

Clean Water in the Great Lakes

The Great Lakes contain about eighty-four percent of North America's fresh water.¹ As Michiganders our active participation in fresh water preservation is crucial. The Clean Water Act of 1972 is a federal law that regulates the discharge of pollutants into American waters.² The Clean Water Act was a huge step in the right direction in making sure our water is protected, however polluters have found ways to poke holes in the Clean Water Act.

"Dirty water is the world's biggest health risk, it continues to threaten both quality of life and public health in the United States."³ There are many contributing factors that lead to the pollution of water, commercial factories that use coal and nuclear energy, agricultural runoff, and storm water to name a few. Storm water and melting snow run off roads into our water picking up toxic chemicals and disease carrying bacteria along the way. Polluters and developers have used the courts to their advantage, arguing that the Clean Water Act doesn't include streams and wetlands.⁴ These streams and wetlands are exactly the bodies of water that clean and feed the Great Lakes.

Michigan is especially affected because of its large amounts of water at risk of being polluted. According to the organization Environment Michigan, "in 2010 alone, nearly 2.2 million pounds of toxic pollution was dumped into Michigan waterways."⁵ This would remove forty years of hard work allowing industries to resume dumping in our water and paving over our wetlands without permission. The Great Lakes along with Michigan's other waterways are vital to Michigan's success and sustainability. The water pollution threat levels however continue to rise. Hugh McDiarmid Jr. spoke on Michigan Radio about the possibility of a nuclear waste dump in Ontario, "if anything should go wrong it jeopardizes the water that is the lifeblood of Michigan, and the Great lakes region. The ramifications of that are tremendous."⁶

Having grown up in White Lake Township, Michigan, I have been surrounded by many lakes and streams my entire life. White Lake is faced with many of the same water pollution problems that face the rest of the state, most notably storm water and watershed problems. In the recent years White Lake Township has been put in place preventive measures to protect streams and wetlands. White Lake passed ordinance Number 105 Wetland Ordinance. The Wetland Ordinance intent is to provide procedures, standards, and regulations for wetlands within White

¹ Environmental Protection Agency, "Basic Info", accessed February 16th, 2014, <http://www.epa.gov/greatlakes/basicinfo.html>.

² Environmental Protection Agency, "Clean Water Act", accessed February 16th, 2014, cfpub.epa.gov/npdes/cwa.

³ Natural Resources Defense Council, "Water: Protecting Clean Water", accessed February 16th, 2014, www.nrdc.org/water/.

⁴ Environment Michigan Organization, "Protect the Great Lakes", accessed February 16th, 2014, www.environmentmichigan.org/programs/mie/project-great-lakes.

⁵ Environment Michigan Organization, "Protect The Great Lakes".

⁶ Hugh McDiarmid Jr., "Michigan Radio Story on Proposed Nuclear Dump in Ontario", www.environmentalcouncil.org/priorities/article.

Lake Township.⁷ This ordinance was put in place to avoid the flooding and polluting of the wetlands due to rapid development expansion. White Lake is also currently constructing a storm water and watershed management plan, this plan includes storm water pollution prevention initiative as well as prohibiting any illicit discharge into the waterways.⁸ This is all in the effort to preserve the Clean Water Act, and to make sure it is carried out faithfully.

Water Pollution is a continuously growing threat in the State of Michigan. Water is our most vital resource. In order to preserve a precious resource like water, it is going to take cooperation from the giant corporations, but also it is going to take an individual effort in order to clean up our beloved waterways.

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⁷ White Lake Charter Township, "Ordinance 105: Wetland Ordinance", September 20th, 1999, accessed February 16th, 2014, www.whitelaketwp.com/ordinance105.

⁸ White Lake Charter Township, "Strom Water and Watershed Management", accessed February 16th, 2014, www.whitelaketwp.com/environ.rsp.