

And farm fertilizer and manure run-offs are a serious problem, but she was quick to point out the work being done by area farmers to help eliminate the run-offs now.

“Some of the projects are to increase the green space along streams and rivers, use catch basins to eliminate sediments before drains empty into the river system, and dredge accumulated sediments,” she said.

Spencer said she expects dredging the river will be the highest priority and will likely cost hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Even so, it can be done.

“Every year I will apply for funding,” she said, as each problem or challenge is met and fixed, likely one at a time.

“In ten years time, we can say, “Look what we accomplished.” This is what happens when we all work together.”

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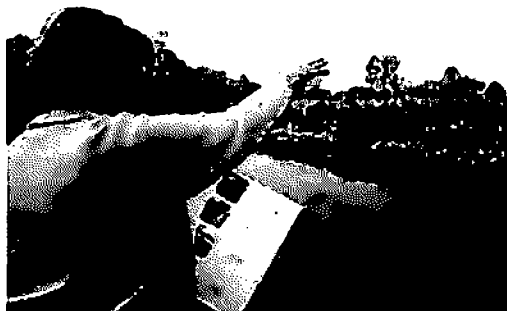
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A clean and healthy Pine River is in our future

By Linda Gittleman, The Morning Sun

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Imagine that in five to ten years the Pine River is clean, healthy and great amounts of e-Coli are a thing of the past.

No, it's not wishful thinking.

The first stage has already begun.

Michigan's Department of Environmental Quality has approved funding to complete the Upper Pine River Watershed Management (clean up) plan, according to Julie Spencer, Gratiot County Conservation District Administrator.

The actual clean up will be several years in the making - and a large amount of grant money will be needed, she said.

But it's a big and important start, signaling the state's interest and commitment to the project.

And Spencer wants to thank everyone involved, including Jane Keon, a member of the "Healthy Pine River" group, who helped write the plan and request for funding, Gary Smith and Dawn Brady, two more members who helped, along with Alma College professors Murray Borrello and Tim Keaton who conducted tests on the river.

But she particularly wants to thank the MDEQ.

"We have just got to say thank you, thank you, thank you," she said.

The community asked for help and the MDEQ responded with, "Here's the help," she said.

The state has provided nearly \$142,000 so that an environmental consultant can complete the plan (already begun by Keon and Spencer) and work with the state to meet its requirements.

In about a year, and acting on the finished plan, Spencer said she believes she can begin requesting the grant money.

The Pine River doesn't just have one problem or one source of that problem, she said.

A sand dam near Honeoye Creek broke in the 1980s and sediment is piling up.

"Jane Keon said ducks can walk across it," Spencer said.

There are 300 residences along the river where there is no evidence of any sewer system since the 1970s, she said.