

## ARTIST'S STATEMENT:

### **WATERSHED**

**Tim Gustafson PhD**

*Music Video (2018)*

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*Music video available at: <https://www.ecosong.band/watershed/>*

I have been a songwriter for 40 years, working in what has come to be known as the Americana genre. Musically, Americana grows out of folk, blues, and country traditions of American popular music; lyrically, it can range from confessional and personal to topical and political. Recently, I have been writing material for the [Ecosong project](#) as a member of the [Hypoxic Punks](#), a band that includes fellow University of Minnesota faculty members Mark Pedelty and Bob Poch. Writing such material presents an interesting challenge: trying to communicate an environmental message in an engaging, artful song that transcends a public service announcement.

Writing songs always feels to me like collaboration with the Muse as well as with an imagined audience. I had been reading and thinking about watershed issues when I came up with the song's opening (and closing) lines:

We're all living in a watershed  
All sharing the same roadbed, and we're  
All drinking from the same fountain of life.

From there, the song developed quickly. Originally the verses focused on agricultural runoff, but once Mark Pedelty applied for a grant from The Mississippi Watershed Management Organization (MWMO) to partner in their "Salt Smart" initiative, I revised the focus to chloride pollution--not just by salt trucks on roads, but by homeowners and business owners.

Working up a musical arrangement of a song with a band is inherently the work of partners. Although I usually have a general idea of what the arrangement of one of my songs might sound like, I thoroughly enjoy how the other musicians figure out their own parts, including any improvisation/solos. In the Hypoxic Punks, the band talks about how things feel and sound as we develop the arrangement; the song inevitably becomes something I hadn't imagined--always in a positive way. With "Watershed," Bob Poch quickly found the drum groove that anchored the arrangement, and Mark Pedelty decided to play harmonica rather than guitar or keyboard.

We made the audio recording with Karl Demer at Atomic K studios in Minneapolis. A recording engineer is a crucial partner in any musical recording, affecting everything from the volume and tone of individual voices and instruments to the overall mix, arrangement, and feel of a song. The job requires technical skills as well as people skills (including tact, candor, and much patience), all of which Karl possesses.

Making a music video with the Hypoxic Punks for the Ecosong project is necessarily collaborative, and I am still a neophyte in the world of video creation/production (*Watershed* is just the third music video project that I have been involved in). Mark Pedelty developed the concept for the video, created a storyboard in partnership with Tammy Schmitz from MWMO, and also recruited dancers with the assistance of Carl Flink from the U of M's Dance Program. Mark served as Producer and Director of the video.

Mark worked with nine undergraduate student dancers, introducing them to the project, the song, the concept, and the storyboard. Once the dancers had their roles (ranging from "salters" to "slippers" to "Vanna Whites" to "shovel dancers"), they choreographed their own segments and worked in rehearsals to integrate their parts into the whole as it developed. Here are three dancers' statements about their experience:

It was a fun and unexpected experience working on the *Watershed* video. I really had no idea that there was even an issue with salting before starting this project, but I feel like it's knowledge that I am now obliged to pass on! It feels good to know I took part in something that is making steps towards bettering the environment. (Maxine Yamazaki).

I felt like my time and energy was valued by Mark and the rest of the team. (Tori Breen).

The entire process was very collaborative and I felt supported by everyone involved. (Abby Beckers).

We shot the video on the east end of the Washington Avenue Bridge (on the U of M campus) in four hours on a Saturday in January, facilitated by the work of Director of Photography Karl Demer, Assistant Director Eric Todd, and Associate Producers Kelli Burr and Elja Roy.

In post-production, Mark and Karl assembled the footage and created the titling, making numerous decisions in consultation with Tammy Schmitz of the MWMO. The result of all this collaborative work and creative partnership is the video published here.

Tim Gustafson teaches writing in the Department of Writing Studies at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. He writes songs and performs in several bands, including the Hypoxic Punks, with whom the song and video Watershed was created. He lives in Minneapolis, near the Mississippi River.

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