



The Watershed Council's monitoring programs coordinator, Caroline Keson, brainstorming signage ideas for the forthcoming fishing piers on the Cheboygan River. PROVIDED BY TIP OF THE MITT

## Tip of the Mitt: Watershed council projects making a dent in Cheboygan's water quality issues

Your Turn

Caroline Keson

Guest columnist

CDT 3-2-22

Nearly four years in the making, a new fishing access is finally coming to fruition. In 2018, the City of Cheboygan reached out to Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council, looking for assistance in improving Major City Park.

Erosion along the Cheboygan River was something we could tackle; fishing platforms turned out to be the answer, as they keep foot traffic to a minimum and preserve river banks. Erosion can cover fish spawning habitat and carry excess nutrients into rivers and lakes. Cue three successful grant applications, a slew of public meetings, a sprinkling of media coverage, a zillion phone calls, and now we're here, on the eve of construction. It's a perfect time for reflection.

Since the beginning of this project, we've seen Cheboygan shine brighter and brighter. The downtown is filled with new businesses, the Children's Trail became a serious attraction, and new art is popping up. The uptick in activity has been going on for a while, but over the last few years, the Watershed Council has participated. We've helped direct additional private and state grants towards Cheboygan to help with water pollution. We're happy to have a few more projects that are contributing to the community and counting on them leading to more investment in water resources in the area.

It's clear that the improvements in Cheboygan are led (and fueled) by many hands. The fishing access project in particular is propelled by quite a few partners. One major player is the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, who leased the land to the city. A signage workgroup, consisting of the U.S. Geologi-

cal Survey, Cheboygan Downtown Development Authority, and Children's Trail volunteers Dale and Connie Rieger, has been focused on providing educational amenities to the access.

Along the way, landscape architect firm Sanders & Czapski Associates have lent their expertise in designing and carrying out recreational projects. The latest grants from the Great Lakes Fishery Trust's Access to the Great Lakes Fishery and Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund total over \$600,000 for construction. Looking ahead, two of the seven fishing platforms will be completed in 2022. It will be a nice complement to the existing Children's Trail, and you can look for us at a Free Fishing Weekend event there on June 11.

We are aiming to build off of our stormwater monitoring from 2020 through a few different pathways. First, we will have a draft plan identifying pollution sources along the Cheboygan River, Lower Black River, and Mullett Lake watersheds by the end of 2022. We're also looking further upstream at tributaries around Black Lake. This big picture look helps us assign priority and context to future projects. Second, we hope to bring engineering expertise to Cheboygan's stormwater issues.

Green stormwater infrastructure techniques, which mimic nature and focus on slowing down, spreading out, and soaking in stormwater, may be just what Cheboygan waterways need. Lastly, we are pursuing additional water quality monitoring through volunteers and encouraging the state of Michigan to take a second look at certain waterways.

If the last few years is any indication, more progress is in store for Cheboygan. We'll see you out there.

*Caroline Keson is the monitoring programs coordinator for Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council.*