

Each Chequamegon Bay estuary is a unique treasure connected by the waters they share.

A STRING OF PEARLS: THE ESTUARIES OF CHEQUAMEGON BAY

Cathy Techtmann

es·tu·ar·y (ĕs'chōō-ĕ r'ē) **noun**

An arm of the sea that extends inland to meet the mouth of a river.¹

Along Lake Superior's southern shore, rivers draining the land flow into the cold blue waters of the world's largest freshwater sea. These places, on the edge of water and soil, have been shaped through time by nature and man. Like their saltwater cousins, the shallow coastal wetlands formed where the waters from the land and inland sea mix and mingle are estuaries².

Like a string of pearls, fresh water estuaries grace the sweeping curve of Lake Superior's Chequamegon Bay. Each estuary is a unique treasure connected by the waters they share.

Just as the Lake shapes these coastal wetlands, the estuaries in turn influence the Lake. In a dynamic relationship the quality of water sent out through the estuaries affects the people, wildlife, plants and even the future of the Lake Superior region. Each has a story to tell that is best shared by the people who cherish and protect them.

A 20-minute video, "*A String of Pearls*," captures the stories of estuaries of Chequamegon Bay. The University of Wisconsin-Extension and Wisconsin Coastal Management Program (WCMP)

produced the video with help from tribal elders, natural resource managers and concerned citizens. Shot on location on Lake Superior, the program takes viewers on a virtual tour of each estuary and allows them to experience their rich diversity – without getting their feet wet! Viewers gain personal insights from the people who manage and care for these resources. From historic photos and on-the-water scenes, they learn about the issues and opportunities concerning protection of the estuaries.

The video is organized into five vignettes featuring the traditional Native American flute music of Frank *Anakwad* Montano. Each vignette reveals a different perspective on how each estuary has shaped the region's culture, history and ecology, and the challenges of preserving them.

- **Kakagon-Bad River Estuary**...protecting the 16,000 acre "Everglades of the North" and what is sacred to the Ojibwe people.
- **Fish Creek Estuary**...discovering how natural events and human activities have made change a constant.
- **Whittlesey Creek Estuary**...restoring a damaged watershed and the native Coaster Brook Trout through a new National Wildlife Refuge.



- **Sioux and Onion River Estuaries...**citizen volunteers taking leadership for preservation and protection through land use planning.
- **Raspberry Bay Estuary...**sustainability through tribal leadership to prevent erosion and preserve water quality for wild rice, fish and traditional uses.

The freshwater estuaries of Chequamegon Bay have experienced many changes. Only now are we beginning to appreciate the function of these unique coastal wetlands and recognize their cultural and biological importance. *“A String of Pearls”* explains how citizens, agencies and tribes work together to preserve these rare treasures. The stories of these estuaries remind us of how much our past and future are linked to the water and how, in turn, they are linked to each other.

The creation of *“A String of Pearls”* builds on a partnership between the WCMP and the University of Wisconsin-Extension through the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center in Ashland. The video raises the awareness of visitors to the region, citizens, students and local decision-makers of



the importance of Chequamegon Bay’s freshwater estuaries and coastal wetlands. The Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center distributed the video to schools and libraries throughout the Lake Superior region and features it in estuary education programs. It is available in VHS or CD format or via webstreaming at www.uwex.edu/ces/nglvc.

Organizations providing technical expertise in the creation of *“A String of Pearls”* include the Bad River Band of the Lake Superior Chippewa, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, the Inland Sea Society, the Red Cliff Band of the Lake Superior Chippewa and the University of Wisconsin-Superior Videography Department.

Lake Superior’s Chequamegon Bay estuaries shaped the character of the region for centuries. Educational projects such as *“A String of Pearls”* help to ensure that these irreplaceable resources prosper in the decades to follow.



Cathy Techtmann is the Education Coordinator for the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center’s University of Wisconsin-Extension Office. She is a Professor of Community Resource Development and the producer of “A String of Pearls.” She can be reached at (715) 685-2671 or at catherine.techtmann@ces.uwex.edu.

¹ The American Heritage Dictionary. Second College Edition. Copyright 1982.

² U.S.C. §1453(7) Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972 (as amended 1996).