

RIVER CURRENTS

A PUBLICATION OF MILWAUKEE RIVERKEEPER



2019 flooding in Village Park along the Milwaukee River north of the Thiensville Dam.

SIGNS OF CLIMATE CHANGE:

Great Lakes Water Levels Take a Wild Ride

Over the last 6 years, water levels on the Great Lakes have been steadily increasing and are now at, or near, record highs. Increasing at about 12 inches per year, Lake Michigan is up a staggering 6.2 feet from six years ago, breaking its high-water record of 33 years for July—at 582.18 feet. The reason for this roller coaster of water levels is complicated, and related to a global pattern of volatile weather and climate events. While the lakes have always naturally fluctuated, many underestimated the effects of climate-enhanced “swings” in precipitation and evaporation on these huge bodies of water.

Locally, high lake levels have caused some havoc in the Milwaukee area, espe-

cially downtown where our three rivers meet in the Milwaukee Estuary. In this area, water levels are heavily influenced by Lake Michigan because of historic navigational dredging. Several downtown riverfront businesses had to close due to flooding from high water levels this summer, and others are still pumping water out of foundations on an almost continuous basis.

Similarly, high river levels forced water into some sewage and stormwater pipes, which must be continually pumped out to protect properties from sewage back-ups. Other buildings have been unable to install piers, due to anchoring infrastructure - CONTINUED ON PG. 3

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WELCOME



Jennifer Bolger Breceda | Executive Director

Dear Friend of the Rivers,

As summer comes to a close and we move into fall, we look forward to taking a breath and reflecting on all we accomplished during our “in-the-river” season. There were paddles, rain barrel workshops and hikes, river cleanups, water quality monitoring trainings, data collection and an art boat parade, we testified to the Water Quality Task Force and commented on permits and projects, we patrolled the waterways in our new boat and educated children about our rivers and water quality. It has been a busy several months, but one of the most exciting things, was adding two new people to our amazing team.

With new exciting partnerships and community-wide restoration efforts underway not to mention a major anniversary on the horizon, we are committed to PROTECT, RESTORE, CONNECT, and ADVOCATE on be-

half of our waters.

This past year we expanded our Water Quality programs to include additional Bacteria Monitoring and more Road Salt Monitors in the northern part of the Basin. We look forward to a new monitoring season and increased awareness around our water quality programs.

Our Adopt-A-River program has quite literally DOUBLED its impact. With over 32,000lbs of trash cleaned from our waterways - we’ve already smashed our previous record. From businesses to community groups and individuals, we now have over 100 adopters. We owe a great deal of this growth to our Americorps service member, Rose Alvarez. As her time with Milwaukee Riverkeeper comes to a close, we want to recognize her incredible dedication to MRK’s programs and events. We wish her well on the next leg of her career journey.

With support from our Trinity Fellow, we worked over the past two years to build an educational program and develop partnerships with 11 schools across the Basin reaching nearly 300 students. As we look ahead to 2020, we plan to expand our programs even further meaning there will be many NEW opportunities to connect and celebrate 25 years of MRK. We hope to see you at our Annual Member

gathering this fall, where we’ll share more about this year’s work and future plans.

Our work defending the health of our rivers was once again tested this year. From defending the Great Lakes Compact - yet again, to protecting the important regulatory functions of our state agencies there has been barely a moment to celebrate wins or process setbacks. We remain vigilant in our role as the voice of the river pushing for strong environmental protections and important new regulations.

We hope you share in our excitement and look forward to closing out the year with you!

To healthy, free flowing rivers,

Jennifer Bolger Breceda
Executive Director



2019 Milky Moonlight paddle with River Alliance of Wisconsin

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AllAboard! New Faces at MRK.

Lisa Greco OPERATIONS MANAGER

Hometown: Milwaukee, WI

Describe yourself in 3 words: Curious, Generous, Adventurous

What is your personal mantra? Adventures are the best way to learn!

Coffee or tea? Coffeeeeeeeee

What are your favorite things to do outside of work? Crafts, raising butterflies, and riding my Vespa

People would be surprised if they knew: My parents worked for the CIA and I spent my formative years in the Middle East.

Favorite season? Autumn

Best piece of advice? Help people; You may be the only one that does.

Favorite spot in the MKE River Basin: Kletsch Park

Describe MRK in 3 words: Inspiring, Proactive, Protecting



Leah Holloway PROGRAM MANAGER

Hometown: Longville, MN

Describe yourself in 3 words: Hard-working, Compassionate, Kind

What is your personal mantra? Learn, Grow, Repeat

Coffee or tea? Oh, coffee, most definitely. Preferably cold brew.

What are your favorite things to do outside of work? Read, Nap, Paddle, Underwater Hockey

People would be surprised if they knew: How secretly introverted I am.

Favorite season? Fall

Any hidden talents? Pie Crust

Describe MRK in 3 words: Dedicated, Engaging, Beneficial



CONTINUED FROM PG. 1 -- being well underwater, and others have built new ramps or structures to allow water users to safely access our rivers and Lake.

In addition, high water levels and lake level surge has caused navigation issues where break walls, buoys, and other obstructions are underwater, posing safety concerns to boaters.

Throughout the Great Lakes, high waters and wave action means beaches, bluffs, vegetation and built structures are disappearing and being damaged at an alarming rate. Both people and pets have been swept off piers, and many have drown in riptides this year, according to the U.S. Coast Guard. Experts expect water levels to only minimally decrease in the next few months, meaning we could see storm surges that further threaten our coasts, bluffs, homes, and residents.

So what is the new normal? Many experts predict continued variability in lake and tributary river levels, and more surprises to come for our Great Lakes and shoreland communities. It is important that we find ways to adapt to this variability while still protecting our natural resources, our public health, and our quality of life.

For full article visit: bit.ly/MRKclimate



Cheryl Nenn, addresses the Wi Water Quality Task Force

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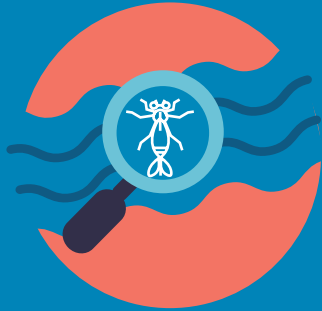
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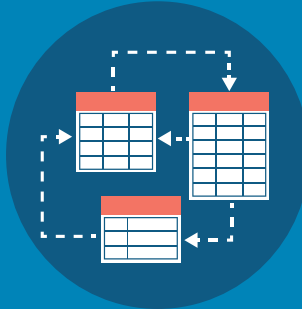
Jacob Rogers*
Water Quality Assistant

*Marshfield Clinic Americorps

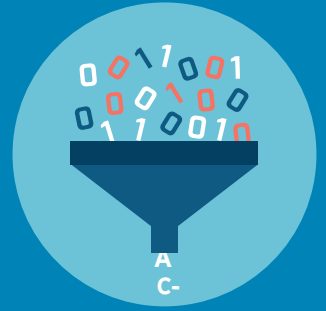
Making the: 2018 MILWAUKEE RIVER BASIN



COLLECT



COMBINE



COMPARE



Below the Surface...

At the end of every year, Milwaukee Riverkeeper releases an Annual Report Card on the overall health of the Milwaukee River Basin. The process to move from water sample to final report is lengthy and takes a lot of effort from individual volunteers, partners and Milwaukee Riverkeeper staff.

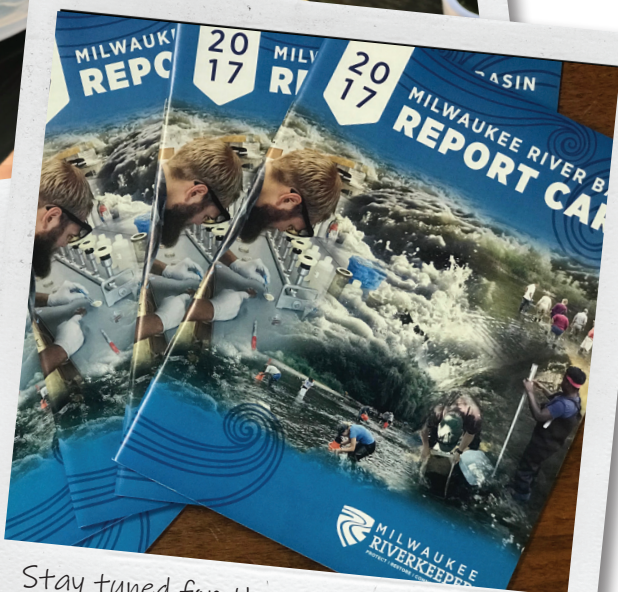
After each monitoring season we **COLLECT** all of the data gathered by our monitors. We then **COMBINE** the Milwaukee Riverkeeper data with that of other organizations and agencies that also monitor water quality in the Milwaukee River Basin. We then **COMPARE** that data to the standards for each parameter and assign each a grade to **COMPLETE** the report.

Our Report Card intern has been hard at work crunching the numbers from the 2018 season. Soon, our Annual River Report Card will update the public, politicians, and policy makers on the overall health of the Milwaukee River Basin.

This work would not be possible without both time AND treasure. There is no mission without money, and we are extremely thankful for a **DECADE** of support from:



**Fund for
Lake Michigan**
Clearly making a deep impact.



Stay tuned for the 2018 Milwaukee River Basin Report Card this fall!!

REPORT CARD



COMPLETE



Volunteers put in over 600 hours each summer collecting important data!

Thank You, Volunteers!

Over **80** volunteers head into the field to collect data on physical, chemical and biological parameters in the Milwaukee River Basin each year. Monitors are the eyes and ears of our waterways and, often, are the first to detect and report water quality issues.

Baseline Water Quality Monitors visit their assigned site monthly between May and October collecting a wide range of data - the fuel for our report card! In 2019, over **100** sites within the Basin are being monitored - totalling more than **600** site visits!

Road Salt Monitors: Our heartiest volunteers are our road salt monitors. This tough crew braves the elements from January through March monitoring for elevated chloride levels due to road salt after **EVERY** snowmelt. Chloride levels peak in winter and risk the safety of our fish and other aquatic life.

Emerging Contaminants: In partnership with the collaborative group, Community Leaders Engaged in Aquatic Research (CLEAR), **3x** per year volunteers head to **20** sites in the Milwaukee River Basin, Root River, Fox River and Lake Michigan. For these **one-day** events, monitors collect a sample that our friends at UWM's School of Public Health analyze for emerging chemicals like recreational drugs, pharmaceuticals and more!



Join the toughest volunteers around!
Become a Road Salt Monitor!

Our work simply would not happen without the tireless efforts of these individuals. To learn more about Milwaukee Riverkeeper's Monitoring Programs or to become a Water Quality Monitor, visit:

milwaukeekeeper.org/protect

Riverkeeper Watch



Cheryl Nenn | Riverkeeper

Kletzsch Park Fish Passage Project is a Generational Opportunity to Improve Fisheries

Milwaukee County Parks and WDNR are proposing a fish passage project at Kletzsch Park Falls. This is a generational opportunity to improve connectivity along the Milwaukee River and pass native fish around the dam to access upstream spawning habitat. This restoration project is a priority habitat project for the Milwaukee River Estuary Area of Concern, and will help improve habitat and fish populations, as well as address portage safety concerns and improve public access to the river.

MRK Weighs in on Federal Budget, Great Lakes and National Marine Sanctuary

In spring, Milwaukee Riverkeeper signed onto several letters asking for funding for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, Coastal Zone Management Program, public trails, and conservation programs in the Farm Bill, among others. In May, MRK and partners sent a letter to the Great Lakes Governors, prior to a Milwaukee summit, asking them to commit to bold and accountable action to provide clean, affordable and accessible drinking water for the Great Lakes region. Riverkeeper also wrote to U.S. EPA, on behalf of Community Advisory Committee for our Milwaukee River Estuary Area of Concern, asking to become a priority in the next Great Lakes Action Plan for 2020-2024.

In June, MRK sent another letter, this time to Governor Evers expressing support for the Wisconsin-Lake Michigan National Marine Sanctuary, which would protect and conserve more individually listed shipwrecks on the National Register of Historic Places than any other state. This section of Lake Michigan, from Port Washington to Manitowoc, possesses exceptional historic, archaeological, and recreational value, including two of Wisconsin's oldest wrecks.

Riverkeeper Testifies in Front of State Water Quality Task Force

In early spring, Speaker Robin Vos of the Wisconsin Assembly created a Task Force on Water Quality to gather information and make policy recommendations to better assess and improve the quality of both surface water and groundwater in our state. As part of the process, the Task Force held public meetings across the state. Originally, there were no plans to hold a meeting in Milwaukee, but after significant push back, the Task Force set a public meeting in the area on August 13th. MRK testified on water quality priorities for Wisconsin including more funding for infrastructure, more support to reduce agricultural runoff, and increasing state matching funds for our Area of Concern program. We also submitted a letter detailing our water quality priorities on behalf of MRK and several of our local partners. Links to our testimony on Wisconsin Eye and letter can be found on our website.

Little Menomonee River Restoration Clears Hurdle in Mequon

In August, Milwaukee Riverkeeper testified to the Mequon Common Council in favor of permits for Ozaukee County's Little Menomonee River Corridor Ecosystem Restoration Project. Milwaukee Riverkeeper supports this project, which is the first of several that will restore large sections of the Little Menomonee River, converting channelized or straightened portions of stream into naturally meandering river that connects to adjacent floodplains and wetlands. The project will improve native plant diversity, improve ecological function, restore wetland habitat, improve fish and wildlife habitat and spawning areas for Northern pike and other native fish, improve water quality, and reduce flooding. Mequon voted 5-3

in favor of this project.

2nd Cream City Classic Open River Swim is a Success

The 2nd Annual Cream City Classic was a success, with 83 registrants swimming a 1.5 mile race course on the lower Milwaukee River. Milwaukee Riverkeeper conducted water quality testing the week of the swim to ensure safety of the swimmers. Staff also ran the safety boat and participated as safety kayakers. We are excited to be part of an event that highlights the community's desire to have clean, swimmable rivers.

Water Main Break in Wauwatosa Affects Gran Tosa Creek

In August, one of our water quality volunteers alerted us to a huge sediment plume on Gran Tosa Creek. We reported that information to the WDNR and Wauwatosa and found a large water main burst due to poor condition. WDNR staff required some changes to the emergency dewatering efforts associated with replacing the water main to better protect the Creek, but significant runoff entered the Creek and the lower Menomonee River over the subsequent days underscoring the need for more funds to replace old, failing pipes and infrastructure.

Elm Grove Restoration Project Largely Complete

After a very wet spring conditions subsided, contractors constructed the Elm Grove Floodplain and Stormwater Infiltration Project. A large number of ash trees died from Emerald Ash Borer, leaving a severely stripped area near Underwood Creek. This area was converted into a natural area with a permanent wetland, several wetland scrapes, and stormwater management bioswales. It will help reduce runoff from Underwood Creek Parkway and Tonawanda Elementary School, and improve connectivity of the Creek with the floodplain, and increase infiltration of stormwater during large storm events. There is still more work to do for invasive species management and establishment of native plants, but the major construction elements of the project have concluded. This project was funded by a Fund for Lake Michigan grant procured by Riverkeeper, and the Village of Elm Grove.

Community gets a voice with Milwaukee Blue Crew

The newly named “Milwaukee Blue Crew” met over the summer to discuss current happenings in Milwaukee’s Area of Concern (AOC). This group of community members convenes regularly to provide feedback and help make important decisions related to cleanup and restoration work.

During the meeting the Crew voted not only



Milwaukee Blue Crew meeting at the UWM School of Freshwater Sciences

to rename the group but also to remove the Aesthetics Impairment. The 11 existing impairments present in our waterways are the driving force behind Milwaukee’s listing as an AOC. As these impairments are removed, we edge closer to our ultimate goal of de-listing our Milwaukee Area of Concern.

The Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources (WDNR) discussed upcoming work designed to remove our fish and wildlife populations impairment. A special group of technical experts and scientists identified 21 projects that need to be completed to restore our waterways. WDNR also discussed the status of several other projects which are all at various stages of planning and implementation. These include: Grand Trunk, Kletzsch Park, South Shore Beach, and more.

As we push forward to make this AOC restoration work a priority, we look forward to re-energizing the Milwaukee Blue Crew and hope to engage new community members in this important work.

Learn more: milwaukeeestuaryaoc.com

Advocacy In Action

Wisconsin, Defines Creating Great Lakes Diversion

The Great Lakes Compact, an international agreement with Canada and regional compact between the Great Lakes States, was enacted in 2008 to protect the Great Lakes Basin and keep 20 percent of the world’s surface freshwater in its place. The Compact protects these waters by prohibiting diversions of water outside of the Basin, except in limited circumstances. In the case of an exception to the prohibition on diversions, a community would have to return water back to the Great Lakes, minus an allowance for consumptive use, in a way that protects the physical, biological, and chemical integrity of the resource.

Wisconsin finds itself setting the precedent for diversion exceptions because the first four requests for diversions of Great Lakes water all occurred in South-eastern Wisconsin--Pleasant Prairie, New Berlin, Waukesha and Racine under varying circumstances. One of those diversions is not going to make or break the health of the Great Lakes. However, the precedent of these diversions and how they are allowed could lead to harmful future diversions from the hundreds of communities that straddle the Basin around the Great Lakes. The cumulative impact of multiple diversions could have a significant effect.

To learn more about the Compact Implementation Coalition and other Great Lakes diversions, visit: protectourgreatlakes.org

Waukesha Diversion Moves Forward

The Waukesha diversion project is moving forward after receiving approval from the Great Lakes Governors and Premiers in 2016. The Department of Natural Resources held a public informational meeting at Carroll College in

Waukesha on August 20th on Waukesha’s wetlands and waterways permit and Preliminary Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Cheryl Nenn, Riverkeeper, along with others from the Compact Implementation Coalition, gave oral comments at the hearing.

Primary concerns centered on the lack of meaningful public input on the diversion since so many changes that have occurred since the last Draft EIS was issued 3.5 years ago. DNR was asked to write a new draft EIS that includes

a comparison of all of the alternatives considered to date, and which provides the public an opportunity to make informed comments on Waukesha’s alternatives for drinking water and return flow by reading one document.

Many people impacted by new proposed pipeline routes were not involved in the EIS process that occurred 3.5 years ago. The draft water discharge permit, which governs the water quality of the return flow that Waukesha is proposing to send back to Lake Michigan via the Root River, was also just released for comment.

To be the first to know about opportunities for public input, or to read Milwaukee Riverkeeper’s comments on issues, visit: milwaukeeriverkeeper.org





Collaborative Office Space:

600 E. Greenfield Avenue
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www.milwaukeekeeper.org

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FALL INTO THE SEASON WITH MRK!

For more information, registration and other events visit: milwaukeekeeper.org/events

SEP
1-30

ORVIS GIVEBACK DAYS

Stop out to Orvis and help protect our rivers
Donate \$10 to MRK and get \$10 Orvis Cash!
September | \$10

NOV
7

ANNUAL MEMBER GATHERING

Celebrate the success of the year with other
members and river lovers. **5:30pm - 7:30pm | Free**

SEP
18

RIVER WALK & TALK @ JACKSON PARK

Hike along the river and learn about water quality
monitoring **5:30pm - 6:30pm | Free**

NOV
29

BLUE FRIDAY: WATER SAMPLING EVENT

Volunteers will collect a water sample to be analyzed
for emerging contaminants **All Day | Free**

OCT
16

RIVER WALK & TALK @ ESTABROOK PARK

Hike along the river and learn about native fish
5:30pm - 6:30pm | Free

APR
18

SAVE THE DATE

ANNUAL SPRING CLEANUP

Celebrate 25 years of Milwaukee Riverkeeper's
Spring Cleanup by helping clean our waterways!

www.milwaukeekeeper.org

