

# Watershed protection: Planning and participation

The Watershed Center Grand Traverse Bay, along with a diverse group of project partners, has been developing a Protection Plan for Grand Traverse Bay for the past 18 months. This plan will be used to direct protection, restoration and education activities throughout the watershed for years to come.

Almost every activity on land has the potential to affect the quality of water in our area. Watershed planning brings a broad group of people within the watershed together to address those activities, regardless of existing political boundaries.

By working together, individuals and organizations within the watershed can design a coordinated plan that builds upon the strengths of existing programs and resources and addresses water quality concerns in a well organized, more cost-effective manner.

A variety of organizations and agencies have collaborated in the development of the Grand Traverse Bay Watershed Protection Plan. Township planners, agriculture experts, biologists, GIS specialists, web developers, land protection specialists and many others have lent their expertise and participated in the project Steering Committee.

There are many steps involved in creating a protection plan for a watershed of this size.

■ **One of the key components is public participation.** The Watershed Center has conducted a number of public stakeholder meetings to gain input into the plan elements. In addition, a telephone survey was conducted to gauge public aware-



Above, public meetings were held throughout the watershed to learn about citizens' water quality concerns and engage the public in the planning process.

ness levels about watershed issues, and several focus groups were conducted with area business leaders. From these various

sources we learned about more the water quality issues that concern area residents the most.

■ **The next step is to assess the watershed.** This includes identifying known and suspected pollutants, along with their sources

and causes.

For example, excess nutrients are a pollutant. There are a number of sources including residential and commercial fertilizers. The cause in this case would be improper application of the fertilizer. Each pollutant can have a large number of sources and causes.

For a complete assessment of pollutants in our watershed, visit our website and follow the links to the Watershed Protection Plan section of the site. Many of the plan documents are available there.

The Steering Committee will identify goals and objectives for protecting the watershed. To achieve them, a comprehensive list of specific tasks will be developed. These projects can include anything from repairing road/stream crossings to providing education to landowners on how to install buffer strips.

For a watershed this large and diverse, the implementation tasks are numerous. To make the list more manageable. The tasks will be organized based on priority areas identified by the Steering Committee.

Priority areas in the Grand Traverse Bay Watershed are defined as parts of the watershed that are most sensitive to environmental impacts and greatest likelihood to affect water quality and aquatic habitat.

## WAYS YOU CAN HELP

If you would like to learn more about the protection plan, visit our website at [www.gtbay.org](http://www.gtbay.org). Plan documents and data are available for downloading on the site. We welcome your comments on this work in progress.