

Protecting Indiana's Coastal Waters

Today, more than 700,000 people live in Indiana's coastal counties (Lake, Porter, and LaPorte). Aside from aesthetics, Indiana's coastal waters provide homes for an amazing array of plants and animals and are recreational retreats for more than two million visitors per year.

Yet, high levels of bacterial pollution closed beaches in these three coastal counties 347 times in 2001. Rapidly increasing population growth and urban development along our state's coast could cause a higher frequency of future coastal water quality problems.

Many times the source of these coastal water quality problems is nonpoint source (NPS) pollution. Within Indiana, sources of NPS pollution include agricultural and urban runoff, faulty septic systems, marinas and recreational boating, physical changes to stream channels, and habitat degradation.

During 1998 to 1999, the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) conducted a Unified Watershed Assessment of Indiana's Lake Michigan region. IDEM ranked the present condition of water in lakes, rivers, and streams and investigated resource concerns and stressors on water quality for the region. IDEM found that all the watersheds in the coastal region did not meet designated uses or other natural resource goals. Stressors were identified as residential septic system density, urbanization, and some agricultural activities.

In 1990, Congress enacted Section 6217 of the Coastal Zone Act Reauthorization Amendments to confront the NPS pollution problem in the United States' coastal waters. The central purpose of this program, the Coastal Polluted Runoff Program is to strengthen coordination between federal and state coastal management and water quality programs and to enhance state and local efforts to manage land use activities that degrade coastal waters and habitats. As one of 34 states and territories with approved coastal management programs, Indiana will implement a Coastal Polluted Runoff Program within its Lake Michigan coastal watersheds.

Indiana will develop goals for four major categories of NPS pollution:

1. Agricultural runoff;
2. Urban runoff;
3. Marinas and recreation boating; and
4. Hydrological modifications.

Examples of practices or methods for addressing NPS pollution include:

- Reducing runoff from impervious parking lot surfaces by placing gently sloping grassy swales between rows of parking spaces;
- Installing soil erosion and sedimentation controls to prevent pollutants from leaving the site of land disturbing activities; and
- Planting or preserving buffer strips of vegetation along stream banks to reduce runoff and protect against erosion.

The Indiana Department of Natural Resources through the Lake Michigan Coastal Program (LMCP), will work with IDEM, Purdue Cooperative Extension Service, and other stakeholders to identify strategies and coordinate public participation in development of a Coastal Polluted Runoff Program. Development of the program will include the public and representatives from business, industry, local, state, and federal agencies, environmental organizations, recreational interests, and agriculture.

Several existing state programs work to address NPS pollution through voluntary partnerships. The LMCP will work with these existing programs to develop specific goals for Indiana's coastal waters; this approach, in addition to public involvement will reduce duplication and lead to the development of a successful Coastal Polluted Runoff Program in Indiana.

