

News

A Watershed event-Bad River Association gathers for fundraiser



Chad Dally/Staff Photo- THOUSANDS RAISED - About 100 people came to the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center Saturday night to help raise funds for the Bad River Watershed Association. An estimated \$3,000 was generated toward water-quality monitoring at rivers and streams in Ashland, Bayfield and Iron counties, among other projects.

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For many locals, the lure of the White River revolves around its fishy inhabitants.

But it has a different draw for Pat Musil.

"I grew up on the White, and my boyfriend decided he wanted to be my husband when he saw it," she said jokingly, pointing to her hubby, Dennis. "And that was 50 years ago."

The Musils were two of about 100 people who came to the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center Saturday night to help raise funds for the Bad River Watershed Association.

It was the fourth "Spring for the Water" event held by the association, and Executive Director Michele Wheeler said Sunday that the group appears to have hit its target. Nearly \$3,000 was generated, Wheeler estimated, through a mix of admission fees that covered food and drink. Attendees also took part in a silent auction full of locally donated items, from a fly-fishing excursion to photographs and pottery.

Although a precise size is difficult to pin down, the watershed stretches from just south of Ashland

down to the Mellen area, and runs from Delta in the west over to Hurley on its eastern edge.

The funds help the association with two main tasks: water-quality monitoring at about 18 sites across northern Wisconsin, and maintaining inventories of crossings where rivers slip under roads and where culverts hamper fish movements.

Since its inception in 2002, the BRWA has been able to replace a few of the culverts — long tubes through which the water flows — in spots where water levels have dropped low enough to make it difficult for fish. But more importantly, it's been able to create an inventory of potential rough spots for future work, Hudson said.

For its water quality monitoring program, the group was honored on Saturday night with a couple of awards, given out by Nancy Larson of UW-Extension on behalf of UW-EX and the state Department of Natural Resources.

"This group has gone above and beyond what we normally think of with citizen monitoring," Larson said.

Larson pointed out that by sending out well-trained volunteers to monitor rivers and streams, the BRWA has established six years of baseline data for water quality throughout the watershed.

That, in turn, played a huge role in 44 stream segments being designated by the DNR as either "exceptional resource waters" or "outstanding resource waters."

As the group notes in its strategic plan, providing a blueprint for its focus until 2025, "streams in the Bad River watershed were not considered for these designations due to a lack of information.

"Our macroinvertebrate sample data was submitted to WDNR to demonstrate that many of the waters we sample deserve this special designation," the plan states.

While praising the work of the BRWA's volunteers, Wheeler said the its work is far from over.

"This (award) is a springboard for future work," she said.