

# Harnessing April Showers

by Bri Kilroy • photography by Two Eagles Marcus

**A**s American culture shifted from the materialism of the 1950s' to the modern environmental movement, the West Michigan Environmental Action Council (WMEAC) took part in the cascade of activism focused on water pollution. This was long before qualities like “sustainable,” “all-natural” and “zero waste” were drawing consumers to shops, restaurants and events in the Grand Rapids area; in 1968, WMEAC came to life with a mission to educate and lead citizens to protect natural resources, strongly focusing on protecting our water.

While a handful of us have made recent changes to make environmentally-friendly adjustments, WMEAC's Water Programs Outreach Coordinator, Ondrea Spychalski, grew up doing many of the current green-trending practices.

“I grew up on a farm,” says Spychalski. “My parents were always gardening, composting and recycling. I realized at a young age the importance of the natural world.”

Water is one of the most important natural resources we can credit for the quality and existence of life, and Spychalski strongly connects with WMEAC's focus on water protection since her internship with them in 2013. Now part of the passionate staff, she serves as the go-to water woman, coordinating the water programs that show individuals their power to protect the world's water and Michigan's Great Lakes.

“Water” you waiting for? Check out some of the programs you can spring into immediately for a fresher, greener life.

## Rain Barrel Workshops

WMEAC provides low-cost Rain Barrel Workshops that send families and individuals home with their very own rain barrel created in the workshop. With hundreds of 55-gallon rain barrels donated by Michigan's DeWitt Barrels, the workshops include everything participants need for set up along with education on the importance of managing the storm water that runs off their roof.

April showers bring May flowers, but rain from the streets collects all the debris. That river of litter drains to our sewer systems and into the Great Lakes that in turn flow back into our streams and rivers. Rain gathered in a rain barrel reduces that inconvenient truth and is a free water supply that can be reused to water your grass, garden and other plants, freely soaking into the soil and being absorbed by Mother Nature just the way she likes it.

Sign up for a workshop at various locations at [www.WMEAC.org/RainBarrels](http://www.WMEAC.org/RainBarrels):

- April 4 at Flowerland on Alpine, 1-2 p.m.
- April 7 at Schmozh Brewing Company, 6-7 p.m.



WMEAC's staff is passionate about the environment and reducing waste of all kind.

- April 11 at Flowerland in Kentwood, 1-2 p.m.
- April 18 at Kent District Library (Wyoming Branch), 10:30-11:30 a.m.
- April 22 at Weesies Brothers Garden Center & Landscaping, 6-7 p.m.
- April 28 at Schmozh Brewing Company, 6-7 p.m.

## Teach for the Watershed (T4W)

A watershed is an area of land where all of the water below drains to the same place. T4W is an interactive education program providing teachers with education training and students with the tools needed to learn actively about and protect the water in their community.

Participants range from interested individuals to a full class of students. Classes include information on water usage, storm water management practices and watershed biology, and participants observe how macroinvertebrates and other animals indicate water quality. Then, those in the program use their new nature-nurturing intelligence to adopt a local stream or river, monitor its activity through measurements and documentation and practice adoptive parental protection by identifying and removing species that may be harmful to the water. That means you, pollutants!

## West Michigan Water Trails

WMEAC is working to bring more education and recreation to the Michigan Great Lakes Water Trails, which are waterway routes that encourage non-

motorized water sports and geotourism. Along with sustaining and enhancing the geographical character of the natural surroundings, the water trail initiative wants to expand and provide more safe access to waterways with routes that include lodging and camping locations, restaurants, convenience stores and other community businesses.

You may have already floated through some of Michigan's established water trails (like the 41-mile Grand River Heritage Water Trail or the Lake Michigan Water Trail West) and experienced the both physical, mindful and educational benefits of these liquid paths. Visit WMEAC's website to learn more about the Water Trail Initiative and visit [www.MichiganWaterTrails.org](http://www.MichiganWaterTrails.org) to discover even more water trails that will take you on a salubrious journey through the greatest inspirations of the Pure Michigan campaign.

These are only a few of the water programs WMEAC provides to further Grand Rapids' status as a bouncer to water pollutants. Other programs include rain garden education, storm water management and 15 to the River, an informational session educating the community on the importance of navigating rain to drain into the ground.



Bri Kilroy is a Grand Valley and AmeriCorps alumni who learned to type through vigorous Mavis Beacon trainings. She also passes as an artist, illustrator and author of this bio.