



This map shows the extent of the Cheboygan River Watershed, which includes several smaller watersheds within its area. The health of the rivers and lakes that drain into Lake Huron are all interconnected, which is why the Watershed Council has an extensive water monitoring program in place.

PROVIDED BY TIP OF THE MITT WATERSHED COUNCIL

Water where you live: Learning about the Cheboygan River Watershed and you

Your Turn
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Guest columnist

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Have you ever passed a sign welcoming you to a watershed and wondered what the signs mean and why they matter? Just what is a watershed, and how are Cheboygan County residents connected to their watersheds?

First off, we all live in a watershed. It's just a basic part of living in this landscape. A watershed is a land area that drains into a stream or other body of water. Gravity pulls water from rain storms, snow melt, and even groundwater supplies downhill until it reaches the lowest point, where bodies of water are found. The boundaries of a watershed are determined by the shape of the land and generally connect all of the highest points around the body of water.

Some watersheds are very small and drain to tiny unnamed streams, like one you might find in your own backyard. Other watersheds, like the 900,000-acre Cheboygan River Watershed that drains into Lake Huron, are very large. Tiny watersheds can collectively make up larger watersheds, just like many properties make up a neighborhood and many neighborhoods make up a town. In our service area, smaller watersheds, including those of Burt, Mullett and Black Lakes and the Sturgeon, Pigeon, Maple, and Black Rivers, are all part of the Cheboygan River Watershed. Any place you stand can be part of many watersheds of varying sizes. Thousands of small watersheds drain into progressively larger watersheds in Michigan until eventually draining through the St. Lawrence River to the Atlantic Ocean.

But what makes watersheds so important? It turns out that our everyday actions have a direct impact on the health of the watershed in which we live. As rainwater or snowmelt moves across the surface of the land, it will pick up pollutants and carry them into nearby waterbodies. These pollutants, called non-point source pollutants, can include things like

lawn and agricultural fertilizers, domestic animal waste, leaked or spilled automotive fluids, loose soil from construction or farming, and more. These pollutants may harm or kill aquatic life, reduce the beauty of the natural resources, and impair waters to the point that they must be closed to fishing and swimming.

Protecting the land and preventing non-point source pollution in Michigan is critical to maintain water quality and quantity for both human use and aquatic life. Thankfully, there are many simple ways to do just that, including picking up domestic pet waste, preventing over fertilization of lawns and gardens, and managing stormwater runoff. Check out the Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council's stormwater runoff page to learn more at watershedcouncil.org/stormwater-runoff.

And, for those of us who are fortunate enough to live near a lake, the Michigan Shoreland Stewards (MiSS) program is an excellent tool to learn how to protect the water bodies that we love. The MiSS program is a voluntary, web-based survey that asks property owners about their property management practices. The property is broken down into four main areas: the upland, the buffer, the shoreline, and the lake. The questions are designed to help property owners better understand how their practices impact the health of the lake. To take the survey, go to mishorelandstewards.org.

No matter where we live, we are in a watershed that's full of life. Watersheds provide habitat for fish, birds, and wildlife, and they are where we live and play. As members of watersheds, their health is in our hands. That's why the Watershed Council will continue to work with community partners to protect the valuable water resources of Cheboygan County and beyond.

For more information, visit watershedcouncil.org. Have a question? Email us at info@watershedcouncil.org or call 231-347-1181.

— Eli Baker is the water resources education coordinator for Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council.