

For five years now, the EarthKeepers have been setting environmental milestones. The figures are worth repeating, because they set records not only in Michigan but across the country.

In 2005, 45 tons of hazardous waste was collected in one day. In 2006 over 300 tons of electronic waste was collected in one day and in 2007, a ton of outdated medications was collected. In 2008, over 3 million pounds of carbon was reduced through voluntary energy conservation.

The results include cleaner water, cleaner air and a safer environment. And who did all this? People of all ages from 150 EarthKeepers churches, representing ten different faiths, located in communities across the Upper Peninsula.

The EarthKeepers idea really started over five years ago during a long drive around Lake Superior. Afterwards, the Cedar Tree Institute in cooperation with the Superior Watershed Partnership captured the concept on paper.

This agreement, called the EarthKeepers Covenant, stated that the signatories would make a commitment to help protect the unique environment of the northern Great Lakes.

Signers now include the bishops and religious leaders from the following faith traditions: Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Episcopal, Methodist, Presbyterian, Buddhist, Jewish, Unitarian, Bahai and Quaker. So, five years ago a document was signed but then what?

How do you take the good intentions of so many people and turn them into actions? That is the real work and that is where the Superior Watershed Partnership (SWP) plays a vital role.

The SWP is a non-profit organization serving the Upper Peninsula with a staff of biologists, planners and educators who work to protect the watersheds and communities of Lake Superior, Lake Michigan and Lake Huron. Beginning with the first EarthKeepers event, the SWP has identified annual projects, secured funding, provided logistical support, coordinated trucks, filed permits, monitored progress and documented results for EarthKeepers initiatives.

The results have been nothing short of staggering and state and federal agencies have taken notice. There has been a ripple effect throughout the Great Lake states. In 2008, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency contacted the SWP requesting information on how to structure similarly successful community collections. The EPA then offered special grants for collections of e-waste and pharmaceuticals with many of the collections to take place on or around Earth Day just like EarthKeepers events.

Surprisingly, most of the collections, even in large cities like Milwaukee, Chicago or Cleveland did not come anywhere close to the amounts col-



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AT A GLANCE

A blessing and planting of 12,000 trees will be held at various times on May 3 at about 100 churches and temples across the Upper Peninsula. Participating faith traditions include Lutheran, Catholic, United Methodist, Presbyterian, Jewish, Bahá'í, Unitarian Universalist, Zen Buddhist, Quaker and Episcopal. For more information call the U.P. EarthKeepers at 228-2388 or the Superior Watershed Partnership at 228-6095

lected by EarthKeepers. Even with a relatively sparse population (317,000) the Upper Peninsula has shown a stronger commitment to pollution prevention (by volume) than many major urban centers with millions of people. It should also be noted that the SWP has always encouraged public participation for EarthKeepers events. And all EarthKeepers events are free.

This year, EarthKeepers will be planting 12,000 native trees and once again, the benefits from this project will have a ripple effect far beyond the Upper Peninsula. Many people might wonder if we really need more trees here in the Upper Peninsula and the answer is a resounding, yes!

Trees provide many benefits including preventing erosion, providing habitat, cooling streams and more, but in these days of global climate change it is important to remember that trees also trap carbon.

It is estimated that these 12,000 trees at maturity will capture over 3 million pounds of carbon annually. The old adage – Think Globally, Act Locally – comes to mind. In early May thousands of EarthKeepers and their children will be making a difference by the simple act of planting a tree. The SWP would like to recognize our corporate partners who have donated trees including Holli Forest Products, Plum Creek, Forestland Group, Meisters and Thrivent.

Most trees will be planted in backyards or at camp but for those who do not have a good site, the SWP has several environmental restoration sites available that could use additional trees.

For more information please contact the Superior Watershed Partnership at 228-6095 or EarthKeepers at 228-2388.

Editor's note: Carl Lindquist is executive director of the nonprofit Superior Watershed Project in Marquette and co-founder of the EarthKeepers Initiative.

Great Lakes ripple effect