

Annual Report – Iron County Watershed Coalition – May 2017

For the Iron County Watershed Coalition (ICWC) 2017 has been a year of reviewing the last 20 years and determining as a group to march forward with new initiatives and ideas.

As a way of reminding ourselves why we do this, in May of 2016 we organized the public meeting “What’s in the Water? Who Knows? Who Cares?” where Mike Golas discussed the current state of area lakes, Jennifer Johnson (DNR Fisheries Biologist) discussed the current state of affairs with the fisheries, and Bette Premo discussed the current state of area wetlands, streams and rivers, and groundwater.

Then John Reed, Coalition secretary, embarked upon a multi-year effort to tie together and organize the records of the Iron County Watershed Coalition (and its predecessor Iron River Watershed Council). Files are housed at White Water Associates and at the Iron-Baraga Conservation District office. This requires inventory of all the files and then reordering some of them to put them in chronological or subject order while maintaining a record of original order of materials. A tedious and time consuming task!

Meetings held during the summer focused on defining Iron County watershed issues and needs and the list included: gathering new members, cooperating on projects with IC Lakes and Streams Partnership, Schools, Trout Unlimited, Wildlife Unlimited, providing matching grants, or in-kind services, to Iron County environmental related projects, refocusing on Iron River related issues like mine outflows, Iron River waste storm sewer, road crossing (culvert/bridge) improvements and Apple Blossom Trail interpretation and finally, initiating public programs/media (for adult and children) on the importance of the concept of "watershed".

So in order to begin a more active approach the members did some homework and reported back at the monthly meetings. The actions were: review of Iron River Watershed Comprehensive Watershed Plan, review of what other organizations like ours are doing, individually perform a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis, and performing stakeholder interviews.

In the meantime an opportunity arose to reconsider a project to improve the Wild River Road Culvert through grant applications with Superior Watershed Partnership and MEF (WE Energies Mitigation Enhancement Fund) and partnering with Iron County Road Commission, and Trout Unlimited. We are currently awaiting word on drafting full proposals for the grants.

After considering several facilitators the ICWC decided to undergo a formal Strategic Planning retreat with the help of Freshwater Futures, Ann Baughman. With her assistance we began the process of refining our mission statement and development of a strategic plan. At this point we have tentatively articulated vision, mission and values statements and will be, in the coming

months, engaging in developing the strategies, goals, objectives and actions for the next few years. Our mission is to ensure the highest possible quality of waters in Iron County by educating and engaging our communities in projects that will restore and preserve our watershed for future generations.

During this same time the “Watershed Awareness” project was initiated and guided by Maggie Scheffer with committee members Sara Basso, Richard Sloat, Angie Stine and John and Judy Reed. With support from a grant from Upper Peninsula Environmental Coalition, this project seeks to enhance the ecological literacy of our communities and increase public awareness and knowledge of the importance of the watersheds on which we live. This will be achieved through public school programs, development of an Iron County Watershed map, informational brochures and banner, a website, production of a groundwater model by David Martwick, and community programs such as river cleanup, tree planting, the River Fest, canoe float, concerts and other events.

Which brings us to this 2017 May Annual Meeting where we are fortunate to have renowned ecologist Dr. Gene Likens provide a program to our community on the environmental understandings gained from the watershed-ecosystems approach.

Our actions in 2017-18 will define what we want this organization to be. During this transition time we will fine tune the strategic plan and organization’s structure, bylaws and policies. We are particularly aware of the need to grow our membership and to increase their participation in the work of the organization as well as decision making and governance. We will work together to fulfill our vision, mission and value statements with defined goals and objectives.

All the while, as opportunities for funding become available, we hope to conduct projects like the Wild River road crossing improvement and will be continuing with the “Watershed Awareness” campaign.

Due to our members refreshed vision, participation in other regional meetings and with the influence of new members we have new synergies that will enable us to answer the questions of “How can we collaborate on?” and “How can we initiate?” projects on our Iron County watersheds that fulfill our mission and goals.

Bette Premo, President