



2024 Fall Newsletter



Important Note – our November 14th HPR Membership meeting will be at 7:00 p.m. at the Alma Public Library. Our focus will be watershed organizations, their challenges and need for collaboration.

Congratulations HPR – As we look to enter 2025, HPR will be celebrating its 10-year anniversary! Thanks to our membership for their long-standing support as we continue to grow in our commitment to our river, watershed, and environment!

HPR's 2025 Membership Drive – We will be starting our 2025 annual HPR membership drive soon ask that you, our members, send in your annual dues/donations. They are critical in supporting HPR's mission and work. Our dues will be staying the same at \$5/active member but please read the Sustainability Model information later in the newsletter to learn of some changes that we believe will provide HPR continued funding for taking on new challenges in restoring our river.

Alma College Summer Water Testing Program – At our HPR October 10th meeting Alma College staff/students shared the summer water testing results with HPR membership. 23 sites were tested throughout the Pine River Watershed. Test results and comments that stood included:

- We are still seeing high concentrations of nutrients and thermotolerant *E. coli* throughout the Pine River Watershed.
- In the Pine River Headwaters, water quality improvement is seen at the Blanchard Road testing site.
- In the PR Midsection, Riverdale does not appear to have a significant impact on water quality. Honeyoye Creek appears to be improving.
- The downstream section of the watershed, and particularly Sugar Creek, shows high levels of nutrients and *E. coli*.
- **For the full water testing results**, graphs, and possible reasons for the improvement and degradation of the Pine River, visit healthypineriver.org/information-and-education/ and download the "[Summer 2024 Water Testing](#)" PDF files under the "Alma College Water Testing" heading.

Note: HPR has funded the summer water testing program conducted by Alma College for several years as one of our most important priorities. At our request, the college hopes to put together a summary of the Pine River water testing over the past 20 years. The cost of this year's testing was \$7,500.



Grants Update – HPR currently has written four grants which are now under consideration and has recently received notification that we were not selected for the EGLE Accelerator 40 grant. which had 97 applicants for only 25 grant awards. The grants still being considered are:

- **EGLE Accelerator 40 grant** – provided for 25 grant awards to work in consortium for one year and receive federal support in developing a federal grant.
- **EGLE Environmental Justice Impact Grant** – focusing on river restoration, the utilization of nearby city parks by nearby neighborhoods, and improving water recreation.
- **EGLE Watershed Planning grant** – HPR is seeking a technical upgrade to our current Upper Pine River Management Plan book regarding water testing history, and dam/river channel research.
- **Gratiot County Community Foundation grant** – this grant centers on developing a sustainability model for HPR along with continuing outreach to our public and stakeholder groups.
- **Considering applying for the EGLE Watershed Council grant for 2025** – This grant would help HPR continue to fund our field liaisons, outreach to our communities, townships, and schools, grant writing and oversight, and prepare for developing applications for significant grant awards on priority projects.

2024 EGLE Watershed Council grant is ending – These state of Michigan grant funds have been significant to our work this past year. This \$31,400 grant gave HPR the opportunity to hire a new director, develop print materials and expand our outreach program, continue funding our liaisons in the field, and purchase needed equipment. The grant is drawing to a close this October and a special thanks to Brittany for her oversight and fiduciary responsibilities in overseeing the grant.

Septic Smart presentation at Sumner Township Hall – On September 19, HPR and Gratiot Conservation District co-hosted a Septic Smart meeting at Sumner Township Hall. Brittany and Ladean developed an agenda and program that brought together EGLE, Mid-Michigan District Health Department, area septic contractors, and a number of residents from various townships to discuss septic practices, potential loan opportunities for septic upgrades, and the positive impact healthy septic systems have on the Pine River and our watershed. Thanks much, ladies!

Speaking of Septic – Our septic liaison Mikie VanHorn has, for the last two years, worked diligently with over 300 homeowners/residents of Riverdale, Elm Hall, and Sumner. She is preparing for her Spring work with Elwell. Thanks, Mikie for truly making a difference for our rural residents!



Broken septic pipe from a home in Gratiot County; found & repaired with the help of Mikie V. and Akers Waste Removal.

Vista Volunteers – Good news, once again Alma College was awarded three Vista Volunteer positions for this school year. Chuck is working with Dr. Ben Peterson and Vista Volunteers Ingrid Gustafson and Maria Kolb as they hope to help HPR in communication, technology, and grant writing. Please extend a warm welcome to them when you see them at our HPR meetings/events.

HPR Board Workshop – The HPR board met on Saturday morning October 19th to work on our 2024-25 priorities and projects and discuss the development of a “Sustainability Model” for HPR ongoing work. The board has identified a number of priorities for the upcoming year.

2024-25 Priorities discussed:

- **Funding for the Dam/River channel Feasibility Study** – locating funding to move forward with a dam/river channel feasibility study to assist the City of Alma, Alma residents, and HPR in best understanding options available for the restoration of the river channel.



- **Legislator Outreach** – seeking the involvement and support of our legislators in assisting with HPR priorities.
 - **Septic Engagement** – continue our liaison work with our rural communities and residents on/near the Pine River in understanding proper septic practices
 - **Property Owners outreach** – seek their membership, involvement in HPR, and outreach as shoreline stewards
 - **Farm Outreach** – continuing our efforts to engage our farming community in understanding and assisting with Pine River issues
- **HPR Sustainability** – seeking a funding model that provides funding avenues that help guarantee HPR can move forward in funding priorities and projects.
 - **Township Outreach** – continuing our efforts to inform and educate our Gratiot and watershed townships on Pine River issues and our efforts to restore the Pine River to a healthy state.

Alma College LEAPS invites HPR to campus – Stay tuned as the Alma College Leaders for Environmental Awareness, Protection, and Sustainability invite HPR members to attend a LEAPS meeting/event on the Alma College Campus. More info coming as soon as the details are worked out

Outreach Efforts – In 2025 we plan to continue our outreach efforts to our Gratiot Communities, Townships, rural residents (septic) and farming community while adding our area schools by developing curriculum and presentations for both elementary and secondary students in providing learning experiences about the Pine River and our watershed.

Holiday Gift “Giving” – Would you like to give a unique gift this holiday season? How about enrolling a family member or friend as an HPR member for 2025? Our 2025 membership drive mailer will be out in early December!

Honeyoye Creek/Pine River Confluence – Drain Commissioner, Bernie Barnes is working with Spicer Group engineers on several possible projects regarding county drain 96. One of the projects is reopening the confluence between Honeyoye Creek and the Pine River currently plugged with 6’ of sediment inhibiting the flow and function of both the creek and drain. This has long been a HPR priority.

Sustainability Model – Our HPR board has developed a Sustainability Model for our future that is designed to assure HPR has the revenue resources needed to continue our projects and priorities. Our current model is focused on the four revenue sources listed below. Please stay tuned and continue to be a dues paying member of HPR.

1. Annual Membership/Individual Donations
2. Municipal Support from the cities of Alma and St. Louis as well as Gratiot County and our various townships.
3. Friends of Pine River Campaign – we will invite businesses to support HPR’s important work and mission
4. Grants for project related work



Volunteers Needed – **As HPR continues to grow its commitment to our river and watershed we are finding a real need for more volunteers to assist us in the numerous ongoing projects we are undertaking. Let us know if you have some time and a passion for improving our environment and we promise to use your help wisely! Visit <https://www.healthypineriver.org/volunteer/> to be added to our list of volunteers!**