



Western Lake Erie Basin Partnership Healthy Land ~ Healthy Lake

Michigan Western Lake Erie Basin Cooperative Conservation Agreement Fact Sheet

On April 3, 2008, USDA, Michigan Department of Agriculture, the conservation districts in Branch, Jackson, Hillsdale, Lenawee, Monroe and Washtenaw counties, and the non-profit Environmental Defense Fund launched an effort to improve water quality and restore wildlife in southeast Michigan's Western Lake Erie Basin Watershed.

This effort combines:

- increased funding to conservation districts for farmer outreach and technical assistance;
- advanced level EQIP practices to improve water quality, like precision nutrient management, winter cover crops and continuous no-till; and
- CREP practices that filter runoff and provide wildlife habitat, such as streamside buffers and wetland restoration.

Financial assistance to landowners will come primarily from Michigan's Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). EDF will help provide conservation districts with increased financial assistance to work with farmers to plan for and implement the practices. The conservation districts also will receive technical training and assistance from the NRCS and Michigan Department of Agriculture.

A recent amendment of the Michigan CREP expanded the scope of this valuable program beyond the River Raisin area to include parts of Branch, Hillsdale, Lenawee and Monroe Counties to enhance benefits to the Western Lake Erie Basin. CREP participants receive payments to take highly sensitive, marginally-productive lands out of production and convert them to streamside buffers, restored wetlands and other practices that filter water and provide wildlife habitat. For information on practices and incentives, visit the FSA Web site at www.fsa.usda.gov/mi.

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program, administered by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, provides financial assistance to farmers for a wide variety of conservation measures. With water quality improvement a key priority for NRCS in the state, the agency is committed to prioritizing for EQIP funding farmer applications for implementation of key advanced level water quality improvement practices such as precision nutrient management, winter cover crops, and continuous no-till. By increasing outreach to and technical support for farmers to develop conservation plans focused on these highly effective practices, this innovative partnership will help increase implementation of these practices through EQIP and enhance water quality improvements in this critical region. More information about EQIP is available on the NRCS-Michigan Web site, www.mi.nrcs.usda.gov.



Expanded CREP area - Michigan portion of Western Lake Erie Basin

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Conservation Practices Promoted by WLEB Partnership Lake Erie is both the most biologically productive of the five Great Lakes and the one facing some of the biggest conservation challenges, particularly from runoff and erosion. The most significant source of nonpoint runoff into Lake Erie is the Maumee River Basin. Once largely forested swamp, the Maumee watershed is now 85 percent farmland. Each year about five million tons of soil erode off the land into the Maumee River and then into Lake Erie.

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and the USDA Farm Service Agency in partnership with local conservation districts provide technical and financial assistance to farmers to install conservation practices designed to reduce soil and nutrient runoff into surface water. Examples of these practices include:

Conservation Tillage (top right)

Conservation tillage involves reducing the amount of tillage done to farm fields. Reducing or eliminating tillage reduces erosion by leaving a crop residue on fields, such as corn stubble, that holds the soil together and reduces erosion caused by wind and rain.

Riparian Buffers (middle right)

Riparian buffers are strips of grasses, shrubs or trees planted or left in place along streams, rivers and creeks. The buffers hold soil in place and also filter eroded soil and nutrients from field runoff.

Cover Crops (bottom right)

Cover crops, such as winter rye or clover, are planted between periods of regular crop production to prevent soil erosion and improve soil quality. Cover crops help control erosion by shielding the soil surface from the impact of falling raindrops, hold soil particles in place and slowing the velocity of runoff. Cover crops also improve soil structure by adding organic matter.



Western Lake Erie Basin Partnership ~ Michigan Partners

Environmental Defense Fund—Branch Conservation District—Jackson Conservation District
Hillsdale Conservation District—Lenawee Conservation District—Michigan Department of Agriculture
Monroe Conservation District—USDA Farm Service Agency—USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
Washtenaw Conservation District

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