's. These plans are crucial for allocating federal transportation dollars into local projects.

2023-2026 Transportation Improvement Program

In FY2022, the MPO adopted the FY2023-2026 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Approval came at the local level as well as from the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). With this approval, federal and state agencies have concurred that the plan is in compliance with requirements outlined in federal transportation legislation. Throughout the process of developing the plan, commission staff worked closely with the WestPlan Technical and Policy Committees, as well as state and federal partners. The TIP covers a four-year span of project programming for the WestPlan area. The TIP includes federally funded transportation projects that will be completed in Muskegon County and Northern Ottawa County. Projects identified in the TIP are primarily road construction type projects, which are generally either reconstruction or resurface projects. There are also transit and marketing projects, as well as non-motorized and Congestion Mitigation Air Quality (CMAQ) projects that include signal projects, bus purchases, and trail projects. Projects in the plan are constantly updated and amended through the MPO process. The MPO brings the changes to the Technical and Policy Committees who meet monthly to approve the requests. MPO meetings are open to the public and are attended by representatives from all road and transit agencies in the MPO area. State and federal agencies also have seats on the committees and review all amendments. The current TIP lists over 160 projects with well over \$100,000,000 of planned investments in Muskegon and Northern Ottawa Counties.

2050 Long Range Plan Development

MPO staff started the process of developing the 2050 Transportation Long Range Plan (LRP) for the MPO. The current plan (2045) and is set to expire in 2024. Baseline population and employment data was updated and approved by MPO committees in FY2022. This data will serve as a basis for modeling the new plan. The Long Range Plan is a federally mandated document that provides for a multi-jurisdictional, multi-year look at the Muskegon and Northern Ottawa area and the future transportation system. Used as a guide for investment of public funds, the document plans for 20+ years of strategy and capital improvements to the transportation system within the MPO area.



Citizen enjoying the Hart-Montague
Bicycle Trail beginning in
Whitehall and ending in Hart, MI

local government services

One role of WMSRDC is to support the planning responsibilities of local governments. Doing so in a respectable and affordable manner helps foster local support for the commission. It also helps promote a regional mindset and collaborative environment. In 2022, WMSRDC had a full slate of local government activities:

Oceana County Planning:

WMSRDC was engaged in a wide range of initiatives in Oceana County, including economic development technical assistance, transportation planning, environmental planning, and community development. WMSRDC began working with Oceana County's planning commission and parks and recreation commission to update the county's master and recreation plans, both of which are expected to be completed in fall of 2023.

Newaygo County Recreation Plan:

WMSRDC guided the Newaygo County Parks and Recreation Commission through the process of conducting a five-year update of the county's recreation plan.

White River Economic Impact

Assessment: WMSRDC is the fiduciary for an effort, led by a subcommittee of the White River Watershed Collaborative, to assess the value of the White River to communities it touches in the counties of Oceana, Newaygo, and Muskegon. In this role, WMSRDC staff applied for and received three community foundation grants to fund the assessment. This effort began in 2022 and is expected to come to fruition in July 2023.

Hazard Mitigation:

WMSRDC is updating the Hazard Mitigation Plans for the counties of Oceana, Lake, and Mason. These plans are required to be updated every five years and are required for communities to access certain types of pre-disaster and post-disaster hazard mitigation funding. The plan updates will be completed in the fall of 2023.

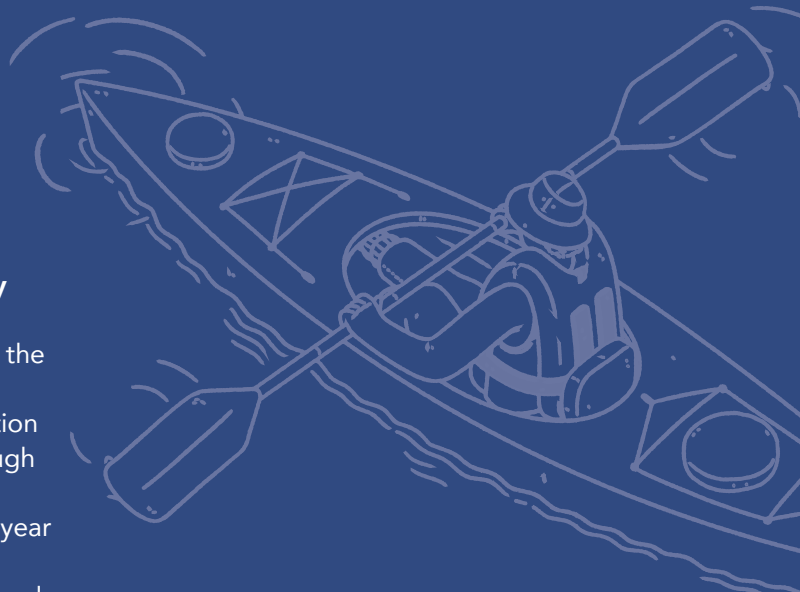


Photo by Desola Lanre-Ologun on Unsplash

GIS (geographic information systems)

WMSRDC's GIS (Geographic Information Systems) program saw several new projects in 2022. Work is finishing up on a project for the Oceana County Drain Commission. WMSRDC updated and corrected the county's drain lines and drain districts. Some of these were drawn from descriptions written in the early 1900's, while others were gathered from consultants who have worked to certify the correct and current districts and drainage routes. The accuracy of this data can affect drain maintenance and figuring taxation for drain upkeep. The completed layers will be used by the Drain Commission's office and the County GIS system. Oceana County has approximately 111 separate drains and drain districts.

Cemeteries

The GIS department has also worked to map two cemeteries in Mason County. The townships of Free Soil and Riverton in Mason County have contracted with WMSRDC to digitize all of their existing paper documents and death records and create an accurate map of the cemeteries' locations, roads, lots, and graves. Pictures were also taken of all the headstones and an online map was created for township officials and the general public to access names, dates, images of headstones, and locations of graves within each cemetery. These maps will not only assist the office with maintaining grave information and locations but digitizing the data will preserve the records from water or fire damage and make it easier for future generations to search for relatives, update genealogical records, and search and view unique headstones. Free Soil Township's Maple Grove Cemetery is located just northeast of Ludington and has roughly 2,500 graves. Riverton Township has two cemeteries, West and Center Riverton Cemeteries containing roughly 3,400 graves. All the cemeteries have graves and headstones dating back to the early 1800's and the township's are relieved to know that the precious information of the past will be preserved and passed on.



Gravestone markers from the 1880s, West Riverton Cemetery, Riverton Township, MI

financials

REVENUES	2021	2022
Intergovernmental revenues		
Federal	5,473,996	1,961,084
State	122,597	286,517
Local	237,372	249,282
TOTAL REVENUES	5,833,965	2,496,883

EXPENDITURES

Current		
Land use planning	37,450	101,248
Regional initiatives	10,330	81,727
Economic development	331,146	238,495
Transportation planning	654,605	769,356
Environmental clean-up	4,758,837	1,249,117
Administration	3,670	3,112
Capital outlay	-	228,322
Debit service		
Principal	-	15,792
Interest and fees	-	2,360
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	5,796,038	2,689,529
Excess of revenues over (under) expenditures		(192,646)

OTHER FINANCING SOURCES

Proceeds from lease obligations	-	228,322
Net change in fund balance	37,927	35,676

Fund balance at beginning of year	339,702	377,629
Fund balance at end of year	\$377,629	\$413,305

2022 regional commission board

Bonnie McGlothlin, Chairperson
Councilperson, City of Muskegon Heights

Jennifer Hodges, Vice Chairperson
Supervisor, Muskegon Charter Township

James Maike, Secretary
Commissioner, Newaygo County

Ron Bacon, Commissioner, Mason County

Ron Christians, Commissioner,
Oceana County

Kim Cyr, Commissioner, Muskegon County

Rachel Gorman, At-Large Commissioner,
City of Muskegon

Richard Houtteman, WMSRDC Appointee,
CMS Energy

Marcia Hovey-Wright, Commissioner,
Muskegon County

James Kelly, WMSRDC Appointee
MSU Extension

Bryan Kolk, Commissioner, Newaygo County

Andrea Large, WMSRDC Appointee,
Community Foundation for Mason County

Roger Morgenstern, Councilperson,
City of Norton Shores

Phil Morse, Commissioner, Oceana County

James Rynberg, Mayor, City of Fremont

John Selmon, President,
Muskegon Community

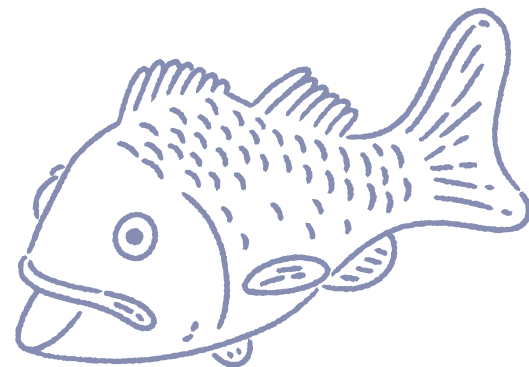
Lewis Squires, Commissioner,
Mason County

Len Todd, Commissioner, Lake County

Rillastine Wilkins, Commissioner,
Muskegon County

Wendy Wells, Talent Pipeline Coordinator,
West Shore Community College

Kathy Winczewski, Councilperson,
City of Ludington



WMSRDC Staff

Erin Kuhn, Executive Director
Amanda Snyder, Finance Manager
Syndi Copeland, Office Manager

Air Quality and Information & Communications

Amy Haack, Program Manager

Economic Development, Community Development and Local Government Services

Stephen Carlson, Program Manager
Robert Johnson, Planning Aide

Transportation Planning

Joel Fitzpatrick, Planning Director
Brian Mulnix, Program Manager
Jamie Way, GIS Specialist

Environmental Planning

Fallon Chabala, Program Manager
Gale Nobes, Planner



 **WEST MI
SHORELINE**
Regional Development Commission

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WMSRDC.org



Heritage Landing, formerly "Scrap Bay"
post-restoration, Muskegon, MI



Heritage Landing, formerly "Scrap Bay"
pre-restoration, Muskegon, MI