

# LAKE ERIE WATERSHED PROTECTION ALLIANCE

## CATTARAUGUS, CHAUTAUQUA, AND ERIE COUNTIES

### What is LEWPA?

In 2009, massive flooding occurred along Cattaraugus Creek, which forms the border between Erie County and Cattaraugus & Chautauqua Counties. Concerned supervisors and mayors joined with other elected officials to become proactive on water quality and water quantity issues. The Erie County Water Quality Committee was reinvigorated and the Lake Erie Watershed Protection Alliance (LEWPA) formed as a result.

LEWPA started meeting formally in 2012 as an alliance of municipal officials and concerned stakeholders working together to alleviate the water quality and quantity issues affecting Lake Erie as a result of the activities within three counties of the New York State Lake Erie watershed (Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, and Erie counties).

The LEWPA Board includes 9 voting members, three from each county. These include a Soil & Water Conservation District member, a regional government member, and a local government member from each county.

Quarterly meetings are open to the public and stakeholders in water quality.

The Coordinator for LEWPA activities was funded through Clean Water Act 604(b) for 2012-2014.



### By the Numbers:

- 77 cities, towns, and villages in the tri-county area have jurisdiction in the Lake Erie watershed.
- Over 2,400 square miles drain to Lake Erie and the Niagara River in New York State.

## LEWPA Board Members

### Cattaraugus County

Brian Davis—Soil & Water Conservation District

Crystal Abers—Cattaraugus County Economic Development, Planning & Tourism

Christopher Lexer—Town of Yorkshire Highway Superintendent

### Chautauqua County

David Spann—Soil & Water Conservation District

David McCoy—Chautauqua County Planning & Economic Development

George Borello—Town of Hanover Legislator

### Erie County

Mark Gaston—Soil & Water Conservation District

Thomas Hersey—Erie County Environment and Planning

Leonard Pero—Town of Brant Supervisor

## Habitat Restoration Projects in Tri-County Area

The New York State Soil and Water Conservation Committee awarded LEWPA \$5,000 for tree and shrub plantings. These funds were leveraged to provide additional work at sites throughout the Lake Erie watershed.

In Erie County, trees and shrubs were planted at Times Beach Nature Preserve to complement an invasive species eradication project. Also, volunteers were able to plant trees and shrubs at Bennett Beach in conjunction with a habitat project that included stream bank plantings to prevent erosion, seeding with wildflower pollinator mix, installing blue bird boxes, and planting beach grass to protect the natural sand dunes along the beach.

In Cattaraugus County, twenty-five trees were planted along a highly erodible portion of Mansfield Creek that will provide a buffer, as well as shade. Combined with in-stream stone work, this will enhance trout habitat. In addition, sixty trees were planted along Elton Creek to complement a large in-stream trout habitat project completed in 2013. The extra shade will help to keep the streams cool and hospitable for trout species.

Chautauqua County was able to supplement restoration efforts at a FEMA site in the Village of Brocton that suffered major flooding during a heavy rainfall event in 2013. Trees were planted to re-vegetate the area near Slippery Rock Creek.



Mansfield Creek, Cattaraugus County



Elton Creek, Cattaraugus County



Slippery Rock Creek, Chautauqua County

**LEWPA works to ensure regional water quality goals are voiced at the state & federal levels.**

LEWPA actively engages with other watershed organizations and water quality stakeholders on the state-wide, federal, and binational level.

Input from surveys and meetings have been shared with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's Great Lakes Program. LEWPA also participates in Great Lakes Action Agenda meetings to ensure regional priorities are illustrated in state-wide goals, as well as to ensure that LEWPA is well-informed of state-wide Great Lakes goals.

## LEWPA Gives WNY a Voice

Because of Soil and Water Conservation District involvement in LEWPA, the alliance also interacts with other watershed groups in New York State through the Soil and Water Conservation Committee.

On the federal level, LEWPA participates in the Lake Erie Binational Forum, which seeks to engage the public on Lake Erie basin-wide implementation of Lakewide Management Plan (LaMP) goals. Organizations from both the U.S. and Canada meet to discuss current Lake Erie issues.

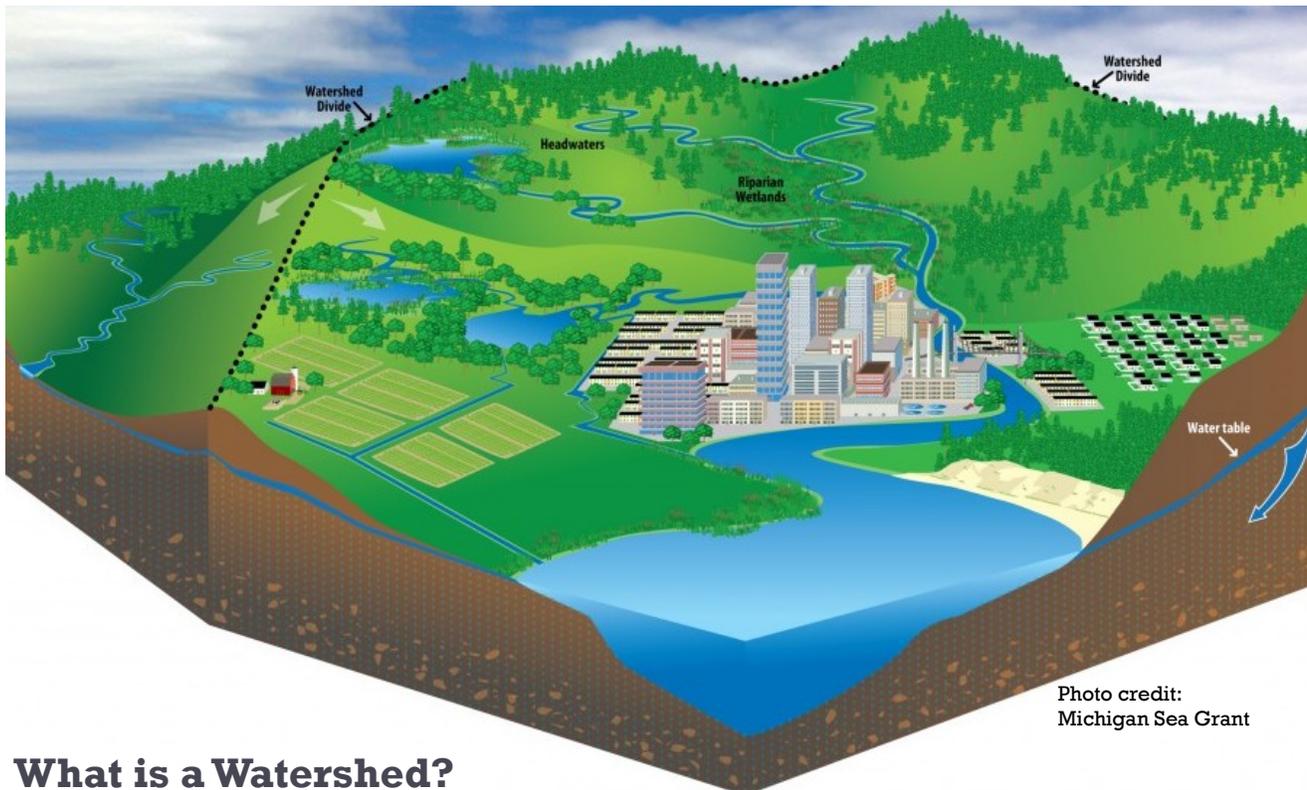


Photo credit:  
Michigan Sea Grant

## What is a Watershed?

A watershed is an area of land where all of the water above and below ground drains to a particular body of water, in this case, Lake Erie. Watersheds can vary in size from the land area draining to a small stream to the land area draining to all of the Great Lakes! Because water does not stop flowing at municipal boundaries, it is important to work regionally and on a watershed basis on this issue.

*We ALL live in a watershed!*

## LEWPA Surveys Municipalities

LEWPA has been surveying municipalities in the watershed annually. Each year, results are compiled to determine water quality priorities. In addition, municipalities and stakeholders are asked about potential water quality improvement or protection projects.

The results are utilized to create regional water quality projects by combining similar needs and ideas. When grant funding opportunities are announced, proposals are created to ensure collaboration, efficiency, and widespread benefits.

These results are also incorporated into county water quality planning strategies. Results are shared with binational, federal, statewide and regional planning entities as well.

We appreciate the time spent filling out surveys and strive to make the results useful. Responding to this surveys is a good investment of time. As grant opportunities arise, LEWPA strives to let respondents know about potential funding sources for projects.

To learn more about the survey results, visit the LEWPA website at [www.erie.gov/LEWPA](http://www.erie.gov/LEWPA).

## Informing WNY Delegates

LEWPA engages with elected officials at all levels whenever possible in order to promote the water quality needs of the region.

In 2013, the Lake Erie Watershed Protection Alliance made a formal presentation to the elected officials of Western New York.

This education and outreach is an important part of making sure that the regional officials are aware of the concerns and priorities regarding water quality in the Lake Erie watershed.

In addition, LEWPA Board

members regularly speak with delegates to communicate issues such as nutrient pollution and harmful algal blooms, micro-plastic pollution, invasive species, failing infrastructure, and other concerns that negatively impact our ability to use our fresh water resources as they were intended.

By joining together in this Alliance, municipalities have a larger voice on these water quality issues, especially in relation to funding. Because water doesn't stop flowing at municipal boundaries, it is important to tackle these issues regionally.

### Why LEWPA matters



LEWPA is a regional community-driven organization for state and federal entities to channel water quality investments into Western New York

## The Future for LEWPA and Watershed Planning

The New York State Department of State has awarded Erie County \$507,830 to continue a Niagara River Watershed Management Plan and expand it to include the Lake Erie watershed. The "Regional Niagara River Lake Erie Watershed Management Plan - Phase 2" project will

take place from 2014-2017.

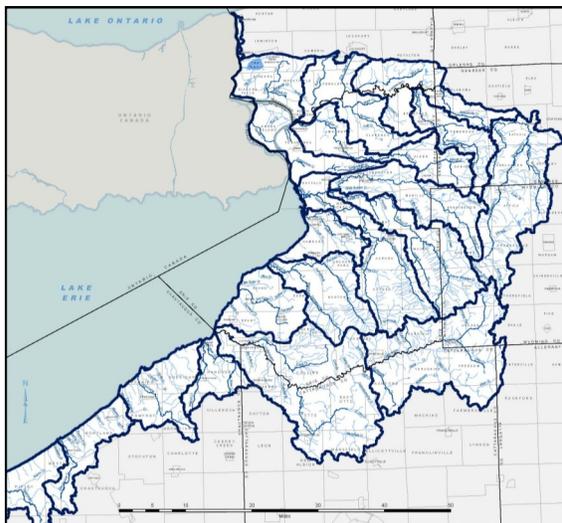
In cooperation with Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper, funds are being matched making this a more than \$1,000,000 project to create a comprehensive plan for the entire watershed.

Stakeholders will be engaged throughout the process to

expand the geography of this plan, as well as create in-depth looks at 5 sub-watersheds in order to move toward an EPA 9-element watershed management plan that will make the region more eligible for additional funding sources.

LEWPA will update the Watershed Atlas that will list existing reports, resources, and information. It will also update the Watershed Characterization Report in order to provide information on the make-up of each sub-watershed draining to Lake Erie. This information is critical for planning a region that protects and improves our water resources.

Anyone interested in learning more or participating on one of the Advisory Committees should contact Joanna Panasiewicz, Project Manager, at [Joanna.Panasiewicz@erie.gov](mailto:Joanna.Panasiewicz@erie.gov).



Niagara River/ Lake Erie watershed to be covered by the plan