

URBANWATERS

FEDERAL PARTNERSHIP

Restoring Urban Waters, Revitalizing Communities

Grand River Watershed (Grand Rapids, Michigan)



Ambassador

Matt Chapman (Grand Rapids White Water)
(616) 710-1753
matt@grandrapidswhitewater.org

Co-Leads

Scott Hicks (USFWS)
scott_hicks@fws.gov

Kristian Williams (NRCS)
Kristian.williams@mi.usda.gov

Overall Assessment of the Partnership Since the Beginning

The Grand River/Grand Rapids Partnership is unique in that it receives significant support from the private sector and a representative from a non-federal organization serves as location Ambassador. Despite this difference, the Grand River/Grand Rapids location seeks a long-term vision of sustainability that balances private interest with support from Urban Waters Federal Partnership (UWFP) agencies to achieve a common goal. This partnership has worked well since inception, and its members are considering ways to continue to expand the partnership and strengthen on-the-ground results.

Members of the Partnership

This partnership is supported by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), which serve as federal agency co-leads.

NRCS local field, area, and state office staff contributes time, ideas, and technical knowledge to the project. NRCS formerly staff served as a local technical advisor on the Grand River Restoration Steering Committee and the Water Quality Subcommittee, and currently assist in

integrating water quality issues into the Grand River restoration project. NRCS worked with other federal and non-federal partners to discuss resource concerns and how to address them through the project.

The USFWS provides its unique authorities and expertise on endangered species and the management of sea lamprey, a devastating Great Lakes invasive species. The agency plays a key role in project planning through early and frequent engagement at many levels and in a variety of contexts. To restore the rapids, an innovative inflatable barrier will replace an aging dam and functional lamprey barrier and an endangered mussel will be relocated from construction areas. USFWS involvement is helping to ensure the Great Lakes fishery is protected from lamprey and endangered mussels are conserved, while helping city residents connect with their river and uncover their namesake, the Grand Rapids.

[Grand Rapids Whitewater \(GRWW\):](#)

A local nonprofit 501(c)3 organization comprised of individuals, rowing and paddling clubs, anglers, and businesses dedicated to achieving the dream of putting the namesake rapids back in the Grand River. Their goal is to partner with the city to create a safer, more exciting river experience for everyone. A GRWW staff member currently serves as the location Ambassador and works with the UWFP co-lead agencies to implement and coordinate the partnership.

Nature of the Partnership

Participation in the partnership is voluntary. Partners support the UWFP and the Grand River restoration efforts by providing knowledge, technical assistance, financial assistance, and connections to other potential partners.

The partnership holds location update webinars multiple times per year. These serve as a larger forum that brings all partners together to brief them on the involvement of individual partners.

A significant portion of the work in this partnership takes place via small group meetings, with various stakeholders and federal agencies working to solve individual complex issues related to the river restoration efforts. As additional federal, non-federal, and non-governmental organization (NGO) partners become involved, the UWFP steering committee is exploring opportunities to further expand the partnership.

List of Partners

Federal Partners

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service

Additional Non-Federal Partners Playing Key Roles in Grand Rapids

- The City of Grand Rapids
- Downtown Grand Rapids, Inc.
- Fishbeck, Thompson, Carr & Huber
- Grand Valley Metropolitan Council
- Grand Rapids Parks Department
- Michigan Department of Environmental Quality
- Michigan Department of Natural Resources
- River Restoration
- The Wege Foundation

Additional Federal Agencies Playing Key Roles in Grand Rapids

- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- U.S. Geological Survey

Organizations for planning and action; plans developed and timing, consensus process

Much of the work at this location takes place in small committees with technical expertise. Planning for future partnership operations and success measures will be underway shortly.

Major Actions Taken Since the Beginning of the Partnership

This partnership was launched in 2013 in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and has seen tremendous success since inception. The preliminary river restoration project plan was unanimously endorsed by the Grand Rapids City Commission in June 2014 and received endorsement by the Board of Directors for the Grand Valley Metropolitan Council in 2015.

The vision of a revitalized river and restored rapids downtown catalyzed a comprehensive

planning process focused on reviving approximately seven miles of the river corridor and spurred the first update of the Downtown Development Plan in over 20 years. This coordinated effort between the City of Grand Rapids and the Downtown Development Authority (aka Downtown Grand Rapids, Inc.) was branded as “GR Forward” and identified 15 “opportunity sites” along the river banks for public access, riverside trails, open space, neighborhood improvements, and private development. The City Commission appointed the Grand River Restoration Steering Committee to coordinate finalization of the river restoration plan with other efforts, including community outreach by GR Forward and plans to enhance the city’s flood protection. The Grand River Restoration Steering Committee’s final report was unanimously accepted by the City Commission in July 2015.

Major Impacts of the Partnership

The UWFP designation has helped elevate the status and importance of a historic transformation project that will provide significant environmental, social, and economic benefits to the West Michigan region for years to come. The partnership is creating opportunities for private sector stakeholders to engage and interact with public agencies at the local, state, and national levels. The UWFP has played an important role in advancing the discussion about the need to restore and care for the Grand River as it flows through Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Major Actions Planned in the Future

All project partners and stakeholders remain committed to finalizing the Grand River Revitalization and Rapids Restoration Project design and look forward to implementation of this plan to create a safer and healthier Grand River for everyone to enjoy.

A large group of partnership members attended the UWFP National Workshop in 2016. They returned with new ideas and excitement for expanding the partnership and creating additional connections to support the Urban Waters movement in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Project partners look forward to additional discussions and planning opportunities for our location.

Major Challenges in the Future

Achieving success in improving and restoring our urban waters takes an army of committed and passionate individuals with a variety of backgrounds and resources. Coordinating the

work of individual NGO, federal, and non-federal partners takes a tremendous amount of time and effort to truly develop a partnership that is successful and united around a common goal. Balancing the time and resources needed to build the partnership while focusing on project-specific needs is a challenge that will require additional consideration in the future. Additional work is also needed at the federal level to communicate with local representatives of the federal agencies in the UWFP locations to ensure they have knowledge and understanding of UWFP goals.

“So, our goal is to restore the historic rapids to the Grand River – about a 2.5 mile stretch – and really turn the city’s attention, the community’s attention, back to the river to embrace it, to be stewards of the river, and to connect with it for the environmental, community, and economic benefits it can bring.”

- Kalie Nye, Former Project Coordinator at Grand Rapids Whitewater