

Healthy Watersheds

The health of our watersheds is impacted by every person's decisions and actions at home, in our yards, at businesses and in our communities. You can take individual and collective actions to effectively conserve, enhance, restore and manage watershed resources for the benefit of all.

1. Watershed organizations play a key role in connecting people and communities to increase understanding and awareness of problems and find solutions to solve them. You can get involved by reaching out to your local watershed organization.
2. Speaking to your local government officials about the importance of watershed protection in your community can help inform local decision makers and lead to more effective watershed protection policies.
3. Your business can support watershed protection by practicing environmental and stormwater best management practices, such as using native plants for landscaping.
4. Wetland and streamside areas provide many free services, such as flood control, streambank stabilization, and protection of stream health and habitat for many types of aquatic and terrestrial species. Work with your local watershed organization, soil and water conservation district, or land trust to support land and riparian area protection.
5. Promote the enhancement and restoration of streams and wetlands in your community by planting trees and letting native vegetation grow along streambanks, supporting wetland restoration efforts, and learning to identify non-native and invasive species so they can be removed.
6. Every tree that is planted in a watershed can reduce stormwater runoff by 1,000 gallons per year, which reduces stress on urban infrastructure. You can learn about trees appropriate for your yard or neighborhood by contacting your local watershed organization, county soil and water conservation district, or urban forester.
7. Use erosion control best management practices on bare soil and establish soil-stabilizing vegetation as soon as possible to limit erosion.
8. Before applying nutrients to lawns, flowerbeds and gardens, have your soil tested to determine what types of nutrients, if any, your soil needs.
9. Minimize the use of pesticides, especially before rain is forecast. Pesticides can be toxic or lethal to many non-target organisms including birds, fish, beneficial insects, and plants. Pesticides that runoff into waterways negatively impact water quality. Consider the use of natural, chemical-free landscaping practices to control pests and weeds.
10. Landscape with native plants and trees that are more resistant to pest and drought damage than non-native species. Avoid non-native and invasive plants as they can spread uncontrollably and provide limited food or habitat for birds, animals and insects.
11. Flushing medications down the toilet introduces chemicals into our waterways, which can harm aquatic life. Instead of flushing, dispose of expired, unused and unwanted medications in the trash or drop them off at a medication take-back program at a local pharmacy for safe disposal.
12. Only rain down the storm drain and water down the sink. Properly dispose of potentially hazardous chemicals (e.g. cleaning supplies, paint, motor oil, etc.).
13. Single-use plastics and other trash can end up in our waterways and Lake Erie. Reduce, reuse and recycle to reduce litter pollution.
14. Minimize your use of disposable, single-use plastics and reuse items when possible. When recycling, follow your community's recycling guidelines for curb-side pickup and recycling dropoff centers. If your community does not yet offer a recycling program, ask local officials for help with starting one.

15. Make it a habit to bring along your own reusable shopping bags. Single-use plastic bags in local waterways are easily mistaken by animals as food, which can lead to death. Americans use 100 billion plastic bags a year which requires 12 million barrels of oil to manufacture yet only 1 percent of plastic bags are recycled each year.
16. When possible, use refillable water bottles and cups. Globally humans buy one million plastic bottles per minute, yet 91 percent of all plastic is not recycled. Refilling a water bottle will also save you money. The average costs of a gallon of water from a public water system is less than one penny, which means you could refill a 20-ounce water bottle 6.4 times for \$0.01. The average cost of one 20-ounce single-use plastic bottle of water is about \$2.00, or \$12.80 per gallon.
17. Prevent the introduction of non-native and invasive animals to streams and Lake Erie. Don't throw unused fish bait into waterways. Never release live or dead bait, bait packaging, or unwanted aquatic pets into streams and Lake Erie and avoid releasing aquatic animals from one water body into another.
18. Learn about federal, state and local laws, regulations and resource management policies that regulate activities that can impact our streams and watersheds. Riparian and wetland areas provide free flooding and erosion prevention and water quality protection services to residents and communities. Learn how regional and local planning and local zoning, such as the adoption and implementation of riparian, ravine and wetland setbacks, can help protect the free services these areas provide.
19. Support or engage in research and monitoring to help people understand how watersheds work and make decisions to protect the values of healthy watersheds. Citizens can support Lake Erie and watershed research and restoration by donating to the Lake Erie Protection Fund and by purchasing Lake Erie license plates.
20. Rinse boats of any sediment or vegetation after removing from water and before submerging in another body of water.
21. Dispose of old or unwanted fishing line properly.
22. Install rain barrels or cisterns to capture and reuse rainwater, which can reduce your water bill and peak stream flows.
23. Install rain gardens and vegetated filter strips or disconnect downspouts to soak stormwater into the ground rather than sending it into a storm sewer.
24. Limit total lawn area to provide garden space for more diverse plantings, which benefit pollinators, birds and water quality.
25. In lawn areas, periodically aerate and top dress with compost to foster a healthy lawn that allows rain to soak into the ground.