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Watershed group wins statewide award

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MARQUETTE -The Michigan Outdoor Writers Association has chosen the Superior Watershed Partnership as the 2009 recipient of its Clean Waters Award, recognizing the organization's commitment to preserving, protecting and enhancing the watersheds of the Lake Superior, Lake Michigan and Lake Huron basins.

The award was presented during a recent SWP member appreciation night at Upfront and Company in downtown Marquette.

Based in Marquette, the Superior Watershed Partnership is a regional leader in Great Lakes protection for the U.P. Over the past 15 years, SWP has grown from a single citizen-based watershed council to a network of more than 20 watershed groups. The group's mission is to promote responsible individual and community actions that ensure a sustainable environment, encourage a sustainable economy, and help improve quality of life.

"When considering the nominations, we were impressed with the way SWP pulled so many communities and community groups together to work toward a common goal," said Carol Swinehart, chairwoman of the award committee. "We especially appreciated its annual Superior Youth Conservation Corps, which employs young people each summer to work on conservation projects at no cost to local units of government, non-profits and agencies such as the U.S. Forest Service and National Park Service."

Started in the central U.P., the Summer Youth Conservation Corps is expanding this year with plans for several new crews, including an all-female conservation crew in cooperation with the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community.

"We're especially proud of the fact that, in addition to our community education and policy work, we can consistently document measureable improvements in water quality and habitat conditions due to the restoration projects we implement each year," said Carl Lindquist, SWP executive director.

The Superior Watershed Partnership has been involved in many other conservation efforts.

Starting in 2005, the group participated in public waste collections in 20 communities across the U.P. In the first year, the group collected more than 45 tons of household hazardous waste for proper disposal.

Other SWP projects include work with local residents and communities to improve and protect water quality and natural resources in rural areas of the U.P. and to increase landowner stewardship through targeted public education campaigns. The SWP provided municipalities in all 15 U.P. counties with draft riparian protection ordinances to protect urban rivers and streams flowing to the Great Lakes.

Swinehart said organizations such as the SWP need to be encouraged to keep up their good work, which is part of the reason why MOWA's Clean Waters Award exists.

"It's important that the people of Michigan realize how hard these folks work on our behalf. Most of this effort is done by volunteers with significant in-kind contributions from local businesses, government agencies and their communities. They deserve our appreciation and our thanks," she said.

Michigan Outdoor Writers Association is an organization of more than 200 outdoor writers and other outdoor professionals.

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