

Commission Quarterly

2025 APRIL-JUNE ISSUE

National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Community Capacity Building and Planning

West Michigan hosts several lakes commonly known as "drowned river mouth lakes." Formed by glaciers, these lakes are located at the mouths of rivers flowing into Lake Michigan, separated only by short channels. Drowned mouth lakes provide critical habitat and nursery grounds for native and recreational fish in the Great Lakes. Unfortunately, all watersheds in the project area have known sites of erosion, stormwater management needs that impact the local economies, and road stream crossing that are not adequate for fish passage. The Michigan coastal communities that surround these lakes are heavily dependent on anglers, tourists, and beachgoers who want to recreate in clean waters.

To begin the process of improving these conditions, WMSRDC secured funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) National Coastal Resilience Fund (NCRF) to collaborate with community leaders, stakeholders, and the selected environmental consulting firm, Environmental Consulting & Technology, Inc. (ETC), to develop a prioritized list of nature-based projects. WMSRDC will host the following county level planning meetings to allow participants to provide input on locations in need of protection and the ideal outcomes and benefits from resiliency and restoration efforts.

- **Wednesday, July 23** at the Oceana County Community Services Building from 2:00 – 3:30 pm
- **Tuesday, July 29** at the Ludington City Hall from 2:00 – 3:30 pm
- **Wednesday, July 30** at the Newaygo County Board Room from 2:00 – 3:30 pm
- **Tuesday, August 5** at the WMSRDC office from 2:00 – 3:30
- **Wednesday, August 6** at the Lake County Board Room from 2:00 – 3:30 pm

If you have environmental restoration project ideas, but are unable to attend your local meeting, WMSRDC has set up a survey to collect your ideas which can be found on the WMSRDC website: <https://wmsrdc.org/project/resilience-planning-in-west-michigan-project/>

Depending on the highest priority projects' scopes and budgets, two to four of the identified projects will be prepared to flow into the Site Assessment and Preliminary Design phase of the NCRF pipeline. The additional projects recognized in the plan will continue to work through development and community preparedness to be submitted under future years of the NCRF pipeline or through other funding programs.

All future designs will utilize soft



Watersheds within the five-county area.

engineering solutions influenced by fluctuating water levels seasonally and annually and resilient to site hydrology to reduce any future coastal hazards, while ensuring all projects enhance habitat and benefit native wildlife, leading to improved habitat for native plants and animals, reduced shoreline erosion, improved fish passage, and increased tourism due to improved fishing, boating, wildlife watching, and aesthetics.

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Transportation: Asset Management Begins

Regional staff recently began the process of collecting data for its annual Asset Management program. Asset management is a planning tool that is 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.

Each year, WMSRDC staff, along with the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and a county road commission employee, collect this data for at least half of all the federal aid roads within Region 14. The data collection effort requires the collection of three items: road condition rating, surface type, and the number of lanes. The road rating assesses the road surface condition for a given segment on a scale of 1-10.



Road construction on US-31.

WMSRDC is required to collect data on the Federal Aid eligible road system but also rates local roads as a service for local road agencies. So far in 2025, Federal Aid data collection has been completed for Newaygo, Oceana, and Muskegon counties. Ratings for Mason, Lake, and

Northern Ottawa counties will take place later this summer. In addition, WMSRDC staff completed local road ratings for the Village of Fruitport, the Village of Shelby, the City of Montague, and the Village of Rothbury.

Transportation: MPO Committees Approve Newly Developed FY2026-2029 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

The West Michigan Metropolitan Transportation Planning Program (WestPlan) Technical and Policy Committees approved the draft FY2026-2029 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) at their May 2025 MPO meetings. The TIP is a short-range planning document that 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.

MPO staff began developing

the new planning document in FY2024, with assistance from the MPO committees, which include road and transit agencies as well as MDOT staff. Once the committees selected and approved a project list, staff were able to complete other detailed chapters of the document that analyze potential impacts of the new projects such as Air Quality and Performance Measures.

Federal funding for the FY2026-2029 TIP is expected to be nearly \$90 million for approximately 130 transit and highway projects in

the MPO area. These projects include bus purchases, signal work, resurface and reconstruction projects, safety, economic development-related, and non-motorized projects.

Public participation was encouraged throughout the process, and all MPO meeting information is listed on the WMSRDC website. A public review period was also held for 15 days prior to a public open house that was held on April 15, 2025. The document in its entirety can be viewed on the WMSRDC website. If you have any questions regarding the TIP or WestPlan related activities, please contact Brian Mulnix at 231-722-7878.

Transportation: Air Quality Activities

The 2025 Clean Air Action season kicked off with STEAM Along the Lakeshore at Hackley Park in Muskegon on May 3. Staff were able to spread air quality awareness to over 950 children and their families! The months prior to this event were spent developing an interactive scavenger hunt game for event participants to play and learn about emission sources in their immediate surroundings. This same game was used for Feet on the Street in Whitehall on June 1 and was well received.

On May 15, WMCAC hosted a luncheon at Johnson Park in Walker, Michigan where staff from each planning organization partner presented the Clean Air Action program to the attendees. In addition to these summertime events, the informational display rotation began at the West Michigan Works! office in Muskegon from May 12-28. The display then travelled to Ferrysburg City Hall from June 2-17, and then to Laketon Township Hall from June 23-30.

The first Clean Air Action Day of 2025 was issued on June 11. This announcement could be seen on WOOD8, WZZM, Fox17, and varying streaming services, as well as be heard on WGHN. Be sure to check out the website (www.wmcac.org) for Lauryn Blake's interview with WGHN Good Morning Grand Haven. Remember: Do your share for cleaner air!



Staff hit the streets of Whitehall at their summer kickoff event, Feet on the Street, on June 1. Attendees of all ages approached us for information and to play scavenger hunt bingo!

Photo credit to White Lake Area Chamber & Visitors Bureau



Staff hosted an informational activity table at STEAM Along the Lakeshore on May 3 in Muskegon, Michigan at Hackley Park.

Transportation: 2026 Unified Work Program Approved

The Fiscal Year 2026 Unified Work Program (UWP) was approved by the WestPlan MPO Policy Committee at their May meeting. The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) are currently reviewing the document for final approval, which is expected in July. The UWP outlines the budget and activities for the MPO for the next fiscal year. Budget estimates for the UWP are provided by MDOT and are allocated to several different program areas for the MPO.

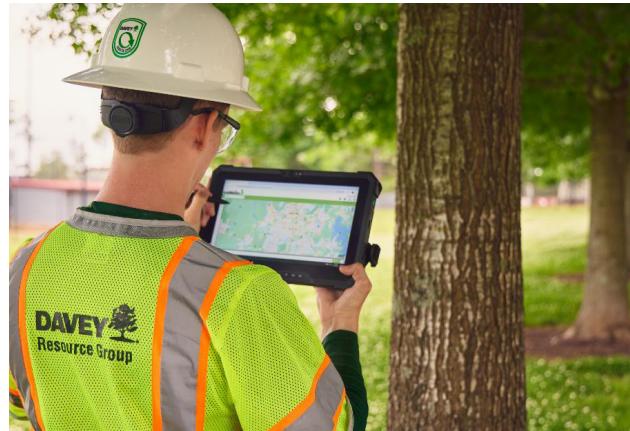
The UWP is a federally required document, which is reviewed and approved by the MPO Policy Committee on an annual basis. The UWP outlines the budget and activities for the MPO for the next fiscal year.

Environmental: Tree Inventory Kickoff

On June 10, Davey Resources Group officially began conducting an inventory of the City of Muskegon trees. The inventory includes all the city's street trees and as much of the city's park trees as funding will allow. The data collected for each tree will include the location of the tree as well as its species, diameter, height, condition, any maintenance recommendation, its hazard rating, and more.

Once the inventory is finalized, Davey will develop a corresponding tree management plan to prioritize the most dangerous trees in need of removal. Then, the City of Muskegon will implement 15 tree removals and 30 new tree plantings. The project team understands that the tree inventory and associated management plan will outline the need for rates of tree removal and plantings above and beyond the funds of this project. However, the data gathered will help the city plan future efforts. Under their annual budget, the City of Muskegon will assume the responsibilities described in the management plan, including the continuation of dangerous tree removal and new tree plantings, administering updates to the tree inventory data, and consistent health monitoring of all trees within the city's jurisdiction. These sustaining efforts will restore the city's tree canopy resilience with healthy and biodiverse trees.

WMSRDC and the City of Muskegon would like to thank the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Urban and Community Forestry Inflation Reduction Act (UCF IRA) Grant Program made possible through IRA funding provided by the USDA Forest Service's Urban and Community Forestry Program for this unique opportunity!



Davey staff member conducting a tree inventory

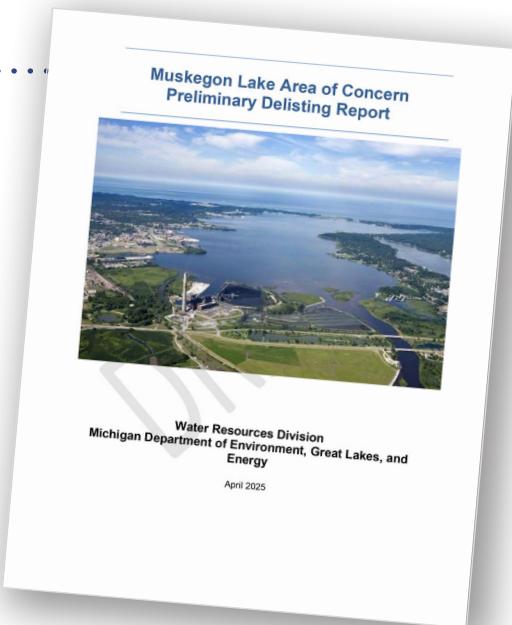
Photo credit to Davey Resources Group

Environmental: Public Comment for Muskegon Lake AOC Delisting

WMSRDC is excited to announce that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE) are proposing to delist the Muskegon Lake Area of Concern (AOC) based on the achievement of management actions, removal of the Beneficial Use Impairments (BUIs), and decades of restoration. The draft Final Delisting Report is available on EGLE's Muskegon Lake AOC web page: <https://www.michigan.gov/EGLE/About/Organization/Water-Resources/AOC/Muskegon-Lake-AOC>

EPA and EGLE will host a public comment meeting in place of the Muskegon Lake Watershed Partnership regular monthly meeting on Tuesday, July 1, 2025, 12:00 p.m. at the Grand Valley State University - Annis Water Resources Institute.

If you are unable to attend the meeting, public review and comments are invited now through July 9, 2025. Please direct comments to Stephanie Swart, Great Lakes Management Unit, Water Resources Division, at SwartS@Michigan.gov, or EGLE,



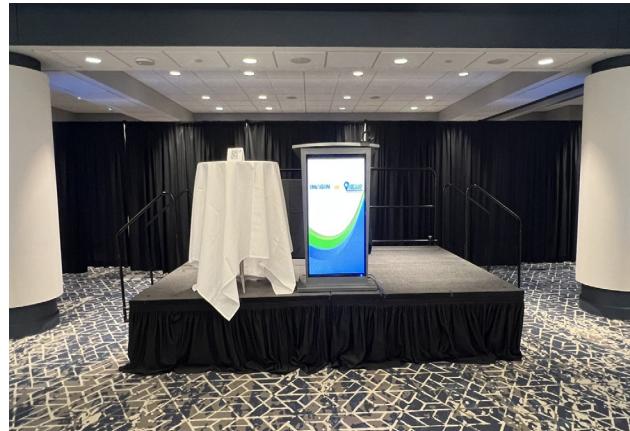
Water Resources Division,
Great Lakes Management Unit,
P.O. Box 30458, Lansing,
Michigan 48909-7958.

GIS: IMAGIN-MiCAMP Conference 2025

Jack Grice, Transportation Planner/GIS Technician, attended the joint IMAGIN-MiCAMP Annual Education Conference held in Kalamazoo on June 1-3. Both Improving Michigan's Access to Geographic Information Networks (IMAGIN) and Michigan Communities Association of Mapping Professionals (MiCAMP) are statewide organizations whose members are Geographic Information System (GIS) professionals from various industries, including government, private consulting, utilities, and education.

This year's conference hosted over 250 attendees who participated in more than 30 technical sessions. These sessions covered a wide range of topics, including best practices for managing a GIS organization, developing new tools and workflows for efficient processing, analyzing case studies such as the use of machine learning to assess agricultural yields, and exploring the history of GIS and cartography education.

Attendees also had ample opportunities to collaborate with colleagues during numerous social events supported by the conference.



The IMAGIN-MiCAMP Conference brings GIS professional, scientists, and educator together to discuss geospatial solutions.

Special Projects: Chamber Economic Summit



Erin Kuhn (WMSRDC), Tyler Kent (MDOT), and Marc Fredrickson (MDOT) present at the Muskegon Lakeshore Chamber's Economic Summit.

Photo credit to the Muskegon Lakeshore Chamber of Commerce

On May 29, the WMSRDC Executive Director, Erin Kuhn, gave the keynote address at the Muskegon Lakeshore Chamber's Economic Summit. Erin first highlighted

WMSRDC's 55 years of serving West Michigan and the success of the agency. She then specifically focused on the WMSRDC transportation program, resources

available through WMSRDC, and the US 31 corridor between the Grand River in Ottawa County and the Muskegon River in Muskegon County. Along with WMSRDC staff, Erin also presented the MPO process, the traffic count program, and the asset management PASER road rating program. Nearly 300 attendees were able to see the data and resources available on the WMSRDC and MDOT websites.

Tyler Kent, MDOT Grand Region Office, and Marc Fredrickson, MDOT Transportation Service Center, joined Erin to discuss MDOT funding, priorities, and history of work along the US 31 corridor.

Local Government Services: Congratulations, Blue Lake Township!



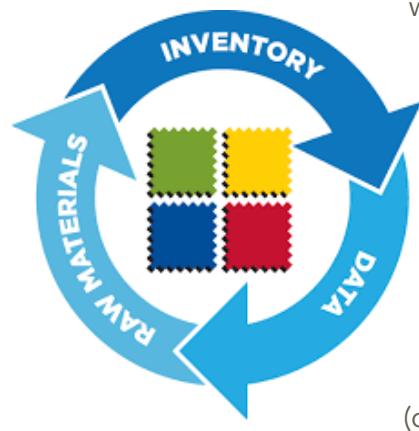
Information sign showing trails at the new Blue Lake Township Park.

Local Government Services: Materials Management Planning Update

The Materials Management Planning Committee (MMPC) continues to meet monthly on the first Monday of each month. The gathering place rotates around the five-county region. In April, the committee met in Baldwin (Lake County) and enjoyed a presentation from Jeff Krcmarik from the Michigan Department of Environment Great Lakes and Energy (EGL). In May, following the meeting in White Cloud (Newaygo County), American Classic guided the committee on a tour of its materials recovery facility (MRF) in the City of Newaygo. In June, WMSRDC hosted the meeting in Muskegon, however no business was conducted due to a lack of quorum.

In the coming months, WMSRDC will guide the MMPC through outreach and discovery processes. To inform local jurisdictions of materials management planning, WMSRDC will begin communicating on a regular basis (likely quarterly) and partner with MMPC members to attend collaborative municipal meetings like townships associations in each county. In addition to keeping communities updated, this outreach phase will seek information regarding locally available waste and recycling services. These are the first steps toward estimating waste and

recyclable materials that are generated (collected) within each county.



At its regular meeting in June, the Board of Blue Lake Township in Muskegon County adopted the Blue Lake Township Comprehensive Development Plan Update. This came on the heels of adopting the updated community recreation plan in January. WMSRDC is proud to have helped Blue Lake Township concurrently update the plans, a process which began in June 2024.

The plans will serve the community for five years, and then must be reviewed, updated as needed, and then re-adopted. The Comprehensive Development Plan serves as justification for the community's Zoning Ordinance, containing goals and objectives for community development, a community factbook, and a generalized Future Land Use Map. The Blue Lake Township Community Recreation Plan, which was approved by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources in February 2025, allows the township to apply for recreation grants from the state through 2029. Already in 2025, the township has put the plan to use applying for recreation funds to improve the newly established Blue Lake Township Park.

Economic Development: Agriculture Analysis Update

The West Michigan Agriculture Cluster Impact Analysis is a WMSRDC-led, EDA-funded initiative to inform public officials, economic development organizations, and agriculture producers and processors to make strategic and sustainable investments towards increased efficiency, productivity, and resilience of the region's food systems and agricultural economy. Through research, analysis, mapping, and stakeholder engagement, the analysis will outline assets, economic and infrastructure gaps, and opportunities to grow and sustain the agricultural sector. These will help stakeholders pinpoint key growth areas and barriers within the local economy and address essential needs such as infrastructure improvements, workforce development, and logistics.

This spring, WMSRDC was awarded matching contributions from the community foundations for Mason and Oceana counties. This came in addition to contributions already committed by Fremont Area Community Foundation, Community Foundation for Muskegon County, the Making It in Michigan Competitiveness Fund, and a Rural Readiness Grant.

To conduct the analysis, WMSRDC is teaming up with the Michigan State University Product Center, MSU RS&GIS, and Highland Economics. On June 4, Highland and MSU presented initial results to the steering committee and sought feedback before entering the final stage of the analysis. Project deliverables, to include a summary report and online interactive asset map, will be available to the public by September 2025.



Agriculture Cooperation

Commission Operations: Meet the Staff



Erin Kuhn,
WMSRDC Executive Director

Erin Kuhn has been with WMSRDC for more than 25 years working in the economic development and local government services programs prior to becoming the executive director in 2014.

As a Governor appointee, Erin is Vice-Chair of the Michigan Infrastructure Council (MIC), also serving on the MICs Communications sub-committee and chairing the Education Committee. She currently serves as Past Chairperson on the United Way of the Lakeshore Board of Directors. She served as President of the Michigan Association of Regions from 2019-2022 and is former chair of the West Michigan Prosperity Alliance. Erin is a member of the Muskegon Rotary Club, former

Lakeshore Athena Award nominee, and a Muskegon Lakeshore Chamber of Commerce Agent of Change.

Erin was born and raised in West Michigan. She earned degrees from Muskegon Community College and Grand Valley State University. Erin enjoys spending time with her family and friends, especially on her boat, watching the sunset on Lake Michigan. She currently lives in the City of Norton Shores with her husband and three children.



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