



Natural Infrastructure Initiative to Protect Lake Erie and Saginaw Bay Through Wetland Restoration

ISSUE

Investing \$30 million of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to restore and develop highly functional wetlands will minimize phosphorous entering Lake Erie and Saginaw Bay thereby reducing harmful algal blooms while supporting ecosystem services such as flood reduction, increased groundwater infiltration, fish and wildlife habitat creation, and improved quality of life for local communities.

Funding at this level will support the development of a network of restored wetlands across the Lake Erie Basin and Saginaw Bay watersheds to capture agricultural runoff and prevent excess nutrients from reaching the lakes. This initiative will make substantial progress towards Michigan's objectives of the Lake Erie and Lake Huron Action and Management Plans to improve water quality, while increasing wildlife habitat and potentially public recreation opportunities. This investment will scale-up a current pilot project being led by DNR, MDARD, EGLE, and DU to restore 50-80 acres in the Lake Erie watershed to reduce phosphorous and nitrogen runoff.

POINTS OF INTEREST

- Harmful algal blooms (HABs) in Lake Erie and the Saginaw Bay compromise public drinking water, reduce recreational opportunity, and harm fish and wildlife, all of which negatively impact local economies.
- In agriculture-dominated landscapes like the River Raisin and Maumee River tributaries of Michigan, strategically placed wetland restorations to intercept run-off is a widely accepted solution to improving water quality, with evidence showing 30%-80% reductions in loading of agricultural nutrients.
- DU, in partnership with state agencies, has piloted a landscape assessment tool to identify and evaluate sites for wetland restoration that intercept agricultural run-off and flood water.
- A \$30 million investment will support at least 15 projects that could act as filters for over 20,000 acres.
- This investment will be utilized to leverage additional public and private funds to further amplify the work.

MOVING FORWARD

The Natural Infrastructure Initiative will invest in wetland restorations designed specifically for nutrient reduction while also resulting in additional ecosystem services such as flood attenuation, increased carbon capture, increased fish and wildlife habitat, and improved public recreational opportunities. These funds are best administered by conservation professionals at the Department of Natural Resources who are in the best position to partner with non-governmental organizations to deliver projects on-the-ground and monitor benefits. This investment would complement the work being done by other state and federal partners across the landscape and show other Great Lakes states that Michigan is committed to solving our water quality and quantity challenges. In the long term, a wetland restoration program such as this could be expanded and utilized in other regions of Michigan that would benefit from these restoration outcomes.

CONTACT

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