

## Watershed Council Awarded Grant to Monitor the Maple and Sturgeon Rivers: Volunteers Needed to Protect our Rivers and Streams!

The Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council was recently awarded a grant from the Michigan Clean Water Corps to boost their Volunteer Stream Monitoring program. Since 2004, Watershed Council staffs have worked side-by-side with over 100 volunteers to keep tabs on streams and rivers throughout Northern Michigan, including well-known blue-ribbon trout streams like the Jordan and Pigeon Rivers. Thanks to the grant award, the program will be expanded to include eight new sites on two other Michigan stream beauties: the Maple and Sturgeon Rivers. Regarding the expansion, project coordinator Kevin Cronk commented that “since the program began, people have been asking me about monitoring these rivers”, adding that “now it’s time to get the word out, that the Maple and Sturgeon Rivers are in... and that we need more volunteer help protect our streams.”

Two times per year, in the spring and in the fall, volunteers collect aquatic macroinvertebrates from area streams to assess water quality. More commonly known as “critters”, these macroinvertebrates paint a picture of stream water quality: the greater the diversity, the higher the water quality. Of particular importance are the sensitive critters, such as mayflies and stoneflies, which are usually, and fortunately, quite common in Northern Michigan streams. To this, Cronk comments that “our stoneflies and mayflies are the “canaries in the coal mine”. If we don’t find them at a site, it usually raises an alarm”. And the alarm has been raised at a few streams, such as Stover Creek in Charlevoix and Tannery Creek in Petoskey, which flow through and are impacted by urban areas, and where Watershed Council volunteers have found few, if any, of these pollution-sensitive “canaries”.

Currently, scores of volunteer teams monitor 29 sites on streams flowing into Black Lake, Lake Charlevoix, Mullett Lake, Torch Lake and Little Traverse Bay. The addition of the Maple and Sturgeon Rivers raises the number of sites to 37, which has Cronk clearly elated, but with a trace of anxiety. Ideally, each monitoring team includes a leader, a collector, and three additional helpers, which adds up to 20 new volunteers to cover sites on the Maple and Sturgeon Rivers. Regarding his anxiety, Cronk says “We’ve been beating the drum for several years to get more volunteers involved with the program, but this year it will have to be even louder to get enough volunteers.”

Fortunately, there are many groups and individuals interested in learning more about and helping protect Northern Michigan’s streams, such as the Miller VanWinkle Chapter of Trout Unlimited. Brian Kozminski, the local chapter president comments that “It’s great to see the Watershed Council’s program expand, especially to jewels like the Maple and Sturgeon Rivers,” adding that “these rivers are extremely important to Trout Unlimited members and we’ll be giving it our all to provide volunteer support to help protect them.”

Is there still time to get involved with this season's stream monitoring activities? Cronk answer to that: "yes, yes, and yes, come one, come all, we'll sign you up even at the last minute", adding allure with "volunteers really enjoy this experience because they get the chance to explore new streams, learn the bugs, and meet new people." The Watershed Council plans to coordinate volunteer monitoring at all 37 sites on Saturday, September 17, starting at 9:00 a.m. For those interested in learning the ropes of the program prior to monitoring, Cronk will be providing a training the week before on Saturday, September 10, at the Watershed Council office in downtown Petoskey (426 Bay St, across from the Perry Hotel). The program's fall activities wrap up with a critter sorting and identification session at the Science Building on the North Central Michigan College campus on Sunday October 2<sup>nd</sup>, from noon to 3 p.m.

If you would like more information regarding the Tip of the Mitt Volunteer Stream Monitoring program or if you would like to get involved, contact Kevin Cronk at 231-347-1181 (via email at [kevin@watershedcouncil.org](mailto:kevin@watershedcouncil.org)) or visit [www.watershedcouncil.org/protect/](http://www.watershedcouncil.org/protect/)