

## Iron County Watershed Coalition - President's Report - March 2018

In order to describe our work in the last year it is best to remind ourselves of the vision, mission, values, and strategies that we adopted as a result of 2017's strategic planning sessions.

**Vision:** The lakes, streams and wetlands of Iron County will be an exceptional model of environmental stewardship and sustainable outdoor recreation for present and future generations.

**Mission:** We work to ensure the highest possible water quality in Iron County lakes, streams and wetlands by educating and engaging our communities in projects that will restore and preserve our watersheds for future generations.

**Values:** We are, inclusive and recognize a multitude of mutual stakeholders. We are collaborative, often constructively working with a variety of partners. We are reliant on scientific approaches, and we are respectful of the economic base our natural resources provide for our community.

**Strategies:** We will carry out our vision, mission and values using strategies to educate and engage, establish, lead, and preserve.

With this in mind I have organized the highlights of the ICWC work in 2017 under these strategic categories. Each of these activities demonstrate our ability to work collaboratively with a variety of partners.

### **Educate and Engage**

At the Annual Meeting in 2017 we were pleased to host a presentation by Dr. Gene E. Likens, noted ecologist, co-founder of the Hubbard Brook Ecosystem Study, and president emeritus of the Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies, in Millbrook, N.Y. Dr. Likens topic was *Environmental Understandings Gained from the Watershed-Ecosystems Approach* and he answered many questions and comments from the audience.

This presentation was followed by the showing of a world premiere of a 10-minute video about the *Iron River*, produced by students from the West Iron High School. This video was produced as part of our Watershed Awareness campaign with the help of Maggie Scheffer and Angie Stine and went on to be presented at a film festival in Marquette.

The 2017 Watershed Awareness Campaign was very successful with well-planned and varied events that included the production of the first ever Iron County watersheds map with much help from Richard Sloat, a watershed awareness concert at the Windsor Center with Red Tail Ring, school programs delivered by Maggie Scheffer and Angie Stine (using a groundwater model made by David Martwick), the River Fest on June 24<sup>th</sup> at the RV park (with the help of many board member volunteers), a booth at the Iron County Fair and other events, and a "Float the Paint" experience. These events helped to shine a light on the ICWC and as a result we gained new members and lots of insight on how to further this campaign for future years. Along with these programs an informational brochure developed by John Reed, Maggie, Richard and Angie, and extensive website development by Angie Stine are getting more information out to the public regarding our projects.

## **Establish and Preserve**

Two major projects have been the focus of work by our board members. Richard Sloat has spearheaded and worked with Bates Township to help plan the Paint River Rustic Camping site and help propose the construction of an ADA Paint River boat launch and nature trails in the school forest. This site will allow for better access to the Paint River in a way that is more protective of the river and the people enjoying it. The ICWC has agreed to help plan and maintain these sites.

The ICWC was instrumental in obtaining a grant for the Iron County Road Commission from the Superior Watershed Partnership to replace a very old and poorly operating culvert crossing the Iron River at the Wild River Road. Total project costs are estimated at around \$234,000 with \$174,000 coming from the grant and \$60,000 matched pledges. This project will enhance the fisheries and aquatic habitat of an important stretch of the Iron River.

## **Engage and Lead**

The Dober Mine mitigation site is an important system that keeps acid mine water out of the Iron River. ICWC members, I along with Ron and Sara Basso, met with Rep. Tom Casperson at the Dober Mine Site on Friday, October 20 to bring to his attention the need for continued maintenance and operation of the site. A follow-up letter to Michigan Department of Environmental Quality emphasized our concern that proper operation of the site is critical to the health of the river.

To further our goals of communicating and collaborating with county offices the ICWC dedicated one meeting to discussion with the Iron River City Manager David Thayer and another to discussion with Iron County Economic Chamber Alliance (ICECA), Executive Director, Paul Schuytema. Both Mr Thayer and Mr Schuytema are interested in making Iron River and Iron County attractive to visitors and residents. They both feel that our abundant lakes and rivers are key elements to creating an environment that people want to enjoy. The ICWC expressed our desire to work with both to help identify and plan activities and development while being mindful of the natural systems that are the keeping our waterways healthy.

Special recognition this year goes to John Reed for his tireless work as both Secretary and Treasurer. John's excellent financial reports, minutes and the personal financial donations to the organization by John and Judy Reed have been invaluable in keeping this organization running smoothly.

We were very fortunate to receive a donation from the Iron County Chapter of 100+Women Who Care to help finance our Watershed Awareness Campaign for 2018.

We begin our season of 2018 with an annual meeting where we host Dr. Alan Johnson, professor emeritus of Michigan Technological University. Dr. Johnson will help us understand the Dober mine mitigation site and other aspects of the mines that lie under the City of Iron River.

In 2018 we look forward to another Watershed Awareness campaign, work on the Wild River Road Culvert with the Iron County Road Commission, work at the Paint River sites, work with the Iron County Lakes and Streams Partnership on a county-wide conference, increasing our membership, and continuing to develop our strategic plans for the future. There is much work to do. We are making progress.

Bette Premo, President of Iron County Watershed Coalition