2019 ANNUAL REPORT
Protecting & Celebrating Our River
The Genesee RiverWatch story of 2019 will be told on the following pages. It is a remarkable record of achievement and growth in the six short years since the Center for Environmental Initiatives gave birth to Genesee RiverWatch. Applying the same values that guided CEI, Genesee RiverWatch has built strong and productive relationships with rural stakeholders in the Upper River, as well as urban groups in Monroe County and the City of Rochester. You will see evidence of this in the projects and initiatives completed in 2019 and those underway in 2020.

In early February when I first started making notes for this message, Genesee RiverWatch was basking in the glow from 2019 and making plans for an even more active 2020. Since then, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the world dramatically for all of us. At this point, none of us can predict the future extent or duration of this change on a personal, business, or national level.

With this in mind, we are moving ahead in 2020 guided by three key principles:

- Remaining committed to our mission and founding values
- Ensuring the long-term health of Genesee RiverWatch as an organization
- Continuing to drive forward with each of our initiatives as rapidly as possible while recognizing the constraints of state and local directives and our responsibility for the health of our volunteers and the public.

Our Mission and Vision (see page 3) focus on improving the water quality of the Genesee and expanding the environmental, recreational, and economic uses of this unique asset to improve the lives of our neighbors, both rural and urban. The current crisis underlines the importance of these goals in helping maintain our region as a major supplier of food to the nation and a center that attracts the best minds for medical research and high-tech manufacturing.

Our Core Values inherited from CEI and practiced over 46 years will be even more critical to our success in uncertain times. They are:

- **Integrity** in dealing with others
- **Collaboration, cooperation, and teamwork** - internally and externally
- A focus on **science and data** in all our decision-making
- **Passion and perseverance** in pursuing our goals
- **Pragmatism and resourcefulness** when faced with obstacles
- **Disciplined responsiveness** to changing events and opportunities

Genesee RiverWatch has been a largely volunteer organization since its inception. Though difficult at times, we have structured the organization itself to operate within the limits of support from our local business and individual donors. We have avoided fixed commitments to offices and paid staff that would be difficult to maintain during the current crisis. Thus, RiverWatch is well-positioned to continue normal operations in the short term and take on new initiatives when this storm subsides.
We are concerned, however, about the future of our grant-funded large project activity. Over the past six years, we have completed or have in process $1.5 million of streambank stabilization projects, river surveys, recreational map development, access improvements and K-12 aquatic education programming. These have been supported by grants from state and federal sources as well as landowner in-kind work. We cannot blindly assume that these sources will be fully operational after the current health crisis is brought under control. At this point there is no way to forecast this aspect of the future, but we will monitor it closely and adjust our work accordingly.

Further on in this report, you will see a listing of the projects and initiatives planned to start in 2020 or that are in progress from 2019. All of these are surrounded by varying degrees of uncertainty as described in the 2020 Outlook. Nevertheless, our volunteer teams are working as hard as ever – doing so from their homes and by e-mail and Zoom. Wherever there is an opportunity to move a project forward, we are doing so as aggressively as ever. The results for 2020 may not be as impressive as 2019 as they will reflect a slowing of progress, but not a suspension of activity.

One further matter warrants special attention in this message. Many readers of this report are aware that we trace our lineage back to the founding, in 1974, of The Center for Environmental Information – a nationally-known advocate for and source of information on a wide variety of environmental matters. For reasons described in our 2017 Annual Report, CEI launched the Genesee RiverWatch initiative in 2014, concentrating our attention and efforts on the needs of the Genesee River Watershed. Over the past six years, the Genesee RiverWatch name has become much better known than CEI. In addition, it has become clear that our organization will be focused exclusively on the Genesee for years to come. Having two names has become confusing to grant agencies, donors, partners, and the public. Therefore, at the end of 2019 our Board of Directors voted to formally change our name to “Genesee RiverWatch, Inc.” We are implementing this change and will announce its completion shortly. We do not want to lose sight of the long and successful history of CEI and its founders, in particular Elizabeth Thorndike, thus we will maintain its chronicle on our website for those interested in knowing how Genesee RiverWatch and its set of core values came to be.

May you all remain safe and well. Take time to enjoy the Genesee while social distancing and join us to celebrate our river when we can be together again.

Mike Haugh
President, Board of Directors
ABOUT US...

MISSION
To champion solutions that improve the water quality of the Genesee and initiatives that connect people to the River.

VISION
A healthy and sustainable Genesee River ecosystem that is an environmental, recreational, and economic asset for all generations.

WE ADVANCE OUR VISION BY:

1. Developing and maintaining regional partnerships.

2. Promoting public interest, education, and active involvement.

3. Monitoring and publishing water quality information.

4. Developing, funding, and executing priority restoration projects.

5. Advocating for appropriate regulation and compliance.

6. Developing a sustainable organization via fundraising and volunteer efforts.
2019 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Develop and Maintain Regional Partnerships

- Collaborated with Allegany County Soil & Water Conservation District on the Edelweiss Farms streambank restoration project and development of two additional projects for 2020.

- Partnered with City of Rochester to develop the new Petten Street cartop boat launch facility scheduled to open in 2020.

- Participated in St. John Fisher College’s Service Learning program, working with a Political Science class to study ways in which five cities have used their rivers for economic development.

- Continued working with the Genesee River Alliance to build river-focused partnerships within the City of Rochester.

Promote Public Interest, Education and Active Involvement

- Produced the 6th Annual Genesee River Basin Summit – “A Report to the Community”. Projects and plans for water quality improvement, access and recreation facilities, preservation of agricultural land, and aquatic education were reviewed by 105 attendees and 21 presenters.

- Held two dinner cruises of the Lower Genesee on the Harbor Town Belle, giving 210 participants the chance to experience the beauty and history of the river and the Genesee River gorge’s “wilderness within a city”.

- Continued to support development of the Aquatic Educators Network with professional development sessions and pilot classes teaching middle and high school students.

- Partnered with the Genesee Waterways Center to hold a series of public paddling events, one on the Erie Canal and two on the Lower River from Lower Falls to the harbor.
Monitor and Publish Water Quality Information

- Published the first ever “Genesee River Basin Report Card”, grading the water quality of the Genesee’s Main Stem and principal tributaries. See page 10 of this report for a summary of findings.

- Continued to develop water quality data using our Citizen Water Quality Monitoring Team of volunteers working across the watershed.

Develop, Fund and Execute Priority Restoration Projects

- Completed construction on a 1,900’ streambank restoration project at Edelweiss Farms, in Fillmore, NY. Teams of volunteers planted nearly 2,000 trees over two weekends in June. Funded by a $250K grant from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and $34K in-kind work by the property owner.

- Partnering with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service on a 2,720’ restoration project at Chamberlain Farms in Belfast, NY. Permitting is underway and construction should begin in fall 2020. Funded by a $523K grant from the Kodak Environmental Response Trust.

- Developing a strategic Nutrient & Sediment Reduction Plan for the Genesee Basin that will propose a long-term commitment to funding erosion control projects. Such a program, if adopted, will be much more cost-efficient than one-off projects, will preserve valuable farmland, cut dredging costs, improve sediment levels in the river, and reduce nutrient-caused beach closings.
2019 ACCOMPLISHMENTS (CONTINUED)

Advocate for Appropriate Regulation and Compliance

- Continued collection of public data on outflows from regional wastewater treatment plants. When complete, this can underpin advocacy for a DEC requirement to monitor Total Phosphorus output, leading to reductions in algae-producing nutrients.

Develop a Sustainable Organization Via Fundraising and Volunteer Efforts

- Our 2019 Supporter program set a new record with 61 corporations and individuals contributing between $2 and $4,500 each.

- Our volunteer program continues to be strong. Twelve people now regularly donate their time to Genesee RiverWatch initiatives including water quality monitoring, project engineering, development of educational programming, website and social media upkeep, financial control, marketing programs and fundraising activities. In addition, 35 volunteers devoted their time over two weekends to plant trees as part of the Edelweiss streambank project.
OUR PLANS FOR 2020
(SUBJECT TO HEALTH EMERGENCY REQUIREMENTS)

We Will Execute Funded Projects, Including:

- Begin construction on the 2,720’ Chamberlain Farms streambank restoration project in partnership with U.S. Fish & Wildlife.

- Begin construction on an 1,800’ streambank project in Houghton, NY. This work is supported by a $197K grant from the Great Lakes Commission and $119K of in-kind work by the landowner, Mallards Dairy.

- Complete construction of an ADA-compliant cartop boat launch facility at Petten Street on the Lower River. This project is funded by the City of Rochester with $17K donations from Genesee Brewery and Rochester Gas & Electric, as well as supporters and board members of Genesee RiverWatch.

- Continue the development of our aquatic education initiative, partnering with St. John Fisher College and local teachers in executing a NOAA grant to develop and deliver watershed education to K-12 students.

We Will Develop and Seek Funding for Future Projects, Including:

- At least one major streambank restoration project for the 2021 season.

- The multi-year Sediment & Nutrient Reduction Plan described above.

- Additional and improved river access sites that will eventually allow boaters and fishermen to safely enter and leave the river at no more than 10-mile intervals.

- On-going monitoring of water quality at key points along the river that will measure the impacts of erosion control projects, wastewater treatment upgrades, and implementation of agricultural best management practices.
OUR PLANS FOR 2020 (CONTINUED)

Though Restricted in 2020, Our Events Will Continue to Be Key to Engaging the Public in the River:

- As of this writing, nearly all our 2020 public events have been cancelled or postponed indefinitely. This includes the 7th Annual Genesee River Basin Summit, most of the planned summer paddling program and two of three Harbor Town Belle cruises.

- Our public events planning for the remainder of 2020 and for 2021 will continue to be based on the following key goals:
  - Ensure that all our gatherings comply with the most stringent health guidelines.
  - Allow more people to directly experience the beauty of our river through such activities as sponsored cruises and paddling programs.
  - Provide forums, such as annual Summits and specialized workshops, for interested people and organizations to learn about work being done on the river and help prioritize future efforts.
  - Partner with other organizations to expand our mutual capabilities and enlarge the potential audiences for these events.

Our Publications Will Be Designed to Inform River Communities:

- An updated recreation and access map of the Genesee River from Pennsylvania to Lake Ontario will be available this summer in both electronic and printed form. We are partnering with Allegany County-based Genesee River Wilds and the Genesee Valley Conservancy on this project.

We Will Develop Expanded Funding Sources to Meet the Needs of the Growing Organization:

- As state and federal grants become available, we will use them to fund major projects, e.g., streambank restoration.

- The core Genesee RiverWatch organization will grow through the generosity of an expanding group of regional individuals, businesses, and local foundations.
Staff & Directors

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Wayne Howard – Information Manager, GIS Analyst
Janet Weissend – Office Manager

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2019 GENESEE RIVER BASIN REPORT CARD
- SUMMARY -

This first Report Card grades the Genesee River and its major tributaries on water quality and usability based on publicly available information. Its purpose is to raise awareness of the environmental challenges that face the Genesee River Basin so that actions can be taken to improve the state of the watershed and preserve its beauty for generations to come.

The overall grade for the Genesee River Basin is a “C” and represents the cumulative effects of all the subwatersheds. Canaseraga Creek received the lowest grade - “D” - of all the subwatersheds, indicating poor water quality and limits to human usage. Oatka Creek and Black Creek received a grade of “B”, the highest grade of all the Genesee River subwatersheds, indicating better water quality and better opportunities for human usage. The Upper Basin of the river, Honeoye Creek and Conesus Creek subwatersheds received a grade of “C”. In summary, there are portions of the Genesee River watershed that are environmentally in good health. However, major portions of the watershed are degraded to varying degrees.

Learn more and download the full Report Card at www.geneseeriverwatch.com
With Gratitude & Appreciation

Genesee RiverWatch gratefully acknowledges the generous contributions of our individual and corporate supporters. The listing below reflects contributions of $250 and greater received in 2019.

**Genesee River Basin ($2,000 +)**
- Genesee Brewing Company
- Rochester Gas & Electric Corporation
- Elizabeth Thorndike

**Main Stem ($1,000 +)**
- American Dairy Association
- William Hallahan
- Gilbert McCurdy
- Georgiana Prince
- Popli Design Group
- Stantec
- Brad VanAuken

**Letchworth ($500 +)**
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- Joseph & Joyce Makarewicz
- Noblehurst Farms
- Pathfinder Engineers & Architects LLP
- Anne & Jack Stocum
- Jennifer Capezzuto Stott, CPA
- Charles Valeska

**Tributary ($250 +)**
- Anonymous
- City of Rochester
- Mark Gregor
- Ruth Morton Fund

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