Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network

2010 ANNUAL REPORT

Dear Friends,

On behalf of the Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network (WIN), I am pleased to provide you with our 2010 annual report.

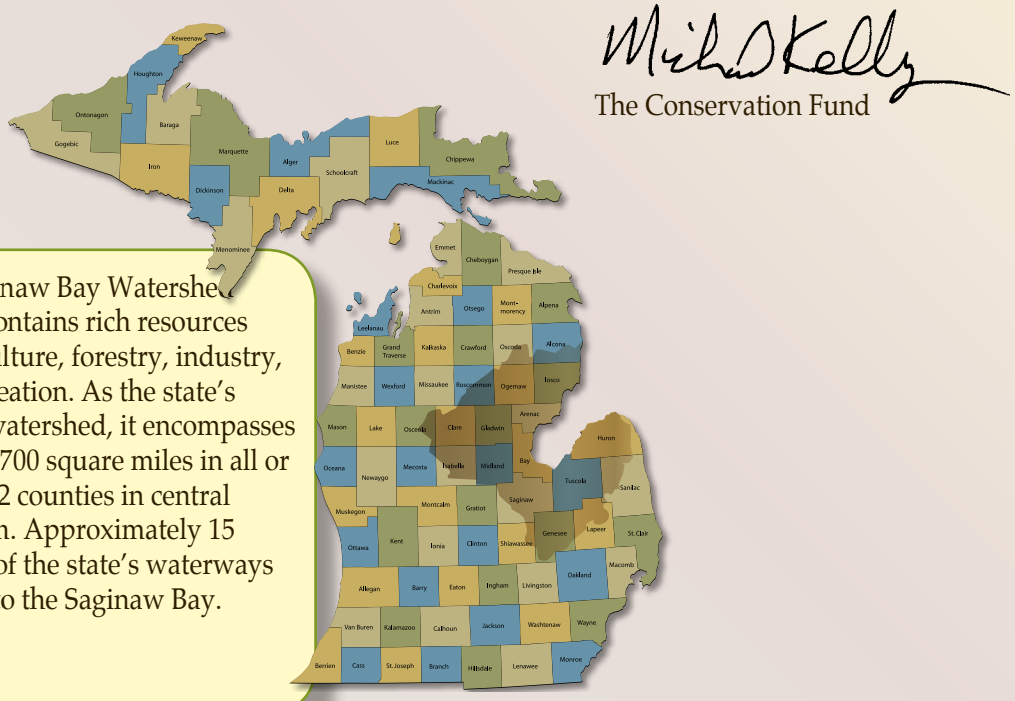
WIN is fortunate to work with many partners in the effort to make the Saginaw Bay region a "hub" of sustainability. From our foundation and corporate partners that support us financially and play a central role in the capitalization of our grant programs, to the committee members who review and spend the time building great projects. The work WIN does is the sum total of the collective input of a fantastic group of people, all dedicated to supporting the environment, the economy, and the communities of the Saginaw Bay Watershed.

That was never more true than in 2010. As WIN reached the milestone of supporting over 200 projects since its inception, we realized that the best efforts are most often the result of a combination of a good idea, joined by the expertise of many, that result in initiatives that address some of the key challenges in our region.

For example, WIN was able to work with a key team of individuals assembled by the Chippewa Watershed Conservancy to assist them in bringing attention to the economic and environmental importance of the Chippewa River. We worked with Bay County leaders on a unique project – the first that we know of in Michigan – where a local revolving fund will be established to support the replacement of septic systems that are degrading water quality. WIN supported other efforts as well, including innovative educational programming in Flint, as well as a new way to engage property owners in the Cedar River watershed through development of a "conservation registry." You'll learn about many of these efforts, and others, in this year's report – and you'll learn how a combination of partners made these projects work.

On behalf of The Conservation Fund, thank you – partners – for making 2010 another great year across all of our program areas. Your ongoing commitment to supporting the great work that we do continues to be the key to the program's success.

Michael Kelly



The Saginaw Bay Watershed region contains rich resources in agriculture, forestry, industry, and recreation. As the state's largest watershed, it encompasses nearly 8,700 square miles in all or part of 22 counties in central Michigan. Approximately 15 percent of the state's waterways drain into the Saginaw Bay.

About the Saginaw Bay Watershed

- Home to more than 90 fish species, 138 endangered or threatened species, and 1.4 million people
- Includes more than 175 inland lakes
- Contains about 7,000 miles of rivers and streams
- Path for migrating song birds and waterfowl on the Mississippi Flyway
- Significant agricultural and industrial resources supporting Michigan's economy

Our Vision

As stewards of the Saginaw Bay Watershed, we value our shared, unique resources, and together we will balance economic, environmental, and social priorities to enhance the quality of life for this and future generations.

WIN Partners

A committed group of 10 foundations support WIN with financial contributions and technical support.

They are:

Bay Area Community Foundation

Consumers Energy Foundation

Cook Family Foundation

The Dow Chemical Company Foundation

Harry A. and Margaret D. Towsley Foundation

Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow Foundation

Midland Area Community Foundation

Rollin M. Gerstacker Foundation

S.C. Johnson Fund

Saginaw Community Foundation

WIN's Guiding Principles

- Provide a pleasant and healthy environment
- Conserve historic, cultural, and natural resources
- Integrate economic prosperity, ecology, and aesthetics
- Use land and infrastructure effectively
- Continually evaluate and refine shared vision and goals

Collaboration + Community

WIN projects are effective because of the appreciation and encouragement of involved individuals who appreciate and encourage collaboration. Along with WIN, they realize that good ideas just aren't enough. Successful projects need a "community orchestra" of creative and talented people, as well as private and governmental organizations, all willing to be champions for change.

At WIN, we understand that our support provides more than money. It often gives these innovative projects a spotlight on the community stage right at a crucial make-or-break time of development. WIN's support can help start the show while encouraging other funders and technical experts to join in.

With our 2010 grants, we continued to focus on collaborative efforts that promote the wise use of resources and encourage economic impacts for the benefit of our watershed communities. WIN is proud to support projects and people who still believe that – working together – their ideas can become full-scale success stories, that are music to everyone's ears.

Projects that received WIN funding in 2010 are:

- Bay County, Septage Source Elimination Program and Revolving Fund
- Bay Future, Great Lakes Bay Regional Solar Energy Initiative
- Chippewa Watershed Conservancy, Chippewa River Trail Map and Signage Project
- Little Forks Conservancy, Cedar River Land Registry Program
- Shiawassee National Refuge, Setting the Stage for the Future of the Shiawassee Flats
- Saginaw Conservation District, Community Wood Use and Demonstration Project
- Saginaw Valley State University, Native Planting Preserve
- University of Michigan – Flint, Blended Learning Environment for Place-Based Learning

Project Focus

Communities Flow

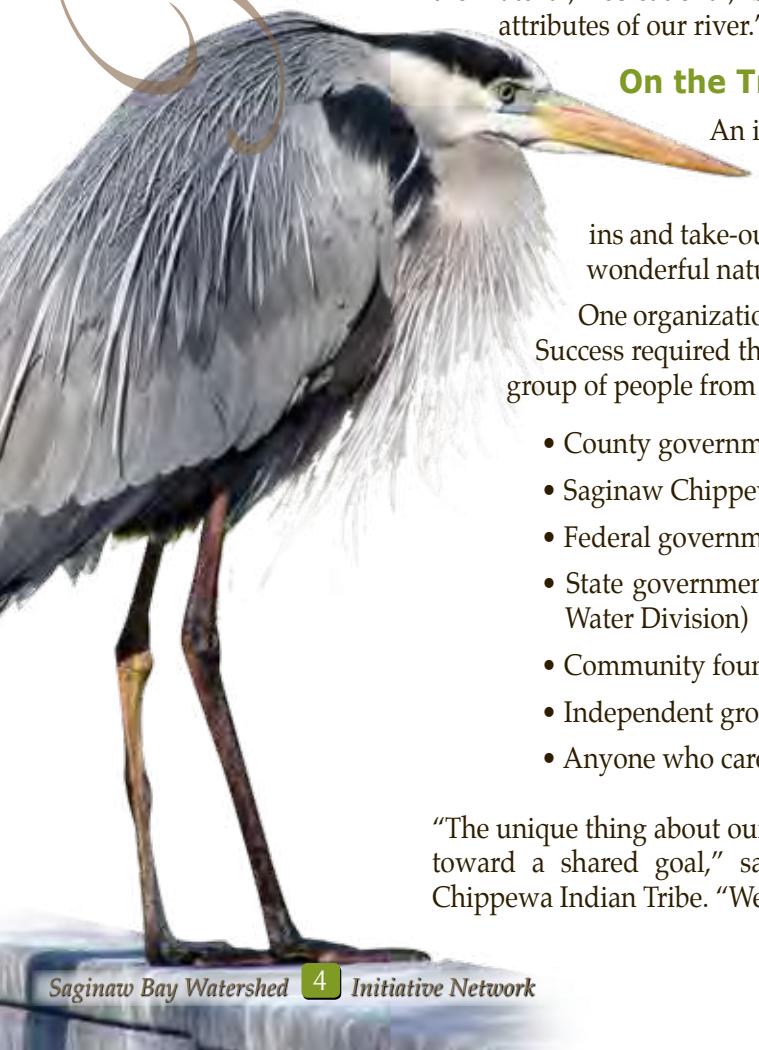
It Starts Upstream on the Chippewa River

If there's a lesson we can learn from our rivers, it may be this: embracing the flow knows no boundaries. Taking a page from the Chippewa River, Stan Lilley and the Chippewa Watershed Conservancy are spearheading a trail map and signage project that connects river communities and doesn't stop at county lines.

Many communities thrive within the river's watershed. Mecosta County is home to the headwaters of the Chippewa River. Then the river flows through Isabella County to meet the Tittabawassee River in Midland County. These waters all end up in the Saginaw Bay.

All along those 80 miles of the Chippewa River are natural, historic, educational and economic opportunities. And nothing existed that could connect these vital points of common interest for area residents, visitors and tourists. Until an informal planning group of Chippewa River watershed stakeholders started talking.

"We realized that we shared many common issues and one prime natural resource: the Chippewa River," says Stan Lilley, executive director, Chippewa Watershed Conservancy. "We knew everyone would benefit from promoting and protecting the natural, recreational, business and other quality-of-life attributes of our river."



On the Trail Together

An idea united the group. Create a trail map that highlights life on the Chippewa River. From history – like its past as a water highway in the 1800s for $14 million worth of logs – to recreational canoe put-ins and take-outs, the trail map would educate and entertain while respecting this wonderful natural resource.

One organization couldn't make the project happen. And neither could one county. Success required the drive of the Chippewa Watershed Conservancy and an involved group of people from many organizations, including:

- County governments (Mecosta, Isabella, Midland, Bay)
- Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe of Michigan
- Federal government (USDA Natural Resources Conservation Services)
- State government (Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment, Water Division)
- Community foundations (Bay Area Community Foundation)
- Independent groups (Chippewa Nature Center, Central Michigan University) and
- Anyone who cares for, benefits from and enjoys the river.

"The unique thing about our project is that we gathered from different places to work together toward a shared goal," says Carey Pauquette-Schalm, water quality specialist, Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe. "We all saw the river as the responsibility of all of us along its length."

> "The great thing about working with WIN is that it values the collaboration of many community groups. Just like we do. The Chippewa River Trail Map and Signage Project was created by several people who have a passion for our river resource. WIN was on board with our vision from the start."
>
> Carey Pauquette-Schalm, Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe of Michigan

Raising River Awareness

Bring people to the Chippewa River; create a way for both residents and visitors to easily relax and recharge; connect with flora and fauna; briskly – or leisurely – make their way downriver; and enjoy a clean and dynamic waterway. The Chippewa River Trail Map and Signage Project will do all of that.

Yet WIN funding is awarded to projects that achieve many goals. Fun on the river has its place, of course. But the waters run deeper when it comes to the project's full vision.

"Yes, we want to see increased use of the river," says Lilley. "From there, we want to generate awareness of the river as an environmental *and* economic resource that deserves our stewardship and care."

The Chippewa River Trail Map and Signage Project opens windows for educational and economic development as well.

Educational Highlights

- Historical events
- Cultural richness
- River etiquette
- Resource protection
- Animal and plant viewing and recognition

Economic Support

- River-oriented business
- Community appreciation
- Commercial stores
- Hotels/motels
- Restaurants

River Current

WIN funding, a Bay Area Community Foundation (BACF) grant and donations from other sources help make the project a sign for our times. The project is designed to include:

Signage – on both road and trail announcing "You are in the Chippewa River Watershed"

Printed Map – trail route with highlighted stops of historic, environmental, recreational and commercial interest

Web-based Map – interactive map featuring graphics and photos

"The web-based map will be a fantastic resource," says Lilley. "It will allow users to virtually enter the Chippewa River experience by following their interests and creating their own water adventures."

Local Champion: Chippewa Watershed Conservancy

Partners: Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe, Isabella County, City of Mount Pleasant, Union Township

WIN Grant Award: $22,550

Project Focus

Out of the Wood Work

Making Good Use of Dead Wood

Sometimes the smallest things can make big change. Take the emerald ash borer. This little insect has killed millions of ash trees in Michigan and neighboring states. After the larvae finish munching on inner bark, they leave behind dead trees that create hazards for people, as well as removal, handling and disposal issues for municipalities. The tiny emerald ash borer have made a big, though dreadful, difference.

Luckily for Saginaw County, a small project is making a big difference by shifting how we view that devastation. The Community Wood Use Project, championed by the Saginaw Conservation District, is starting a small revolution in community wood use to help manage the dead wood in new ways.

"Since 2002, we've moved from a focus on pest control to figuring out how to manage the destruction of our urban forests," says Dan Keane, district forester, Saginaw Conservation District. "With city forestry budgets cut severely, the situation is especially problematic. So we developed a solution that plants a new vision for community wood use."

The Chips Are Down

Trees removed from municipal sites are often used as firewood or chipped for landscaping and gardening. However, the amount of trees killed by the emerald ash borer and the beauty of the wood caused Keane and others to think beyond the chipper.

"These trees lend themselves well to higher-end uses," says Keane. "Ash is a lovely native wood that can be used for more valuable, aesthetically pleasing and economically smart products."

Higher-end applications envisioned by the Saginaw Conservation District include:

- Trim
- Flooring
- Cabinetry
- Furniture
- Park benches

Funding for the Community Wood Use Project was enough to start the logs rolling for two significant and community-focused activities.

> "WIN funding is a tremendous support for organizations and people with innovative, paradigm-changing ideas that need help to get going. The Community Wood Use and Demonstration Project would not have gone far without the grant we received for cutting and kiln-drying the lumber."
>
> Dan Keane, Saginaw Conservation District

Wood Be Lessons

New Lothrup High School students, faculty and the school's Ecology Club sponsored by Bernie Delemester, had a field day in the fall of 2010. Along with the Saginaw Conservation District and local forester Jeff Tuller, they harvested ash trees from a nearby lot, and then sawed the wood into lumber.

Open to the community, the forestry field day gave people a hands-on lesson in urban forestry and lumber production. Taking the lesson even further, the lumber students made is being used for projects in the school's woodshop classes.

"The New Lothrup High School field day was amazing," says Keane. "With professional help, students learned first-hand about native trees, and safe ways to harvest them and fabricate useful wood products. This lesson will stay with them forever."

SVRC Industries Inc. is hosting another Community Wood Use activity. A non-profit vocational rehabilitation service for students with disabilities, SVRC Industries Inc. provides opportunities for young adults to gain fulfilling employment. One of their first steps in supporting the transition from student to adult is an independent living home.

The Community Wood Use Project has a role in building a new home for these young adults. The home is designed to be as green as possible. And that goal started when the site was cleared of trees, both ash and other species.

Using WIN funding, Mike Schultz, a sawmill operator, is kiln drying and milling the wood to create baseboard trim and a fireplace mantle for the house. The residence is an excellent example of the wonderfully practical home products that can be made from found wood.

Getting the Word and Wood Out

Keane and the Saginaw Conservation District are eager to get the word out about the diverse – and even profitable – new uses for salvaged ash trees.

"We want to share these success stories with cities, homeowners, architects, builders, realtors and rehab organizations like Habitat for Humanity," says Keane. "By choosing salvaged wood, stakeholders can promote sustainability, mitigate forestry costs and boost the local economy."

Local Champion: Saginaw Conservation District

Partners: Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), City of Saginaw, SVRC Industries, Inc.

WIN Grant Award: $2,950

Project Focus

Growing Interest

Awareness and Enjoyment of Native Plants

A dedicated group of people sponsored by Saginaw Valley State University (SVSU) is going native. With plants, that is. By using plants native to the Saginaw area, they are creating a Saginaw Bay Watershed Native Planting Preserve on campus, designed for awareness, education and enjoyment.

SVSU has expanded its campus with new classroom buildings and student housing over the last six years. In the process, 15-acres of relatively undeveloped land bordered by the new construction needed attention and landscaping.

"'Beautification with a purpose' was the idea behind our planning and designs," says Steve Hocquard, assistant vice president, SVSU Campus Facilities. "We realized that by using native plants, we could create a lovely outdoor area that is also environmentally, socially and economically smart for the University and the community."

Turning Over a New (Old) Leaf

For decades, plant cultivars and imported plants have been used in landscaping. However, these plants are not native, not genetically adapted, to the Saginaw Bay Watershed area.

As a result, keeping them healthy, alive and disease-free requires maintenance, labor, resources and money. And over time damages the local eco-system through the use of fertilizers, insecticides, fossil fuels and watering.

Even the same plant, like a Red Maple tree, can have different DNA depending on its origin or provenance. Native plants, whose fathers, grandfathers and great-grandfathers lived here, have DNA specifically designed to flourish in Mid-Michigan's microclimate without expensive help.

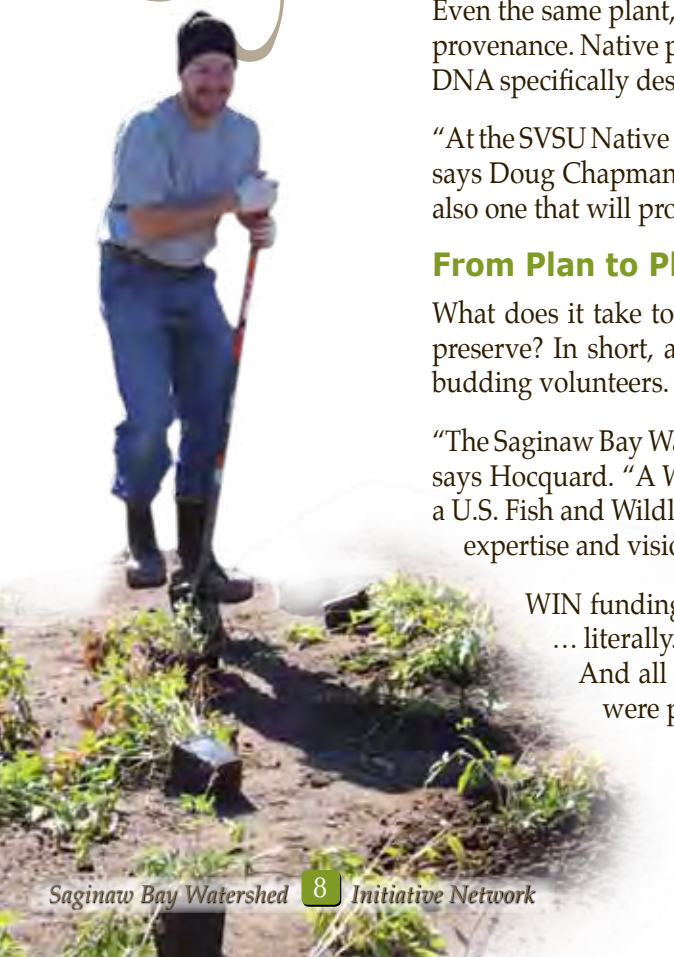
"At the SVSU Native Plantings Preserve, we can help expand the perception of what looks good," says Doug Chapman, WIN partner. "People will see a beautifully designed landscape. Yet, it's also one that will promote genetic diversity, plant health and environmental sustainability."

From Plan to Planting

What does it take to get 8,000 native trees, shrubs, grasses and flowers growing on a 15-acre preserve? In short, a lot of grass-roots planning, investment through seed money and many budding volunteers.

"The Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network (WIN) was part of the planning from the start," says Hocquard. "A WIN member was on our Advisory Board, along with an SVSU instructor, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service professional and others. Their collaboration brought invaluable expertise and vision to the project."

WIN funding and other matching grants helped lay the ground work for the preserve … literally. It is now 80 percent complete with earthwork, utilities and ponds in place. And all the plants, including 5,000 donated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, were planted by 200 SVSU students, WIN members and many other volunteers.



> "WIN's funding has made it possible for SVSU, local native plant producers and all our volunteers to create a living classroom for students and the public that will help change the perception of what beautiful, healthy and sustainable landscaping can and should be."
>
> Doug Chapman, WIN partner

Fruits of the Preserve

Education and economic growth are expected to sprout beyond the SVSU Native Plantings Preserve. Through classes, research, relaxing visits and tours of the preserve, people will have many opportunities to learn about and see the advantages of using native plants, such as …

- Nearly maintenance-free landscape
- Decreased maintenance costs
- Less fossil fuels needed for mowers and weed-whackers
- No pesticides or insecticides
- Increased stewardship of the eco-system
- Support of animal and insect life
- Healthier backyards, gardens and landscaping
- Growth of local businesses with demand for native plant producers and nurseries

"I think the success of the preserve can be defined in the WIN goals of environmental, economic and social growth," says Chapman. "First, SVSU faculty and its biology program will use the area more for student education. Next, we hope to create a demand for native plants that leads to more local nurseries. And, finally, I hope the public will feel welcome and visit often."

Provenance … It's Not Just for Antiques

Very soon, it may be common to ask "What's the provenance of that plant?" before starting to dig. If the answer is the Saginaw Bay Watershed, grow ahead!

A Few Native Plants of Growing Interest

Wildflowers

- False Sunflower (Heliopsis helianthoides)
- Heart Leaved Aster (Aster cordifolius)
- White Water Lily (Nymphaea tuberosa)
- Wild Hyacinth (Camassia scilloides)
- Yellow Cornflower (Ratibida pinnata)

Grasses, Sedges and Rush

- Brown Fox Sedge (Carex vulpinoidea)
- Dwarf Fountain Grass (Pennisetum alopecuroldes)
- Prairie Cord Grass (Spartina pectinatus)
- Soft Rush (Juncus effusus)
- Torry's Rush (Jumcus torreyi)

Shrubs

- Fragrant Sumac (Rhus aromatica)
- Virginia Sweetspire (Itea sp.)
- Red-Osler Dogwood (Curnus sericea)

Trees

- American Sycamore (Platanus occidentalis)
- Black Gum (Nyssa sylvatica)
- Downy Serviceberry (Amelanchier arborea)
- Paper Birch (Betula papyrifera)
- Redbud (Cercis canadensis)

Local Champion: Saginaw Valley State University

Partners: Michigan Native Plant Producers Association, Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge, others

WIN Grant Award: $40,000

Project Focus

Out of Sight ...

Very Much in Mind

The Saginaw Bay …
Beautiful? Unquestionably.
Recreational opportunities? Tons!
Relaxing to live near? Ahhh, yes.
Requires little attention and care?
Not so fast.

The Saginaw Bay offers much to the communities that populate its shores and surrounding areas. Yet, while many people love the Bay, they may unknowingly contribute to one of its biggest health and environmental challenges: bacterial contamination caused by sewage overflows. The Septage Source Elimination Program and Revolving Loan Fund is designed to help homeowners protect the Bay by improving septic system performance.

"No one who lives by the Bay wants to be part of the problem," says Laura Ogar, director of Environmental Affairs and Community Development, Bay County. "Often homeowners aren't even aware there's a problem because their septic systems are working fine in their houses. The issue lies underground and shows up in area surface water where they don't see it."

Underground Background

Contaminated surface water negatively affects water quality and, ultimately, quality-of-life. This surface water flows naturally to the Saginaw Bay, creating problems for everyone and everything connected to the water. From homeowners to microscopic algae, bacterial contamination imposes a heavy cost in terms of health, safety, the environment, clean-up, tourism and property values.

One of the biggest questions has been: What are the real sources of bacterial contamination? Over the years, Bay and Saginaw Counties spent a lot of money to upgrade water treatment facilities in order to meet normal discharge standards. Yet one major source of contamination was beyond the control of water treatment efforts.

"Failing septic systems may be the least understood source of surface water contamination," says Tom Hickner, county executive, Bay County. "Mixed emotions and conflicting viewpoints definitely surfaced during our many discussions. There's no question that everyone wants the problem fixed. The challenge has been finding resources to help make the required improvements."

Funding for Fixing

The truth is that homeowners with failing septic systems are in a tough situation. They clearly love the Saginaw Bay area and they care. Why else would they choose to live there? Yet, the necessary improvements can cost upwards of $10,000, straining most people's budgets impossibly.

"The answer really boiled down to helping people make these costly but necessary septic system improvements," says Ogar. "So we developed an innovative way to help using a model that has proven successful for other home-improvement issues, like weatherizing older homes."

The Septage Source Elimination Program and Revolving Loan Fund will supply low-interest loans to homeowners with at-risk septic systems. To qualify, systems must meet respective health departments' criteria and be shown to negatively affect surface water that flows into the Saginaw Bay.

To receive loan monies, qualifying septic systems must be…

- A proven failing system
- Shown to have a hydrologic connection to surface water

WIN and The Conservation Fund, with funding provided by Freshwater Future and the Healing our Waters program, provided an invaluable tool to help make sure both criteria are met. Using infrared thermography, the Bay County Health Department could quickly and visually identify warm septage seeping from homes into surface water. This innovative technology can be used to allow homeowners to "see" and better understand the problems caused by their systems.

In addition to administering the Revolving Loan Fund, Bay County provides other vital support for the Septage Source Elimination Program, including:

- Home and septic system inspections
- Recommendations for maintenance
- Education through printed materials and meetings with stakeholders
- Incentives for early payback of the loan

"The grant provides much needed resources to address significant issues posed by aging and degraded private septic systems in Bay County," says Barbara MacGregor, Bay County Health officer. "And it helps the Health Department educate local homeowners on the proper maintenance and operation of them, as well. The Revolving Loan Fund has the opportunity to become a major sustainable source of active resources that local homeowners can tap now and in the future."

A Source for Solutions

As with other projects WIN supports, the Septage Source Elimination Program and Revolving Loan Fund is a simple, clear and effective solution made possible by the collaboration of many people.

"This is good governance in action," says Ogar. "Bay County is partnering with WIN, the Kawkawlin River Watershed Property Owners Association and other organizations and people concerned about the Bay. Working together we created an innovative solution to help protect the Saginaw Bay."

> "WIN's support was indispensible. They were active partners throughout project development. They encouraged innovation, modeled sustainability and helped us look beyond the obvious. We were challenged to consider environmental, social and economic issues. All of which made our project more robust."
>
> Tom Hickner, Bay County

Local Champion: Bay County

Partners: Bay County Health Department, Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment (MDNRE), Bay Area Community Foundation (BACF), Freshwater Future, Kawkawlin River Watershed Property Owners Association

WIN Grant Award: $ 50,000

SAGINAW BAY
WATERSHED
INITIATIVE
NETWORK

WIN Funding Process

WIN follows a unique, interactive process for awarding grant funding for projects and initiatives. Throughout the community-based review process, individuals from many organizations take part by reviewing project applications and offering their expertise on a variety of topics.

WIN awards grant funding twice each year; there are no grant deadlines. If you have a project to submit for funding consideration, contact WIN at (989) 892-9171 for an application.

Contact Us

For more information about WIN, visit *www.saginawbaywin.org* or contact:

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The Saginaw Bay Watershed Initiative Network is facilitated through a partnership of The Dow Chemical Company Foundation, The Conservation Fund, and local and regional organizations dedicated to promoting the concepts of sustainability in the Saginaw Bay region.