**THE YEAR IN REVIEW – CHAIRMAN BILL WRIGHT'S REPORT**
**TO THE PARTNERSHIP FOR THE SAGINAW BAY WATERSHED**
**AT ITS ANNUAL MEETING – MARCH 29, 2016**

A REBUILDING YEAR

If we were a sports team, the past 12 months would be called a "rebuilding year." The Partnership survived some changes in how we do business, and we forged new relationships that put us in a better position for success in the future.

In 2015, the Department of Environmental Quality announced they would administer Public Advisory Council (PAC) Support grants directly, rather than contract with the Great Lakes Commission. That impacted the Partnership's grant, because we don't havea DUNS Number, a federal requirement that was previously handled by the Great lakes Commission. We owe a huge THANK YOU to Bay County for agreeing to be the grantee, and utilize their DUNS number for our PAC Support funds!

Our 2015-16 PAC grant covered only three months' work, but the process forged new relationships with Bay County and brought our new admin services contractor, Jo Ellen Strieter on board. We're still working on these arrangements, but our 2016 PAC Support grant process should be much smoother.

"WHEN YOU COME TO A FORK IN THE ROAD, TAKE IT!" – YOGI BERRA

Whatever Yogi meant, by the time we present this report at the 2016 Annual Meeting, we'll know whether the Partnership's Board has approved two proposals to change how the Partnership does business. One calls for dropping dues for membership in this organization. The other would change how members of the Partnership's Board of Directors are selected. Both proposals will be considered at a Board meeting to be held just before the Annual Meeting on March 29, 2016. We'll report what happens in our newsletter and on our website:**psbw.org**.

"THIS FAR YOU MAY COME AND NO FARTHER. HERE IS WHERE YOUR PROUD WAVES HALT." JOB 38:11

Perhaps, past generations thought of this verse as they erected dams to harness the rivers of our watershed. They probably didn't realize that those dams also stopped many species of fish from swimming upstream to spawn. Loss of spawning habitat contributed to the collapse of Saginaw Bay's once-productive fishery, although pollution, sedimentation and over-fishing also played crucial roles. Today, many people are trying to expand natural reproduction of native fish by restoring access to upstream spawning areas.

In 2005, the Partnership released a study, titled *Enhancing Fish Passage over Low-head Barrier Dams in the Saginaw River Watershed.* It was funded by the Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network (WIN) and produced by Public Sector Consultants. The Fish Passage study found that "… considering selective dam removal in tributary streams is limited primarily by:

> Lack of understanding and knowledge on the part of dam owners and local citizens of the value and type of ecological restoration techniques now possible

Lack of public support for dam removal as a viable tool for river restoration

Lack of complete and accurate information when decisions on dam removal are made, often in an emotionally charged and divisive atmosphere.

Lack of financial resources to achieve desirable fish passage techniques, including dam removal"

Ten years later, work inspired by the Fish Passage study has overcome the noted limitations and impacted dams on several Saginaw River tributaries. Two of the three highest priority dams identified by the study have been reconstructed, the Chesaning Dam on the Shiawassee River in 2007, and the Frankenmuth Dam on the Cass River in 2015. These were replaced by "rock ramps," a series of shallow pools and short drops. The primary target species, walleye, aren't "jumpers," but they can make it up these "stair steps." Almost $4 million was spent on the two projects. Over 100 miles of upstream tributaries are now more accessible. Researchers are studying how well these ramps work to promote fish passage during spawning seasons.We can't say for sure whether removing these barriers will increase native fish populations, but such efforts have worked elsewhere.

These successful projects have spurred other dam removal work.On the Shiawassee, the City of Corunna has learned this year (2016!) that it will receive a state grant to match money from WIN for removal of a dam there. Farther upstream, the State of Michigan and Friends of the Shiawassee River are continuing a years-long effort to remove the hazardous Shiatown Dam. Work in 2012 lowered the level of the impoundment, and complete removal is projected for later in 2016.

In 2013, the City of Vassar removed what was left of a dam on the Cass River upstream from Frankenmuth. History says that Vassar was developed, because the founders selected that spot as a good place to build a dam to power mills. By 2010, that dam had become a safety hazard for people in canoes. Deteriorating dams on the Cass near Caro are being discussed for possible future projects.

Hamilton Dam on the Flint River at the University of Michigan-Flint campus also is being considered for replacement by a rock ramp. The dam is just a few steps from the building housing the Flint River Watershed Coalition's office, and could serve as great example of water resources stewardship for thousands of students who pass by it every semester. The design proposed for this site wouldcreate a destination for kayakers in the heart of our watershed's biggest community.

MEANWHILE, AROUND THE WATERSHED -

Work has continued on the dioxin cleanup in the Tittabawassee River. Planned extensions of this work will extend through the Saginaw River and into the Bay. Also, SVSU's Saginaw Bay Environmental Science Institute added to its capabilities in 2015 with development of a drone (unmanned aerial vehicle) equipped to collect water samples. Finally, several years of study on inner Saginaw Bay's rock reefs has led to proposals for restoration of these important fish spawning habitats.

We're glad to celebrate so much progress on so many fronts, and we applaud the efforts of the people who've made all this happen. Please, keep up the good work!