



2024 SPRING NEWSLETTER



Project GreenER Takes Off

Over the past few years, different people have asked us if PCS would ever consider doing something like our high school Green Team program for adults. A social monitoring report from DataWise also challenged us to find a way to equip interested volunteers to advocate better for the watershed. After several discussions with Hannah Mico, a Community Organizing Associate with River Network, a grant of \$8,000 was awarded by River Network to PCS to host a pilot leadership development project, which we called “Project GreenER” (a spin on Green Team, with “ER” standing for Ecological Restoration).

This initiative provided 8 bi-weekly evening sessions of community-based experiential learning for 10 adult participants of varying ages, from college students to retirees. *(Story continues on page 2)*



PCS Co-Founders Publish Book About Plaster Creek

Plaster Creek Stewards co-founders, Gail Heffner and Dave Warners have published a new book, *Reconciliation in a Michigan Watershed: Restoring Ken-O-Sha* (MSU Press). This book details the history of the Plaster Creek watershed, how humans have influenced this place, and how we can bring healing to damaged relationships that have occurred over time. *Reconciliation in a Michigan Watershed* is available for \$29.95 through MSU Press or wherever books are sold. We encourage everyone to read this hopeful book! If your book club is interested in accessing some chapter by chapter discussion questions, let us know.



Project GreenER (continued)

Every other Tuesday evening this spring, participants gathered to share a meal and learn together. Participants learned about the historical and present injustices in our watershed, toured areas of Plaster Creek, practiced native plant identification, transplanted native seedlings, heard from local environmental justice advocates, met local conservation practitioners, practiced project budgeting and writing maintenance plans, and more. Additionally, the River Network grant allowed each participant to receive up to \$500 toward an independent restoration project of their choice. The projects that were proposed included community outreach efforts and a variety of native plant gardens. PCS will now assist the Project GreenER participants as they complete these projects and spread the word about watershed restoration.

The first cohort ever have proven to be curious, kind, and highly motivated, inspiring us with the passion they show for caring for the places and the people with whom they interact. As they walk away with new skills to practice, participants who complete their independent project will earn a digital badge from Calvin University in restoration ecology, a shareable credential to demonstrate their learning. We are grateful to Hannah Mico and River Network, the many local partners who shared their expertise, and the amazing participants for a joy-filled spring of learning together.

If this vision for equipping volunteers to become advocates for the creek inspires you to invest in future cohorts, please contact us. And if you'd like to participate in this program next time, keep your eyes out for more information sent through our mailing list and on social media.





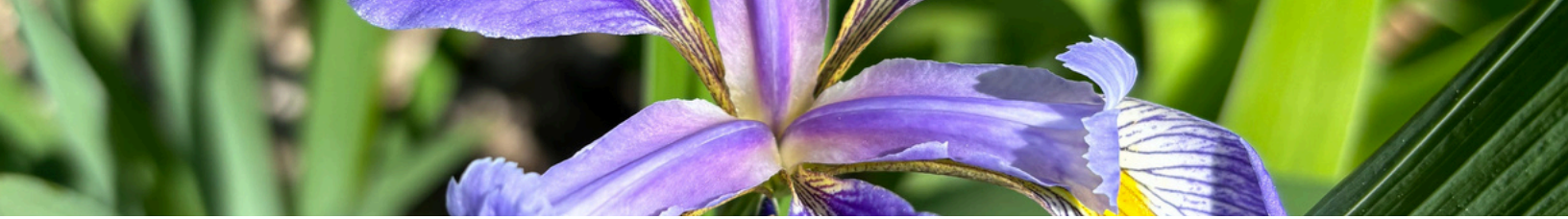
Spring Event Brings Hope for Floodplains

This year's Spring Event focused on floodplains, the diversity they support, and their benefits for our water. We heard from Garret Crow, Will Hoffman, and Dave Warners from the Emma Cole Project, an initiative to catalogue the naturally growing native plants and their habitats in West Michigan. The team recently published a paper on the remnant floodplain habitats along Plaster Creek.



We followed up the lesson with some floodplain restoration of our own, with some people transplanting at the greenhouse and another group planting native species into the floodplain restoration project at Leisure Creek Condos. Thank you to everyone who helped out!





Education and Research



These School Gardens Are Thriving

We had the chance to visit and put some native plants in the ground with several schools this spring. These schools include Thrive Learning Academy (pictured), Byron Center Christian, Evergreen Christian, Godwin Middle, Calvin Christian HS and Living Stones Academy. It is inspiring to be around young people who are curious and caring about the world around them!

Student Summer Research

We have 16 Calvin students joining us this summer who will be assisting with a variety of projects. Several of these students will also be doing research -- looking at soil chemistry in curb cut rain gardens and how well different native trees absorb stormwater runoff. This research will help us better understand how best to help improve the water quality of Plaster Creek.



Urban River Adventure Inspires

As a part of the recent River Rally National Conference, PCS hosted an Urban Adventure Hike along Plaster Creek. During the hike, we shared stories of harm that had occurred to the creek, and celebrated the ways that we can continue to find harmony. We were inspired by many others from across the nation who took the time to learn more about our beloved Plaster Creek!



Restoration



Communities Clean Up

Small groups can make a huge difference helping Plaster Creek. On a cold Sunday in March, we led over 40 volunteers from Seymour CRC picking up trash along the Plaster Creek. To celebrate Earth Day, we, along with La Casa de la Cobija and American Rivers, led volunteers cleaning along a storm drain on Division Avenue. Thank you to all who participated!

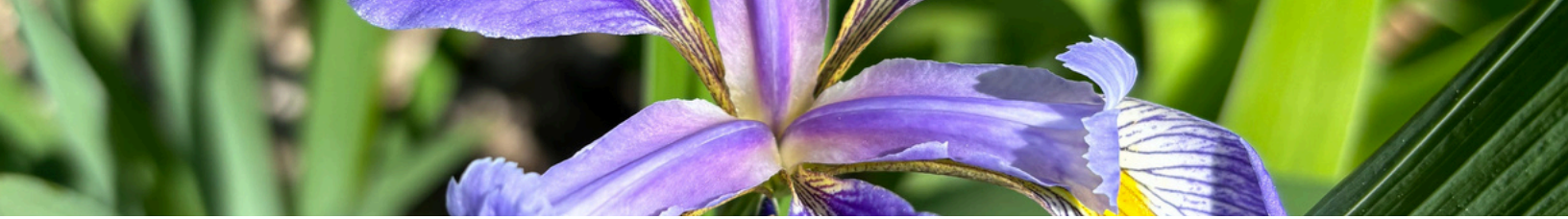
Controlled Burns at Calvin

This spring, we partnered with Blue Heron Ministries out of Goshen, Indiana, to conduct some controlled burns in select areas at Calvin University. These burns, done every few years, are important for helping discourage invasive plants, adding nutrients to the soil, and helping natives to flourish. Read more in this [article from Calvin Chimes!](#)



Volunteer at the PCS Greenhouse

PCS needs volunteers willing to help transplant at our greenhouse this summer. We will have regular volunteer days on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays from 1:15-4:15pm. To join us for an afternoon, **[sign up here!](#)** If you and a small group want to come on a Saturday or at a different time, contact us to schedule a volunteer time.



Coming this Summer



Completing the Floodplain Restoration Project at the Leisure Creek Condos



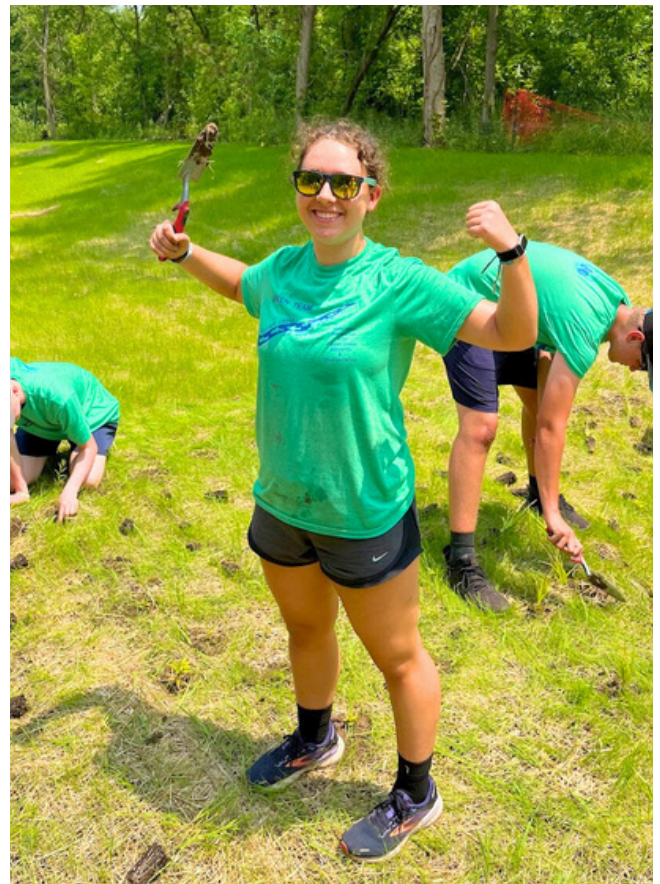
25+ New Curb Cut and Parkway Pocket Rain Gardens



16 Calvin student workers



Expanding our native tree nursery



20 High School Green Team members



Welcoming New Team Members

We were thrilled to welcome two new members to our team this past spring. Starting in January, Hanna de la Vega joined our team as an undergraduate intern from Cornerstone University. Hanna has a love for people, sustainability, learning, and community engagement. Now that she has graduated, we look forward to seeing her grow and thrive as she begins a new job with the West Michigan Sustainable Business Forum. Thank you, Hanna, and congratulations!

In March, we hired Jacob Bol as a Restoration Ecology Fellow. He joins us through the MI Healthy Climate Corps, a new initiative to combat climate change and pursue environmental justice in Michigan. Jacob will be with us through November at least, participating in different restoration projects and community initiatives.



Contact Us

PlasterCreekStewards@calvin.edu

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Check to See if You Qualify for a **FREE** Rain Garden

If you live in Roosevelt Park, Oakdale, Garfield Park, Burton Heights, or Alger Heights, consider applying for a **Curb Cut Rain Garden!** Filled with home-grown native plants, these beautiful specialty gardens capture and filter rainwater from the street, preventing pollutants from entering Plaster Creek. They are a great way to help clean and support our watershed. Not all sites qualify, but apply today for a site visit to see if your property is a good fit.

Have you already applied but your site doesn't qualify? Ask about our new **Parkway Pocket Gardens!** These gardens also use native plants, but can be planted in different soils as well as around trees and some utilities.



APPLY HERE



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