

# Commission Quarterly

## City of Muskegon Heights Food Mapping Project

This summer, WMSRDC's GIS program partnered with Access Heath, Pathfinders of Muskegon, CHIR/Livability Lab, and Kindred Marketing, with additional support from the Michigan Health Endowment Fund, to hold community sessions with the citizens of Muskegon Heights to talk about food access within their city. In June, five sessions were hosted and moderated by Pathfinders where over 100 residents of Muskegon Heights were invited to discuss their needs and wants for food availability. Residents attending these sessions provided detailed information about what food assets currently exist and are absent within the city boundaries. Most residents expressed that their top needs included a grocery store, community gardens, a functioning farmers

market, and more support for elderly and low-income residents in accessing local foods. While there are several convenience stores, dollar stores, and eating establishments that exist within the city, the need for a local store with fresh produce, meats, and dairy is a missing necessity.

WMSRDC created a map showing all the food assets within the city of Muskegon Heights based on the results from the moderated sessions. Overlaid with city roads and transit routes, an overall picture of the city's food resources showed the lack of accessible fresh foods and vegetables within the city boundaries. Healthy meals were provided at each session by local Muskegon Heights' restaurants or catering services. With the sessions completed, a final report is being produced by Kindred

Marketing and Access Health to be released this fall. To learn more about this event and the results and to see a map of the Muskegon Heights food assets, visit [www.livabilitylab.com/heightsfood](http://www.livabilitylab.com/heightsfood) or visit the GIS project page on the WMSRDC website.



**100**  
Muskegon Heights residents and business owners came together and shared their knowledge and opinions about food and existing food resources.



City of Muskegon Heights residents participating in listening sessions

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## Commission Operations: FY24 Work Plan and Budget

On September 25, 2023, WMSRDC staff presented the fiscal year 2024 work program and budget to the Board of Directors. The annual work program outlines each of WMSRDC’s programs’ goals, objectives, and proposed projects for the upcoming fiscal year. Projects highlighted were concluding the Hazard Mitigation Plan updates for Lake, Oceana, and Mason counties, several cemetery mapping projects located though the region, development of the 2050 Long Range Plan, and a variety of pending environmental grants targeting underserved communities and environmental justice.

The fiscal year 2024 budget presented totaled to an ambitious \$5.91 million. WMSRDC’s goal of diversifying funding sources and expanding into new project areas was a highlight of the budget discussion. Staff described in detail the unique grants and opportunities targeted because of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act.

WMSRDC is pleased to report that both the work program and budget received full support and unanimous approval by the board. The staff is excited to kick off the fiscal year in October 2024 and put words into action!

### FY2024 Funding Summary

Local .....	\$712,576
State .....	\$1,051,363
Federal .....	\$4,147,903
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Total .....	\$5,911,842

## Economic Development: Broadband Update

According to the Michigan High-Speed Internet Office (MIHI), close to 500,000 households are unserved or underserved by high-speed internet infrastructure with another 730,000 households facing barriers related to a

combination of affordability, adoption, device access and digital literacy. This means approximately 30% of Michigan households do not have an affordable, reliable high-speed internet connection that meets their needs.

The BEAD plan and other helpful information is available at <https://www.michigan.gov/leo/bureaus-agencies/mihi>.

WMSRDC is committed to being a central point of contact between the MIHI office and local units of government in the region. As a regional planning agency committed to supporting local governments, WMSRDC is well-positioned to facilitate communication between state and federal interests, local stakeholders, and internet service providers (ISPs). In addition, WMSRDC economic development, community development, transportation planning, and infrastructure asset management programs share ties to many aspects of broadband planning.



Installation of broadband fiber infrastructure.  
Photo credit: <https://www.truestreamfiber.com/june2023-construction-update/>

Earlier this year, Michigan received \$1.559 billion in Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) funding to close the digital divide. The BEAD Five-Year Action Plan provides information on the implementation of the BEAD Program and how MIHI is working towards universal availability for all Michiganders.

**Economic Development: CEDS Update**

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) update process is underway. Throughout the drafting process, sections of the plan will be available for review at [wmsrdc.org/project/ceds-2023/](http://wmsrdc.org/project/ceds-2023/). The completed plan will be posted on this page upon completion this fall.

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 the economic prosperity and resiliency of a region. 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 WMSRDC region to remain eligible for EDA funding programs.

There are currently four active EDA-funded projects in the WMSRDC region, all of which were eligible for EDA funding by virtue of the WMSRDC CEDS document. These communities include the cities of Muskegon Heights (Muskegon County) and Hart (Oceana County), and the counties of Lake and Oceana.



WMSRDC 2018 CEDS document cover page

**Environmental: Thank you, Gale!**

WMSRDC would like to extend a huge “thank you!” to Gale Nobes for his years of service to environmental conservation. After 16 years as a soil conservation technician for Natural Resources Conservation Service, Gale joined the WMSRDC environmental team in 2015. Prior to that his volunteer activities included habitat improvement efforts with Trout Unlimited and chairing the Muskegon River Watershed Assembly. Since his retirement from WMSRDC at the end of July, we have already missed Gale’s knowledge, dedication, and amazing photography skills, but we know we will continue to see him at Muskegon Lake Watershed Partnership meetings and other local events. We hope he can fill his extra time with family, eating sushi, and going fishing!

Gale documenting fish monitoring efforts at the White River fish passage restoration site.



## Environmental: Remembering Greg Mund

In the spring of 2022, we lost Greg Mund, a fierce advocate for organic farming and environmental restoration. His family and friends meant the world to Greg, so to honor his life, WMSRDC, the Muskegon Lake Watershed Partnership, Ramboll, and the Mund Family collaborated to place dedication plaques along the Lakeshore Trail at the Amoco Fish and Wildlife Habitat Restoration Project Area on Muskegon Lake. This was one of the last projects he worked on with WMSRDC. Although he may not have found this dedication necessary, he would have been proud of the project results. (Well, he might have had a few notes). As observed by Greg numerous times and memorialized on one of the plaques, "it's just a little biology."



*Greg overseeing construction efforts at the Amoco site.*



*Dedication plaque location. Photo provided by Ramboll.*

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## Local Government Services: Oceana County Planning Assistance



*Ruckel's Bridge, Golden Township, Oceana County*

WMSRDC continues to work with the Oceana County Planning Commission and the Oceana County Parks and Recreation Commission to update the Oceana County Master Plan and the Oceana County Recreation Plan. After months of research and public engagement, drafts of each plan will be presented to the committees for review in October. The drafts will then be made available for public review and comment through parts of November and December. Following the review periods, a public meeting will be held to receive feedback from the public. The WMSRDC webpage [wmsrdc.org/project/oceana-county-planning-assistance/](https://wmsrdc.org/project/oceana-county-planning-assistance/) is a great place to keep in touch with progress, find important meeting dates, and access materials to review. Both plans are on track for completion and local adoption in January 2024.

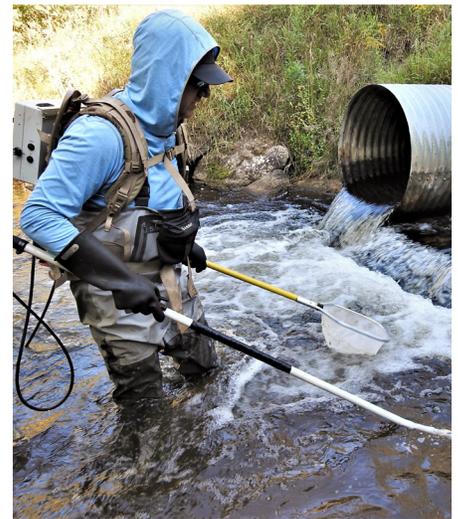
**Environmental: NOAA Regional Partnership Update**

In 2020, WMSRDC entered the Lake Michigan Rivers and Coastal Wetlands Regional Partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Since then, the Little Cedar Creek, Stony Creek, and White River projects were selected for funding. All projects have completed design plans and are at differing stages in the implementation process. At Little Cedar Creek, the 500 feet of instream habitat restoration and the culvert replacement at Sweeter Road stream crossing have been completed. The additional culvert replacement at Michillinda Road crossing began construction at the beginning of September. The White River project will replace three road stream crossings in Swinton Creek and one in Cushman Creek and restore 1,080 feet of instream habitat in Swinton Creek. This work is set to begin this fall. 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 instream habitat replacement. This work is anticipated to begin in the spring of 2024.



*Sweeter Road and Little Cedar Creek crossing during pre-restoration monitoring and after construction.*

To complete all anticipated construction activities and post-monitoring efforts, WMSRDC has collaborated with NOAA to extend the project deadline through September 2024. 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.



**Local Government Services: Hazard Mitigation**

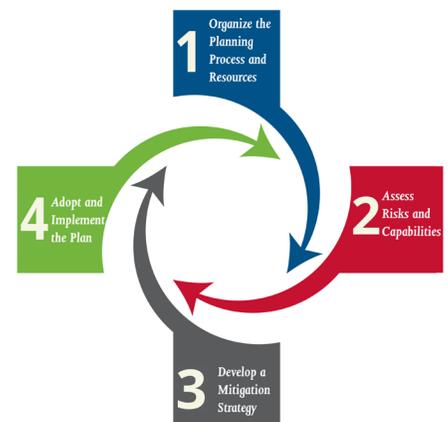
WMSRDC is nearing completion of a project to update Hazard Mitigation Plans for the counties of Lake, Mason, and Oceana. With FEMA-approved plans in place, each county and each local community that participated in the planning process will be eligible to adopt the county plan and become eligible to apply for federal pre-disaster and post-disaster funding.

The WMSRDC website [wmsrdc.org/program/hazard-mitigation/](https://wmsrdc.org/program/hazard-mitigation/) currently hosts draft

sections for public review. Local officials in the counties of Lake, Mason, and Oceana are especially encouraged to review and provide input on these materials to ensure their community will at least have the option to become eligible for mitigation funding.

Hazard mitigation is any sustainable action that reduces or eliminates long-term risk to people and property from future disasters. Mitigation planning seeks to break the cycle of disaster damage, reconstruction,

and repeated damage. Hazard mitigation includes long-term solutions that reduce the impact of disasters in the future.



## Special Projects: White River Economic Impact Analysis

According to a new Grand Valley State University (GVSU) study, the White River attracted nearly 70,000 visitors in the past year resulting in a total economic output of \$19.5 million and supporting 189 jobs.

Completed in August 2023, "The Economic Assessment of the White River" is the culmination of work and collaboration initiated by the White River Watershed Collaborative (WRWC). WRWC is led by Trout Unlimited, Jake Lemon, and involves stakeholders from over a dozen local, state, and federal organizations. The WRWC Economic Opportunity sub-committee, led by Newaygo County's Economic Development Director Julie Burrell, identified the opportunity to conduct an economic impact study of the White River.

In early 2022, WRWC set out to document the economic impact of the White River in Newaygo, Oceana, and Muskegon counties. This information could be

leveraged to both target economic development opportunities and grants to improve the quality of the White River.

Recognizing the potential value of this study, WMSRDC stepped in to serve as fiduciary on behalf of the WRWC. WMSRDC successfully applied for and received funding from the Community Foundation for Muskegon County, the Community Foundation for Oceana County, and the Fremont Area Community Foundation. Additional funding

partners included Shrems West Michigan Trout Unlimited, Trout Unlimited National, and Free the White River group. One hundred percent of funds raised were dedicated to contracting with GVSU to conduct the study.

The Economic Assessment of the White River is available for download at [wmsrdc.org/white-river-impact](https://wmsrdc.org/white-river-impact). WMSRDC and the WRWC would like to thank GVSU staff and research assistants for their guidance and diligent work over the past year.



Railroad trestle over the White River in White Cloud, Newaygo County

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## Transportation: Non-Motorized Traffic Counters

The West Michigan Shoreline Regional Development Commission recently purchased five Eco-Counter trail counters, along with traffic count software. These 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, match free, through the WestPlan MPO using COVID HIP funding.

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.



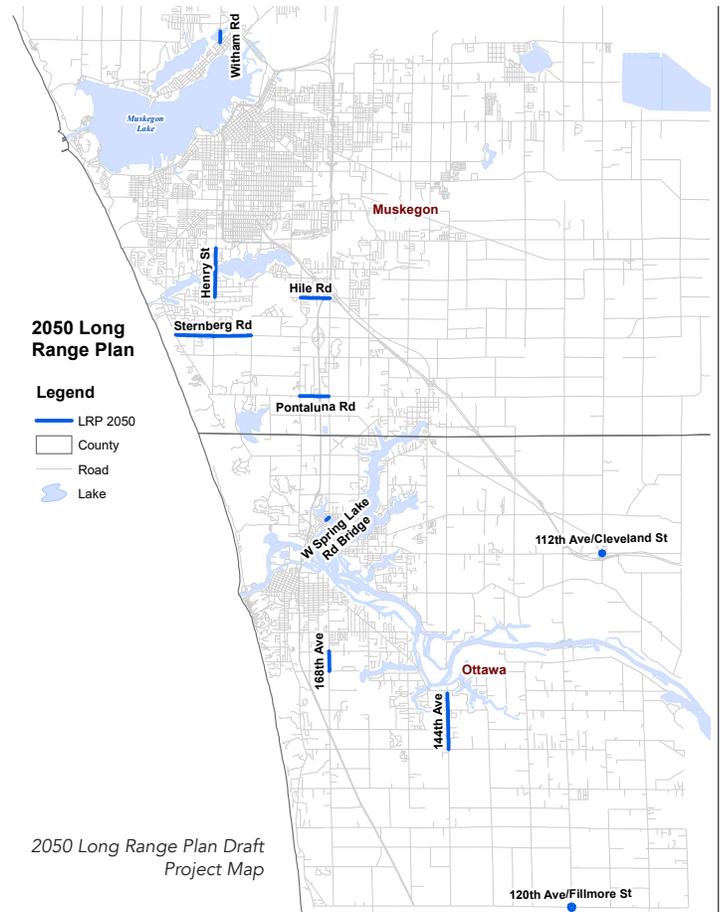
Non-motorized pathway in Oceana County

## Transportation /GIS Mapping: MPO Update

WMSRDC received notice that the FY2024 Unified Work Program has been approved by the Michigan Department of Transportation. This approval has allowed WMSRDC to move forward with developing and approving the FY2024 agency budget.

The UWP outlines the budget and activities for the MPO for the next fiscal year. Budget estimates for the UWP are provided by the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and are allocated to several different program areas for the MPO.

In August, the WestPlan MPO Technical and Policy Committees approved the project list for the upcoming 2025 Long Range Transportation Plan. A map of the projects is included in the newsletter.



## Transportation: Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) Update

The WestPlan MPO Technical and Policy Committees acted at their August Technical and Policy Committee meetings to amend the FY2023-2026 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Amendment 10 was approved by the committees and has since been approved by MDOT and FHWA. Projects in the amendment include several Traffic Safety related projects that were submitted by MDOT, as well as the removal of one local project that was part of the 2023 federal budget rescission that impacted covid funded projects that has not been obligated. Details of WestPlan MPO TIP amendments can be found by visiting the website at [www.wmsrdc.org](http://www.wmsrdc.org).



Road work on US 31 Business route



316 Morris Avenue, Suite 340  
Muskegon, MI 49440

PRSR STD  
U.S. POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
MUSKEGON, MI  
PERMIT NO. 429

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