



MICHIGAN HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

April 10, 2019

Governor Gretchen Whitmer
George W. Romney Building
111 S. Capitol Ave
Lansing, MI 48933

Re: Grand River Waterway Dredging Project

Dear Governor Whitmer & Director Eichinger,

As you are aware, the people and geography of Michigan are defined by our globally unique freshwater ecosystem. The Great Lakes watershed is complex and includes some of the world's most beautiful and productive rivers. The Grand River is notable among these river systems for its length; at 252 miles, it is the longest river in Michigan. Today, the Grand River is an active recreational amenity, supporting a variety of user-groups and an increasingly vibrant ecosystem. Please consider this letter a formal request to discontinue all current planned activities and expenditures pertaining to the study and implementation of the Grand River Waterway project.

The Grand River Waterway project plans to dredge a 22.5-mile channel between the Fulton Street bridge in Grand Rapids and the Bass River State Recreation Area (near Eastmanville in Ottawa County). The channel would be 50 feet wide by 7 feet deep and designed to allow large power boats from 26 to 49 feet long. The other two Directors listed are his business partner and attorney. With insufficient public input, the Michigan State Legislature passed two bills, 2018 PA 207 and 2018 PA 618, with significant appropriations totaling \$3,150,000 to support the study and completion of the Grand River Waterway project. The latest \$2 Million contribution was quietly appropriated during the December 2018 lame duck session.

Like many rivers in the Midwest, the river is showing signs of recovery after decades of abuse and neglect. Over the last decades, a growing movement of engaged citizens and organizations, including the State of Michigan, have begun to build a new narrative focused on respecting, restoring and reclaiming the river for the highest ecological and human uses. The Grand River Waterway project is a significant threat to the ecosystem, economy and quality of life of the Lower Grand River. Local leaders, including scientists, academics, business leaders, riparian property owners, concerned citizens and elected leaders agree - if implemented the Grand River Waterway project would:

- **The Project Conflicts with the Michigan DNR's Wildlife Action Plan** - The Michigan DNR's 2015-2025 Wildlife Action Plan identifies dredging and channelization of rivers as one of the top threats to wildlife because it typically results in decreased habitat diversity, loss of natural aquatic vegetation and floodplain habitats, bank instability and erosion, and increased sediment transport. The Michigan DNR has no choice but to be involved because it has been directed to do so by the Michigan Legislature.

- **Potentially Impact Threatened and Endangered Species** - Nearly 50 species of concern associated with the river corridor have been documented in Ottawa County. The Grand River, its tributaries, and its banks are home to many species of State-protected plants, birds, amphibians, reptiles, fish, and shellfish species. Disruption of the river substrate, flow channels, spawning grounds, banks, and connected wetlands poses a significant threat to their habitats.
- **Devastate Ottawa County's Grand River Greenway Investments & River Ecosystem** -
 - Channelization of the river is known to lower water quality, increase water velocity, carry sediment further downstream, and it would likely expand the plume of sediment that already extends into Lake Michigan at Grand Haven.
 - Dredging would destroy important river-bottom habitats essential to protected fish and shellfish species. Increased riverbank erosion could threaten protected plant species.
 - Disturbing the riverbed and riverbanks has the potential to unlock trapped contaminants that may have accumulated from decades of industrial activity, sewage discharge, and the abandoned Fenske landfill site which borders the river.
 - During dry periods, channelization can further lower water levels and cause ecological harm along the shoreline, as well as in adjacent bayous and wetland areas.
- **Require Extensive, Ongoing Public Investments in Maintenance, Public Safety Services and Increased Liability for the State of Michigan & Local Communities**
 - Maintenance dredging would need to happen on a regular basis and would continue to disrupt and destroy river bottom habitats for years and decades to come. Grand River Waterway claims the cost to taxpayers for ongoing dredging and maintenance of the channel will be approximately \$160,000 annually. Local experts estimate that Grand River Waterway's estimates are unrealistic and lower than the actual cost for annual maintenance.
 - Routine patrolling, law enforcement, and emergency rescue services would rely primarily on local law enforcement such as the Ottawa County Sheriff's Department. The dredged waterway would be an additional financial burden for municipalities, further stressing limited budgets and resources.
 - The Grand River Waterway group estimates the need for 450 buoys, channel signage, and seasonal installation, removal, and storage. The Grand River from Bass River Recreation Area to Grand Rapids is a navigable waterway but is not a Federally recognized channel. As such, the Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Coast Guard does not have the authority or funding to maintain the channel. This burden would fall on State and local government.
 - The State of Michigan would likely be liable for property damage and loss among riparian land owners in the river corridor, caused by increase traffic and subsequent bank destabilization over time.
- **Potentially Harm Native American Artifacts and Historically Significant Sites** - There are many documented historic and Native American sites on the riverbank and within the river channel that could be negatively impacted by dredging and expanded shore erosion. The Grand River Heritage Water Trail identifies many of these sites.

The Grand River Waterway project has vastly ignored the harmful environmental and economic and quality of life impacts it will have on the Grand River for future generations. The people of this state have constitutionally mandated elected officials and civil servants to lead efforts to protect our greatest natural resource – our freshwater ecosystems. Moving forward with the Grand River Waterway project betrays that mandate. On behalf of the countless concerned citizens, thank you for your consideration regarding this urgent and important matter. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Rachel Hood
State Representative
76th House District

David LaGrand
State Representative
75th House District

Winnie Brinks
State Senator
29th Senate District

CC: Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel, MDEQ Director Liesel Clark

Attachments:

MLive Articles

- [Cost, pollution raise concern at meeting on proposed Grand Rapids to lakeshore powerboat link](#)
- [Push for powerboat link from Grand Rapids to lakeshore drawing scrutiny](#)

Michigan Sea Grant, [Summary of Research Related to the Potential Physical and Biological Impacts of Dredging to Channelize the Grand River](#)