

FACT SHEET

White Lake Area of Concern



July 20, 2011

White Lake, located in Muskegon County, Michigan, is in better health than it has been in decades. Pollution from a chemical manufacturing era and unchecked development placed White Lake on an international list of “toxic hotspots” called Areas of Concern in the mid-1980s, along with 42 other waterways in the Great Lakes. Since then, much has been done to achieve progress, including years of community meetings, environmental studies, cleanups of toxic sediment in the lake, and habitat restoration projects.

The environmental problems that put White Lake on the Great Lakes Area of Concern list caused significant changes to its ecology, water quality, economic vitality, and recreational use. Because these changes, termed Beneficial Use Impairments (BUIs), were considered to be affecting the Great Lakes, White Lake qualified for a special federal and state cleanup program – the Great Lakes Area of Concern Program.

White Lake’s Beneficial Use Impairments

Eight BUIs (out of a total of 14 possible) have been identified in White Lake: Restrictions on Fish and Wildlife Consumption, Degradation of Benthos (aquatic organisms on the lake bottom), Restrictions on Dredging, and Eutrophication or Excessive Growth of Algae, Restrictions on Drinking Water Consumption or Taste and Odor Problems, Degradation of Aesthetics, Loss of Fish and Wildlife Habitat, and Degraded Fish and Wildlife Populations.

State and federal agencies and the White Lake Public Advisory Council have worked together to establish a process for deciding when each of these impairments could be removed as a problem in White Lake. Goals, called restoration targets, were established for each BUI, describing the desired condition of the lake in relation to that problem. Criteria were also determined for each BUI, specifying what would be measured, where, and when, in order to achieve the targets. Two BUIs

will be addressed with the completion of a new project beginning in July 2011 and concluding in September 2012 -- **The White Lake Shoreline Habitat Restoration Project.**



This \$2.1 million Great Lakes Restoration Initiative project will restore valuable fish and wildlife habitat at seven public and private sites along the shoreline of White Lake. When completed, there will be

increased diversity of wetland plants, healthier habitat for fish and wildlife, improved water quality, and more aesthetically pleasing shorelines. It will also address two of the habitat-related impairments: Loss of Fish and Wildlife Habitat, and Degraded Fish and Wildlife Populations. This will help to remove White Lake from the list of Great Lakes Areas of Concern.

Community Involvement

The White Lake Public Advisory Council (PAC) provides local input to the cleanup program for White Lake. Since its establishment in 1992 by local community members, the PAC has been working with the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to address the BUIs, restore the health of White Lake, and remove it from the Area of Concern list. The PAC, which meets monthly, has hosted numerous public meetings to ensure participation in the restoration effort by citizens of the White Lake area. The Muskegon Conservation District provides administrative and technical support to the PAC.

The community has played an invaluable role in advancing progress to restore White Lake, through supporting the initiatives of the PAC, attending meetings to show that cleanup issues are important, and sending letters to the media and to elected officials on specific issues and in general support of restoration of the lake. There are many opportunities for individual and collective educational and stewardship activities to assist in the restoration and maintenance of White Lake.

For More Information

Many informative documents, publications and resources are available at: www.muskegoncd.org/whitelakepac.

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