

# Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Fact Sheet

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) efforts under the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) are focused on protecting and restoring priority watersheds in the Great Lakes Basin.

## Background/Purpose

Over 30 million Americans get their drinking water from the Great Lakes, which also support a \$62-billion dollar economy\* based on fishing, boating, and recreational activities. The waters of the Great Lakes are highly sensitive to biological and chemical stresses and many of the coastal areas have become impaired by sediment and nutrients. Wildlife has also been impacted by habitat fragmentation and competition from invasive species.

NRCS is proud to be one of 11 federal agencies supporting the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI). (You can visit the multi-agency website at <http://greatlakesrestoration.us/index.html>.) NRCS is helping landowners and land users to plan and implement activities to improve and protect the natural resources in locally identified watersheds within the eight GLRI states -- Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin.

NRCS conservation professionals are providing technical assistance to farmers and communities to install scientifically-proven conservation practices on the land. The GLRI Action Plan calls for



*Conservation practices installed through GLRI help to improve and protect the waters of the Great Lakes Basin for the benefit of residents and citizens of the United States and Canada.*

aggressive efforts to address five urgent priorities:

- Clean up the most-polluted areas in the lakes,
- Combat invasive species,
- Protect watersheds and shoreline from run-off,
- Restore wetlands and other habitats, and
- Work with strategic partners on education, evaluation, and outreach.

The plan also provides accountability by including measures of progress and benchmarks for success over five years.

## Partnerships

NRCS is working with several partners to accomplish the GLRI conservation goals. The Keweenaw Bay Indian Community in Michigan is joining with NRCS to open over 70 miles of rivers and streams to fish passage. The

Great Lakes Commission and their Great Lakes Basin Program have provided additional grants in that area focusing on soil erosion and sediment control.

Partnering with the Chicago Park District, NRCS is working to restore and protect 17 acres of a 104-acre beachfront park that provides recreation to a wide area of South Chicago where land-based invasive species were taking root in the soil and out-competing desired plants that hold the soil in place. The Thousand Islands Land Trust in New York will help NRCS improve 133 acres of shrubland habitat on Grindstone Island, which provides critical nesting sites for the Golden-winged warbler, a bird of special concern in New York State.

Several State agencies, NRCS, and other conservation partners in the Ohio Phosphorus Task Force have joined to reduce phosphorus

runoff into Lake Erie. Phosphorus contributes to harmful algal blooms occurring in the Lakes. Conservation districts continue to be critical partners in providing a local conservation voice in GLRI efforts.

## Goals and Objectives

NRCS conservation professionals are helping producers implement practices to control and reduce invasive land-based species, reduce sediment from frequent flooding through easements, and protect farmland from development. Conservation practices will reduce sediment, nutrients, and pesticides running into the Lakes. Wetlands will be protected and restored, and habitat improved for wildlife and aquatic species. Progress has already been made, which is good news for the residents of the Great Lakes Basin.

## For More Information:

For more information on GLRI, contact your local USDA NRCS office or look on the web at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/glri/index.html>. For more information on the complete GLRI Initiative, go to <http://www.epa.gov/greatlakes/glri/>.

## Conservation Funding

Using the Conservation Technical Assistance Program, NRCS conservation professionals provide technical and planning assistance to determine which conservation management practices will provide the results that best benefit the farmers and the goals of GLRI. Nutrient management systems, erosion control, conservation tillage, pest management, and buffers systems are just some of the practices being used to improve and protect the Initiative area.

To help install conservation practices, NRCS also provides financial assistance using programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives

Program (EQIP), and the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP).

## Benefits

NRCS is proud to be involved in GLRI and working with landowners and communities to improve and protect the natural resources. Landowners and farmers are receiving incentive payments to implement conservation practices that help them farm the land more efficiently and effectively. In addition to the financial assistance, they see the land become more productive and sustainable for the future. Communities are benefiting from cleaner water, safer beaches, and healthy habitat for the wildlife and aquatic communities that provide diversity in our ecosystem.



*Local groups within the GLRI defined area helped determine priority watersheds in which to focus conservation efforts.*