

2023 FALL NEWSLETTER



State of the Stewards

As we approach this year's end, we feel incredibly grateful for all of the opportunities we have had this year. PCS has participated in life-giving restoration projects, engaged in diverse learning communities, and witnessed inspiring research. We are especially thankful for each of our friends and partners in the community who have volunteered with us and supported our work. Check out our Year at a Glance to see a snapshot of what our community accomplished this year.



Our Year at a Glance

 29 Community Partnerships Cultivated

 3,887 Volunteer Hours Logged

 63,016 Native Plants Grown

 48,950 Native Plants Installed

 46 Green Projects Installed

 497 Seed Species Collected

Support the Green Team

Green Team is a truly unique experience. Every year, we hire twenty high school students from around the watershed. Over the course of three weeks, they get a crash course on watershed ecology, help install and maintain green projects, and learn about environmental careers and educational opportunities.

Students emerge from this experience with a new confidence in their ability to work with nature and an appreciation for their home environment. Many are proud to be able to identify native plants, and they go home looking for spaces to implement their own projects. One of them said about the experience, “I really enjoyed knowing I was doing something good for the community as a whole.” Another reflected, “I really liked the connections I got to form with both people and nature and that I could just be myself.”

As the end of the year approaches, PCS is raising funds to support next year’s Green Team. With the community’s help, we hope to raise \$25,000 by the end of 2023. If you are able to donate, you may do so [online](#), or write a check to Plaster Creek Stewards and send it to:

Calvin University Development Office
3201 Burton SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49546

[DONATE NOW](#)

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Education



Mud Gardening

Over the course of five days, the elementary school students at Dutton Christian School came to help us plant at the Leisure Creek Condos, the site of our current floodplain restoration project. While it rained almost every day, no one was shy about getting a little muddy. With their help, we planted over 4,500 plants.

Marketing as Education

For the first time ever, we partnered with a marketing class of 16 high school seniors from GRCHS. To learn about nonprofit marketing, these students immersed themselves in PCS, touring the watershed and planting with us. As the culmination of their semester, students designed marketing materials for PCS to use.



A Plaster Creek Mystery

This fall, Plaster Creek Stewards met with students at Burton Middle School to play a mystery game. The students acted as farmers, loggers, homeowners, and other people around the watershed, all working out who was responsible for polluting the water. It was a fun way to learn about the history of Plaster Creek!

Research

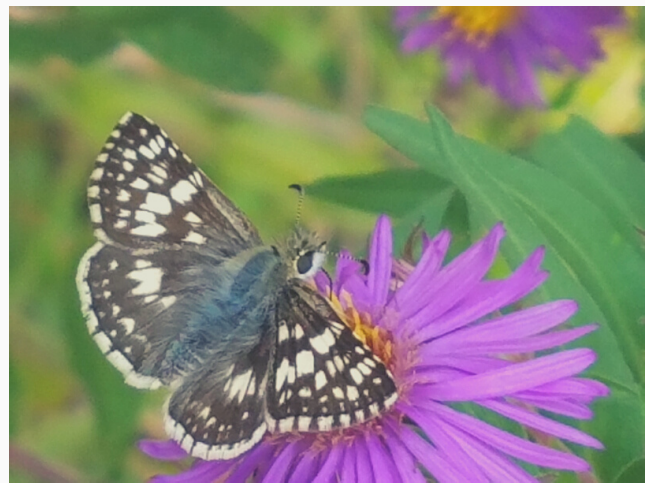


Recent Publication

Haley Weesies, Dave Warners, and Dr. Garrett Crow wrote a [scientific paper](#) comparing plants growing along Plaster Creek now with historical records collected by Emma Cole, a revered local botanist in the late 1800s. This research helps inform PCS's work in the Leisure Creek floodplain restoration project, and we hope it can assist other local restoration leaders too.

Insect Biodiversity Study

Calvin students Julia Klooster and Naomi Dykstra have been researching how native plant gardens impact local insect populations. They sampled insects in curb cut rain gardens and adjacent lawns, and their preliminary results show that rain gardens house about twice as many insect species as lawns do.



Green Team and Wellbeing

Over the summer, Calvin Sociology student Delaney Sall began researching how green work affects the mental wellbeing of Green Team students. Preliminary results show overall increases in students' sense of engagement, knowledge, and belonging as a result of their participation in the Green Team. [Watch Delaney's presentation here!](#)

Restoration



Leisure Creek Continued

We have finished our fourth year of an ongoing floodplain restoration project at Leisure Creek Condos in Dutton. This year, a flood bench downstream of the bridge was created, and restoration with native plants and trees began. So far, 700+ volunteers have helped put over 16,800 native plants in the ground!

Seed Collecting

One of our favorite fall responsibilities is collecting local-genotype native seeds from public lands around West Michigan. We harvest a small portion of seeds from plants growing in the wild to be grown in our greenhouse and used in our restoration projects. So far this year we have collected 497 different species!



Wonder Academy

Curiosity starts young! This fall, we had the pleasure of working with middle schoolers at The Potter's House. These students investigated macro invertebrates, water conductivity, and water temperature in the creek. They presented their findings to the community, along with ideas to improve Roosevelt Park and help Plaster Creek.



Fall Event Success

This year's Fall Event was a wonderful experience. The morning's stunning sunrise and beautiful double rainbow were eclipsed by the smiling faces of approximately 50 volunteers who braved rain and mud and enjoyed cider and donuts!

After starting the day with presentations from our summer researchers, we all braved the cold and rain to do some planting. A small group helped transplant at the greenhouse, while everyone else planted trees at our floodplain restoration project. With everyone working together in the wet and the mud, we were able to get 70 trees in the ground! Thank you to all the volunteers who helped us with this important project.



Coming in 2024

Even as our greenhouse is buttoned up for the winter, PCS is eagerly preparing for the year ahead. Varied sources of funding and community support extend projects around the Plaster Creek watershed.

- Partnering with local groups to plant trees, parkway pocket gardens, and curb-cut rain gardens along Plaster Creek with funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Sustain Our Great Lakes.
- Planting at Leisure Creek Condos and installing 10 more curb cut rain gardens with funding from the MI EGLE and EPA 319 Clean Water Act
- Celebrating our 12th year of the Green Team with 20 high school students, supported by Bosch Community Fund and local funders like you!
- Restoring a woodland area with Calvin students on Calvin's campus
- Researching with college students and interns
- Planting with Healing over Habitats: native plantings at places of healing, a part of the National Wildlife Federation
- Planting new green stormwater infrastructure projects with support from American Rivers
- Piloting an Adult Leadership Development program (like Green Team but for adults!) with support from River Network
- Collaborating with schools, houses of worship, and other community partners to share the story of Plaster Creek and the good work we can do together.

