

Happenings in Your 'shed

Rain Gardens Workshop

Thursday, May 18, 2006, 7 p.m. – 8 p.m.
Yale Public Library
2 Jones Street, Yale, 48097
Sponsored by the St. Clair County Health Dept.
Phone: (810) 387-2940

Master Gardener Association Garden Tour

Saturday, July 15, 2006, 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.
Cost: \$10.00
For more information: (810) 650-0075
Tickets on sale at MSU Extension Office, Moshers Jewelry, Chameleon Salon, and Schwehofer's Nursery.

Pond Workshop

Wednesday, May 17, 2006, 6:00 p.m.
7700 Trumble Road, Columbus Township, 48063
Sponsored by the St. Clair Conservation District
Contact Stacey Kautz at (810) 984-3001 x5

River Day 2006

Saturday, June 10, 2006
For complete event details and updates, call (810) 987-5306 or email riverday@stclaircounty.org.

Fall Tree Sale

Saturday, October 7, 2006, 9:00 a.m.
Goodells County Park
Sponsored by the St. Clair Conservation District
Contact Stacey Kautz at (810) 984-3001 x5



For more information on any of these events or to add your event to our calendar, please contact Sheri Faust at (810) 987-5306.

If you no longer wish to receive **The Blue Watershed News** by mail, or you are not yet on our mailing list and would like to receive the newsletter electronically or by mail, please call 810.987.5306 and leave your name, address, phone number, email, and whether you wish to be added or removed from the mailing list.

This newsletter is distributed by the St. Clair County Storm Water Program on behalf of the Northeastern Watersheds (includes the Black River, St. Clair River and Lake Huron subwatersheds) and the Anchor Bay Watershed Advisory Groups.

St. Clair County Health Department

Division of Environmental Health

Storm Water Program

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Our Water. Our Future. Ours to Protect.



The Blue Watershed News

Issue 4 • Spring 2006

A biannual publication of the St. Clair County Storm Water Program

What Is a Watershed?

A watershed is an area of land that drains runoff to a common stream, river or lake. We all live in a watershed!

What is Watershed Planning?

In 2003, the United States Environmental Protection Agency mandated that St. Clair County and seventeen communities work together to address water quality in our watersheds.

These entities are working together to outline actions they must take to improve the quality of our rivers, lakes and streams.

This process is called Watershed Planning because actions must be taken across an entire watershed in order for water quality to improve.

We Need Your Help!

We want to hear about the water quality problems you see and the actions you want taken to resolve them. The best information we receive is from residents who live along a river, stream, creek, ditch or drain. Call the 24-hour Water Quality Hotline at (810) 987-7253.

Northeastern Watershed Active Partners

| | |
|------------------|----------------|
| St. Clair County | Marine City |
| Marysville | Port Huron |
| St. Clair | Clyde Twp |
| Burtchville Twp | Kimball Twp |
| East China Twp | St. Clair Twp |
| Fort Gratiot Twp | Port Huron Twp |

Anchor Bay Watershed Active Partners

| | |
|------------------|---------------|
| St. Clair County | Casco Twp |
| Ira Twp | Algonac |
| Cottreville Twp | Clay Twp |
| Macomb County | Lenox Twp |
| City of Richmond | New Baltimore |

X-STREAM Makeover: St. Clair County Edition

X-STREAM Makeover needs your help to restore three St. Clair County rivers severely spoiled due to trash and litter

Volunteers are needed on Saturday, June 10th to celebrate River Day 2006 and help give three St. Clair County rivers an X-STREAM Makeover.

X-STREAM Makeover offers individuals and families hands-on involvement in the cleanup of trash and debris from the stream banks and floodplains of three St. Clair County rivers.

X-STREAM Makeover sites have been situated across the county to make participation easy. The sites include three, one-mile stretch of rivers: Mill Creek in Yale, Stocks Creek in Port Huron Township, and the Marine City Dredge Cut Creek in Cottreville Township.

We need your help! The goal of the morning workday is to remove as much litter as possible from the rivers and floodplains. Dumpsters will be located at each of the sites to put the garbage in the right place, as it does not belong in our rivers. Site coordinators will be registering volunteers between 8:30 – 9:00 a.m. Volunteers will be rewarded with a free pizza and pop lunch at 11:30 a.m.

We encourage you to participate in X-STREAM Makeover as an individual, family or group. Not interested in a river clean up? Take part in one of the many other River Day activities like fishing or canoeing, or guided wastewater treatment plant tours. River Day is free and fun for the whole family! No fishing licenses are required the weekend of June 10-11 courtesy of Michigan's Free Fishing Weekend.



Debris waiting to be removed from the Marine City Dredge Cut Creek. Meet on Roberts Road between M-29 and Marsh roads in Cottreville Twp at 9 a.m. on June 10th to help remove the trash.

Please contact us at (810) 987-5306 for complete River Day event details and updates or to register as an X-STREAM Makeover volunteer.

X-STREAM Makeover Locations:
Mill Creek - Meet at the Yale City Park on the north side of Yale Rd just west of Brockway Rd (M-19), Yale.
Stocks Creek - Meet behind Chippewa Middle School, 2800 Chippewa Trail, Port Huron.
Marine City Dredge Cut - Meet on Roberts Rd between Marsh Rd and M-29, Cottreville Township.

X-STREAM Makeover Notables:

- Volunteers sixteen and under must be accompanied by an adult.
- Please wear appropriate field clothes; boots recommended.
- Tools & bags, & other equipment provided.

Port Huron Sewer Separation Project

With only six years left to go, the City of Port Huron has successfully reduced the area served by combined sewers by 75%. At the start of the Sewer Separation Project fifteen years ago, there were nineteen active combined sewer outfalls on the Black and St. Clair Rivers. Currently there are only six outfalls left. Once completely separated, all sewer discharges to the Black and St. Clair Rivers will be eliminated. This means that our stormwater, which once was cleaned, will now discharge directly to our rivers without cleaning. Remember: Only rain in the drain. Storm drains are not garbage cans.

Earth Fair a Success!

On April 21st and 22nd, the St. Clair Co. Environmental Education Network celebrated the 4th Annual Earth Fair at Goodells County Park.

There were many new features added to this year's Earth Fair. With so many new exhibitors and vendors, this year's event expanded into a second barn. And with all of the additional activities, Earth Fair hit a record new attendance of 1,500 visitors!

Also new to Earth Fair this year was a lineup of live entertainment on Saturday. Performances included Jason Magic and his "Enviro-Magic Show", Evie Boss and her "Sing-A-Song of Nature" musical program and an endangered species play written and performed by the Port Huron Northern T.R.E.E. club. We hope to see you there next year!

Petition to Rename Drains

The St. Clair County Water Quality Board is looking for residents that live along a county drain that are interested in changing the name of the watercourse from the word "Drain" to "stream" or "creek". It is hoped that this name change will encourage people to value the watercourse more.



The name of Huffman Drain (shown here in Port Huron Twp) was changed back to Bunce Creek.

During last year's River Day, the St. Clair County Drain Commissioner officially renamed the Huffman Drain to

Bunce Creek which re-established the historical name of the watercourse in Marysville, Port Huron Twp and Kimball Twp that was made into a drain in 1907. Officially, renamed drains are still county drains under the jurisdiction of the Drain Commissioner.

Many natural creeks and streams became county drains in the 19th and 20th centuries through a legal process of a Landowner Petition, which gave the Drain Commissioners the right to deepen, widen, and straighten the stream. This was usually done to improve farmland and drain swamps.

The name of a drain can be changed at any time by a petition from at least five landowners whose land is traversed by the drain and by the approval of the Drain Commissioner.

To ask about getting a petition, contact the Drain office at (810) 364-5390.

Northeastern Watersheds Focus Group Meeting Update

The Northeastern Watersheds Group has worked hard to involve a variety of stakeholders in the development of the watershed management plan. Over the past three years they have held monthly meetings, conducted public meetings and recently held two focus group meetings.

The first focus group meeting in December 2005 addressed land use planning issues. Presentations were given by Ira Township and a planning consultant on land use planning tools that manage development to protect water quality. Attendees identified key land use priorities for the watershed plan such as improve soil erosion control on new construction and agricultural land; improve protection for floodplains, wetlands & woodlands; and

improve site plan reviews and enforcement at the local level.

The second focus group meeting in March 2006 prioritized goals of the watershed plan. The top three priorities were: Identify and preserve high-quality natural areas; ensure sustainable growth and development; and coordinate planning and engineering standards across the county.

Public meetings will be held again in August 2006. If you are interested in attending or participating, please contact Kristen Jurs at (810) 987-5306. You can also email your water quality concerns and land use priorities at anytime to watersheds@stclaircounty.org.

Improving the Health of the St. Clair River – Keep It Natural

The St. Clair River stretches 40 miles, with much of the shoreline on both sides of the river being urbanized and industrialized. A few natural shoreline areas remain, although their area has declined significantly. A shoreline survey conducted by the Storm Water Program in 2005 determined that approximately 81% of the St. Clair River has engineered steel seawalls and other hardening structures. As a result, fish habitat has dramatically declined and is considered a serious impairment because it is the most difficult to reverse.



A natural shoreline can be seen here in Marysville located between two engineered seawalls.

Natural shorelines benefit wildlife and water quality. Steel seawalls increase the "slap" energy from freighter and boat traffic. Studies have shown that this has many negative effects including reduction of water quality because of erosion and nutrient enrichment, destruction of natural sloping shorelines, and reduction of aquatic plants that provide places for fish to feed and breed. Many fish depend on near-shore waters for habitat.

A recent comprehensive plan initiated by Acheson Ventures along the St. Clair River in Port Huron involved replacing old crumbling debris lining the shoreline with new riprap strategically placed to compliment the public's desire for access to the river, provide good fish habitat and improve the quality of the waterfront.



Acheson's St. Clair riverfront in Port Huron at the mouth of the Black River.

Rather than replacing the rip-rap with a seawall, they carefully selected rip-rap which absorbs the slap energy, providing better habitat for fish.

Waterfront property owners can help improve water quality and restore natural features to their shoreline by establishing a buffer of native vegetation. One of the major focuses is on lawns that are mowed to the water's edge. Landowners are encouraged to install buffers with native flowering shrubs, wildflowers, grasses, sedges, and aquatic plants that enhance the natural beauty of the shoreline. This buffer strip of vegetation reduces soil erosion and traps fertilizers, filters chemicals and provides cover, food and breeding grounds for fish. Taller vegetation buffers along the shoreline also deter Canada Geese from congregating.



Construction of a new seawall on the St. Clair River in St. Clair Township.

Calling All Naturalists!

Marsh Monitoring Program (MMP) volunteers are needed to monitor birds and amphibians in St. Clair County's marsh habitats. Established in 1995, the MMP provides information on the population status of marsh birds and amphibians, information about their habitat requirements, and an assessment of wetland areas. Data collected by MMP volunteers are an important contribution to the conservation and management of St. Clair County's watersheds, wetlands and wildlife. It's easy to be a Marsh Monitor Surveyor! With help from MMP staff and a training kit, volunteers select a marsh to survey. Data forms are then sent back to *Bird Studies Canada* for analysis. To date, data submitted by MMP volunteers have been used to detect significant changes in population trends of marsh birds and amphibians and to provide practical information for marsh habitat management. For more information call 888-448-BIRD or visit www.bsc-eoc.org.

Columbus Township Applies for a Belle River Watershed Grant

Columbus Township has taken the lead to improve water quality and applied for a Watershed Management Plan grant for the Belle River! They are currently waiting to hear back from the Michigan DEQ on whether funding will be granted. Once word is given, watershed planning will begin for the Belle River. The Belle River encompasses China, Casco, Columbus, Emmett, Riley, Berlin, Capac & Memphis.

For a list of plants native to Michigan, visit www.socwa.org and click on Lawns & Gardens.