

GREAT RIVER GREENING

RESTORING LAND, WATER AND WONDER



Restoring Healthy Land and Water Across Minnesota
2016 Annual Report

Seeding optimism

For Great River Greening, as Minnesota's leader in community-based restoration, seeing healthy land and water across Minnesota is not just a vision, it is a commitment to working with people—and a great deal of fun. As our tagline says, we are restoring Wonder too.

We bring people out to get their hands dirty, rain or shine, in parks and natural spaces in their own communities. It is an act of optimism we are happy to promote, as a way of addressing the many environmental issues that challenge our precious natural areas.

The issues are serious: degraded parks, an increasing loss of diverse habitat in our natural areas, a disappearance of pollinators, and a declining interest from our youth in being outdoors.

Engaging people is the only way to a long-term, sustainable solution. Along with volunteers, Great River Greening works in long-term partnerships with counties, cities, state government, scientists, and others dedicated to conserving Minnesota's natural heritage.

This annual report illustrates that there is much to be optimistic about.

In 2016:

- ◆ We held a record-breaking 51 community restoration events with 2,468 volunteers—the highest turnout in 18 years; one-third of them were youth.
- ◆ 235 teens joined our outdoor classrooms for an afternoon of science-based exploration.
- ◆ Our pollinator work received a major grant from The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.
- ◆ We began Oak Savanna restoration in Bridgeview Park Reserve, a new Sherburne county park created to preserve a scenic and vital natural area.
- ◆ Thanks to our partners, funders, and volunteers, these accomplishments lay a foundation for future growth. Thank you for your interest and support.

“Learning how to care for the land is an invitation to do it. That is why I bring my daughter to these events.”

—Pond Dakota Volunteer



Engaging local communities throughout the state

On a surprisingly warm Saturday in May, on the north side of Spring Lake in Prior Lake, 83 volunteers pulled on their boots and pushed up their sleeves to help restore over 1,000 feet of eroding shoreline. They hauled 140 cubic yards of buckthorn up steep slopes and planted more than 1,000 wildflowers and grasses.

On a cool day in October, 65 volunteers removed nearly three acres of buckthorn from Westwood Hills Nature Center in St. Louis Park. Their work started the process of stabilizing the wooded slopes, and created awe inspiring views through the woodlands.

Later that month, 100 people reforested an old hay field with Bur Oak trees, in Allemansrätt Wilderness Park in Lindström. The trees are also a part of a long-term climate adaptation study.

These activities and landscapes are elements unique to three of the 51 volunteer events we hosted in 2016. Teaching is a signature element of all our events.

At a Great River Greening event, an ecologist is always on site to teach the restoration techniques and explain the environmental impact of the work being done. Often, volunteer supervisors are also there to lead the groups, ensure members are safe, understand the work, and have a good time.

In 2016:

- ◆ More than 2,400 volunteers planted nearly 55,000 native trees, shrubs, and wildflowers to improve critical habitats.
- ◆ Together, we restored or enhanced 1,620 acres.
- ◆ Volunteer supervisors contributed over 1,000 hours to make our events possible.

“The wonderful thing about Great River Greening is that they stay positive, optimistic, and really practical. Getting your hands in the ground, planting a tree you can go back to see as it grows - it’s a great way to connect people to the land.”

—Longtime Volunteer Supervisor



Working in partnership across Minnesota

In September 2016, 60 members of the St. Peter community gathered to answer the question: “What can we do together to sustain and advance the long-term economic and environmental health of the Seven Mile Creek watershed?” The visioning session was presented by the Seven Mile Creek Watershed Partnership, a group led by Great River Greening. Stakeholders include county and state government agencies, farmers and property owners and others, with the vision that local solutions promise the greatest chance of success.

Said one farmer about the day: “It was very positive. The focus was on what we can do.”

Each of Great River Greening’s restoration projects represent partnerships with counties, cities, watershed organizations, and other concerned groups—and of course the 40,000+ volunteers who have joined us to remove invasive species and plant 450,000 trees, grasses, and flowers.

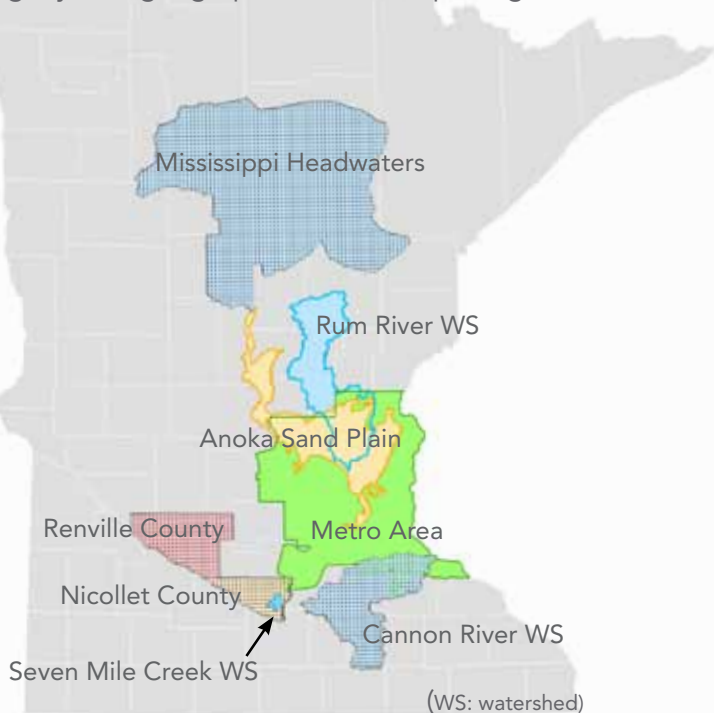
In 21 years, Great River Greening has worked in nearly 350 natural sites across the state, to improve, restore, and care for Minnesota’s natural heritage—17,500 acres and counting. They cover a great range of conditions, including neighborhood parks, shorelines, Wild and Scenic Rivers, rain gardens, farm ravines, wildlife refuges, Scientific and Natural Areas, and other public and private lands. Nearly half of these sites are in the metro area, our oldest and deepest program. Our growth in Greater Minnesota is through collaboration with many other government and nonprofit partners, including two partnerships that we lead: Seven Mile Creek and Anoka Sandplain.

In 2016:

- ◆ A new partnership with the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD) creates the opportunity to involve the community in restoring MCWD lands, including the Minnehaha Greenway, an impressive multi-year endeavor to restore the creek to its former state by redirecting the water through a series of curves, rebuilding wetlands and wildlife habitat and incorporating opportunities for public access.
- ◆ We brought our community program to Sand Creek, which drains farmland in Rice, Le Sueur, and Scott counties. Volunteers at this family-friendly event planted native vegetation on the bank of the creek to restore the riparian zone.

Where we work and communities we serve

Great River Greening has worked in nearly 350 sites across the state. The shaded areas of the map below signify new geographies we are exploring.



Expanding our geographic reach

Great River Greening has been meeting with longtime partners, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and Trust for Public Land (TPL), along with other organizations to discuss opportunities for us to bring our core competency as the primary restoration partner to their work in acquisition, easements, and planning. They include:

- ◆ Expanding the Seven Mile Creek Watershed program to include all of Nicollet County
- ◆ Restoration in Cannon River Watershed with TNC and Cannon River Watershed Partnership.
- ◆ Restoration in the Hawk Creek Watershed, with Renville County Soil and Water Conservation District.
- ◆ Working in the Headwaters region of the Mississippi River to complement ongoing efforts.



Milkweed is the state flower for good reason

Over the past 20 years, the North American monarch population has plunged from one billion to fewer than 60 million. With the decline of other pollinators as well, we face a potential decrease in flowering plants and crops that impact our food supply.

At Great River Greening, creating pollinator-friendly lands is a top priority, and we lead several partnerships on this effort. In 2016, our work received a major grant from The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) to support the recovery of monarch butterflies.

Our goal is to raise the monarch habitat in Minnesota to an exceptional level for breeding and migration, and provide a conservation model that includes community engagement and multi-level partnerships.

“Great River Greening’s work will accelerate others’ efforts across the country who have been hard at work restoring habitats that allow these beautiful creatures to complete their incredible, multigenerational migration.”

Jeff Trandahl, executive director and CEO of NFWF

In 2016:

- ◆ We kicked off the first year of our Million Milkweed Initiative where volunteers collected seeds over three weeks at summer’s end.

Buzzing across the prairie

Pilot Knob is a high, prominent hill on the east bank of the Minnesota River near where it meets the Mississippi River. From atop, you can see both Minneapolis and Saint Paul downtown skylines. With such vistas, as well as its designation as a national historic site, this 25-acre urban, public space is a rarity.

When the City of Mendota Heights purchased Pilot Knob in 2005, the land was severely degraded. Great River Greening was brought in to restore its native Oak Savanna habitat. Since then, more than 1,800 volunteers have helped us transform the land.

But more than a lovely area, Pilot Knob has become healthy enough for research on pollinators. Surveying bumble bees in this prairie, in partnership with The Xerces Society, has provided excellent baseline data for which flower species are most beneficial to pollinators.

In 2016:

- ◆ Great River Greening volunteers found nine species of bumblebees, three of which are extremely rare.



Inspiring environmental stewardship in younger generations

On a crisp and brilliant fall day in 2016, 30 students from Wellstone International High School in Minneapolis tested the water quality of a stream in Pond Dakota Mission in Bloomington that feeds the Minnesota River.

Joining them was Dr. Drew Lanham, an ornithologist, Professor of Wildlife Ecology and Master Teacher at Clemson University, and author of “The Home Place: Memoirs of a Colored Man’s Love Affair with Nature,” published by Milkweed Editions. He demonstrated bird calls and told the students to find their careers by “learning and following their hearts.”

The event was part of Great River Greening’s Field Learning for Teens (FLT) program, which has inspired more than 1,200 students through hands-on restoration activities and connections with mentors with environmentally-based careers, typically local professionals.

FLT connects students to nature at a time when youth are spending less time outdoors. Studies show a staggering 38% of Minnesota’s youth do not participate in a single outdoor activity throughout the year. This number gets drastically worse among youth of color.

In 2016

- ◆ 235 students took part in FLT, more than 80% were youth of color.

“This program showed me you can learn about science outside the classroom, and that you can have an environmental job in a field you are passionate about.”

—FLT high school student

Thank you!

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\$25,000+

3M Foundation
The McKnight Foundation
Patrick and Aimee Butler
Family Foundation
Xcel Energy Foundation

\$10,000- \$24,999

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BUSINESSES

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Aggregate Industries
AgriBank
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Lakewinds Natural Foods
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RBC Blue Water Project
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Bituminous Roadways
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CHS Inc
District Energy Saint Paul
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Indeed Brewing Co.

KeyStone Search
Liesch - A Terracon Company
Minnesota Twins
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Electric Trust
The Nature Conservancy
New Belgium Brewing Co.
Pace Analytical Services
Saint Paul Garden Club
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Smiths Medical
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Summit Brewing Company
Thomson Reuters
Upper River Services

\$250-\$999

Barr Engineering
Budget Dumpster
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Colle + McVoy
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\$1-\$99

We thank more than 200 additional individual donors for helping to make Great River Greening's work possible.

We also thank the more than 40 project partners and landowners in 2016 with whom we collaborated on restoration and enhancement projects, as well as the Minnesota Environmental Trust Fund and the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Fund.



Great River Greening is a 22-year-old environmental nonprofit working throughout Minnesota with a mission to inspire and lead local communities in restoring and conserving the land and water that enrich our lives.

SAVE THE DATES



BUSINESS FORUM

DATE: Thursday, October 19, 2017. 7:15AM-9:15AM
 FEATURING: Andrea Walsh, CEO, HealthPartners
 LOCATION: McNamara Alumni Center, Minneapolis

GALA
 DATE: Saturday, May 5, 2018. 6:00PM-9:00PM
 LOCATION: InterContinental St. Paul Riverfront Hotel

In the news

- ◆ Hudson Observer, May—Andersen employees remove buckthorn
- ◆ KEYC TV, May—Mankato volunteers help bring prairie back to life
- ◆ Lilly News, May—The city’s gone to the bees and butterflies
- ◆ Prior Lake American, May—Volunteers restore Spring Lake shoreline
- ◆ St. Peter Herald, May—Volunteers clean prairie after controlled burn
- ◆ East Metro Water, June—Groundwater and climate change
- ◆ Gustavus, July—Summer research students study water pollution solutions
- ◆ Rosemount Town Pages, July—Flint Hills plants milkweed
- ◆ St. Peter Herald, July—Seven Mile Creek stakeholders address water quality
- ◆ Conservation MN, Aug.— Nitrogen and buckthorn yes, they’re related issues
- ◆ St. Peter Herald, Aug.—Legislators get deep dive
- ◆ KSTP, Sept. —Performance raises awareness of declining bee populations
- ◆ Star Tribune Sports blog, Sept.—Business Forum
- ◆ Woodbury Bulletin, Sept.—Scout’s honor and then some
- ◆ Mankato Free Press, Oct.—Volunteers plant wildflowers on farmland
- ◆ Rosemount Town Pages, Oct.—Volunteers team up to conserve river bank

2016 Financials

FUNDING SOURCES

Government Contracts & Grants	1,515,707
Foundation Gifts & Grants	412,137
Non-Government Contracts	134,107
Corporate Gifts	146,960
Individual Gifts	114,862
In-Kind & Other Revenue	3,440
Total	2,327,213

EXPENSES

Program Services	2,001,253
Management & General	166,391
Fundraising	118,677
Total:	2,286,321
Change in Unrestricted Net Assets	40,892

ASSETS & LIABILITIES

Total Assets	909,464
Total Liabilities	223,955
Total Net Assets	685,509

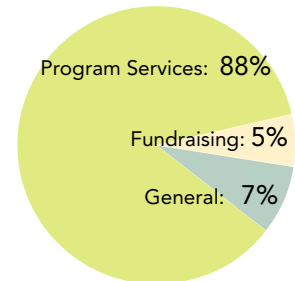


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* Ended in 2016
 ** New in 2017