



## Spring and Summer Newsletter 2022

- Staff Transitions
- Spring Event
- Summer Students
- Green Team
- Reporting Suspicious Pollutants
- Spring & Summer School Partners
- Watershed Support Grant #2 Awarded
- Macroinvertebrate Study Volunteers Needed

# Transitions!



2022 has brought many leadership team transitions for Plaster Creek Stewards.

In January 2022, Benji Steenwyk joined as our Greenhouse Manager. Working partly with Plaster Creek Stewards and partly with the Calvin Native Gardens and Ecosystem Preserve, Benji oversees both organizations' plant propagation, making our shared space more beautiful and finding ways to be more efficient through collaboration and resource sharing. Originally from Hudsonville, Benji studied Geography at Calvin University while working for PCS during the summers. As the Greenhouse Manager, he has enjoyed connecting with people who are equally passionate about the environment as he is, and loves the hands-on work of building a better world. He looks forward to creating a space where people feel welcomed at the greenhouse - and to continuing to support the ecosystem by supporting both Plaster Creek Stewards and the Calvin Ecosystem Preserve with healthy native plant species for their projects.

This fall, Deanna Geelhoed, our Program Coordinator moved on to grad school to pursue a Master's Degree in Environmental Justice at the University of Michigan. Deanna worked for PCS for two years as a Calvin student and then was hired into the Program Coordinator position which she has held for the past 6 years. In this role Deanna has been leading PCS's on-the-ground restoration projects and has played a key role in growing partnerships with houses of worship, non-profits, schools, other watershed organizations, and local businesses. She has assessed countless sites in the watershed, created landscaping plans, grown native plants, implemented the plans with the native plants she has grown, led students, given presentations to all sorts of audiences, and SO MUCH MORE. Many, many Calvin students have learned and thrived doing summer research and internships with Plaster Creek Stewards under Deanna's mentorship. We wish her strength and joy as she continues her journey for watershed healing and environmental justice in her communities!

Ana Singh, Green Infrastructure Associate for Plaster Creek Stewards, transitioned to San Jose, California to work in the native landscape industry there, taking what she learned and growing her leadership and knowledge in a new place. Ana worked for Plaster Creek Stewards for two summers as a student, after which she was hired on as staff. In this role, Ana has advanced the PCS curb-cut rain garden program, been published in a study on native plant success, and led summer researchers for the past two years.

Transitioning into the role of Program Coordinator, Haley Weesies has joined the Plaster Creek Stewards team this September. Haley grew up in the Grand Rapids area and attended Calvin University, graduating with a BS in Environmental Health & Conservation in 2022. She spent the summer of 2020 working for PCS on the curb-cut rain gardens student crew, an experience that helped her realize her passion for creation care and ecological restoration. After graduating from Calvin, she spent the summer working at the Au Sable Institute of Environmental Studies, where she managed their native plant greenhouse and helped carry out restoration projects with local schools and houses of worship. She is eager to return to Grand Rapids this fall, where she hopes to grow deep roots in the community and help restore native biodiversity to the Plaster Creek watershed for God's glory.

## Spring Event 2022

# Floodplains, Drains, and Watershed Gains

This Spring we broke ground at Leisure Creek Condominiums!

Volunteers at our Spring Event planted thousands of native plants at this recently reshaped floodplain. Where Plaster Creek previously eroded the banks and carried sediment and pollution downstream, this floodplain now provides a wide open space of native plants that will gladly soak up and slow down Plaster Creek when it naturally floods after a rain.



# SUMMER STUDENTS

What was a surprising super crew number last year was this year's norm! Once again, thanks to external grants and to funding from Calvin's Science Division, we were able to hire **12 student researchers** from Calvin for learning and restoration this summer. They worked on research projects, mentored the Green Team, installed 20 curb cut rain gardens, and maintained existing green infrastructure projects.



# GREEN TEAM GROWTH

2022 was another joyful Green Team season of installing rain gardens, learning about watershed ecology, meeting with environmentally-focused professionals, snorkeling in the Rogue River, and investigating the varying environmental quality of communities along Plaster Creek.

New to 2022, we piloted an updated **Environmental Justice and Cultural Intelligence curriculum** that was integrated throughout the 3 weeks experience, which we started developing with the help of Dr. Pennylyn Dykstra-Pruim in 2021.

Additionally, we launched our first-ever **Green-Team Lite**, where a team of five students joined for a 1-week concentrated Green Team experience! It was a great way to involve more students in the Green Team experience and get to know more students in our watershed.



Green Team 2022:

- 20 students from the watershed
- 7 schools represented
- 1240 hours (approx.) in watershed restoration, networking, and learning
- EJ curriculum piloted
- Green Team Lite piloted

# Watching out for Our Water

After years of hikers' observations and reports to both the City of Grand Rapids and MI Dept of EGLE, and despite repeated investigations, a small urban tributary to Plaster Creek continued to smell wrong and look wrong without a clear source of pollution. Until this spring. After a resident reported suspicions to us via Facebook, the authorities were able to locate the source and take steps to charge the polluters. If you observe something being discharged to the creek or other suspicious pollutants, please take pictures and call 1 (800) 292-4706 immediately because water flows and will wash out helpful evidence. This is a great reminder of the importance of visiting our waterways, paying attention, and advocating for them! Also, point source pollution like this is damaging, but in reality, we all contribute to non-point source pollution and need to be mindful of our own actions. Everyone can do something for the watershed!

## PLANTING PARTNERS!

Shout out to all the schools we partnered with this spring and summer! From winter hikes about environmental justice, celebrating MLK Day with the Potter's House, to groups of 60+ Dutton Elementary students gathering at Leisure Creek Condos to plant a floodplain, we loved partnering with young people in our community to learn about our watershed and make it a better place.

- AuSable Institute
- Calvin University students
- Columbus State University
- Dickenson School
- Dutton Christian School
- Dutton Elementary School
- Forest Hills Northern Trails School
- Godfrey Lee Elementary Nature Club
- Godwin Heights Middle School Nature Club
- Grand Rapids Homeschool Coop
- GRCHS AP Chemistry
- GRCHS Winterim
- GRPS Brookside Elementary
- Hope College students
- Hudsonville Christian School
- Martin Luther King Jr Leadership Academy
- Northpointe Christian
- Ottawa Hills Softball team
- Southwest School
- The Potter's House



## Watershed Support Grant #2

PCS has been awarded \$40,000 from Michigan Dept of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy to build capacity to capture stormwater from downstream urban parking lots. Much of the downstream portion of our watershed is urban with lots of impermeable surfaces that shed lots of stormwater directly to the creek and instead could be absorbed into the sandy ground. As part of this grant, a brochure detailing green stormwater infrastructure projects for parking lots will be finished along with a website for further information in order to give parking lots owners clear options for green projects that will capture stormwater. In addition, Fishbeck (local engineering company) is working with PCS and a local property owner to develop engineered plans for their parking lot as a demonstration project. The engineered plans will provide a "shovel-ready" project for future opportunities--and provide learning for PCS.

# THANK YOU

Whether you've partnered with us this year in garden installation, financial support, greenhouse volunteering, educational events, or simply following our journey - thank you! It takes a whole watershed community to rewrite the way we interact with land and heal our creek. We could not do it without you.

## Support Our Work

Want to support watershed restoration? You can donate to Plaster Creek Stewards year-round to support the education, research, and restoration initiatives that are changing relationships and healing water in our watershed. <https://calvin.quadweb.site/giving/plaster-creek-stewards>



## Volunteer with Us

Check out our volunteer opportunities for Fall 2022!

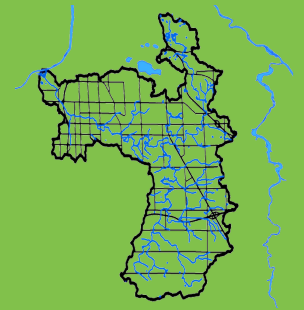
- Fall Event: October 22, 9a-12p - Panel, Planting, and Transplanting
- Greenhouse Transplanting: Tuesday mornings, Thursday afternoons, some Saturdays - <https://signup.com/go/mkVJiRY>

## Looking out for Water

In partnership with West Michigan Environmental Action Council, Plaster Creek Stewards is looking for 8-12 adult volunteers that would like to don waders and collect, identify, and count macroinvertebrates in Plaster Creek twice a year for two years. This is an exciting opportunity to be trained and take part in a guided research project. Please, reach out to Andrea at [aclark47@calvin.edu](mailto:aclark47@calvin.edu) if you are interested in committing to this and getting to know Plaster Creek critters in an up-close way.

## Plaster Creek Watershed

The Plaster Creek Watershed occupies a portion of the ancestral home of the Hopewell people (Goodall Focus), and more recently the Anishinaabe Three Fires Confederacy of Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi nations. We are grateful for the way these people cared for the land and loved it. We are informed by their teachings and strive to honor their example through ongoing education and restoration work.



## Plaster Creek Stewards

Plaster Creek Stewards is a collaboration of Calvin University, community partners, and residents focusing on education, research, and restoration in an effort to return health and beauty to the Plaster Creek Watershed.