



# IMPACT REPORT

---

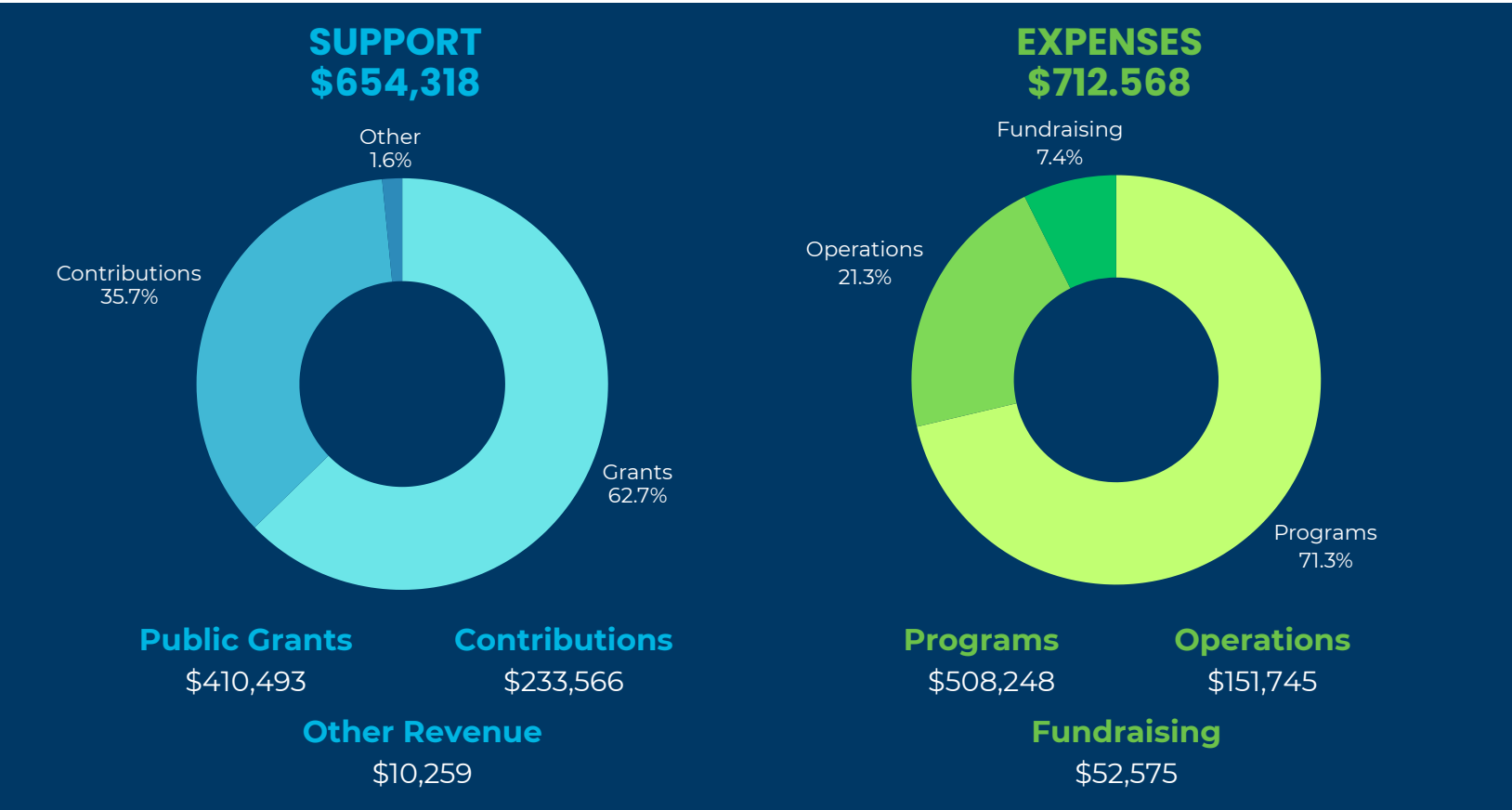
# 2024

[gtbay.org](http://gtbay.org)



# Organizational Sustainability

Your support in action



Compared to previous years, the 2024 finances appear to show an increase in expenses related to income. This is due to an updated approach to how we report temporarily restricted funds in accordance with best practices and current accounting standards. These gifts are recognized as revenue when they are received while the expenses are recognized as the work is complete. This shift aligns our reporting with guidelines that ensure greater transparency and accountability.

Each dollar you contribute helps us raise up to \$120 additional dollars to implement restoration projects throughout the watershed. That is a tremendous impact for our water.

# Connecting You to the Water You Love

Working together to protect the future of Grand Traverse Bay

We are committed to strengthening our community’s bond with Grand Traverse Bay and its surrounding lakes, streams, and wetlands. By fostering a community commitment to clean water, we will all enjoy our waters for generations to come.



## Community Action

Volunteers help our small team reach further and do more to help our waters. Our dedicated volunteers clean beaches, monitor streams, handle administrative tasks, maintain our equipment, and assist whenever they are needed. These volunteers have a strong connection with our waters and a willingness to put their passion and skills to work for our community.

## Trusted Resource

We are the voice for clean water in Grand Traverse Bay, safeguarding our waters through advocacy, policy recommendations, relationship building, and community education. We are a local resource for individuals, municipalities, and community entities to gain knowledge, access support, get involved, and make educated, water-friendly decisions.

Hosted 19 beach cleanup events

200 volunteers donated 1,000 hours

34 recommendations provided to decision making bodies

Responded to 106 community concerns



# Healthy Beaches

Protecting public health

## E. coli testing

For the last 24 years, we have conducted weekly *E. coli* testing at Grand Traverse area beaches during the summer months. Elevated levels of *E. coli* at beaches pose a threat to public health and can cause illness. If test results show high *E. coli* levels, local Health Departments post advisories at impacted beaches until results return to acceptable levels.

20 beaches tested

13 weeks of sampling

17 advisories issued

26 source tracking samples analyzed

## Bacterial source tracking

To reduce the threats to public health due to elevated bacterial levels, it is essential to know the source of bacterial contamination so proper steps can be taken to lower the inputs. Results from this year’s source tracking analysis indicated gulls were still the most common source (74% of samples). Other sources tested (canines, humans, pigs, cows) were found occassionaly and at low levels.



# Kids Creek Restoration Project

Restoring natural steam function and floodplain storage



480 trees

Balsam fir, tamarack, red maple, yellow birch, quaking aspen.



1,500 live stakes

Tag alder, dogwood, sandbar willow.



1,050 shrubs

Chokeberry, dogwood, winterberry, highbush cranberry.



## Native vegetative buffer

This project addressed pollution affecting the main branch of Kids Creek as it runs from US-31/M-37 to Silver Lake Road through land owned by the City of Traverse City. This is the beginning of the segment of the creek that is designated impaired because it receives a large amount of stormwater runoff.

We re-established a 30-foot vegetative buffer consisting of native trees, woody shrubs, and live stakes along 3,000 feet of Kids Creek, with an additional 1,800 feet along two tributaries planted with a 10-foot buffer.



# Nature-Based Solutions in Northport

Rain gardens infiltrate stormwater

## 4 Rain gardens installed

We continued our successful partnership with the Village of Northport to reduce stormwater inputs to Grand Traverse Bay from runoff originating in the village. We installed three rain gardens and rehabilitated another totaling 991 square feet of rain gardens.

## 69K Gallons of stormwater treated

Two of the rain gardens were installed at the Northport Marina and another was installed at the corner of Waukazoo and Main streets. The existing rain garden at the corner of Nagonaba and High streets was refurbished so it could infiltrate the total amount of stormwater it receives.

### Health of our water and our community

By reducing stormwater inputs into Grand Traverse Bay, we are also reducing its associated pollution inputs such as sediment and nutrients. Since stormwater outlets next to Northport Marina Beach, these efforts will also reduce bacterial inputs to recreational waters and protect the health of beachgoers.



# Chloride Impacts on Kids Creek

Monitoring the effects of deicing salts

Deicing agents contain salts such as chloride that break apart when dissolved in water, impacting aquatic species and food web dynamics. Automated monitoring stations in two locations on Kids Creek collect conductivity (an estimate for chloride) and water temperature data every 15 minutes and instantaneously upload data to a website.

Data collected shows that aquatic life in Kids Creek is likely being harmed by high chloride concentrations during winter months as pulses of chloride move through the system after snow storms and during snow melt events. This data demonstrates the importance of raising awareness of the impact of deicing agents on water quality.

We educate individuals, neighborhood associations, businesses, and municipal road maintenance departments about ways to reduce and responsibly use deicing agents. We also advocate for road managers to apply deicing agents only when necessary, use the appropriate amount of deicing agents based on conditions, consider environmentally friendly alternatives, store deicing salts properly, and sweep up excess salt after application.



From the time of the glaciers until today, water has shaped and continues to define the entire Grand Traverse region. At Traverse Tall Ship Company, our goal is to give passengers an unforgettable and meaningful experience on the waters of Grand Traverse Bay and help them understand the important role water plays in the region's vitality and identity.

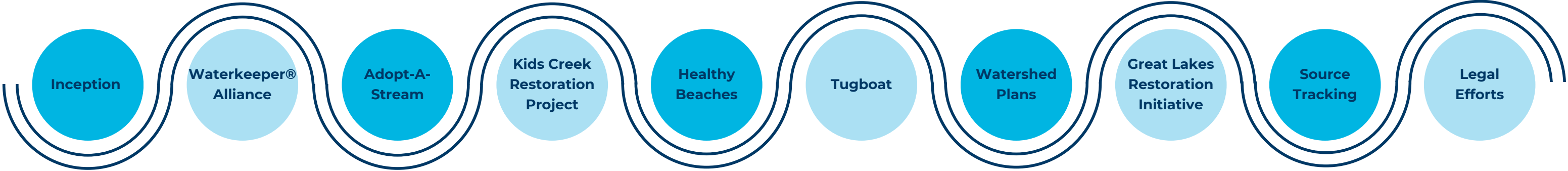
Since the beauty and the health of the bay are intrinsically linked, supporting the vital work of The Watershed Center is both an easy and crucially important choice - for us, and for our shared landscape.

**Jamie Trost**  
Traverse Tall Ship Company



# 30 Years of Protecting Clean Water

We protect the water you love



Thirty years ago, we came together around a shared commitment to protect the water that makes our region so special. What began as a grassroots initiative has grown into a trusted, science-based organization rooted in collaboration, community, and an unwavering dedication to clean water.

Since our founding, we have worked alongside partners, volunteers, and local leaders to understand our watershed and take meaningful action to preserve it. Guided by three watershed protection plans, we secured over \$16 million for our region and completed dozens of projects to reduce pollution entering our waters.

From planting buffers and restoring critical habitats to reducing stormwater runoff and speaking up for our waters, our work has led to cleaner and healthier lakes, rivers, wetlands, and shorelines. These efforts reflect not only the breadth of our science-based work, but also our long-standing commitment to protecting the health of our community and the waters that sustain it.

This progress has been made possible through deep collaboration and meaningful community engagement, which is the foundation of our approach and the reason we have been able to achieve visible, lasting impact.

As we celebrate 30 years, we look back with pride and ahead with purpose. The strength of our work has always been our people - early organizers, longtime volunteers, local advocates, and engaged community members who care deeply about this region.

Your support fuels our mission and keeps us grounded in the values we started with: connection, collaboration, and a shared responsibility for the future of our waters.

**Christine Crissman**  
TWC Executive Director

**Dick Thompson**  
Former TWC Board member

The Watershed Center gets things done - that's what I feel the real impact is. I've always been so proud of the organization and the work it does.

Their research-based work has helped shift our community's mindset - they recognize how precious clean water is to our way of life and know we need to protect it so it stays that way.





# Clean Water Advocacy

Standing up for everyone’s right to clean water

## Regulations

As advocates for clean water, we follow local issues and community developments, speak up to educate the community on water issues, and stand up for the bay when local decisions may negatively impact the health of our waters.

This year, numerous communities were interested in updating zoning ordinances to better protect our waters. We developed technical memos on pruning, riparian buffer considerations, shoreline hardening, and impervious surface limitations. We pride ourselves on being a trusted resource for communities striving to better protect the environment.

3

Comprehensive Master Plan reviews

20

Public events hosted

24

Sites of concern investigated

31

EGLE permits tracked

## Citizen Suit

In 2022, we joined Elk-Skegemog Lakes Association and the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians in a citizen suit against Burnette Foods, Inc. The suit is a result of over a decade of Burnette Foods routinely land-applying wastewater that adversely impacts water quality in the surrounding area.

In April 2024, Judge Beckering denied Burnette Foods’ Motion to Dismiss that allowed the suit to continue. We then engaged in the discovery process by reviewing and compiling evidence, participating in depositions, and securing subject-matter experts in hydrology, wastewater, and wetlands.

As the suit progresses, we will continue to pursue a resolution that will identify and ensure timely implementation of solutions that fully protect and maintain water quality.



# Adopt-A-Stream Program

22 years of volunteer stream monitoring

Adopt-A-Stream is a stream monitoring program that provides high-quality, reputable data on stream health. Volunteers survey local streams for macroinvertebrates, a meaningful way to assess stream health since macroinvertebrates have known tolerances to pollution, are easy to identify with training, and are not very mobile within a stream.

Adopt-A-Stream also helps cultivate a sense of freshwater stewardship and better understanding of water quality issues for volunteers engaged in the program.



100+

Volunteers

Volunteers are the heart of Adopt-A-Stream, always learning about the sites they monitor.

28

Stream Sites

Valuable stream data was collected at sites across the watershed.

## Results

In June and October, volunteers collected valuable macroinvertebrate and stream habitat data. This data determines stream health and identifies trends and issues at each site.

This year, 58% of the sites sampled scored good, very good, or excellent, and 42% of the sites scored fair or fairly poor. This data is compared to past years to determine potential sites of concern.





The Watershed Center Grand Traverse Bay advocates for clean water in Grand Traverse Bay and acts to protect and preserve its watershed.

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

*Acting Chair, Secretary*

Nicole VanNess

*Treasurer*

Christopher Carol

*Directors*

Isaac Avila

Kelli Mengebier

Christine Petersen

Royce Ragland

Brittany VanderBeek

## STAFF

*Executive Director*

Christine Crissman

*Program Director*

Sarah U'Ren

*Grand Traverse Bay WATERKEEPER®*

Heather Smith

*Director of Philanthropy*

Michelle Handke

## CONNECT WITH US



[gtbay.org](http://gtbay.org)



231.935.1514



[info@gtbay.org](mailto:info@gtbay.org)



[@gtbaywatershed](https://www.instagram.com/gtbaywatershed)



[@watershedcenter](https://www.facebook.com/watershedcenter)



[@gtbay.watershed](https://www.youtube.com/gtbay.watershed)



13170 S. West Bay Shore Dr., Suite 102  
Traverse City, MI 49684



**WATERKEEPER® ALLIANCE**

**MEMBER**