

Community partnerships protect Michigan's water

The following guest commentary was written by Jennifer DeMoss, communications director of the Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council.

One secret to the Watershed Council's success is our fruitful community partnerships. In this month's column, we're going to feature a few of our partners who are working to safeguard water resources for generations to come.

Mark Heydlauff is the Charlevoix city manager. He's part of the Lake Charlevoix Watershed Advisory Committee, a partnership among local organizations, conservancies, governmental agencies and citizens dedicated to protecting the Lake Charlevoix Watershed by reducing nonpoint source pollution (the kind that comes from diverse sources, not just a single pipe, for example). Tom Cannon is the city administrator for East Jordan, and also part of the Lake Charlevoix Watershed Advisory Committee. Along with the Watershed Council and numerous other partners, they've been working on green stormwater infrastructure solutions for stormwater pollution in their cities.

Here at the Watershed Council, green stormwater infrastructure is a pretty important topic. Green stormwater infrastructure consists of techniques to reduce the amount of stormwater that flows into bodies of water by diverting it into the ground. This can prevent stormwater from

carrying pollutants into places like Lake Charlevoix and its surrounding tributaries.

"What we're working on is how we can design that infrastructure in a way that's minimally detrimental to quality of lakes, with the goal of keeping Lake Charlevoix and watershed clean and vibrant for folks out on the water and wildlife," said Heydlauff.

This year, Cannon and Heydlauff have partnered with the Watershed Council on proposed green stormwater infrastructure projects for the Lake Charlevoix watershed. The Watershed Council collaborated with Drummond Carpenter LLC on a series of meetings and online surveys to solicit public feedback about green stormwater infrastructure projects like rain gardens and permeable pavers.

"This project has really opened our minds to the options," remarked Cannon. "We know we have stormwater issues, but the variety of options is where the excitement lies."

Cannon and Heydlauff are interested in green stormwater infrastructure because it has the potential to divert stormwater while also beautifying their cities. Heydlauff mentioned that whether people are members of one of the area's tribes, long-standing residents, or newcomers, people feel a strong attraction to water and the natural environment.

"Charlevoix wouldn't be what it is without the waterways it sits on," said Heydlauff. "It's the key to our whole community, and people are working to

take the protection of Lake Charlevoix more seriously."

Aside from benefitting water quality and recreation, Cannon pointed out that the designs are also cost effective for East Jordan, since excess stormwater can cause expensive maintenance problems.

The green stormwater infrastructure projects are still in their planning stages, and we will keep you informed as the Watershed Council pursues funding to make stormwater diversion a reality.

"With projects like these it's been helpful to have the Watershed Council take the lead with an experience and professionalism that allows us to provide public feedback to the cities, since we're not the environmental experts," said Cannon.

The Watershed Council is more than happy to work with our partners on projects that benefit the waters that sustain our communities. A huge thanks to all the Watershed Advisory Committee members who have worked hard to bring green stormwater infrastructure solutions to the Lake Charlevoix watershed.

Funding for this planning project was generously provided by the Charlevoix County Community Foundation; the Coastal Management Program through the water resources division of the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy; and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

For questions about this project, please contact Jennifer Buchanan of Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council at (231) 347-1181.