

# Chapter 9 - Sustainability

**LOWER GRAND RIVER ORGANIZATION OF WATERSHEDS**

**Your watershed needs your help!**



We strive to protect the watersheds where we live, work and play.

**Join us!**

**WHERE'S YOUR WATERSHED?**

You live in a watershed, the area of land that drains to a single body of water.



**Lower Grand River Watershed**  
17,247 square miles

**Grand River Watershed**  
5,177 square miles  
The Grand River in Mississippi  
has a great 240 miles.

**Help Prevent These Sources of Pollution:**

Keep farm runoff on the farm.



Your local storm drain goes straight to the river!  
*Only rain down the drain.*



Pick the right fertilizer and use it with care.



**Keep Your Watershed Clean by Going Green!**

Your agricultural buffer soaks up farm runoff before it reaches the water.



Save your rain for a sunny day! Green roofs and rain garden help manage rain where it falls.



Your landscape makes a difference. Native plantings are easy care and need little to no fertilizer.



**LOWER GRAND RIVER ORGANIZATION OF WATERSHEDS**

## 9.1 Introduction

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# 9.0 SUSTAINABILITY

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## OBJECTIVES

- How was interest in the Lower Grand River Watershed initiated?
- What is LGROW?
- How is LGROW going to assist in implementing this WMP?
- How are Watershed accomplishments going to be measured?

## 9.1 INTRODUCTION

The recommendations of the Watershed Management Plan (WMP or Plan) are options that can be voluntarily implemented to achieve water quality goals. It will be important to sustain the voluntary implementation of the Plan's recommendations to ensure that the conditions in the Lower Grand River Watershed (Watershed) improve, thereby reducing the need for state regulations and mandates. Success of the WMP depends on consistent support from local governments, citizens, and businesses. Each of these communities has distinct needs that will require different strategies. However, to remain committed to a common water quality goal will require ongoing coordination of the intentions and actions of all these groups.

## 9.2 A STRATEGIC BEGINNING

The initial WMP, adopted in 2004, anticipated the need to sustain the collaboration and partnerships, and to advance the mission, vision, goals, and objectives established in that process. The intent was to place the Lower Grand River WMP initiative in a much larger context of long-term success founded on a wide base of support from all parts of the Watershed community. At that time, a mission statement, vision statement, core values, and other strategic components were developed through facilitated input from an assembly of Watershed stakeholders (informally known as the Grand River Forum).

**Organizational Mission:** *Discover and restore all water resources and celebrate our shared water legacy throughout our entire Grand River Watershed community.*

**Watershed Vision:** *Swimming, drinking, fishing, and enjoying our Grand River Watershed: Connecting water with life.*

### Core Values of Our Watershed Work:

- Watershed activities are diverse, inclusive, and collaborative.
- Watershed efforts are sustainable and of high quality.
- Watershed images and messages create a widely shared sense of legacy and heritage.
- Watershed methods and products are holistic and employ a systems approach.
- Watershed organization and program evaluate progress and reward success.

**Lower Grand River Watershed Strategic Components:** The Vision Committee, established in the initial 2004 WMP, conducted focus group sessions with various Watershed stakeholders, to establish strategic goals and broad accomplishments to meet the vision. These components are included in Appendix 8.2. They include considerations for public awareness, information management, organization and finance, and general actions that are needed to establish and maintain a new watershed entity for the Lower Grand River Watershed.

## 9.3 A NEW WATERSHED ORGANIZATION

In determining what kind of organization was needed to support a large complex area such the Lower Grand River, Grand Valley State University's Seidman School of Business facilitated a strategic session

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in 2005 with various stakeholders from throughout the Watershed. That process identified the need for an ongoing coordinating group of local officials, agency representatives, and leaders from local organizations. The provisional steering committee set up for this process undertook months of research, deliberation, and consideration of alternatives for creating the Lower Grand River Organization of Watersheds (LGROW). To meet its strategic needs, including providing basin-wide oversight, implementing watershed-wide initiatives, and prioritizing water quality concerns, LGROW was designed as a new kind of “hybrid” organization reflecting attributes of both Watershed Alliances (emphasizing the municipal and agency work required under Clean Water Act permit requirements) and Watershed Councils (supporting a wide array of input and interests from the wider community). It was very important that the new organization fit in with our strategic objectives and the components outlined in our previous Watershed planning efforts.

The purposes and primary responsibilities of LGROW are included in their bylaws (Appendix 9.1) and are summarized as follows:

- Maintain a widely recognized center to provide Watershed-related services.
- Ensure that there is effective coordination with other organizations, governmental bodies, agencies, and other entities, in order to meet the needs of the public, governmental bodies, sub-basin entities, and others concerning Watershed matters.
- Ensure public awareness of the need for effective Watershed protection and management.
- Devise and promote programs available to the public; and prepare materials for distribution to residents of the Watershed, emphasizing the importance of a healthy, usable, and sustainable lower Grand River.
- Receive, evaluate, organize, and distribute Watershed data and information to residents of the Watershed, regulatory bodies, and research organizations.
- Convene periodic assemblies of the persons and entities having interests in the Watershed.
- Formulate a WMP and implement the Plan in ways that will improve the quality of waters within the Watershed and encourage local efforts to protect and improve rivers, streams, and other waters.
- Review and comment upon sub-basin WMPs.
- Recommend priorities in the implementing of improvement projects affecting the Watershed.
- Review and comment upon local land use plans, capital improvement plans, and other proposals as they may relate to or affect the Watershed or any of its component waters.
- Prepare and disseminate reports on its activities, and address other water-related issues of interest to LGROW participants and the general public.
- Serve as a forum in which to coordinate Watershed and natural resource planning among local and regional land use agencies and programs.
- Promote sustainable development and smart growth in accordance with the principles adopted by Grand Valley Metro Council (GVMC) and other regional authorities.

## **9.4 ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY**

To be sustainable, the provisional steering committee determined the need for a sound business footing, strong leadership from a wide cross section of the region, and an effective communications plan to reach out and continually involve the public at large in organizational activities.

### ***Initial Business Plan***

While LGROW is in the process of producing a new business plan to support the new organization, the steering committee had reviewed draft business plans and made several key findings during its organizational development.

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## **Key Findings from 2006 Draft Business Plan**

1. Need for Organization. Water quality and usage is an emerging concern for many communities, and government mandates for storm water management are under legislative and enforcement purview as communities are working to solve these potential impacts. In addition, the Grand River also serves as a source of entertainment, water for manufacturing, electricity, wildlife, and is a part of every citizen's daily life. Maintaining the river and educating the public regarding water preservation issues is a top priority for any organization representing the Lower Grand River. A new organization will endeavor, as stated in the mission, to help government, businesses, and residents to appreciate our natural resource and its value for future generations.
2. Competition and Coordination. There are several organizations working to improve the environmental quality in West Michigan. Every one is concerned about land usage, air quality, development patterns, economic potential, traffic patterns, and many other community development issues. These organizations include: West Michigan Strategic Alliance and its Green Infrastructure Initiative, West Michigan Sustainability Alliance, the West Michigan Sustainable Business Forum, Trails and Greenways Coalition, West Michigan Environmental Action Council, and others. All these groups are pursuing funding, educating the populace, and working to improve the environment. The opportunity for confusion amongst the communities is immense, but collaboration opportunities also exist. A Lower Grand River Watershed organization will establish its niche in the usage and protection of water resources with respect to the basin for the Grand River. This impacts all areas along the Grand River from its many tributaries to Lake Michigan. An association with GVMC will also leverage linking and encouraging collaborative efforts between municipalities as well as the above organizations. Coordination and collaboration will also be encouraged for existing and evolving watershed councils within the Lower Grand basin, such as the Rogue River Watershed Council.
3. Marketing and Communications. A new Watershed organization will need to establish its primary products or services as applied to various target audiences. They will further need to produce a communications mechanism to make future stakeholders and potential members aware of these services and the value made available to them by engaging with the organization. Target audiences, service offerings, promotional methods, and benchmarking to evaluate progress are all necessary components of ensuring the new organization will succeed.
4. Operations. GVMC will provide staff and fiduciary support as well as management oversight. A new organization may opt to acquire services through GVMC. Another option is to hire a director and staff through GVMC which in turn will be the employer of record and be required to meet all employee requirements. At this time, data on the quality of the Grand River is sketchy, fragmented, and reliability is inconsistent. Initial operations for this organization will include developing a program to train water monitoring volunteers to gather data consistently and be disseminated effectively. This will help establish benchmarks for water quality and usage. This baseline will evaluate effectiveness for water environmental programs, pollution control, water runoff, and also structures. These data can be used to establish priorities, design new programs, search for new resources, and help educate corporations and citizens on how to protect, improve, and maintain water quality.

## **Board Membership**

Several of the key findings cited above led to a series of "next steps" for the organization, the result of which led directly to the establishment of its current committee structure and the following Board of Directors membership structure:

- Water Management Members. Municipal or regional public entities with water management responsibilities under the Clean Water Act.
- Watershed Sub-Basin Members. Representatives from those Watershed sub-basins of the Lower Grand with WMPs and functioning organizations working on key issues.
- Grand River Forum Members. Representatives selected at the Annual Meeting from one of the following forum groups: partnering municipalities, businesses/institutions, community organizations, private National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permittees, and the public at large.

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The balance of voting on the Board restricts the number of sub-basin and Grand River Forum members add up to no more than the total number of Water Management Members. This ensures that a near majority is always possible for the Water Management Members on the LGROW Board of Directors. The Board organizational chart can be seen in Figure 9.1.

### ***Services Review Committee and Communications Plan***

Another key element of the initial business plan led to a committee established to determine stakeholders and their service needs. Further need for a communications plan is vital to successfully promoting LGROW awareness; maintaining a regional presence; and educating stakeholders, constituents, and the West Michigan public on the purpose and accomplishments of the organization.

### ***Sustaining Organizational Resources***

LGROW operations can only be sustained through maintaining its membership base and engaging its partners at all levels. Above all else, LGROW must establish a strong effort to determine the needs of members and its partners' constituency, and report on its successes in meeting these needs.

## **9.5 MEASURING WATERSHED ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

As suggested above in key findings from LGROW's draft business plan, the organization will need to establish a method of benchmarking and evaluating its progress.

### ***Watershed Accomplishments Inventory***

LGROW conducted a Watershed-wide inventory of accomplishments from many of its stakeholders (including local governments, county health departments, county parks departments, county road commissions, conservation districts, land conservancies, and Watershed sub-basin organizations). Each were asked in both personal interviews and an online inventory questionnaire to report on a wide array accomplishments including various best management practices (BMPs), illicit connection counts, enforcement actions, earth change projects, sanitary and storm system repairs, spill incidents, street sweeping, streambank erosion measures, storm inlet stenciling, dedicated open lands, adopted rules related to projecting water quality, septic system manifests and records, development restrictions or riparian easements, storm water or Low Impact Development (LID) ordinance adoptions, yard waste management, drainage retrofits, public education efforts, river cleanups, Watershed monitoring, stakeholder outreach, grant awards, and construction site and soil and erosion permits. The questionnaire also included open-ended questions for each of the stakeholder groups about their respective successes and failures and their overall reaction to the process.

Unfortunately, the process did not produce consistency in data, nor a thorough response, from stakeholders. This is due to several factors clearly implying changes for future efforts. First, a generic subscription based on-line system was used for generating and collecting answers for the inventory. The design of such surveys is far too simple to allow for the multiplicity of responses, the number of categories, and the detail in the response required in this process. This led respondents to a high degree of frustration and eventually abandoning the questionnaire. For local governments, for example, out of 76 invitations to report, 26 followed the link and only 7 replied. Other groups had better response rates, but these tended to have fewer questions to answer and fewer organizations throughout the Watershed (thus making personal contact easier and more effective).

The second issue with the questionnaire was that the data being reported is in a form that must be reorganized into spreadsheets or some other data management program, a function which is very labor intensive for stakeholders. Data has been collected and reorganized, but analyzing in a consistent fashion is yet to be done.

Finally, communications surrounding the questionnaire and promoting involvement needs to be expanded. Direct phone calling and one-on-one interviews were performed this time to encourage the completion of the questionnaire. This was successful for most stakeholder groups.

Though this initial effort did not produce enough consistent data for inclusion into a database of Watershed accomplishments, LGROW intentions for this effort are still to create a widely used, routinely

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conducted, and easily interpreted reporting method. LGROW and its Data, Information, and Procedures (DIP) committee are currently reviewing the process and considering it for subsequent efforts.

### ***Ongoing Measures for Success***

At a time when resources are limited, it becomes critical that there is an integrated system in place that will help evaluate how successful an organization is in meeting their mission, vision, and goals for both the organization and Watershed resources. Through lessons learned from the disappointing results of the Watershed accomplishments inventory cited above, LGROW has realized the need for a focused effort and complete strategy to develop and implement an effective evaluation process. As a key finding in the draft business plan, LGROW is committed to continuing with this effort.

To accomplish this, LGROW is proposing measures of success and accomplishments that will be used to celebrate achievements, evaluate progress, make appropriate adjustments in approaches, and provide education and awareness. Stakeholders will be able to access assessment data thus helping to leverage resources and encourage a high level of engagement. To meet this outcome, LGROW intends to:

1. Continue to identify, collect, analyze, and summarize the recent Watershed accomplishments (2004-2009) regarding the implementation of the WMP.
  - a. This goal was accomplished during the updating of the 2010 LGR Watershed Plan.
2. Develop a plan that will define measures of success and a system necessary to track progress and accomplishments. This system should meet the data management criteria listed in the Lower Grand Vision Outline (Appendix 8.2).
  - a. Establish an Evaluation Subcommittee of the LGROW DIP to develop key water quality indicators and organizational evaluation measures.
  - b. Enlist stakeholder group representatives to tracking indicators pertaining to their respective stakeholder groups.
  - c. Report to the LGROW WMP Committee for considering appropriate adjustments, approaches, and priorities.
  - d. Request LGROW Board to direct staff to seek funding for this program.
  - e. LGROW would develop proposals to seek additional funding to implement the plan. Each of these components would have an implementation strategy, milestones and timeline. The time frame to complete Goal 2 will be January 2011 through Dec 2011
3. Implement the plan in a 3-year timeframe and integrate the process with ongoing work of LGROW, including routine updates to the WMP.
  - a. Continue to have designated meetings throughout this time period with the various identified committees to address challenges and fine tune the system. The time frame to complete Goal 3 would be from Jan 2012 – Dec 2014.

If this proposal is achieved, it will help ensure that efforts by LGROW partners are effective, efficient, and sustainable. It will also help ensure that the Lower Grand River region remains a great place to live, work, and play, as well as provide a model for other watersheds in West Michigan.

## **9.6 ENVIRONMENTAL AND COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY**

As an organization which aspires to affect all potentially polluting or destructive activities conducted throughout the entire Lower Grand River Watershed, LGROW is in a unique position to join with other large-scale initiatives throughout West Michigan, and bring a greater sense of water stewardship and improved quality to the entire region. Important initiatives of similar scale are now forming throughout the area to ensure that our environmental values are sustained for future generations, and that our population centers are built (or rebuilt) to grow and prosper without damaging the water, air, land, and life resources with which Michigan has been abundantly blessed.

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To meet this end, LGROW already partners with many local organizations through its diverse membership and Board of Directors structure. However, due to their equally large geographies or expansive missions, many organizations and agencies have not seen themselves as part of LGROW's organizational membership. Such organizations and initiatives should be considered for ongoing partnerships surrounding the need for coordinating long-term sustainability in West Michigan.

### ***Grand Valley Metropolitan Council and Metropolitan Planning Organizations***

GVMC is currently the host organization, but may not always perform that role. LGROW should be involved in all efforts associated with region-wide planning of all types, especially those involving transportation, land use, housing, energy and other similar planning efforts.

### ***Other Regional Planning Agencies***

In addition to GVMC, the Macatawa Area Coordinating Council (MACC), West Michigan Regional Shoreline Development Commission, and the Southwest Michigan Regional Planning Commission all conduct similar activities to GVMC and should be valued partners for planning activities as well.

### ***West Michigan Strategic Alliance – Green Infrastructure Leadership Council (GILC)***

There is currently a Watershed focus-area within the GILC scope of activities. LGROW has already established a presence in this organization and should continue to do so.

### ***Other Watershed Organizations***

The Muskegon Watershed Assembly, the Macatawa Watershed Project of the MACC, the Kalamazoo River Watershed Council, upper reaches of the Grand River, and other watersheds in West Michigan, are all important regional efforts in West Michigan which LGROW should partner with, learn from, and assist wherever possible.

### ***Other Regional Conservation Organizations***

An array of large regional conservation related organizations with missions that match closely those of LGROW are often working on similar projects. LGROW should find ways to ensure their future efforts are compatible with these organizations.

### ***Unique Educational Events, Gatherings, or Activities***

Oftentimes there are unique and important events or forums that are conducted in the LGROW Watershed. The Ottawa County Water Quality Forum, Green Grand Rapids, the Community Sustainability Partnership, and the decennial Grand River Expedition are just a few of these. LGROW should participate in these efforts as well.

## **9.7 THE FUTURE OF WATERSHED MANAGEMENT IN THE LOWER GRAND**

The ongoing success of a new LGROW is vital not only to improving water quality in the Grand River, but also improving the quality of all lives throughout the Great Lakes Basin. Through their continued use of this WMP in the Lower Grand River, LGROW can play a significant part in improving the quality and availability of waters throughout the entire state and region. By joining with other watersheds, including those in upper reaches of the Grand River, and with efforts to improve water resources below ground, in the atmosphere, and in our surrounding Great Lakes, LGROW can broaden its reach, share its knowledge, and learn from others as we tackle the most significant issues facing us today. Among these are: finding effective ways to moderate the negative affects of human activities, restoring balance to large-scale disturbances in global ecosystems including climate and energy, to improve the quality of life for all social classes, and to more efficiently invest in a future built upon sustained natural ecosystem services.

A WMP and its supporting organization can only go so far in accomplishing such wide-scaled change. While LGROW's mission is related specifically and directly to improving the waters in their charge, real change will only be through involvement with collaborations and partners dedicated to making long-term



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successful lives from our homes, local towns, and subwatersheds, all the way up to our cities, regions, states, and nation. It is in this spirit, that of connecting the improvements in each of the hundreds of local rivers throughout our Watershed with the larger needs of our entire community and citizenry at large, that we have created this WMP.

