

Western Lake Erie Basin Bulletin

December 2007

Healthy Land ~ Healthy Lake

Volume 1 Issue 1



Welcome to our first issue of the *Western Lake Erie Basin Bulletin*. Aimed at providing you with the latest news and information on upcoming projects and events, the *Bulletin* will be released at least three times a year, in January, May, and October. The first two issues, due out in November 2007 and January 2008, are aimed at summarizing the activities of the WLEB Partnership since it was established in 2005. Consider this the “*Cliff Notes*” for the WLEB Partnership’s first two years. Starting in May 2008, we will settle into our regular format. For now, sit back, catch up on a few things you may have missed along the way, and enjoy the news items we have scattered throughout.

Strategic Plan in Place!

The partnership is adopting Strategic Objectives in alignment with both the eight priority areas of the Great Lake Regional Collaboration and with important local resource concerns within the WLEB project area. For each Strategic Objective, the partnership will establish specific goals (milestones) and short, intermediate and long term action items that will support the attainment of each goal. Goal time frames are defined as: Short Term Goals = within 1 year, Intermediate Goals = within 3 years and Long Term Goals = within 3 - 10 years.



This plan will be implemented via the collective efforts of 30+ partners who will take voluntary leadership for various components of the plan. The partnership acknowledges that this is a collective plan and that not all partners have the same authorities, organizational latitudes, missions, or operating capabilities. The partners agree to support and implement this plan in spirit and action whenever possible. It is stated and understood

that this plan does not obligate any partner organization to any WLEB partnership goal, action, or position which is contrary to that organizations policy, authorities, or positions on any singular issue or action. Finalization of this plan was authorized by the WLEB Leadership Team at the August 9, 2007 team meeting.

New WLEB Website Debuts

With the age of technology upon us, a clear, comprehensive website is important to any organization. A high quality website allows for the rapid communication of large quantities of time sensitive, graphically intense data to a large audience to occur almost instantaneously. The WLEB Partnership is proud to unveil their newly revived website at www.wleb.org. The website has been completely redesigned and updated, to include information useful for government agencies, private organizations, and local citizens. Currently only the essentials have been loaded onto the new website and minor technical issues are still being worked out. In the coming weeks, check back regularly as additional information and announcements will be added. Our goal is to make the WLEB website your one stop shop for the Western Lake Erie Basin!

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Western Lake Erie Basin Partnership

Mission Statement

The *WLEB Partnership* is a tri-state partnership dedicated to enhancing multi-purpose projects that improve land and water resource management in the basin and promote a healthy, productive watershed.

Partners:

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, NRCS
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
U.S. Geological Survey,
Ohio Water Science Center
Governor of Indiana
Governor of Michigan
Governor of Ohio
Indiana State Technical Committee
Michigan State Technical Committee
Ohio Department of Natural Resources,
Division of SWCD
National Association of
Conservation Districts
Maumee River Basin Partnership of
Local Governments
Ohio State Technical Committee

Western Lake Erie Basin Partners
are equal opportunity
employers and providers.

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A Brief History of the Partnership Efforts

In 2005, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers initiated a collaborative effort for the improvement of water management and water quality in the Western Lake Erie Basin. The Maumee, Portage, and Ottawa River Watersheds are the primary focus of the partnership effort at this time.

Partnership Activities

A kick-off meeting with various stakeholders in the watershed was held in Defiance, Ohio in November, 2005. Over 15 partners, including multiple governmental agencies and non-profit organizations representing both agricultural and urban sectors, participated in the meeting. In January, 2006, a second meeting was held in Oregon, Ohio, to finalize a project mission statement and objectives. By-laws and a logo were approved at a subsequent meeting in Ft. Wayne, Indiana, on March 29, 2006.

The project is now governed by a leadership group which consists of partner organization leaders, and an operations group consisting of partner organization staff, which reports to the leadership group. NRCS and USACE jointly chair both the leadership and operations groups. In addition, four committees are staffed with volunteers from the WLEB partners and other resource management organizations in the watershed. The committees report to the leadership group via the operations group.

NRCS has entered into agreements with various entities to fund work which supports both the NRCS mission and the WLEB partnership. These entities include the University of Toledo, National Center for Water Quality Research, Local Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Conservation Action Project, the Maumee Valley RC&D, Ducks Unlimited, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, and the Ohio Lake Erie Commission, among others. Cooperative agreements have been signed with all soil and water conservation districts in the basin - this includes Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan.

Rapid Resource Assessments

Rapid resource assessments are underway in an effort to develop a comprehensive compilation of watershed data for the 8-digit Hydrologic Unit Areas (HUA) in the watershed. This data will be used to assist decision-makers as they formulate watershed management plans. The first assessment focused on the Blanchard River Watershed. NRCS is assessing erosion, drainage, agricultural issues, forestry and water quality in order to target USDA Programs to the most significant conservation needs. A local stakeholder meeting was held in the Blanchard watershed in May, 2006 to discuss the rapid assessment. Representatives from 14 agencies and over 30 additional individuals attended the meeting. A follow-up stakeholders meeting will be scheduled soon to present the draft GIS products to local stakeholders for comments and input. NRCS is working concurrently with the USACE to assess each HUA.

USACE Feasibility Study

At the same time the USACE is conducting a broad feasibility study which will build on the local assessment data. This study will look at traditional Corps type issues such as navigation, dredging, flood risk management, and habitat as well as other issues important to the local stakeholders. The feasibility study will be a broad compilation of the assessment of each Hydrologic Unit. It will identify watershed improvement needs and projects and provide a series of recommendations for action within the watershed.

WLEB Partner Focus - NRCS

Lake Erie is part of the Great Lakes System which contains 20 percent of all the freshwater in the world. Numerous Federal and State reports have identified Lake Erie as impaired due to excessive loadings of sediment and nutrients. Long-term water quality monitoring has identified the Maumee River as being the largest single contributor of nonpoint source pollution to the Lake.

Reports and modeling done in the Basin by U.S. Geological Survey, USDA Agricultural Research Service, National Center for Water Quality Research, USACE and NRCS have identified the erosion control practices of conservation tillage and conservation buffers as effective in reducing both soil erosion and sediment transport from the watershed. Nutrient management, manure management plans, wetland restorations, and controlled drainage have been shown to effectively reduce nutrient transport from the watershed to the lake. Current USDA Farm Bill programs are a proven means of facilitating installation of these practices by farmers.

NRCS has developed a plan to use Rapid Resource Assessments, Area Wide Planning, and acceleration of USDA Farm Bill program to address the resource concerns for the Western Basin of Lake Erie, and the contributing watersheds including the Maumee, the Portage, and the Ottawa Rivers as well as other smaller direct discharge streams between Toledo and Sandusky Bay. The project area encompasses 4.2 million acres in the Maumee River watershed and another 714,000 acres in the Ottawa River, Portage River, and the Lake Erie direct tributaries combined, for a total project area of 4,914,000 acres.

Rapid Resource Assessments in each of the eight different 8-digit hydrologic units in the project area will be combined into a basin wide plan. This data will use an Adaptive Management approach to fine tune and guide the acceleration of the USDA Farm Bill program participation.

The plan estimates the acres of filter strips, riparian buffers, grassed waterways, conservation tillage and nutrient management as well as the number of Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans (manure management), waste storage structures, and pasture systems that will be needed to address resource concerns.

This 10-year plan for accelerating the participation in USDA Farm Bill programs will involve financial assistance to farmers in the form of cost sharing and practice payments, and technical assistance to assist farmers in planning and applying these practices.

Progress will be measured by a combination of means, including the NRCS Progress Reporting System (PRS), annual tracking of land use/cover changes, conservation tillage transects, and water quality monitoring data.

Article from: http://www.oh.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/erie_basin/erie_basin_project.html.

Sub-Watershed Focus

Blanchard River



The Blanchard River Watershed is located in the southeast part of the Western Lake Erie Basin. The headwaters begin in Kenton, Ohio until bending around the Findlay reservoir and flowing to the west towards Ottawa. The river empties into the Auglaize River, then into the Maumee River and eventually into Lake Erie. The topography of the Blanchard River watershed, like much of northwest Ohio, is generally flat. The City of Findlay, the largest community within the Blanchard, is slightly sunken within the basin, much like a divot on the 18th green.

The Blanchard River Watershed Partnership is a young organization that has recently acquired its non-profit status. Partnering communities in the watershed include Findlay, Ottawa, Bluffton and many small villages. The Blanchard River watershed has six major tributaries, each of which is characterized by a sub-watershed. Since its inception, the BRWP has focused on education and several river clean-ups. The BRWP is currently targeting the Lye Creek sub-watershed for stream monitoring and seeking grants that would provide for a watershed coordinator to write a watershed management plan.



For more information contact:
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chair@blanchardriver.com
BRWP, P.O. Box 1237, Findlay, Ohio,
45839-1237

Getting Involved in the WLEB

As a part of the WLEB study, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has been directed by Congress to conduct comprehensive assessments of watershed in Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan. The studies will detail problems relating to flood risk management, navigation, water quality, recreation, and fish and wildlife habitat. The studies will also explore potential solutions, emphasizing comprehensive actions that may alleviate several problems at once. An important part of the process is collecting stakeholder input. Currently, the USACE is beginning work on the Upper Maumee and St. Mary's River sub-watersheds. This effort was initiated with a kickoff meeting on October 30th in Fort Wayne, IN. Future opportunities for public input will be announced both by mailings to local organizations, as well as through the updated WLEB website. If you have questions regarding this study or the meetings, contact Charles Gould at 313-226-3365 or charles.r.gould@lre02.usace.army.mil

CALENDAR

December 6 - 7:00 p.m. @ UT Lake Erie Center, Documentary: "Thunder on the Farm" Open to the public

December 12 - 10:00 a.m. Ohio Lake Erie Commission meeting @ Ohio Department of Transportation, Meeting Room GA, lower level, 1980 West Broad Street, Columbus, OH 43223 Open to the public

February 8 & 9 - Lake Erie LaMP Public Forum, London, Ontario, Canada cheryl@theoec.org or 614-487-7506