

# Fish Creek Partnership

A project of the  
CHEQUAMEGON BAY  
**CBAP**  
AREA PARTNERSHIP

people working for cleaner water

Spring 2015

## Water Quality Monitoring on Fish Creek to Continue this Summer



◀ Nile Merton and Kim Oldenborg, SOEI interns, collect streamflow data from a monitoring site on South Fish Creek.

BY AMBER MULLEN

The Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute plans to continue and expand upon current baseline water quality monitoring in the South Fish Creek watershed starting this spring.

According to Watershed Program Coordinator Matt Hudson, the need for expanded water quality monitoring in the watershed came about when a Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) of approximately 26,000 swine submitted an application to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) for a

facility bordering Fish Creek just west of Ashland.

"We were already collecting water quality data in this area for other reasons, so it made sense to add a couple of sites to help give decision-makers more detailed information to evaluate the possible CAFO project," said Hudson. Hudson added that the WDNR and SOEI believe it is important to gather baseline information before the facility begins operations to help evaluate any changes that may occur as a result of facility operations.

For the past year, college students have been collecting sediment, nutrient, and bacteria data from eleven streams (including Fish Creek) that drain to Chequamegon Bay. Collected data is used to help understand how these streams affect the Bay and how climate change may affect fish and other important values the Bay provides, according to Hudson.

"Our student workers are put through rigorous training to make sure they are capable of doing this type of work," Hudson assured.

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“Chequamegon Bay is a vital resource to local communities and the more we can understand how our actions affect what happens in the Bay, the better we can do to maintain and improve its health,” Hudson said.

“This area is naturally susceptible to disturbance because of the mix of sand and clay soils, historical land use, and large increases in precipitation that have happened over the last sixty years. It is of particular importance to understand how increasing agricultural intensity fits into these changes and how we can expect the Bay to respond,” said Hudson.

Research on CAFO facilities across the nation suggests that manure runoff from these facilities has contaminated personal wells, streams, and lakes. Because this CAFO is the first of its kind proposed in the northern region

of Wisconsin, many people are concerned about the potential impacts on water quality.

The data Hudson and his colleagues are collecting will begin to help answer these questions. “Our monitoring work is designed to help us begin to wrap our head around these concerns, but it takes time and lots of data to fully understand how our use of the land affects the water resources we depend on.”

Collecting comprehensive baseline water quality data can take months or years, however, because the proposed facility hopes to start operations as soon as this summer, data collected this year will have to suffice.

Hudson said the project will be funded throughout 2015, but is uncertain after that. “Hopefully, we will be able to continue collecting data well into the future.”



## New CBAP Coordinator Hired

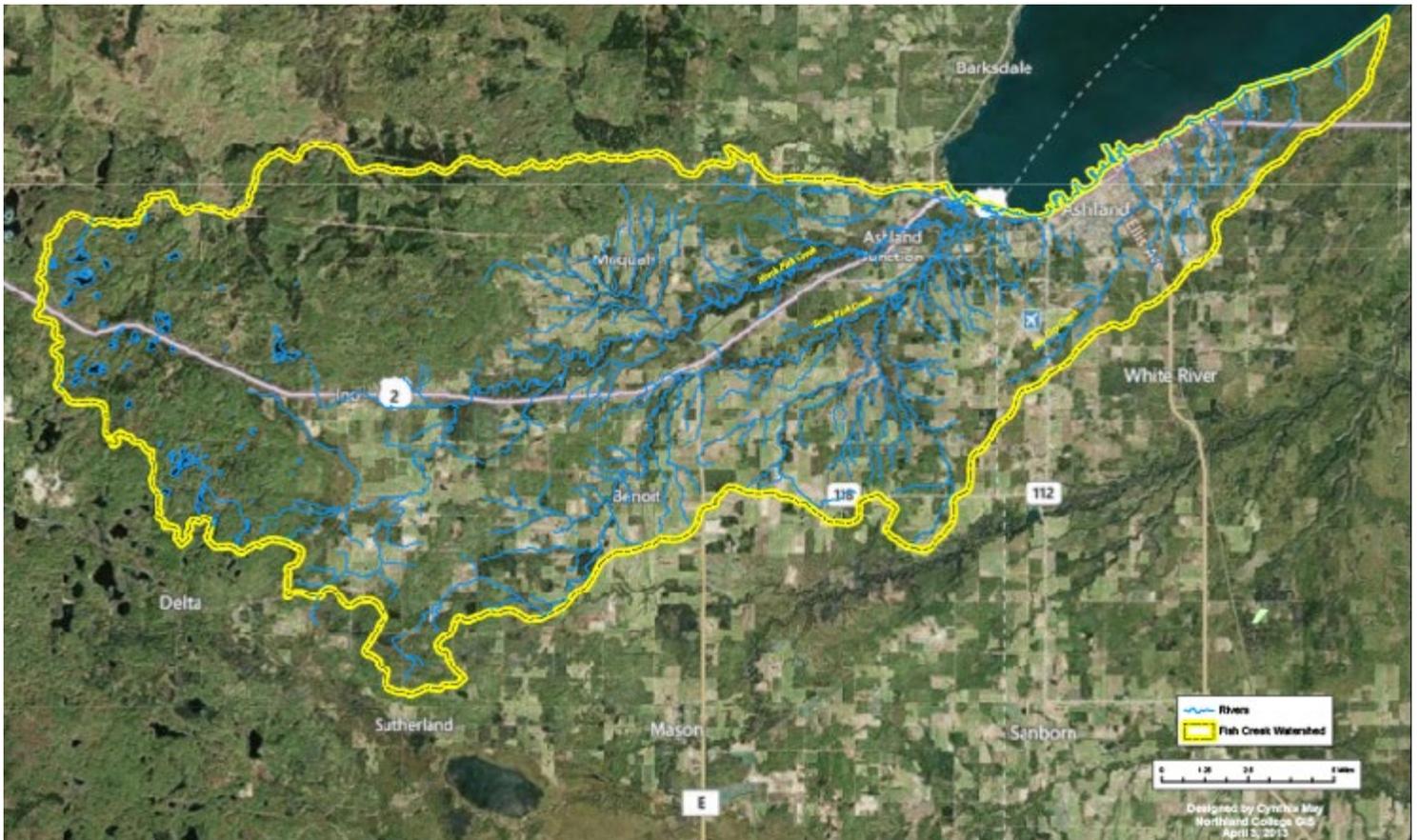
The Northland College Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute recently hired Valerie Damstra as coordinator for the Chequamegon Bay Area Partnership. If you'd like to contact Valerie she can be reached at 715-682-1326 or [vdamstra@northland.edu](mailto:vdamstra@northland.edu).

## CBAP PARTNERS

- Ashland County Land and Water Conservation Department
- Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
- Bad River Watershed Association
- Bayfield County Land and Water Conservation Department
- Bayfield Regional Conservancy
- City of Ashland, City of Bayfield
- Iron County Land and Water Conservation Department
- Northland College (sponsoring organization)
- Northwoods Cooperative Weed Management Area
- Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
- Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute (coordinating partner)
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
- U.S. Forest Service
- University of Wisconsin Extension-Basin Education
- Wild Rivers chapter of Trout Unlimited
- Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

The Fish Creek Partnership is a project of the Chequamegon Bay Area Partnership, which is coordinated through the Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute at Northland College. This newsletter is paid for by support from the Great Lakes Commission under the authorization of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.





# Fish Creek Watershed Restoration and Management Plan

The Fish Creek watershed in Wisconsin's Lake Superior basin occupies 100,096 acres southwest of Chequamegon Bay. Approximately seventy-five percent of the watershed lies in Bayfield County and twenty-five percent is in Ashland County. Most of the portion in Ashland County includes several small creeks and ravines that flow directly to the Bay.

The Chequamegon Bay Area Partnership (CBAP) has identified sediment as one of the primary issues facing Fish Creek and Chequamegon Bay. Too much sediment is a problem for many reasons, including covering important habitat used by fish (like trout and sturgeon) and other aquatic life, causing navigation problems, and

increasing costs for providing clean drinking water.

Fish Creek is one of the largest contributors of sediment to Chequamegon Bay, delivering more than one thousand dump truck loads of sediment every year. The large plumes of red clay that spread out into the Bay from Fish Creek is a common sight following rain events.

With participation from citizens, plus town, city, county, state and federal governments, the Ashland County Land and Water Conservation Department completed the Fish Creek Watershed Restoration and Management Plan in the spring of 2011 to address sediment and other water quality issues in Fish Creek.

The goals of the plan are to:

- Protect and restore water quality;
- Conserve productive soil resources;
- Protect and restore aquatic and terrestrial habitats;
- Manage urban and rural surface water runoff to reduce nutrient and contaminant inputs to streams and to Lake Superior;
- Reduce erosive effects of peak flows; and
- Restore wetland functions in upland landscapes.

You can find a copy of the plan at: [northland.edu/cbap-landowners](http://northland.edu/cbap-landowners) or contact Valerie Damstra at [vdamstra@northland.edu](mailto:vdamstra@northland.edu).



## Bluff Restoration Work on Fish Creek Continues

Last summer we told you about the latest project of the Chequamegon Bay Area Partnership (CBAP), aimed at reducing sediment loading to Fish Creek and Chequamegon Bay. Now that the snow is gone and water levels are down, engineers from the stream restoration firm, Inter-Fluve, were able to complete survey work the week of April 27 at a large, eroding stream bluff along North Fish Creek and Old U.S. Hwy. 2 in the town of Pilsen. The site is a high priority for restoration to reduce sediment into North Fish Creek and to prevent the eventual failure of Old U.S. Hwy. 2.

The survey will give the engineers the data they need to develop a preliminary design to stabilize the bluff. Once the design is created, Inter-Fluve and SOEI staff will work with regulators and landowners at the site to obtain necessary approvals and permits to complete the project. If all goes well, construction at the site could begin later in 2015 or will occur in 2016. Funding for this project comes from the Great Lakes Commission Program for Soil Erosion and Sediment Control.

The Chequamegon Bay Area Partnership is a coalition of federal, state and local natural resource agencies, tribes, municipalities, nonprofit organizations, and Northland College staff and faculty.

The Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute at Northland College coordinates the partnership, which collaborates to provide more effective and efficient natural resource management in the Chequamegon Bay region of Lake Superior. For more information and a list of partners, visit the CBAP website at: [northland.edu/cbap](http://northland.edu/cbap)

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## Helping Rivers for Over 30 Years: Inter-Fluve, Inc.

There's no question that we have some pretty good streams in the Chequamegon Bay area. But sometimes, even the good ones need a little help. Streams like Fish Creek suffer from bluff erosion and sediment washing off the land, into the water, and eventually into Chequamegon Bay. To fix eroding bluffs, like the project on North Fish Creek, we've turned to the experts who know how to do it right. We found these experts at Inter-Fluve.

Inter-Fluve, Inc. is a nationally recognized engineering and consulting firm that among other things, specializes in restoring streams. The company got their start in 1983 in Oregon, when a few folks who were passionate about fishing, science, and playing in rivers eyed an open niche. At the time, "river restoration" wasn't in the common vernacular.

Over time, they expanded their reach and their expertise to other areas in the U.S. In the early 2000's they started bringing their work to the Midwest, eventually opening offices in locations like Madison, Wisconsin. Inter-Fluve's team of scientists, engineers, and technicians have completed over 1,600 projects across four continents and all regions of the U.S. in the last thirty-plus years.

Ben Lee, a hydraulic engineer for Inter-Fluve, has become increasingly familiar with the streams in the Fish Creek and Marengo River watersheds in recent years. Ben has worked with the SOEI and the Bad River Watershed Association to search for funding to restore eroding bluffs that are contributing sediment to Chequamegon Bay.

"I'm very interested in improving streams like Fish Creek because I

think they are very unique systems in Wisconsin and the Midwest," says Lee. "From a physical perspective, there are few streams in the region with as much base flow and as steep of a gradient as Fish Creek. With a relatively extensive forested buffer in the surrounding floodplain of the mainstem, we don't need to complete extensive work within the channel to restore them."

Partnering with organizations like Inter-Fluve ensures our streams are getting the best technical expertise and attention. The feeling is mutual for Lee, as he sees the benefit of doing his work in partnership with local groups. "I really enjoy partnering with non-profit organizations as they tend to have a more vested interest in the health of rivers and watersheds. This also is why I decided to have a career helping to restore aquatic ecosystems."



# Landowners Take Care of “My Lake Superior Northwoods”

BY TAYLOR TIBBALS

CBAP is proud to be an active partner of My Lake Superior Northwoods, a program for landowners living in the Lake Superior watershed of Douglas, Bayfield, Ashland, and Iron counties. The Fish Creek watershed is just one of the high priority watersheds in the larger project area due to its high rate of sediment dumping into the bay, and covering of important fish habitat. As a partnership of over twenty public agencies and non-profit organizations, My Lake Superior Northwoods wants to help landowners care for their wildlife, woods, fields, and waters.

Whatever landowners value most about their property, My Lake Superior Northwoods can help make the best decisions. Landowners play an important role in improving wildlife habitat or protecting water quality.

My Lake Superior Northwoods has free tools and resources. Contact us for:

- Free Healthy Lands fact sheets
- Free site visit with a natural resource professional
- Free monthly email newsletter

Additionally, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service offers a cost-share program, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. We expect an early summer sign-up period so please call the Ashland office for more information at 715-682-9117. For more information about My Lake Superior Northwoods, visit [MyLakeSuperiorNorthwoods.org](http://MyLakeSuperiorNorthwoods.org).

My Lake Superior Northwoods is an equal opportunity provider. This partnership is made possible through a grant from the USDA Forest Service, and is part of the Lake Superior Landscape Restoration Partnership.

# SAVE THE DATE

## **Chequamegon Bay Birding and Nature Festival**

The 9th Annual Chequamegon Bay Birding & Nature Festival will be held May 14-16, 2015. The festival is a weekend of birding and nature activities on Wisconsin's south shore of Lake Superior at the peak of spring migration. With over 110 activities to choose from, birders and nature lovers of all skills and ages will find a wealth of choices at this year's festival. Many of the field trips and programs will begin and end at the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center. For a schedule of events or to register, please visit [www.birdandnaturefest.com](http://www.birdandnaturefest.com).

## **Northern Native Plant Sale**

The annual Northern Native Plant Sale will be held on Saturday, June 6 from 9 a.m.-1 p.m. at the Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute at Northland College. There will be several northwoods nurseries selling native grasses, wildflowers, and small shrubs. The event is sponsored by the Bayfield Regional Conservancy (BRC). Please contact BRC Director Meghan Dennison at 715-779-5263 or [meghan@brcland.org](mailto:meghan@brcland.org) for more information.

## **Kids Fishing Day**

The annual Kids Fishing Day at the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center will be held on Saturday, June 6 from 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Bring the kids to catch fish from the Center's ponds. Rods, reels, and bait provided, as well as a free lunch. There will also be games and prizes, so don't miss out on the fun! For more information please visit [www.nglvc.org](http://www.nglvc.org) or call 715-685-9983.

## **Chequamegon Bay a Unique Laboratory to Study Land and Water Issues**

Researchers gathered at Northland College on April 14, 2015 for the Chequamegon Bay Research Symposium. Scientists presented their findings on research projects, primarily within the bay and along the nearshore areas of Chequamegon Bay and the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore.

"Chequamegon Bay provides a unique laboratory to explore many research themes in a small area, like land use history, the connection between the land and nearshore areas, and the convergence of many ecological, cultural, and physical factors," said Watershed Program Coordinator Matt Hudson, one of the events coordinators.

An afternoon discussion session among participants covered how this type of research can be used in local decision-making and educating the public on water issues around the bay.

To view the presentations and learn more about some of the current research projects going on in Chequamegon Bay, please visit [northland.edu/cbap](http://northland.edu/cbap).



Chequamegon Bay. Photo by: Ted Cline

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