

Elk Rapids wants to help its shoreline through new state Climate Corps program



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On the water a short trip from the Elk Rapids harbor during an electric boat demonstration. Aug. 24, 2023. (Photo: Izzy Ross/IPR News)

Michigan is working with communities and organizations to tackle climate change by funding new staff positions.

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Elk Rapids is surrounded by water.

“Elk Lake, Elk River, East Bay,” Village Manager John Matthews said, listing them off. “We have Bass Lake as well, Birch Lake. So we have a considerable amount of shoreline both on lakefronts and along the river edges.”

To protect and restore all that, Elk Rapids is [hiring](#) a shoreline management coordinator through a new state program, [MI Healthy Climate Corps](#).

The program aims to help fulfill Michigan's [climate plan](#) to cut greenhouse gas emissions and transition to a carbon-neutral economy by 2050. It's an initiative by the Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy's [Office of Climate and Energy](#), which partnered with the [Michigan Community Service Commission](#).

The state is working with communities and organizations to hire 30 AmeriCorps members who will be involved in projects to address climate change and environmental issues.

Along with Elk Rapids, [several other entities](#) have Climate Corps positions in northern Michigan and the Upper Peninsula, including the Antrim Conservation District in Bellaire, East Bay Charter Township near Traverse City, and organizations such as Michigan Energy Options and SEEDS Ecology and Education Centers.

Participating in the Climate Corps is the latest in a long line of environmental efforts in Elk Rapids.

“We have observed for quite some time that the [Elk] river really needs attention,” said Royce Ragland, who has worked with a number of environmental organizations in the region over the years. “Because it's one of the most treasured elements in the Village of Elk Rapids, we've watched it a lot.”

Ragland chairs [Green Elk Rapids](#), a committee of volunteers she helped found in 2009 that aims to raise awareness about the environment and promote stewardship.

The village commissioned the Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council to [assess](#) its shoreline in 2022, and it created a shoreline committee as a result.

Ragland hopes Elk Rapids can use its new coordinator position to build on efforts already underway, and that other communities follow suit.

The Climate Corps initiative will provide its first-round members with \$24,640 stipends over the course of eight months. They will receive “education awards” of more than \$5,100 at the end of the program to put toward loans or use for future education expenses. The corps’ second cohort will start in September and work for 11 months.

“We love our beaches. We – the people in this community – welcome visitors with open arms, we want to share the blessings that we have.”

John Matthews

Elk Rapids village manager

The program has \$2.6 million in federal and state [funding](#) over two years.

Cory Connolly, who leads the state Office of Climate and Energy, said the Climate Corps will help the state move toward its climate goals by having people working with others on the ground.

“It’s not simply going to be a program about specific work projects, but also about organizing and supporting community building and networking around building a robust climate infrastructure and movement across the state of Michigan,” Connolly said.

That focus on building relationships stood out to Matthews, the Elk Rapids village manager. He thinks it will be a good opportunity for those interested in learning more about community environmental work; the position will support initiatives from Green Elk Rapids and the village.

“They’re getting behind what the council has also deemed critically important,” he said.

Part of why Elk Rapids is participating in the program, Matthews said, is that it

“This is not something that anyone that lives here takes for granted,” he said. “We love our beaches. We – the people in this community – welcome visitors with open arms, we want to share the blessings that we have.”

The deadline to apply for the Elk Rapids position is Jan. 21.

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