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Dear GRNA volunteers,

The natural area is in full winter mode now - take a walk and most of what you hear is just snow-shrouded silence and the crunch of snow underfoot. The quiet is occasionally broken by wind rustling the dried beech leaves, the babbling of Finch Creek, or the calling of trumpeter swans out on the river, but for the most part, things are hushed and still. I hope you're getting the chance to get out for a winter walk, ski, or snowshoe from time to time to experience the clarity and peace that the beauty of a winter wander can provide.

In the meantime, we have several ways you can help others enjoy winter at GRNA too, from volunteering at Winterfest, the Grass River Shiver, and more. Or, if you're looking forward to the promise of spring, check out our maple sugaring and vernal pool monitoring opportunities. And of course, if you have a different idea for a way you'd like to help, please feel free to let me know!

Sending warmth, coziness, and contentment your way,

Emily Burke
Conservation & Education Specialist
emily@grassriver.org

IMPORTANT: PLEASE FILL OUT YOUR VOLUNTEER WAIVER!

If you plan on being an active volunteer in 2022, we need you to fill out and sign a volunteer waiver. This must be done every year, so though you have all already done this in the past, in order to be cleared for volunteering in 2022, we need to have a current copy on file.

Steps for completing your waiver:

1. Click **HERE** to access the waiver
2. Print it
3. Fill it out and sign it
4. Submit it using either of these options:
 - Scan it and email it to emily@grassriver.org
 - Bring the paper version with you next time you come to the Center

Alternatively, if you'd rather just complete your waiver in person, you can stop into the Center Saturdays and Sundays from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm to fill out a hard copy.

Thank you, and thanks to everyone who has already submitted their 2022 waivers!

UPCOMING VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES



FRONT DESK DOCENT

Ongoing

GRNA is in need of a few volunteer docents to help us cover the front desk of the Grass River Center. This position involves opening and closing the Center, greeting visitors and answering questions, performing simple point of sale transactions from our gift shop, and light housekeeping duties to keep the Center looking tidy. If you have excellent customer service skills, are knowledgeable about Grass River or are willing to learn, and want to give back to GRNA in a meaningful way, contact James at

james@grassriver.org. Training will be provided. From January through April, the Center is open on Saturdays and Sundays only from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm.

EVENT PHOTOGRAPHERS

Ongoing. First opportunity on Sat, Feb 12th

We're in need of a few volunteer photographers for our events. Photographs help us document

the day's activities and market our events in the future. If you enjoy capturing the spirit of an event through photographs, have your own camera, and can commit to quickly getting GRNA the photos you took, this opportunity is for you! The next day for this volunteer opportunity is during the Grass River Shiver and Winterfest (see below for descriptions), both on Saturday, February 12th. Contact Emily at emily@grassriver.org if you're interested.



GRASS RIVER SHIVER

Sat, Feb 12th at 10:00 am

The Grass River Shiver is GRNA's annual snowshoe 5k and 10k race. We need a handful of volunteers to help with racer check-in and timing, as well as a few volunteers out on the course at critical turns to point racers in the right direction. Email James at james@grassriver.org if you can help out!

WINTERFEST

Sat, Feb 12th from 12:00 pm - 3:00 pm

Winterfest is GRNA's annual family-friendly event celebrating all things winter. There will be indoor and outdoor activities including cross-country skiing and snowshoeing (weather permitting), crafts, games, nature story time, and a blazing fire in the pavilion with refreshments. We're looking for volunteers to help staff activities and assist with set-up and clean-up. Email Emily at emily@grassriver.org if you'd like to lend a hand at this fun event.



MAPLE SUGARING VOLUNTEERS

February - March

The sap will probably start to run within the coming month, so we're putting out a call for volunteers to participate in our maple sugaring program! Volunteers will prep equipment, tap trees, collect sap, split wood, and run the maple syrup evaporator to make maple syrup. Volunteers may also provide demonstrations to the public during events (like Maplefest, set for



Sat, March 19th from 11:00 am - 3:00 pm) and may assist in clean-up and storage of equipment at the end of the season. A training will be provided in mid-February. Email James at james@grassriver.org to be kept in the loop!

VERNAL POOL MONITORS

Late March - Mid May

Vernal Pools are ephemeral wetlands that fill with water in the spring and

are critical breeding habitat for many rare animals like fairy shrimp and spotted salamanders. Vernal Pool Monitors work in small teams to collect physical and biological data at GRNA's vernal pools three times throughout the year: twice in the spring and then once in the late summer/fall to verify pool drying. The data is used to help GRNA protect these important habitats. No previous experience is necessary; a full virtual training is provided by the **Michigan Vernal Pool Patrol**, date TBD but likely in late March, and an in-person follow-up training will be provided at GRNA. Contact Emily at emily@grassriver.org if you're interested.



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: JIM & MEG COSTELLO

For this month's volunteer spotlight, we're featuring longtime GRNA volunteers Jim and Meg Costello. The Costellos purchased their cottage on Intermediate Lake in 2001 and soon found GRNA as a quiet place to get away, hike, snowshoe, and cross-country ski. They started volunteering in 2015 with a simple mailing, and since then, they've become integral to GRNA's governance and event planning. Jim has been on the board since 2016, having held the role of Chairman and currently serving on three committees, while Meg has been an active member of the Riverfest Committee since the start of this annual fundraiser. We recently caught up with this thoughtful, hardworking, and selfless couple to hear about their experiences at GRNA over the years:

What inspires you to volunteer for GRNA?

Jim's reason for volunteering at GRNA is that it is vital to the entire region. He also wants to see it continue to be available to the community for generations to come.

Meg volunteers because her love for the great outdoors fits so well with everything GRNA has to offer.

What's the neatest thing you've learned since you started volunteering with GRNA?

For both of us, it's how vital GRNA is to the health of our Chain of Lakes watershed as well as to Lake Michigan. (Editor's note: 60% of the surface water that ends up in Grand Traverse Bay comes through the Chain of Lakes. By filtering out sediments and pollutants and absorbing excess nutrients, the pristine and intact wetlands surrounding the Grass River are crucial to maintaining water quality in the lower Chain of Lakes and the entire Grand Traverse Bay region).



What do you wish more people knew about GRNA?



We both wish more people were aware of the broad range of offerings for both children and adults. From naturalist-led hikes to classes to day camps, there are just so many ways that people can learn and enjoy at GRNA.

When you aren't volunteering, what do you spend time doing?

Jim fills his extra time with reading, feeding the birds, and traveling. Meg keeps busy gardening and volunteering at the Food and Baby Pantries. Both of them love their time with their English lab, Clark.

Any fun facts about you that you want to tell us about?

Jim was elected to the Michigan Credit Union League Hall of Fame for his leadership role on behalf of credit unions in the state. Meg is a retired physical education teacher. She loves singing and sang with a variety of choral groups, including Rackham Choir and MSU Choral Union.



Grass River Natural Area is a nonprofit organization that has flourished for fifty-two years because of the generous support of people who value our mission "to manage the Grass River Natural Area, conserve and protect its watershed, and provide opportunities that increase knowledge, appreciation, and community-wide stewardship of the natural environment".

If you believe in our mission and want to help us fulfill it for many years to come, please click on the Donate button below. Your support is greatly appreciated.

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