



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Amy LeFebre / alefeb@truscottrossman.com
(O) 616-726-7800 / (C) 616-450-4292

**GRAND RAPIDS WHITEWATER RELEASES FINDINGS OF
ECONOMIC IMPACT STUDY**

*Recreational use of restored stretch of Grand River estimated to bring
\$15.9M - \$19.1M net new annual economic impact*

Grand Rapids, Mich., (September 8, 2014) – Grand Rapids Whitewater today announced findings of the [*Economic Benefits of the Grand Rapids Whitewater Project*](#), a study focused on the potential for expanded economic activity directly related to the restoration of a 2.2 mile stretch of the Grand River through downtown Grand Rapids. The study, conducted by Anderson Economic Group and commissioned by Grand Rapids Whitewater, estimates that expanded recreational use of the river and riverfront will stimulate net new economic impact of \$15.9 million to \$19.1 million per year.

This estimate takes into consideration new and enhanced tourism associated with recreational activity such as kayaking, fishing, rafting, stand-up paddling, wading and other forms of water and riverfront recreation. The estimates comprise net new visitor spending and new earnings for the Grand Rapids workforce.

“The estimated direct economic impact associated with recreational activity, alone, is tremendous,” said Dr. Paul Isely, chair of the economics department at Grand Valley State University. Isely described the findings of the report at a riverside event this morning. “I expect the impact will be larger once you factor in the potential for new riverfront real estate development, improved land use, and business and talent attraction that come when a community enhances and maintains its natural resources and quality of life.”

In May 2013, the Grand River was added to the [Urban Waters Federal Partnership](#), and in November of last year, the full scope of the Grand River restoration concept [plan](#) was revealed, including:

- Removal of five dams between 6th and Pearl Streets to allow safe navigation of the river, restoration of the natural 18-foot drop in river elevation along a 2-mile stretch and exposure of a limestone shelf that will increase lake sturgeon and other native fish spawning habitats

-MORE-

- Re-creating the boulder strewn rapids below the 6th Street dam
- Installation of an effective sea lamprey barrier that will also allow for regulation of upstream flows and provide better river conditions for rowing events

“After being awarded the Urban Waters Federal Partnership and releasing the preliminary restoration plan last fall, commissioning the AEG study was the natural next step in moving this project forward,” explained Chris Muller, co-founder of Grand Rapids Whitewater. “We needed to demonstrate the viability of this project to our partners, members of the community, and funders. This report does that and lays the groundwork for additional economic impact studies the City is conducting in conjunction with the broader Downtown Plan and River Corridor Plan, which will focus on development on the banks of the river corridor.”

The GRWW report conservatively estimates that taxable values of riverfront properties in the immediate area could increase by \$117.7 million and the project could generate new development investment of \$285 million and 1,520 related jobs.

Acknowledging the role healthy ecosystems play in human welfare and a thriving economy, Isely and other experts endorsed the findings of the AEG report and pointed to an expanded suite of benefits other Great Lakes communities have realized as the result of investments in water restoration projects.

“The results of this study are a local reflection of what we have seen throughout the Great Lakes Region—namely, that environmental restoration is economic restoration,” said Todd Ambs, [Healing Our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition](#) campaign director and former president of the national conservation group [River Network](#). “In fact, in 2007, the Healing Our Waters Coalition collaborated with the Brookings Institution on a report finding that every \$1 invested in Great Lakes restoration produced at least \$2 in economic benefit. Since then, over 2000 projects funded by the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative have cleaned up toxic hot spots, restored habitat and provided an economic shot in the arm for hundreds of communities.”

Ambs is in town for the 10th Annual Healing Our Waters [Great Lakes Restoration Conference](#), which was founded ten years ago by Peter Wege and which returns to Grand Rapids this week.

-MORE-

Similar benefits are expected in Grand Rapids. The AEG report concludes that the restoration and enhanced aesthetics of the river and riverfront will generate additional economic benefits that are difficult to precisely quantify, including business and talent attraction and retention, enhanced quality-of-life and long-term environmental impacts. By opening the river to more and safer recreational activities, the Grand River restoration project will also help connect underserved communities to the river and to a vibrant downtown district.

“To say that the City of Grand Rapids is an enthusiastic partner in the Grand Rapids Whitewater project would be an understatement,” said Mayor George K. Heartwell, speaking to the group of business and community leaders and GRWW supporters. “As the Grand Rapids Whitewater project, the River Corridor Plan, and the Downtown Plan converge, we will be engaged in a catalytic initiative that will transform our city and our region.”

The idea of restoring the rapids to the Grand River grew out of the [Green Grand Rapids](#) Master Plan adopted by the City Commission in November 2011. This past March, the City Commission established the Grand River Restoration Steering Committee to coordinate restoration of the Grand River and riverbank development. In June of this year, the City Commission unanimously adopted a resolution supporting the efforts of Grand Rapids Whitewater to restore the historic rapids on the Grand River in downtown Grand Rapids.

The Dick and Betsy DeVos Family Foundation, the Frey Foundation, and the Wege Foundation underwrote the cost of the AEG study. Additional GRWW project funding has been generously provided by many others including Dick and Betsy DeVos Family Foundation, Downtown Grand Rapids Inc., the Dyer-Ives Foundation, Founders Brewing Company, the Frey Foundation, Grand Valley Metro Council, Healing our Waters-Great Lakes Coalition, the VanderWeide Family Foundation, and the Wege Foundation.

###

[Grand Rapids Whitewater](#) is a 501c3 organization with a goal to restore the rapids in the Grand River.