



# RIVER RAISIN INSTITUTE

Raisin' Awareness - October 2007— October 2008

## Natural Building Project

Natural building techniques were used in the construction of a demonstration children's cottage/classroom at the Kensington Farm Learning Center. The project, finished in September 2007, was completed by a diverse crew of volunteers, including men, women and children.

The 300-square-foot cottage is mostly made of materials found onsite at the metropark. Dead ash trees, felled due to the effects of the emerald ash borer, were milled onsite to make the timber for framing the structure. Earthen block, straw bale and fieldstone walls were finished with an earthen plaster.

Volunteers collected phragmites, an invasive plant species, and bundled the harvested reeds for the permanent thatched roof.

Finishing work included the installation of earthen block benches and application of earth plaster to protect the strawbale and earthen block walls from the weather.

Natural building workshops were offered to educate participants on the basic principles for the compressed earth block (CEB) and strawbale construction, and earthen plaster application.

The site has been landscaped with native plant species.



Children's Cottage at the Kensington Farm Center in Brighton, Mich.

Our partners included:

- Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority
- Robert B. Prud'homme Design LLC
- New Harvest Homes, Inc.
- Strawbale Studio
- Great Lakes Green Initiative

## Stewardship and Water Restoration Projects

Monroe Public Schools and RRI received a grant from the Great Lakes Fisheries Trust to formulate a plan and develop an infrastructure to support place-based education and sustainable school-community stewardship

in the Great Lakes Region. The goal is to help young people make the connection between a healthy environment and the quality of life in our communities.

The National Fish and Wildlife

Foundation awarded funding for watershed restoration projects that benefit habitats and water quality and broaden our understanding of the human impact on the health of the watershed while spurring greater civic involvement in its stewardship.

October, 2008

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### Inside this issue:

Flowering Rush Removal	2
Wetland Restoration	2
Grass Filter Installation	2
Wild Rice Restoration	3
Stream Bank Stabilization and Garden Installations	4
Making Connections	5
UNIF Energy & Technology	6



## Flowering Rush Eradication

Working in partnership with Dan Stefanski, Monroe County Drain Commissioner, RRI invited Arthur Lesow Community Center students to assist in the removal of the invasive wild flowering rush from the River Raisin near Sisters' Island and Veteran's Park in the City of Monroe.

The first step was to arrange for the removal of several dam gates which was delayed due to heavy rain events. Pulling the gates caused the water levels to drop and allowed volunteers safe and easy access to the river for hand-removal of the flowering rush and river clean-up days. The lower water levels pro-

vided the opportunity for necessary inspections of the dams.

In late summer 2008, hundreds of volunteers devoted themselves to helping improve the river. At the first of three days dedicated to eradication, one participant was amazed at the number of concerned citizens who turned out to lend a hand. Another shared fond memories of fishing in the river over more than 60 years and his renewed hope that this work would improve fish habitat so young people might also form their own relationship with the river. In just two hours, the water flow improved considerably.

Four days of debris clean-up were scheduled. The Boy Scouts clean-up resulted in 20 canoes filled with debris.

The project has increased public awareness and support.

The improved conditions could allow sturgeon to return and spawn in the river. Additional activities will be planned for 2009.



Over 75 people participated in the first of three work days at Sailors Park in Monroe, Mich.

## Wetland Habitat Restoration

Students at Saline High School worked to convert an existing retention pond to its original wetland habitat by restoring native aquatic plants. A portion of the funds from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation was used to purchase a digital camera, six waders, and a global positional unit to help with the assessment of the wetland behind the school.

In early June 2008, the students cleaned trash from the pond removing plastic water and sport drink bottles, paper and plastic wrapper trash and over 300 tennis balls.

Junior Bob Bianchi said he enjoyed working on the school's wetland project. "This is a different experience than in most classrooms," he said. "You're doing a whole lot more hands-on learning."

Students observed bullfrogs, tadpoles, blue herons and snapping turtles living in and around the pond. With the help of an area wetland expert, they identified a variety of healthy plants surrounding the pond.

Encouraged by his students' interest, David Mellor arranged for their visit to the Saline Department of Natural Resources fisheries.

**"This is a different experience than in most classrooms. You're doing a whole lot more hands-on learning."**

The students identified several fish that could be introduced to the pond as long as certain insects and larvae existed there.

After gaining approval from the school's grounds crew, the students will seek support of their project from district's school board.

## Grass Filter Strip Installation

Students at Deerfield High School walked the ditch along Bucholtz Highway, as well as the Brenott and Camp drains making scientific observations and collecting data.

With help from students and faculty at the Lenawee Intermediate School District VoTech Center, the students tested four water samples for nitrates and fecal coliform.

In May 2008, the students gave a PowerPoint presentation to educate area farmers and promote the adoption of grass filters as a way

to reduce agricultural run-off into drains and the River Raisin.

Lauren Lindermann of Lenawee Conservation District also presented information at the meeting regarding the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program.



Students observe culvert and ditch along Bucholtz Highway in Deerfield, Mich.





## Wild Rice Restoration

In May 2008, students at the Knabusch Mathematics and Science Center utilized three methods for re-seeding wild rice at the center and in Lake Erie along DTE Energy property in Monroe.

Students transplanted seedlings that were sown in March and kept in aquariums until planting. They also placed seed balls, formed by rolling wild rice seeds inside clay, in the shallows of the wetland near the center.

Students were escorted to DTE Energy property where they broadcast seeds into Lake Erie near the shoreline.

The search continues for a wild rice species native to

southeast Michigan. Once located and identified, students and volunteers will harvest the source beds and the seeds collected will be re-sown at Sterling State Park.

A wild rice demonstration is planned for November 2008. Using Native American methods, Michael Neumann will demonstrate the process of parching, jiggling and winnowing the dried wild rice to prepare it for consumption. He will also speak on the nutritional benefits of wild rice that include reducing the risk of diabetes.

We hope to expand this project and partner with the Monroe County Intermediate School District in 2009.



Students broadcasting wild rice into Lake Erie.

## Stream Bank Stabilization and Garden Installations

Morenci High School students began working together with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Lenawee Conservation District to create a stream bank stabilization project on Bean Creek in Morenci. They studied different bioengineering methods for stabilizing soils and reducing erosion.

The students presented their project to city council for approval in June 2008. Although well-received, the project was stalled due to concern over trees that need to be removed from the site and another conservation group's work. Conversations continue

towards moving the project forward in another part of Bean Creek.

Monroe High School students plan to restore three acres of tall grass prairie at the Charles and June Knabusch Mathematics and Science Center and install a native plant garden. In spring 2008, students prepared an 1,000-square-foot site as a seed source and learning laboratory for identifying native plants.

Orchard Center High School students will begin installation of a 3,000 square-foot rain garden on the school grounds this fall. With assistance from the Monroe County Drain

**“Rain gardens can filter out pollutants that would otherwise eventually empty into the River Raisin.”**

Commissioner and AmeriCorps, the students will learn the importance of rain gardens which divert rainwater runoff from buildings and filter it before allowing the water to soak into the ground. Rain gardens can filter out pollutants that would otherwise eventually empty into the River Raisin.

## Making Connections and Outreach

Great Lakes Bioneers Detroit Conference  
October 19-21, 2007

Great Lakes Bioneers Detroit was held at Marygrove College in Detroit, Mich. Plenary speakers were beamed in by satellite from the Bioneers conference in San Raphael, Calif. Local workshop topics included community development, energy, environment, food, health, justice, spirituality, and more. RRI participated as a sponsor and exhibitor and will do so again at the 2008 conference.

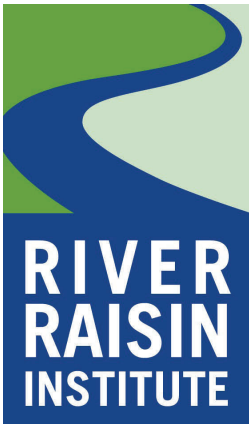
Earth Fair 2008  
April 26, 2008

RRI was one of 26 exhibitors for an event celebrating Earth Day at St. Mary Park in Monroe, Mich. The event provided a unique opportunity for Monroe County families to learn about environmental issues and discover actions they can take to restore and protect the Earth. The event drew 400 attendees. RRI's exhibit included a quiz on water monitoring and handouts about our watershed.

Detroit River Days  
June 20-23, 2008

Detroit River Days featured exhibits on environmental sustainability in the GM Wintergarden at the Renaissance Center in Detroit, in addition to the entertainment and carnival rides along the Detroit River Walk. As an exhibitor, RRI distributed maps of the River Raisin Watershed. Visitors found our exhibit, which included samples of macro-invertebrates, to be especially fascinating.





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Promoting sustainable living for the  
21st century and beyond.

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*The River Raisin Institute is a nonprofit organization that sponsors educational works with the goal to respect, nurture, and promote the well-being of all creation.*

*The institute collaborates with others to promote transformational learning and sustainable community for the 21st century and beyond.*

*The River Raisin Institute was founded in October 2003 by the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (IHM).*

*The institute is a nonprofit organization that grew out of the sisters' commitment to sustainability.*



## UNIF Energy & Technology Project Update

The Institute developed this project with many partners to advance the mission of the University of Fondwa (UNIF) in Haiti by meeting its needs for alternative energy and adequate technology.

In early 2008, RRI and other representatives traveled to Haiti's mountainous region to install computer equipment and complete the first of two information technology systems training sessions at UNIF.

Monroe County Community College faculty and students and Best Electric assembled the solar energy system. The equipment was packed into seven containers for delivery to Rays of Hope for Haiti in Grand Rapids, Mich. The equipment was then due for shipment to Haiti the last week of February.

The end of February 2008 brought closure to RRI's involvement with this project although

we continued to follow the project's progress. Multiple roadblocks in Haiti impeded the project's completion. Issues of civic unrest, corruption, starvation and oppression, and most recently a hurricane that devastated the island were beyond anyone's control.

In March 2008 that shipment was delayed until the end of April due to corruption in the



**Monroe County Community College students assemble solar panels for the energy and technology project in Haiti.**

Haitian customs and port system and the Haitian government's efforts to address the issues by closure of ports in February. The shipment arrived in Port-au-Prince in mid-June and was held there in the customs warehouse. The shipment of containers finally cleared customs in mid-September and were delivered safely to UNIF.

The final training and installation of the solar equipment and computer systems was completed during workshops scheduled on September 29th – October 2nd, 2008.

This project would not have been possible without the collaboration and financial support of many organizations including the Sisters of St. Joseph, in Nazareth, Mich., and Partners in Progress, Association of Peasants of Fondwa, and Monroe County Community College Information Systems and Construction Management Technology departments.

