A milestone year for Tip of the Mitt

The following guest commentary was written by Gail Gruenwald, executive director of the Mitt Watershed Council.

As 2019 comes to a close, all of us here at the Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council are reflecting on a successful year of protecting Northern Michigan’s waters. Each year the Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council addresses a myriad of issues that impact Northern Michigan’s waters. Our programs are as diverse as the lakes and streams we work to protect.

What makes 2019 different, however, is that the Watershed Council celebrated its 40th anniversary of protecting what we all love. The Watershed Council was formed in 1979 by researchers at the University of Michigan Biological Station to assist lake associations and others with efforts to monitor our lakes and streams, and educate the community on ways to protect our waters.

As you look more closely at our current work you will see that it ranges from extensive water quality monitoring on our lakes and streams to advocating against the use of oil and gas pipelines on or near our waters. Because of our breadth of knowledge of both science and policy we are “at the table” in so many ways and are proud of the positive impact we have on the health of our waters.

We have continued to develop various green infrastructure throughout our service area, including rain gardens in the Petoskey area and a green roof at North Central Michigan College. We completed a survey of the entire Lake Charlevoix shoreline to determine if there are threats to overall water quality or to the health of Lake Charlevoix. Throughout 2019 we also hosted a variety of events including beach cleanups, youth education events, a 40th Anniversary Gala celebration, and the 15th Healing the Bear — Bear River Cleanup.

In addition to the above “on-the-ground” work, you will also find us in Washington, D.C., Lansing, and every township, city, and village in our service area working to maintain and improve policies that protect our waters. The Watershed Council responded to the emerging threat of PFAS, chemicals used in everyday consumer products as well as in fire suppression chemicals. We have tested surface waters in Emmet and Charlevoix counties to determine if PFAS are present in our lakes and will report on the results soon.

In addition, our relatively new volunteer program called WAVE (Watershed Action Volunteer Experience) has expanded to new teams, and we were able to provide technical and financial support for water resource projects to these groups of volunteers. We have teams throughout Emmet, Charlevoix, Antrim and Cheboygan counties.

The Watershed Council would like to thank our members and local foundation funders for making this work, and numerous other projects over the last 40 years, possible. In particular we would like to acknowledge the Petoskey Harbor Springs Area Community Foundation and the Charlevoix County Community Foundation. Both of these foundations have been instrumental in making several of the programs described above possible.

Our efforts this past year and throughout the past 40 years have focused on what each of us can do to protect our waters. We will continue to work tirelessly toward this end as we celebrate our 41st anniversary in 2020. Please join us! Together, we can protect our resources for the good of our community, today and for future generations.