

# Watershed Council, other area water resource protection groups, form partnership

We are surrounded by precious water resources in Northern Michigan. The lakes, rivers, streams, and wetlands in this area provide drinking water and wildlife habitat, allow for endless recreational opportunities, and draw residents and thousands of visitors to the region. A desire to better protect Northern Michigan's waters encouraged Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council, Huron Pines, The Watershed Center Grand Traverse Bay,

and Conservation Resource Alliance to form a partnership to strengthen protections for our valuable resources.

Although collaborations among the organizations for small-scale projects are common, the groups often work in discrete geographic areas or on separate projects. As Watershed Center Grand Traverse Bay Executive Director Christine Crissman noted, the partnership provides opportunities to share resources for water conservation and

cover a larger geographic area.

"All of the organizations have their own areas of expertise," said Crissman. "However, the issues facing our waters are systemic and watershed wide, and some of the projects we want to tackle are too big for one group to accomplish on their own. We want to show Northern Michigan that we're working collectively to protect clean water and that by collaborating we can accomplish some really big things."

Gail Gruenwald, Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council's executive director, conceived of the partnership in 2020 and invited the participants to join. The organizations held several virtual meetings last

year, facilitated by Parallel Solutions, LLC, to determine how to collaborate on projects while maintaining autonomy.

"While this planning effort started with an effort to better coordinate and not duplicate work across the four organizations, the result was an agreement to share opportunities to expand upon the protection Northern Michigan's waters receive," says Gruenwald. "We are excited to see where this goes."

Conservation Resource Alliance Director Amy Beyer said that the long-standing trust among Northern Michigan conservation groups is a unique experience that has led to this new, "advanced" model for the four organiza-

tions. "It spells out careful, coordinated project planning, joint fund-seeking, and collaborative communications," said Beyer. "It's sort of a 400-level course in doing conservation work through partnerships."

Huron Pines Executive Director Brad Jensen said that having a strong partnership will benefit all of the organizations involved. For example, Huron Pines covers northeastern Michigan, and doesn't do as much policy or large-scale monitoring as Tip

of the Mitt Watershed Council in the northwest. Being able to use the Watershed Council's monitoring resources would benefit Huron Pines and Northern Michigan's waters. The organizations can also bundle grant projects for impacts at a larger scale.

"I would just say that it presents a new opportunity to work more closely together," said Jensen. "We're all in it for the good of our watersheds, and this gets us one more step ahead in our efforts."