

GRATIOT COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

**RESOLUTION TO APPROVE AN AGREEMENT
FOR PINE RIVER RESTORATION SERVICES**

**RESOLUTION NUMBER 26-374
ADOPTED FEBRUARY 17, 2026**

WHEREAS the Pine River and its tributaries are an important environmental and recreational asset to Gratiot County; and

WHEREAS ongoing restoration efforts help to sustain this important waterway for public enjoyment and future generations; and

WHEREAS the Healthy Pine River organization has a record of success with restoration activities over several years.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Gratiot County Board of Commissioners hereby authorizes an agreement with Healthy Pine River for river and tributary restoration services at a total cost not to exceed \$2,500.00.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Chairperson of the Board of Commissioners is authorized to sign any documents consistent with this resolution, subject to approval as to form by the County Attorney.

The resolution set forth was offered by Commissioner _____ and supported by Commissioner _____.

A vote was thereupon taken on the foregoing resolution and the voter for such resolution was as follows:

AYES: _____

NAYS: _____

A majority of the members-elect having approved such resolution deems the resolution APPROVED.

STATE OF MICHIGAN)
)ss
COUNTY OF GRATIOT)

I certify that the foregoing is a true and accurate copy of the resolution adopted by the Gratiot County Board of Commissioners, that such resolution was duly adopted at a regular meeting held on the 17th day of February 2026, and that notice of such meeting was given as required by law.

Angie Thompson, Gratiot County Clerk



Date: February 9, 2026
To: Gratiot County Board of Commissioners, C/O Commissioner George Bailey
From: Chuck Sandro, Healthy Pine River
Re: Invoice for Gratiot County of \$2,500 for contribution/contract between Healthy Pine River & Gratiot County for services rendered

Healthy Pine River (HPR) is once again seeking annual support from the Gratiot County Board of Commissioners. HPR continues to be the only organization totally dedicated to the restoration of the Pine River and its tributaries. I welcome an opportunity to share with the county commissioners what HPR is doing throughout the year to restore our river and watershed. Please let me know a convenient time to present to the Board of Commissioners.

This past year HPR services include: summer water testing of the Pine River throughout the county and watershed; septic assistance to our rural communities and residents who live on/near the Pine River; sediment testing and characterization; community reporting, collaboration, and conversations; outreach to our townships and organizations; and hosting monthly meetings to inform citizens.

This funding request is important in helping HPR continue its mission of working to restore the Pine River and its tributaries to a healthy state by providing part-time employment to interns and liaisons for water testing, septic assistance, grant writing, farming engagement, and research.

HPR has worked closely with the rural communities of Riverdale, Sumner, and Elm Hall in providing septic assistance to over 300 households and is collaborating with the cities of St. Louis and Alma on specific projects to assist with challenges both communities face regarding their water bodies.

Gratiot County Representative date Healthy Pine River, Chair date



HPR's 2025 Annual Report to Members & Friends

HPR writes an annual report each year to provide an account of what has transpired over the course of the year in working to improve the Pine River. We hope you find the 2025 Annual Report informative.

Thank You! - to our HPR members and "[Friends of the Pine River](#)" for making 2025 a year filled with excellent initiatives in trying to restore the Pine River to a healthier state. Our priorities and projects were supported by your giving to HPR through your [dues](#) and [donations](#) that allowed us to truly fund projects that are helping our river, our residents and communities along our river.

2025 EGLE Dam Risk Reduction Grant Award – HPR co-authored a two year nearly \$300,000 grant with the City of Alma and GEI Engineering to conduct a "Feasibility Study" on what can be done with the ongoing degradation of the Mill Pond (backwater behind the State Street Dam). The backwater for the past two decades has experienced many issues including: shallowing from sediment flowing downstream from the Pine River; has become home to heavy vegetation growth and algal blooms during many months of the year; and through annual water testing has been found to be highly contaminated with excessive nutrients (nitrogen/phosphorous) and E.coli (bacteria from animal/human feces).

The impact of this ongoing degradation is significant as it has greatly reduced water recreation due to human health issues; negatively impacted park usage due to unsightliness; rendered city property on/near the river as unsellable; and has negatively impacted home/property values of those residents living near the river.

The "Feasibility Study" is to seek out what options exist to restore the Mill Pond, or seek other alternatives that might be favorable for recreation and park usage, protecting property values, and encouraging development along the river. A significant component of the grant will be informing and engaging the community through several conversations as to the grant findings and discussing what options are most favorable for the city and its residents.



Satellite Image of the Alma Mill Pond.

Wolverine Pipeline Oil Spill – HPR hosted two membership meetings in January and March of 2025 regarding the Wolverine Pipeline Oil Spill that occurred in Arcada Township. The pipeline puncture and leak occurred in a pipe buried below the surface of a county drainage ditch. It is believed that the damage to the pipe was from an excavator working in that area. Representatives of EGLE, Wolverine Pipeline, and the Gratiot drain commissioner attended the HPR meetings and provided explanations as to what may have happened regarding the pipeline leak, the quantity of oil released, and efforts to recapture the oil from spill. EGLE has signed off on the project asserting that the pipe replacement and cleanup were done properly and effectively.

2025 Summer Water Testing Program – HPR contributed \$8,900 towards Alma College’s efforts to conduct ongoing water testing throughout the watershed this past summer. Results of the water testing continue to show that the Pine River is still heavily contaminated however there was some improvement in specific areas particularly in the Lumberjack Park/Riverdale area.

Specific testing sites were selected to help determine the ever-increasing contamination in the St. Louis impoundment area specifically dealing with increased water vegetation and algal blooms. The college, HPR, and the Gratiot drain commissioner believe they may have located the reason for the increased contamination particularly occurring in Sugar Creek. It is hoped further investigation will continue to identify the location and reduce the contaminants.

Water testing information can be found here: <https://www.healthypineriver.org/information-and-education/>.

Septic Outreach – HPR has continued its septic outreach efforts to our rural communities and residents residing on/near the Pine River and its tributaries.

Residents of Riverdale, Elm Hall, Elwell, and Sumner have been assisted by our HPR septic liaison, Mikie VanHorn and her efforts at providing information regarding appropriate septic practices to nearly 400 residential homes in Gratiot County. Mikie has been working closely with the Mid Michigan District Health Department and the Gratiot Drain Commissioner, Bernie Barnes.

Education Outreach – This past year HPR sponsored a youth science team to compete in the “Pitch-er This!” competition sponsored by United Way of Greater Central Michigan. Our “Pine River Protectors” team led by retired middle school teacher Sara Miller, and comprised of Reagan Falor, Allison Sandro, Ainsley Falor, and Ella Johnson gave their “pitch” to judges regarding the importance of restoring the Pine River to a healthier state. Our girls team placed second in the competition and were awarded the full scholarship of \$5,000 for their efforts.

With the scholarship HPR will continue to develop education curriculum for Alma HS/MS students along with 4th/5th grade

<https://unitedwaygcm.org/success-stories/pitch-er-this-celebrates-10-years> students visiting Forest Hills Nature Area.



Farming Community Engagement – HPR is once again engaging our farming community and county farm agencies in trying to better understand how best to reduce livestock contamination in our river and tributaries. HPR is working to support farmer efforts to have a sustainable and productive business as agriculture makes up a significant portion of our Gratiot economy. HPR has adopted a “WE” attitude that all parties should be interested and engaged in trying to restore the Pine River to a healthy state that positively impacts our future generations. Farmers have been long-standing “stewards” of our lands and we hope to honor and acknowledge that as we work together to improve our environment.

LEAPS & HPR Collaboration – HPR continues to sponsor the Alma College “Leaders for Environmental Protection and Sustainability” chapter and this past year collaborated on projects that involved Earth Day, spring cleanup at Forest Hills Nature Area, and assisting the Community Garden in preparing for a new growing season. Working jointly with these environmental studies students has enriched HPR’s efforts at reaching out to our younger generations and learning what



LEAPS volunteering at the Gratiot Community Garden

role they hope to play in improving our environment. (source: www.instagram.com/almacollegeleaps/)

Vista Volunteers – HPR wants to give a special thank you to our two Ameri-Corp Vista Volunteers Maria Kolb and Zoe Palmer who were very active in HPR projects regarding; Pitch-er This!, Earth Day, grant assistance, fund raising, and HPR monthly meetings. Zoe has moved on to be a MSU Resident Hall Director, while Maria has entered graduate school overseas in the Czech Republic.

HPR’s Advocacy – HPR has continued to stay active and supportive of water and environmental issues by maintaining annual memberships in the Gratiot Area Chamber of Commerce; Michigan Environmental Council (state level), and River Network (national level).

Communication Efforts – HPR is once again working to find effective ways of communicating with our members and public. We are working to upgrade our [website](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube](#) social media accounts, and will continue to provide our quarterly newsletter for fall, winter, spring, and summer. Please let us know if there are areas we can improve communicate with you at healthypineriver@gmail.com.

HPR Board & Leadership – HPR has added four new members to our HPR board of directors including: Sara Miller (retired educator), Joshua Leppien (St. Louis Assistant City Manager, Dave Ringle, Alma Director of Public Services, and Dr. Ben Peterson, Advancement at Alma College.

Brittany Sommerville with a new career position has moved from HPR part-time director to HPR treasurer, and Dr. Peterson will co-chair HPR with Chuck Sandro. HPR is actively seeking out a part-time director in leading HPR.

HPR Monthly Membership Meetings – Each meeting HPR hosts is about learning and how to work towards a healthy Pine River, Upper Pine River Watershed, and our local environment. Please do not hesitate to let us know if you have a program topic or speaker that we would benefit from. We hope you will join us on the 2nd Thursday of the month at 7:00 p.m. at the Alma Public Library.



2024-25 HPR Priorities

With Action Efforts

Basis for 2025-26 Discussion

Annual Water Testing – to continue to understand the contamination/pollution levels in the Pine River and Upper Pine River Watershed.

- HPR has funded the 2025 Summer Water Testing by Alma College including; Supplies, Interns, etc.
- This past year Alma College created a 20 year summary of summer water testing that can be found on the HPR website.

Outreach – to continue to inform and educate our communities, townships, county leaders, residents, recreationalists, and students regarding the issues facing the Pine River, our watershed, and the impact on our communities and citizens.

- Municipalities Outreach – met w/cities of Alma, St. Louis & County Commissioners to provide annual updates on the state of the Pine River and Upper Pine River Watershed
- Provided Septic Smart program to township representatives and residents
- Working with Alma Public Schools Curriculum Council – working towards HS/MS presentations to begin the fall of 2025.
- Working with RESD and Forest Hills Nature Center to develop curriculum for the Pine River and Upper Pine River Watershed for 4th and 5th graders taking field trips to FHNA.
- Engaging businesses, organizations, and individuals through a Before Hours Breakfast Event as a part of our “Friends of the Pine River” fund raising campaign regarding the state of the Pine River and Upper Pine River Watershed
- Host a monthly meeting for our HPR members, LEAPS students, and our public always providing relevant program that is related to the Pine River and the Upper Pine River Watershed.

Septic Engagement – continue our liaison work with our rural communities and residents on/near the Pine River in understanding proper septic practices and available services.

- The HPR Septic Liaison has met with over 300 households in the rural communities of Sumner, Riverdale, Elm Hall, and Elwell to date.
- This past spring our septic liaison began working with Elwell, along with residents on/near county drains and tributaries.
- Hosted for township officials and residents a Septic Smart program in collaboration with the Mid-Michigan District Health Department.

Farming Engagement – continue our efforts to engage our farming community and farm agencies in understanding and assisting with Pine River and watershed issues.

- Currently working to re-establish our Farm Engagement Committee (FEC) with farmers and farm agencies (FB & Michigan Ag. Council)

- Meeting with Farm Agencies for involvement include; Michigan State University Extension office, Gratiot County Conservation District, Natural Resources Services Commission, and Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

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 and Alma residents in understanding options available for the restoration of the river channel/impoundment.

- Have been awarded the 2025 EGLE Dam Risk Reduction grant for conducting a “feasibility study” as to the viable options the City of Alma has regarding the restoration of the Mill Pond and river channel, or the removal of the State Street Dam due to ongoing degradation.
- HPR will be working with the City of Alma, GEI Consulting and numerous other stakeholder groups in overseeing this project/grant.

Sustainability – finding funding support for HPR that provides the opportunities to continued work on projects and priorities.

- Developed new 2025 Membership Drive and Friends of the Pine River fund raising campaign for improved funding. Collectively the two campaigns brought in over \$25,000.
- Continue to seek and write grants pertaining to our river and watershed at the regional, state, and federal level.
- Earned a 2024 Gratiot County Community Foundation that helped fund our sustainability efforts.
- Earned a 2025 EGLE Dam Risk Recovery grant for \$296,000 to conduct a Dam/Impoundment Feasibility Study over a two-year period. The grant begins the Fall of 2025.

Continuing Alma College LEAPS Collaboration – continue to grow our working relationship the Alma College Leaders for Environmental Awareness, Protection, and Sustainability.

- Earth Day Collaboration just took place on April 7th where HPR provided metal collection support with our recycling partner Padnos. HPR provided a cookout for the roughly 50 Alma College volunteers involved in our metal recycling, community garden, and Forest Hills Nature Area clean-up. Money earned from the recycling project will go towards LEAP scholarships for deserving students.
- HPR participated and presented at two LEAPS grant writing workshops to benefit Alma College students interested in future grant writing.
- HPR has placed a LEAPS representative on our HPR board.
- HPR leadership meets regularly with LEAPS & Vista Volunteers to discuss and plan projects.
- HPR has funded LEAPS student research projects that involve topics related to our river and watershed.

Advocacy – working to support initiatives and direction that is healthy for our environment and waterways.

- HPR is an annual member of the Gratiot Area Chamber of Commerce and works closely with Greater Gratiot Development, Inc.
- HPR belongs to the Michigan Environmental Council and nationally to the River Network and supports their lobbying efforts regarding water related issues.
- Attended the Gratiot Area Chamber of Commerce legislative breakfast in August of 2025 and spoke to Michigan representative Jerry Nyer.