



## **The Story Behind the Bush Grant**

Since its inception, Itasca Waters has always focused on preserving, maintaining, and restoring Itasca County's greatest natural resource: water. With more than 1,000 lakes and hundreds of miles of streams and rivers, the county is fortunate in having this water abundance which brings in an annual revenue of \$80 million to our tourist economy. It's also why many people choose to live and work in Itasca County.

During the grant's first year, an in-depth community engagement process was conducted in order to generate a shared meaning and ownership around the importance of proactively protecting our water. Over a thousand Itasca County residents were contacted via online surveys, one-on-one interviews, phone interviews, focus groups, and human-centered design sessions. Itasca Waters reached out to lake associations; elected county, city, and township officials; business owners; fishing guides; resort owners; realtors; and the general community.

In May 2020, Itasca Waters began the second phase of the Bush Foundation grant. The information gathered from the community engagements is being used to plan and implement a public awareness campaign around the importance of clean water in our community. An action plan is also being developed so the community can coordinate efforts to protect our water.