

# A voice for clean water

## Grand Traverse Baykeeper: The Voice For Our Water

This past June, Grand Traverse Baykeeper John Nelson and Executive Director Anne Brasie spent four days at the Waterkeeper Alliance Annual Meeting, held at a small college in the lush landscape of the Delaware River Gap.

John and Anne listened as countless Waterkeepers stood up and told their stories — victories won, pollution stopped, lessons learned. The common thread was the passion and the sense of connection to “my bay,” “my watershed,” “my river” — reflecting that deep commitment to protecting our waters that Waterkeepers and the grass roots supporters share.

John told our story, too — the story of a still pristine bay and watershed facing untold pressure from unprecedented development and growth. Of our work to build awareness of the threats to the health of the spectacular resource we all love. Of an economy so closely tied to the health of our environment that we all either prosper or suffer the ill effects of degradation of pollution together.

137 Waterkeepers are now protecting more than 100,000 miles of rivers, bays, lakes, streams, sounds and coastline across the United States, Canada, Mexico and the world and their enthusiasm for the path they have chosen was palpable. The Waterkeeper movement is the fastest growing environmental movement today — and at this meeting it was easy to see why.

### WHAT IS A WATERKEEPER?

Waterkeepers are former teachers, cab drivers, scientists, lawyers, grandmothers, Native Americans, fishermen and crabbers. They are your neighbors. They are community leaders and strong, committed activists for our precious waters.

A Waterkeeper is:

- An informed environmental advocate
- A consistent voice on the water
- A flexible coalition builder
- A thorough investigator
- A trusted spokesperson
- A dependable listener
- A community servant
- A dedicated scientist
- A dynamic educator
- A resolute leader
- A trusted expert
- A visionary

Waterkeepers are full-time advocates for their river, creek, lake, bay or sound. They are recognized by their community, local government and



media as the voice for their water body. They advocate compliance with environmental laws and regulations, identify problems that affect their water bodies and develop appropriate solutions to address these problems.

### WATERKEEPER USES VARIETY OF STRATEGIES

Waterkeepers around the world work in many different ways to protect our waters:

- Water quality monitoring
- Investigating point and non-point sources of pollution
- Attending local, regional and state government meetings and hearings
- Educating and motivating the public to act on behalf of their water
- Developing solutions to water quality problems
- Enforcing compliance with environmental laws

### GRAND TRAVERSE BAYKEEPER

Our Grand Traverse Baykeeper is John Nelson. John grew up in the Grand Traverse Bay watershed and was instrumental in bringing the Waterkeeper concept to Grand Traverse Bay.

So, what does our Baykeeper do on any given day to protect our water quality? Here's a sampling of activities and

accomplishments over the past year::

- Represents environmental interests on the Grand Traverse Regional Land Use Transportation Coalition.
- Has provided input to the Village of Suttons Bay and comment to the MDEQ regarding upgrading the village's wastewater treatment system. John advocated for an upgrade of the plant from secondary to tertiary treatment.
- Spearheaded an ongoing effort to work with the MDEQ to develop more stringent water quality standards for Grand Traverse Bay.
- Working with the city and county to develop a water conservation brochure.
- Working with local intermediate school district and MDEQ to move forward on cleanup of a toxic plume in East Bay.
- Delivered groundwater free bilge sponges and information about clean boating and controlling invasive species to more than 300 seasonal slip owners at Northport, Elmwood, Harbor West and Clinch Park marinas.
- Met with a number of homeowners and local shoreline governments providing input and advice regarding beach maintenance issues and current regulations.
- Attended various public and civic



Above: The Watershed Center helped out Three Lakes Association volunteers deploy sediment traps in Torch Lake as part of the Water Quality Model project. The Grand Traverse Baykeeper tug has proved its usefulness several times during this three year monitoring project. Preliminary findings and a demonstration of the model will be presented at an all-day workshop at the Great Lakes Campus on November 10<sup>th</sup>. Left to right: Doug Endicott, Bob Anderson, Phil von Voigtlander and Norton Bretz. Left: The Baykeeper Tug transported researchers Natasha Lipinski, Leelanau Conservancy, and Dr. William Bowerman to Gull Island to sample herring gull eggs this spring. Bowerman is an associate professor of wildlife and environmental toxicology, and the lead researcher on the multi-year project to track toxic chemicals in the gulls' eggs.

group meetings and spoke about water quality issues.

- Testified at local hearings for development projects advocating for wetlands protection and effective stormwater management practices.
- Provided official comment to the MDEQ and Army Corps of Engineers on a number of permit applications.

Each year since the Grand Traverse Baykeeper program was launched in 2002, recognition and awareness of its value to our region has grown. The Watershed Center is the go-to organization for questions and concerns regarding water quality for both citizens and local governments.

Plans for the future include improving our technology and adding tools to the Baykeeper's protection arsenal with help from a Biederman Foundation grant.

**For more information about the Grand Traverse Baykeeper, visit our Web site at [www.gtbay.org](http://www.gtbay.org).**

**To learn more about Waterkeeper Alliance, visit [www.waterkeeper.org](http://www.waterkeeper.org).**

