



Reconnect with your environment

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



TOM CERMAK PA SEA GRANT/Contributed photo

The heavily wooded riparian buffers on Conneaut Creek offer protection for fish and other wildlife.

Landowners qualify for easement payment

By ANNA McCARTNEY
Contributing writer

Lake Erie and its tributaries, including Conneaut Creek, have become popular destinations for anglers. These trips generate and support local jobs and more than \$9.5 million annually in economic activity for the region.

To meet this demand for fishing, the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission has developed the Erie Access Improvement (EAI) Program, which is funded by the sale of Lake Erie permits and trout-salmon/Lake Erie combo fishing permits.

The PFBC is looking for landowners who are willing to work with the agency to develop public fishing easements that allow fishing access to the following streams in the Lake Erie watershed: Conneaut, Crooked, Elk, Walnut, Four

Mile and Twenty Mile.

Landowners receive a payment for allowing access for public fishing and commission management activities along a stream corridor. Payments to landowners are based on stream length and value of the fishery. In addition to the purchase of fishing easements, other eligible uses of EAI funding include outright acquisition of important properties for fishing access, development of public fishing access improvements such as fishing piers, and habitat improvements that support fishing.

If you have property along one of these streams and are interested in learning more about the EAI program, contact Pennsylvania Sea Grant Land Use and Economic Specialist, Dave Skellie at 217-9011, ext. 103, or e-mail dus18@psu.edu.



KEVIN HESS, PA DEP/Contributed photo

The Conneaut Creek watershed has not suffered the effects of industrial contamination and land development like many of the other Lake Erie subwatersheds. Its extensive forested corridor and wetlands represent the best opportunity to preserve threatened or endangered species, natural communities and an ecological system that provides protection from pollution and flooding downstream.

Creek connections

Subwatershed is key to healthy Lake Erie

By ANNA McCARTNEY
Contributing writer

Water quality problems in Lake Erie don't begin at the shoreline.

They begin in the subwatersheds that drain water from all the land surrounding the lake.

So following the water provides the best reasons for a shared mission to restore and protect it.

One subwatershed that merits immediate attention and protection is the Conneaut Creek watershed, which drains 190.7 square miles in portions of Pennsylvania and Ohio. Because it has not suffered the effects of industrial contamination and land development like many of the other Lake Erie subwatersheds, Conneaut Creek still has an extensive forested corridor. As a result, the overall good water quality makes it one of the most biologically diverse of all Lake Erie tributaries.

Surveys of Conneaut Creek identified 78 fish species, 32 species of amphibians and reptiles and 98 bird species in or along the creek. The creek also supports populations of native freshwater mussels and contains the largest continuous tract of forest, which includes extensive wetlands in Pennsylvania.

In Ashtabula County, a 21-mile stretch of the creek from the Ohio-Pennsylvania border to the city of Conneaut on the Lake Erie shore is one of only three stream segments listed as an Ohio State Wild and Scenic River. Conneaut Creek is a popular destination for anglers for its quality steelhead and for smallmouth bass, walleye and northern pike. Also noteworthy is the occurrence of the beautiful but threatened Southern red belly dace and the rare and odd-looking brook stickleback because these fish are more vulnerable to changes in the environment.

The majority of this watershed lies on 153.1 square miles of land in Crawford and Erie counties. Water flows into smaller and larger streams and eventually into Conneaut Creek through eight townships

and four boroughs before crossing over into Ashtabula County in Ohio, where it empties into Lake Erie at Conneaut Harbor. This watershed directly connects the residents living there with millions of others who depend on Lake Erie for drinking water.

For now, this watershed supports outstanding wildlife populations and water protection. But adverse impacts from development, wastewater, non-point source pollution, timbering, filling of wetlands and floodplains and oil and gas development could seriously impact this watershed that serves as a refuge for rare and endangered species of plants, fish and mussels.

The Albion Wastewater Treatment Plant's record of effluent violations and the recent proposal to build a \$360 million iron-smelting plant in this community, which lacks the capacity to provide the 1.8 million gallons of water needed daily by the plant, are pressing issues. Another recent proposal to dig a deep injection well for toxic fracking waste on property south of Interstate 90 in Conneaut has generated sizable opposition from Conneaut City Council and neighbors concerned about contamination, noise, seismic activity and the negative impact on nearby Conneaut Creek.

The Nature Conservancy, which includes Conneaut Creek as one of the 20 most important watersheds for conservation in the Great Lakes basin, has partnered with Pennsylvania Sea Grant to prioritize land protection efforts. These two groups are also helping the Lake Erie Region Conservancy implement a watershed conservation plan that provides the framework for citizens' groups, land trusts and government agencies to get involved. Ohio conservation groups have similar programs. Isn't it time you got involved?

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



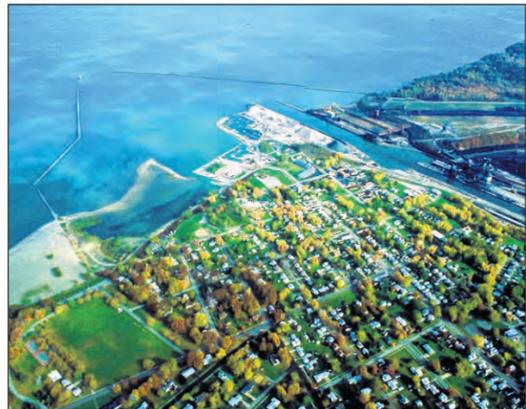
MARY WALSH, PA NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM/Contributed photo

Conneaut Creek is a refuge for native freshwater mussels, one of the most imperiled organisms in North America.



MARY WALSH, PA NATURAL HERITAGE PROGRAM/Contributed photo

A Western Pennsylvania Conservancy-PA Natural Heritage team documents native mussels in Conneaut Creek.



US ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

Water that drains from the Conneaut Creek watershed flows into Lake Erie at Conneaut Harbor. The extensive unspoiled wetlands upstream provide steady water flow throughout the driest summer months.

Greenways Program grants available

The 2014 applications for the Erie County Greenways Program must be received in the Erie County Planning Department no later than Feb. 24 by 4:30 p.m. Various types of greenways and recreational projects will be eligible for consideration, such as acquisition, development and repair of greenways, recreational trails, open space, natural areas, community conservation and beautification projects, and community and heritage parks.

Funding requests are

limited to a maximum of \$50,000. Eligible applicants include state agencies, local governments and authorities, schools and universities and incorporated nonprofit organizations registered as a 501(c)(3).

For copies of the guidelines and an application, contact the Erie County Department of Planning, Erie County Courthouse, Room 111, 140 West 6th Street, Erie, PA 16501; call 451-6018; or e-mail jedonahue@eriecounty.gov.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Neighborhood Art House students tour the TREC.

Educators at TREC impress youngsters

We would like to thank the friends of the Tom Ridge Environmental Center for our trip to the center. We also thank the environmental educators for the lessons on the turtles of Pennsylvania, the fish of Lake Erie and how aquaponics works.

We all had a wonderful time there, especially when we got the tour of the aquaponics lab and

learned about the wonderful fish we have in Lake Erie; most of the kids didn't know anything about the fish that we saw. And we all tasted the lettuce!

The movie "Flying Monsters" was amazing because everybody learned new things about the reptiles that looked like birds that are now extinct. — Jhasmin and Savanna, Inner City Neighborhood Art House

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Check out these websites to learn more:

- www.paseagrant.org/topics/watersheds/
- <http://fishandboat.com/water/lakes/erie/tribs/00conneaut.htm>
- <http://watercraft.ohiodnr.gov/conneautsr>

The newspaper is an exceptional source to find out about development projects in your region. Start collecting them so you can be informed about projects that could possibly affect your watershed.

Share your thoughts about why protecting the Conneaut Creek watershed and other Lake Erie watersheds is important. Send them to axm40@psu.edu for possible publication in the "Your Space" feature.

