



FALL 2023

# Current Reflections

A publication to inform and educate about the importance of protecting our lakes, streams, wetlands, and groundwater.



## BUGS! BUGS! BUGS!

AT THE WATERSHED COUNCIL

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## WATERSHED COUNCIL STAFF

**Kim Baker**

INTERIM MANAGER

**Kory Alaniz**

OPERATIONS SPECIALIST

**Eli Baker**

EDUCATION MANAGER

**Calla Beers**

WATER RESOURCES &  
COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST

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FINANCE DIRECTOR

**Lauren Dey**

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

**Andrea Coronado**

COMMUNICATIONS &  
DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

**Marcella Domka**

WATER RESOURCES MANAGER

**Noah Jansen**

RESTORATION MANAGER

**Emily Johnson**

WATER RESOURCES SPECIALIST

**Anna McGlashen**

LOCAL POLICY MANAGER

**Jennifer McKay**

CHIEF POLICY & GOVERNMENT  
AFFAIRS DIRECTOR

**Natalie Walts**

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**Anna Watson**

WATER RESOURCES SPECIALIST

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## ON THE COVER

2023 Watershed Council  
Intern, Indira Sankaran

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- 📍 426 Bay St, Petoskey, MI 49770
- 🕒 Monday - Friday 8:30 a.m.- 5 p.m.
- 📞 (231) 347-1181
- ✉️ [info@watershedcouncil.org](mailto:info@watershedcouncil.org)
- 🌐 [watershedcouncil.org](http://watershedcouncil.org)

# Reflections



We live in a caring community—a community where individuals and family foundations, businesses, community foundations, and service groups

like Rotary and Kiwanis step up to the plate with tremendous support for those in need. I think of the significant work of the Women's Resource Center committed to the well-being of women, Challenge Mountain for individuals living with disabilities, Manna Food Project for the food insecure, and Nehemiah Project for those in homeless situations here in Northern Michigan.

Over the past six months at the Watershed Council, I've learned that our caring community extends well beyond our neighbors in need—it extends to our lakes, our rivers, and our streams. Your ongoing financial support of our organization, your local lake association, and those who care for our streams, rivers, and wetlands helps to sustain our life and our way of life. So, thank you very much.

One of the ways you can make a lasting difference is to consider a planned gift to the Watershed Council. There are many ways to do so. One thoughtful way is a simple bequest in your will. Whether it's a designated amount or a small percentage, it will be used wisely to further our mission so future generations can enjoy the waterways we all cherish.

Two special individuals chose to do just that. One was Ruth Tucker Ayers Harris, a 38-year-member of the Watershed Council, who died on December 27, 2021. The other was Michael Thain Cameron, a 32-year member, who died on March 12 of this year.

Ruth learned the importance of hard work, watching her mother raise two daughters during the Depression years when dad died too young. A graduate in art history from Wellesley College with a masters in social work from Catholic University of America, Ruth worked for U.S. Senator Jacob Javits in Washington, DC after college. There she met Jack, her husband of 57 years. Together, they raised three sons.

As a watercolor artist and conservationist, Ruth loved nature—everything about it. She enjoyed bird watching and woodland hikes until the last weeks of her life. She gave Northern Michigan a nature preserve in her family's name for all to explore for years to come. Her gift to the Watershed Council will help ensure the future health of our waterways.

Michael was a Detroitier and had a degree in business and political science from Miami University in Ohio. He spent his 38-year career with General Motors, which helped feed his love for cars. Upon retirement, Mike and Martha, the love of his life, moved to Menomqua Beach Association in Harbor Springs where they enjoyed everything outdoors, year round. Martha became a valued member of the Watershed Council's board.

A sailor, fly fisher, kayaker, biker, hiker, and skier, Michael invested his spare time and energy with the Little Traverse Conservancy, serving on its board. The Watershed Council is grateful for his generous gift to support our mission.

*For information on planned giving options, contact [Andrea Coronado, Watershed Council Communications and Development Director](mailto:acoronado@watershedcouncil.org), at 231.347.1181 ext. 1115 or [acoronado@watershedcouncil.org](mailto:acoronado@watershedcouncil.org).*

**Kim Baker**  
Interim Manager

## DIVE INTO THE FASCINATING WORLD OF WATERSHEDS WITH OUR "WATERSHEDS AT WORK" PODCAST!



Join host Kory Alaniz as he dives into the intricate workings of watersheds, shedding light on crucial environmental issues through thought-provoking discussions, and tackling subjects that matter—like watershed management, water quality, wildlife preservation, and many more.

**Listen on Spotify or find them on our website!**

MEMBERS OF:





# FOSTERING THE NEXT GENERATION OF WATER STEWARDS

The Watershed Council teamed up with the Mi-STEM Networks Northeast Michigan Region for a two-day water resources camp, where students in the Cheboygan-Otsego-Presque Isle Educational Service District had the chance to explore STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) careers with Northern Michigan professionals.

Watershed Council staff introduced students to careers in water resources with hands-on field work and classroom instruction. Students learned about watersheds and pollution using our watershed model before being introduced to testing equipment and methods to monitor water quality.

Students put what they learned into practice at Ocqueoc Falls, working together to test the water chemistry of the river, collect aquatic macroinvertebrates (insects) from the stream, and discuss their importance as indicators of water quality. As one student

learned, *"You have to be comfortable around creepy bugs."*

Thanks to a two-year grant from the Great Lakes Fishery Trust, our Watershed Academy will increase awareness and understanding of water resources in Northern Michigan by engaging more students from area high schools in meaningful explorations of their local watersheds. These experiences equip participants with the tools and knowledge to become effective stewards of natural resources through place-based stream monitoring experiences.

With support from the Great Lakes Fishery Trust, local partners, and generous donors, the Watershed Council will continue to foster Northern Michigan millennial stewards and make the program available throughout northern Michigan.

**Eli Baker**  
Education Manager

“ I LOVED THIS CAMP! I LIKED WEARING WADERS AND EXPLORING THE FALLS. I LOVED THE CRAYFISH! ”

**WATER RESOURCES  
CAMP STUDENT**



## WATERSHED COUNCIL INTERNS SAY THANKS



“My internship experience with Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council exceeded my expectations in every way. I am deeply appreciative of the support and contributions from Watershed Council volunteers, donors, board members, and staff that made this transformative experience possible. I would also like to express my special gratitude to Bill Weiss for generously funding my internship.

During my internship, I gained experience in fieldwork, writing, public presentations, computer proficiency, research, and more. Each day presented a new adventure, whether it was instructing middle school students on the use of a Secchi Disk or conducting shoreline surveys of Lake Michigan to monitor the growth of the Phragmites.

I know that this experience is something I'll never forget, I will take the skills I've learned here with me and continue to protect the environment for the rest of my career and beyond.”

**Kai Garcia**



“Arriving in Northern Michigan, I was both nervous and excited to start my internship. Three months later, I have gathered memories, friends, and life-time experiences. From conducting vegetation surveys, boat-washing, native plant identification, and stream and lake monitoring, I dipped my toes into everything the Watershed Council had to offer.

What I'll remember most is connecting with the community. Being a part of the annual Students Experience Lake Charlevoix, I was able to teach hundreds of 6th graders from Charlevoix County schools about water resources and science—on a ferry!

Thank you Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council for this experience.”

**Indira Sankaran**

# CLEAN WATERS CHALLENGE 2023

This summer, we joined forces with MiCorps and the City of Cheboygan to orchestrate a cleanup along the picturesque Cheboygan River. Dedicated volunteers rolled up their sleeves and scoured the areas near Lake Michigan, the fishing piers, and the dam. Their efforts yielded remarkable results, with more than 1,600 pieces of trash collected, totaling a weight of 180 lbs! Noteworthy discoveries included a tire filled with zebra mussels and even a signpost.



Not only did the Cheboygan River get a cleaning, volunteers across our service area joined forces to clean up sections of their favorite lake, river, or stream for the chance to win prizes from our sponsor Bearcub Outfitters.



## KEEPING OUR BOATS CLEAN AND OUR WATERS PRISTINE

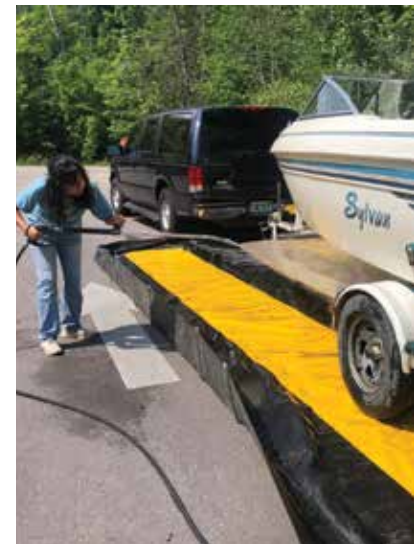
Northern Michigan boasts a magnetic allure during the summer, thanks to its temperate climate and expansive, unspoiled lakes that beckon boaters, kayakers, and paddlers from across the Midwest. However, the region's popularity among water enthusiasts brings with it the looming threat of aquatic invasive species (AIS). In response, our Mobile Boat Washing (MOBO) program has entered its third year of operation, making significant strides in raising awareness about AIS prevention among the community.

Armed with a high-pressure, high-temperature power washer capable of heating water to 140 degrees, the MOBO team could be found preventing the spread of aquatic invasive species at various lakes, offering boat cleaning, informative sessions, and hands-on demonstrations.

We're seeing positive results from our outreach and education campaigns, but our work is far from finished. Invasive species continually threaten our lakes. Among these invaders are aquatic plants capable of forming dense mats of vegetation, leading to the destruction of fish habitats, decreased property values, hindered angling, and obstructed boating opportunities. Plants aren't the only concern, the New Zealand mudsnail population is disrupting the food chain, endangering native species.

To minimize the risk of AIS spreading via watercraft arriving from other areas, remember the mantra "Clean. Drain. Dry."

**Kory Alaniz**  
*Operations Specialist*



### MOBILE BOAT WASHING IN 2023



13  
LAKES



2  
RIVERS



34  
EVENTS



18  
BOAT  
LAUNCHES



160  
VOLUNTEER  
HOURS



1,071  
BOATERS  
EDUCATED



251  
BOATS  
CLEANED



- AU SABLE RIVER
- BLACK LAKE
- BURT LAKE
- CHEBOYGAN RIVER
- DOUGLAS LAKE
- ELK LAKE
- ELLSWORTH LAKE
- LAKE CHARLEVOIX
- LAKE MICHIGAN
- LAKE SKEGEMOG
- MULLETT LAKE
- TORCH LAKE
- WALLOON LAKE



Made possible by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Michigan Invasive Species Grant Program and the U.S. Forest Service.



A COMMUNITY EFFORT  
ESTABLISHES A NEW

# RAIN GARDEN TO PROTECT LITTLE TRAVERSE BAY

Over the last several months, staff from Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council, the Harbor Springs Department of Public Works, and community volunteers worked together to clear a space in Harbor Spring's Ottawa Stadium parking lot for the site of a new rain garden.

Led by Watershed Council Restoration Manager Noah Jansen, the final touches were completed in September as pollinators—bees, butterflies, and other native insects—buzzed overhead impatiently waiting to move into their new home. Staff and volunteers planted nearly 1,000 native plants that will not only benefit local wildlife, but will also help filter stormwater runoff before it reaches Little Traverse Bay and the surrounding watershed.

Layers of aggregate, soil, stone, and mulch will support native plant species with deep roots, allowing water to soak into the ground and spread out after heavy rains, slowing it down before the excess runs into waterways.

The rain garden will capture runoff from stormwater that would normally flow into the bay, taking along with it vehicle oils, fertilizers, pesticides, debris, and anything else it picks up along the way. Now those pollutants will be filtered out by the rain garden before they reach our waters.

This project was completed in partnership with the City of Harbor Springs, Petoskey-Harbor Springs Area Community Foundation, and The Baiardi Family Foundation.



Interested in creating your own rain garden at home?  
Check out our how-to guide for homeowners!

SCAN THE QR CODE TO DOWNLOAD A FREE COPY!



In 2023, nearly 30 new volunteers received hands-on training in stream monitoring.

## VOLUNTEER STREAM MONITORING PROGRAM

**BUGS!** They're creepy, they're crawly, and they help us understand the health of each stream we monitor.



Each summer and fall, volunteer stream monitors pull on their waders, grab their nets, and collect vials of specimens from more than 20 streams in Northern Michigan for analysis.

Certain aquatic macroinvertebrates, which are insects in their nymph or larval stages, are sensitive to pollution, while others are more tolerant. We identify and count the number of each macroinvertebrate species we find from the samples collected. If the sensitive species are plentiful, we can



determine that the stream is of good water quality and is not affected by large pollutant loads.



*Interested in volunteering? Contact Anna Watson, Water Resource Specialist, at [awatson@watershedcouncil.org](mailto:awatson@watershedcouncil.org) for information on the next training session.*

Photos by Bill Howard

# WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN FOR YOUR WATERSHED?

## MICHIGAN COULD BECOME THE 50TH STATE TO ADOPT A STATEWIDE SEPTIC CODE

In Michigan, 35 percent of residents rely on septic systems—higher than the 20 percent national average. This means there are between 1.3 and 1.4 million on-site septic systems throughout the state, and each system generates an average of 300-400 gallons of sewage daily. That means on-site systems in Michigan must treat and dispose of more than 455 million gallons of wastewater each day. But at least a third of these septic systems are not working properly, leaking billions of gallons of human waste onto our properties, into our lakes and streams, and into our drinking water.

This is because Michigan is the only state in the nation that lacks a statewide septic code, which sets minimum standards for construction, operation, and maintenance. Legislation led by Rep. Phil Skaggs (D-East Grand Rapids) in the Michigan House would change that.

House Bills 4479 and 4480 would make it so all septic systems are periodically inspected and, if failing, fixed. Additionally, a database on inspections would be created, an inspector certification system would be developed, and a technical advisory committee on onsite wastewater treatment would be created to advise the Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE) on recommended standards for the management of septic systems.

Rep. Skaggs' has been holding a thorough vetting process for stakeholders to ensure concerns are addressed before the bills head to the Michigan House Committee on Natural Resources, Environment, Tourism, and Outdoor Recreation. The Watershed Council has been heavily engaged with that process, providing specific language and suggestions to get the strongest statewide septic code possible.

Stay tuned for updates, as we will be calling upon all of you to reach out to your state Representative and Senator once these bills are up for a vote.

## REGULATING THE REGULATORS NO MORE

Michigan agencies like the EGLE and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources once again have the freedom to protect our lakes, streams, and rivers by setting stricter regulations than the federal government. Gov. Gretchen Whitmer signed legislation repealing the state's "no stricter than federal" law, passed at the end of Gov. Rick Snyder's tenure.

The "no stricter than federal" law prohibited state agencies from making rules stricter than federal standards unless they established "that there was a clear and convincing need to exceed the federal standard." The "clear and convincing evidence" standard that currently exists is considered the second-highest standard in any legal setting, just behind the criminal conviction standard of "beyond a reasonable doubt."

Federal regulations are intended to be the lowest standard that states must meet—the floor that states cannot go below. Michigan has in numerous instances justifiably, and with benefits for all residents, gone above and beyond the federal minimum.

In 1976, Governor Milliken issued a rule that limited the amount of phosphorus flowing into Lake Erie at a time when algae blooms threatened the survival of the lake and the legislature was taking no action. His requirements were stricter than existing federal standards, and they are credited with saving the lake.

In the wake of the Flint crisis, Michigan adopted tighter rules on lead and copper in water. These changes make Michigan's standards for eliminating lead not only tougher than any other state, but the

regulations are more stringent than federal standards.

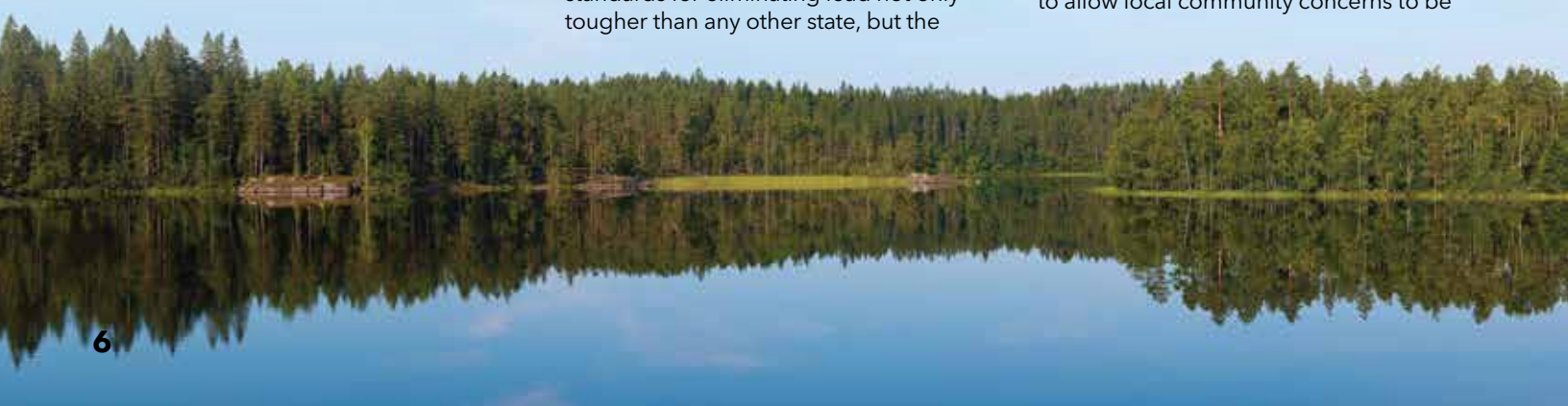
Frustrated with the federal inaction as Michigan endured a PFAS contamination crisis, state officials in 2020 enacted their own drinking water standards. At the time, they were among the nation's strictest.

With the repeal, state agencies once again have the flexibility they need to develop a regulatory structure that fits Michigan's unique natural resources rather than defer critical decisions about the protection of our natural resources and public health to the federal government.

## CONTROL OF GRAVEL MINES TAKES CENTER STAGE IN LANSING

A long-running battle between the gravel industry and local residents over mining operations was reignited with the introduction of legislation that would transfer permitting and oversight of sand and gravel mines from local governments to the state. Under Senate Bills 429-431, the permitting process would be completely removed from the local level and instead shifted to the EGLE—a state takeover of local regulation, eliminating local input from the individuals closest to—and most impacted by—the mining operations.

Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council has a long history of working collaboratively with local units of government and mining companies to identify ways in which companies can effectively mine for aggregates while protecting water resources and the local community. While the bills introduced prescribe a number of requirements that sand and gravel mining companies must meet, it fails to allow for local governments or EGLE, to address all of the concerns that come with mining operations, such as invasive species management. In addition, it fails to allow local community concerns to be



adequately addressed, such as requiring the testing of nearby drinking water wells or increasing setbacks. Provisions are not included to allow for modifications and conditions to be made to permits based upon feedback provided during the public comment period.

Based on the Watershed Council's history and experience, it is far better to engage in productive, proactive dialogue with community members, mining operators, and local units of government to find a solution that serves not only the needs of the gravel or sand operation, but also protects the welfare, character, and environment of the local community. This can only happen when local government, on behalf of those directly affected, is involved and retains control over the process.

Action on the bills was paused due to pushback, but we fully expect the fight for control to reemerge. We stand ready to protect our local water resources and the rights of local government to protect its citizens, character, and the environment.

## A VISION FOR LAKE CHARLEVOIX: DEDICATION TO SHORELINE PROTECTION

During the convergence of recent high water levels peaking in 2020 and ongoing development pressure, Lake Charlevoix experienced a significant increase in shoreline hardening. Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council, in partnership with the Lake Charlevoix Association (LCA) and the Land Information Access Association (LIAA), worked to reinvigorate the commitment local governments have made to the protection of the Lake Charlevoix Watershed and develop recommendations for a forward-looking approach that allows the communities to lead the development process based upon a vision for the future rather than simply react to it.

The communities surrounding Lake Charlevoix have a long history of working together to actively protect water quality, but ever-changing conditions such as recent record-high water levels, the rise of remote work due to the COVID-19 pandemic, accelerating development pressures, and even turnover of elected and appointed officials in local governments and commissions can put communities in a reactionary state instead of on a proactive path toward desired goals.

The Watershed Council, LCA, and LIAA met with municipalities around the lake to obtain feedback on how communities around the lake envision protecting and preserving Lake Charlevoix for the future. The sessions were intended to build toward a common future vision for the lake, listen to the challenges that each jurisdiction faces in managing its shoreline, and highlight available tools and strategies that can support each jurisdiction in realizing its vision for a protected and preserved Lake Charlevoix.

A final report was developed with recommendations to achieve the long-term protection of Lake Charlevoix for future generations.

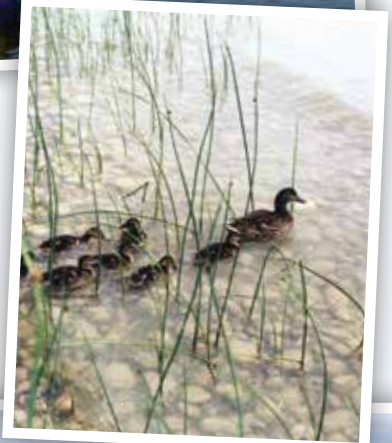
*The report is available at [lakecharlevoixprotection.org](https://lakecharlevoixprotection.org) and will be shared directly with all municipalities around the lake.*



Funding for this project was generously provided by the Charlevoix County Community Foundation, Lake Charlevoix Association, and Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council.

**Jennifer McKay**

*Chief Policy and Government Affairs Director*





426 Bay Street  
Petoskey, MI 49770

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## 2023 ANNUAL ICE BREAKER WINTER LECTURE SERIES!

Join us on select Thursdays from noon to 1 p.m. for our free online winter lecture series. Heat up your winter afternoons with warm conversations on hot topics you care about most, including harmful algal blooms, PFAS, the return of the beaver population in Northern Michigan, wetlands, how climate change is impacting our local water resources, and more.

### Save the dates!

JANUARY 11  
JANUARY 25  
FEBRUARY 8  
FEBRUARY 22  
MARCH 14  
MARCH 28