

2024 Annual Report



To Our Membership,

It is our 10 Year Anniversary! It is hard to believe that HPR is now finishing its 10th year after incorporating as a 501©3 “not for profit” organization in 2015. A special thank you to Gary Rayburn and the founding members including Jane Keon, Dawn Brady, Lynn & Chuck Sandro, Ed Lorenz, and Mark Prout.

We have come a long way and have learned much. However, there is still so much to do. Our challenge is to leave this wonderful natural resource called the Pine River in much better shape for our kids and grandkids than it is today. Simply put.....If not us, who....if not now, when? CS



HPR’s New Director – Brittany Sommerville, our HPR director, is just finishing her first year of service and leadership to HPR. Brittany has brought a skill set to HPR that includes environmental expertise and passion, strong technology skills, grant writing and budgetary expertise. She has provided valuable support in crafting our HPR communications which has greatly assisted our outreach efforts. We are looking forward to her continued tenure at HPR!

2025 Membership Drive – It is that time of the year when “giving” is an important part of the holidays!! HPR particularly needs your support...and your generosity for our annual membership dues/donation drive!! HPR Membership dues are \$5 but will you be extra generous this year in helping us meet the financial challenges HPR’s 2025 priorities and projects include: annual water testing; septic liaison assistance to our rural residents; and collaboration and outreach with our cities, townships, and schools. In the past two years, we have moved from a totally voluntary organization to several members working on a very part-time basis. This transition has made all the difference in the world because HPR now has more capacity and, therefore, more impact on the Pine River ecosystem. We hope you will continue to support our mission with your dues and donations. Visit www.healthypineriver.org/dues for more information on membership dues.

Summer Water Testing program – Once again Alma College performed water testing at 23 sites from the headwaters of the Pine River in Mecosta County to the downstream sites ending at the St. Louis dam. HPR assisted with funding the water testing program with a \$7,500 contribution. Please see this year’s water testing document on the [HPR website](#). A quick summary would conclude many of the river’s issues still very much exist - particularly high levels of nutrients and *e. coli*. However, there were some areas of improvement where contamination levels were reduced.

HPR Activities & Events – this past year HPR held its 4th Annual Earth Day scrap metal collecting event with co-sponsors WMLM and Padnos on April 22 in St. Louis collecting and recycling metal. We traveled by HPR pontoon boat in the Highland Festival Parade; and celebrated with the many organizations we collaborate with at our April membership meeting where we said “thank you” to our long-standing founder and leader, Gary Rayburn, Finally, we held a back to school cookout for our Alma College LEAPS students in September. It has been an active and fun year!



Volunteers at the 2024 Earth Day scrap metal collecting event sponsored by Padnos.

Septic Service to our Rural Communities/Residences – Our HPR septic liaison, Mikie VanHorn, has been hard at work in our rural communities of Riverdale, Sumner, and Elm Hall in providing septic guidance and advice to over 300 households. This service is very significant in lessening possible river contamination through faulty septic systems. Thanks Mikie for all your work on behalf of our rural communities and residents.

HPR grant efforts this past year – In the past two years, HPR has been awarded four small grants by EGLE (Watershed Council grant), Michigan Nonprofit Association, and the Gratiot County Community Foundation. We are so appreciative of these grants; they have been applied to septic and farm liaisons, dam/impoundment research, outreach to our townships and communities and ongoing water testing. Although we have had some success, we continue to seek opportunities to fund our priorities/projects. We currently have three grant applications pending with EGLE and two more grants we are currently crafting to submit to EGLE for 2025.

Research – In 2024, HPR commissioned two Alma College interns to research the relationship that often exists between a dam and its back waters. Through this research we hoped to better understand the State Stream Dam and the impact the dam has on the Pine River channel that creates the 140 acre impoundment behind the dam. Faron Grossman and Jaclyn Dietz wrote the research paper that is now [posted on the HPR website](#) and an excellent resource for understanding the dynamic between a dam and a river.

Municipalities Support – This past year has seen HPR work closely with the cities of Alma and St. Louis, as well as our Gratiot County commissioners. HPR, in collaboration with the cities, has been involved in water testing to better understand the continued degradation of both communities’ river waters behind their respective dams and have also researched the State Street Dam/Alma Impoundment to better understand how the dam impacts the river. We are appreciative of the funding we have received from the county and our two communities as it helps us move forward in serving their needs.

HPR Monthly Programs – 2024 has seen HPR make a concerned effort to provide a program for each of our monthly membership meetings. Topics chosen are related to our river and watershed and often focus on a guest speaker or panel to inform us. Programs and conversations have been healthy and at times lively. To review these membership meeting minutes, visit <https://www.healthypineriver.org/membership>.

HPR Memberships – HPR has renewed their memberships for 2024-5 with the Gratiot Area Chamber of Commerce, the Michigan Environmental Council, and the River Network. All three organizations assist HPR in moving forward in serving our mission and advocating for our waterways and environment.

LEAPS – The Alma College chapter of Leaders for Environmental Awareness, Protection, and Sustainability have joined forces with HPR and are working at finding mutual projects and priorities that our two organizations can collaborate on to make a difference. We have been very excited to gain the perspective and involvement of our college environmental science students and have found they have a great deal to offer HPR. We have found their youth, vigor, and ideas very refreshing!

Ameri-Corps Vista Volunteers – This past year we were blessed with Vista Volunteer Sara Warren who assisted HPR in our website and Facebook redesign and also attended many of the HPR board and membership meetings to help us with planning our 2025 priorities Sara is now attending Oregon State University working on her Masters degree and we wish her continued success. For 2025, HPR will also be able to utilize three Vista Volunteers when our needs fit their areas of expertise. We look forward to working with Vista Volunteers Zoe Palmer, Maria Kolb, and Ingrid Gustafson in 2025.

Townships Outreach – HPR directed more activity towards our neighboring townships here in Gratiot County in 2024. In June, we invited several township supervisors to our monthly membership meeting and shared some of the challenges facing townships today. On September 19th, HPR co-sponsored EGLE a Septic Smart presentation at Sumner Township Hall with Gratiot Conservation District, Mid-Michigan District Health Department, and EGLE. HPR now has printed brochures regarding septic practices available at a number of our township halls.

Environmental Justice & ALICE – Through our grant writing experiences we have learned that both Alma and St. Louis have Quality Census Tract neighborhoods that border the Pine River and may qualify for certain Environmental Justice grants. We have two pending EJ grant applications with EGLE. These grants are focused on outreach efforts to improve education and communication about the Pine River and river recreation for residents in those neighborhoods and – as always – trying to restore the river to a healthier state.

HPR Quarterly Newsletters – We hope that our quarterly newsletters are keeping you informed of the projects and activities HPR is involved in throughout the year. Our first preference is to have you join us at our monthly meetings at the Alma Public Library, but if you cannot make it in person we hope [our meeting minutes](#) and meeting reminders are reaching you and that our quarterly newsletter is helping you stay abreast of our work and priorities.

HPR website & Facebook pages – Please continue to access both our [website](#) and [Facebook page](#) for HPR meeting agendas/minutes, water testing results, research articles, and more as we continue to build our social media presence.



Making a difference! – *We hope that as you read through this annual report you realize how active and engaged HPR has been this past year. Your support both with your dues/donations, attending our meetings, and helping volunteer has made all the difference! We look forward to seeing you at our January 9th membership meeting...7:00 p.m. at the Alma Public Library.*