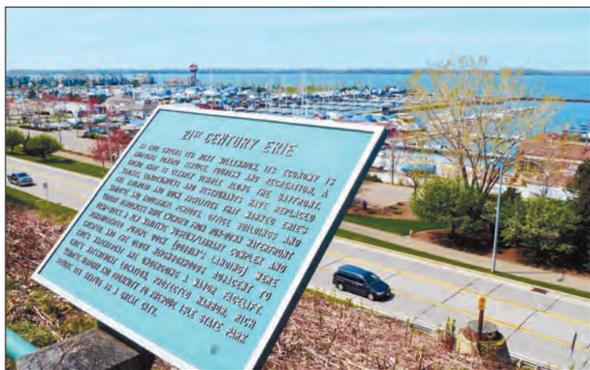




Reconnect with your environment

Learn about environmental issues, their effect on your community and actions for your involvement.



ANNA MCCARTNEY/Contributed photo

Vote for your choices for a new vision during Destination Erie meetings on May 7 and 8 or online from May 9 through June 30.

Destination Erie plan gives public their say

By ANNA MCCARTNEY
Contributing writer

The Erie region's success depends on collaboration and an action plan that defines a sustainable future to propel the Erie region forward in today's competitive global economy.

"Destination Erie: A Regional Vision" is working together with citizens throughout Erie County to create that plan to meet the economic, social and environmental challenges of the 21st century. The goal for the final product is a plan that reflects the values of the entire Erie County community, including residents of all ages from the city of Erie and the county's smaller towns and townships.

The success of the plan depends on community involvement. Make sure the future vision and plan represents your voice by attending any of the upcoming public workshops on May 7 and 8 to vote for your choices. Spread the word to family, friends and

neighbors. If you miss the meetings, you will also be able to vote at www.planerieregion.com between May 9 and June 30.

Girard

Tuesday, May 7, 9-11 a.m.
St. John's Parish Center
1001 Main Street East.

Waterford

Tuesday, May 7, 7-9 p.m.
Fort LeBoeuf High School
931 N. High St.

Harborcreek

Wednesday, May 8, 9-11 a.m.
Fairfield Social Hall
4896 East Lake Road

Erie

Wednesday, May 8, 7-9 p.m.
Avalon Hotel-Niagara Room
16 West 10th St.

ANNA MCCARTNEY, a communications and education specialist for Pennsylvania Sea Grant, can be reached by e-mail at axm40@psu.edu.



ANNA MCCARTNEY/Contributed photo

Lake Erie is the source of drinking water for millions of people. The long-term economic benefits of keeping pollutants out of the lake in the first place can far outweigh the costs. The EPA has found that every dollar spent to protect source water reduces water treatment costs by an average of \$27. Municipal customers can visit <http://www.ewg.org/tap-water/whats-in-yourwater.php> to find what's in their water.

Thirst for knowledge

Check database to learn what's in your tap water

By ANNA MCCARTNEY
Contributing writer

How safe is the water you're drinking?

To find out, you must first know the source.

Does it come from a public utility, a well on your property or do you buy bottled water?

Approximately 85 percent of U.S. residents receive their water from public water facilities. The remaining 15 percent supply their own water from private wells or other sources.

Public drinking water facilities, which are regulated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, treat water before it is piped to you. EPA regulations require public water to be tested daily, weekly and even hourly for certain contaminants. Federal law also requires public water utilities to send an annual report to customers by July 1 that includes where the water comes from and what's in it.

But no federal agency regulates private wells, which are a primary source of drinking for almost one out of every seven Americans. It is up to the owner to maintain and test the well water regularly to determine which contaminants are present and treat them.

Municipal water customers and private well owners can do more to protect their drinking water. But bottled-water drinkers have no way of knowing the source of bottled water or if it contains contaminants. There is no mandatory testing for bottled water companies or rules to disclose the source or any contaminants, including harmful chemicals that might leach out of the plastic bottles. While the U.S. Food and Drug Administration can order bottled-water recalls if a problem surfaces, there is no guarantee that purchased water is safe.

Once you know the water source, keeping it pollution-free is important.

What is your community doing to prevent the release of pollutants in the first place? Is it main-

taining buffer zones of protected land around water sources to reduce and slow down the inflow of pollutants?

An analysis of municipal water by Environmental Working Group found that between 2004 and 2009, 252 million Americans, including some locally, were supplied at one time or another with water containing contaminants at concentrations above the recommended safety guidelines. Many of the contaminants were harmful residual chemicals generated during water treatment to remove the pollutants.

The lack of a comprehensive national drinking water quality database led the nonprofit consumer advocacy group to create the EWG National Water Database so consumers can view yearly reports for municipal water for most states. They obtained the tap water testing data from state water offices, which had collected the results from the utilities in order to enforce state and federal water quality standards.

Municipal water customers can visit www.ewg.org/tap-water/whats-in-yourwater.php to find what's in their water. Just type in your ZIP code and you can check your water supplier and others in the area for chemicals that exceeded health limits and which were detected over the legal limits. A listing of violations and a pollution summary is included for each utility.

If you do your research, you will find the tap is still your safest bet since you can remove the worst offenders by using an appropriate filter. Find the right filter for your water and budget at www.ewg.org/report/ewgs-water-filter-buying-guide.

But don't stop there. Do your part and encourage your local, state and federal representatives to do more to protect source water so filters aren't needed in the first place.

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CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Bottled-water customers may think it is the safest but there are no messages that offer assurance about the source or quality of the water because bottlers are not required to disclose that information.



NOAA

We are forced to spend exorbitant amounts on chemical disinfectants to treat harmful algal blooms. We then drink water with the residual chemicals generated by the treatment process.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

For most utilities with chronically high readings of treatment pollutants, cleaning up source water will require aggressive action to reduce agricultural pollution, runoff from suburban sprawl and upstream sewage discharges.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Sign up for the 2012 Environment Erie Bike Around the Bay.

Register now to ride in Bike Around Bay

By ANNA MCCARTNEY
Contributing writer

Get in shape and support important environmental education programs for all ages by participating in Environment Erie's Bike Around the Bay!

Join hundreds of tri-state bicyclists of all ages on Saturday, May 18, for the 11th annual bicycling event, which kicks off behind the Intermodal Transportation Center on the Bayfront Parkway at 7:30 a.m. Enjoy the sights and sounds of the Lake Erie waterfront and rest stops for water and snacks along the way. After the ride enjoy a picnic lunch and participate in a gift auction.

Whether you are looking for a perfect tour for families, a casual ride or an event for avid cyclists, there is something for you. You can choose to bike 10, 30 or 50 miles. Take advantage of pre-registration by May 8 to ensure you get

a T-shirt and the following rates: \$20 for individuals and \$40 for families. After that deadline, registration, including the day of the event, will increase to \$25 and \$45. Group rates are also available.

Sign-in on the day of the event is from 7:30 to 9 a.m. Departure for the 50-mile tour is at 8 a.m. Others begin at 9 a.m. Riders are required to wear helmets. If you need one, they will be on sale for \$8 each from Safe Kids Erie. E-mail Patty Puline at ppuline@ecdh.org with correct sizes. Someone will be present at the event to fit helmets.

For more details, contact Environment Erie at 835-8069, extension 106, or register online at www.environmenterie.org.

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Check out these websites to learn more:

http://water.epa.gov/drink/guide/upload/book_waterontap_full.pdf
<http://water.usgs.gov/owa/topics.html#cont>
www.paseagrant.org
<http://pa.water.usgs.gov/>

Any new plan for the future of the Erie region will require input and cooperation from every citizen. You have a chance to add your vision for protecting the very water used by millions for drinking, and attracting tourists, anglers and boaters.

Write a letter to Destination Erie to share your ideas about why it is necessary to include pollution prevention in any plans. Do you have any suggestions of how development can take place with the least harmful effects on the environment? Keep in mind that green space offers the least expensive way to cut down on pollution. Send your ideas to axm40@psu.edu for possible publication in the "your space" feature.

