

**The Watershed Center Grand Traverse Bay
Antrim County Annual Report
FY 2018-2019**



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Adopt-A-Stream

- The Watershed Center continued our volunteer stream monitoring program that includes sampling several locations along the Rapid River, which are in fair to good condition (www.gtbay.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/2018-Adopt-A-Stream-Annual-Report.pdf).
- We also trained stream monitoring volunteers of Grass River Natural Area that monitor several sites along Grass River and its tributaries.

Elk River Chain of Lakes Watershed Coordinator

- The Watershed Center, Torch Conservation Center, Torch Lake Protection Alliance, Three Lakes Association, and Antrim Conservation District completed the Dole Family Foundation grant that supported a National Lake Assessment on Torch Lake, compiling and digitizing monitoring data for Torch Lake, creating a field station at the Antrim Conservation District with equipment to borrow for monitoring purposes, and a public presentation about utilizing the monitoring data.
- That effort sparked a larger conversation about the need for better coordinated projects and communication between lake associations, organizations, and engaged citizens concerning water quality in the ERCOL.
- The Watershed Center began to explore the feasibility of an initiative to enhance our focus on protecting and advocating for water quality throughout the entire ERCOL.
- Currently, The Watershed Center is reaching out to lake associations and organizations in the ERCOL to discuss this initiative and better understand how this might help further their efforts, with the goal of achieving support from as many groups as possible.
- At the same time, The Watershed Center is undergoing fundraising efforts to financially support this position for at least the first three years.
- If the necessary financial and collaborative support can be achieved, this position would begin early 2020.

Elk River Chain of Lakes Watershed Plan Implementation Team (ERCOL-WPIT)

- The Watershed Center has co-facilitated these bi-monthly meetings with Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council since November 2010.
- Collectively, this collaboration of lake associations, nonprofit organizations, local and state government, and interested citizens was formed to implement projects pertaining to the Elk River Chain of Lakes (ERCOL) in the Grand Traverse Bay Watershed Protection Plan (www.gtbay.org/resources/watershed-protection-plan).
- This last year, group initiatives included:
 - Arctic grayling: a subcommittee submitted river systems in the ERCOL as potential sites for grayling stocking, but none were chosen at this time by the statewide effort (www.migrayling.org). A local organization did form to solicit donations to help get project needs funded and make stocking potential a reality (www.rewildmichigan.org).

- Golden Brown Algae: several lake associations continued to work with Michigan State University and others to study the cause of golden brown algae blooms in the ERCOL. Three Lakes Association recently published reports on sampling efforts in 2016, 2017, and 2018 (<http://3lakes.com/golden-brown-benthic-algae-project>).
- Swimmer's itch: Elk-Skegemog Lakes Association conducted a comprehensive swimmer's itch study (<https://elk-skegemog.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/ESLA-Final-Report-CARI-2018.pdf>), and this summer Intermediate, Clam, and Torch lakes will do the same (www.misip.org). Lake Associations in the ERCOL are working to learn more about mitigation efforts, including trapping and transferring common mergansers outside of the affected areas (www.michigan.gov/documents/dnr/01WCO2018_Merganser_Control_Permit_and_Regulations_611735_7.pdf).
- Water trail: Paddle Antrim became one of the first state-designated water trails (www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-350-79133_79206_83617-485656--,00.html). They are currently working on designing and installing educational and wayfinding signs throughout the water trail. ERCOL-WPIT is supporting their efforts through outreach, presentations, content for signs, letters of support, etc. (www.paddleantrim.com/water-trail).
- The ERCOL-WPIT Lake Level Subcommittee formed to address lake levels throughout the ERCOL in response to flooding and property damage. The committee, along with Antrim County Drain Commissioner Mark Stone, is spearheading an initiative to obtain a hydrologic and hydraulic study of the entire ERCOL. Currently, they are working with both independent contractors and the Army Corps of Engineers to decide the best path to conduct and fund the study.
- The ERCOL-WPIT Septic Subcommittee continued to focus on septic issues in the ERCOL. In particular, they addressed the introduced statewide septic code by responding to various versions and advocating for further input from Health Departments before adoption. Currently, the statewide legislation is dormant so the subcommittee intends to refocus on local priorities.

Elk River Chain of Lakes Watershed Protection Plan

- The Watershed Center continues to work with Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council to finalize priority areas, tasks, monitoring plans, and the information and education strategy to complete the Elk River Chain of Lakes Watershed Protection Plan.
- A draft of the plan should be available this summer for review and comment.

Elk Rapids Community Visioning

- The Watershed Center worked with staff from the Village of Elk Rapids to have a consultant provide a community visioning session focused on green infrastructure as part of a collaborative project led by Lawrence Technological University and funded by Michigan Sea Grant. Similar sessions were held in various communities throughout Michigan and acted as a planning tool that enabled residents, business owners, and other stakeholders to have a voice in the decision-making process about green infrastructure in their communities.

- This session included design exercises that focused on community assets, barriers, and connectivity, as well as graphical renderings and illustrative site plans of potential green infrastructure locations in various community spaces.
- As a result of this session, The Watershed Center is in the application process for a more than \$200,000 grant to install green infrastructure within the village. The two sites chosen for this project were included in the graphical renderings shown at the community visioning session and were very well received by village officials and the community.

Grand Traverse Bay Watershed Protection Plan Update

- The Watershed Center continued updating the Grand Traverse Bay Watershed Protection Plan, which focuses on coastal areas and smaller tributaries. The original plan approved in 2005 requires updating to reflect what has been accomplished, identify/update priorities for the next ten years, and outline new watershed protection goals.
- The Watershed Center held three *Community Conversations* last summer and conducted an online survey to gather input from community members and learn how people value the watershed and what their priorities are for protection and restoration.
- The project Steering Committee met on three occasions to discuss various aspects of the plan update process, as well as revisions to watershed goals and objectives. Steering Committee members include representatives from local governments, environmental nonprofits, federal/state entities, as well as others.
- The Watershed Center continued collecting and analyzing water quality and ecological monitoring data to inform the updated plan.
- A draft of the updated plan will be available by the end of the calendar year.

Outreach

- The Watershed Center gave numerous educational presentations to local groups (garden clubs, lake associations, realtor groups, etc.) and jurisdictions (planning commissions, trustees, etc.), as well as participated in several community events/festivals.
- We responded to water quality concerns from numerous citizens, business owners, and other organizations.
- We continued to monitor jurisdictions and permit applications for projects with the potential to impact water quality.
- We worked with several township, village, and county staff and elected officials to adopt or enhance ordinances, master plans, and other guiding documents that protect water quality (stormwater ordinances, setback/buffer ordinances, parks and recreation master plans, etc.).