

Lake Huron Basin

Landscape Context

The Lake Huron basin is situated in the northeastern portion of Michigan. This area contains all waters that travel east or southeast into the Lake Huron drainage, including the connecting waterway of the St. Marys River. This basin spans both the Lower and Upper peninsulas of Michigan.

The Lake Huron basin is 16,148 square land miles and includes the major watersheds of the Munuscong, Carp, Cheboygan, Thunder Bay, Au Sable, Rifle, Saginaw (tributaries : Tittabawassee, Shiawassee, Flint, and Cass rivers), Sebewaing and Pigeon rivers plus several small coastal watersheds. Landcover in this basin is forested (40%) primarily in the northern portions and agricultural (33%) which is mostly in the southern portion. Wetlands still comprise 18% of the basin. Urban areas comprise only 2% of the basin area.

Priority Threats

Ten threats to wildlife and landscape features in this basin were identified as significant by participants at a workshop for this region (see Methods chapter in the Introductory Text & Statewide Assessments section for more information). Invasive species (both established species that require control or eradication, and the potential for more species to colonize) and riparian modification were identified as the most severe threats, followed closely by fragmentation. The next five threats were of equal severity: altered hydrologic regimes, altered sediment loads, social attitudes, thermal changes and wetland modifications. The remaining ranked threats (dams, dredging and channelization) were still significant, but not to the same high level as the first eight.

Priority Conservation Actions

The following are conservation actions that were repeated most frequently within each landscape feature category and, therefore, should be considered priorities for the basin, because they will have the most widespread benefits for wildlife conservation in this region (no order implied):

Great Lakes

- Control and prevent introduction and establishment of aquatic invasive species
- Increase education of boaters, scuba divers, and others on the spread of invasive species and preventative steps

Inland Lakes

- Continue vigilance and cooperation toward preventing aquatic invasive species introductions and establishments
- Enact and enforce better wetland and shoreline protection regulations and mitigation requirements
- Restrict dredging activities
- Work with local officials to develop planning and zoning guidelines that consider natural processes

Rivers

- Continue regulating facilities that remove and discharge water into streams and rivers
- Continue working with and educating Drain Commissioners
- Continue working with, developing and refining planning and zoning regulations and ordinances
- Limit water withdrawals in flow-limited and groundwater fed systems
- Protect and rehabilitate groundwater recharge by requiring that all development-related runoff be captured by infiltration basins

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- Protect the natural hydrologic regime of streams and rivers by protecting existing wetlands, floodplains and natural upland areas
- Redraft the Michigan Drain code
- Remove dams to rehabilitate natural hydrology and connectivity
- Work with road commissions and forest management agencies to fix perched culverts and rehabilitate eroding stream crossings, and to site and build effective new stream crossings

Wetlands

- Allow seasonal flooding
- Close roads during breeding seasons or install tunnels along migration pathways to allow amphibians and reptiles safe passage to breeding grounds
- Continue developing and refining planning and zoning regulations and ordinances
- Continue educating legislators, policy makers and the public on the benefits and ecological services that wetlands provide
- Continue working with and educating Drain Commissioners
- Protect existing natural wetlands and rehabilitate degraded wetlands