

# OneFAB

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Agricultural Nutrient Best Management Voluntary Practices Jeff Mann, General Counsel & Chief Editor

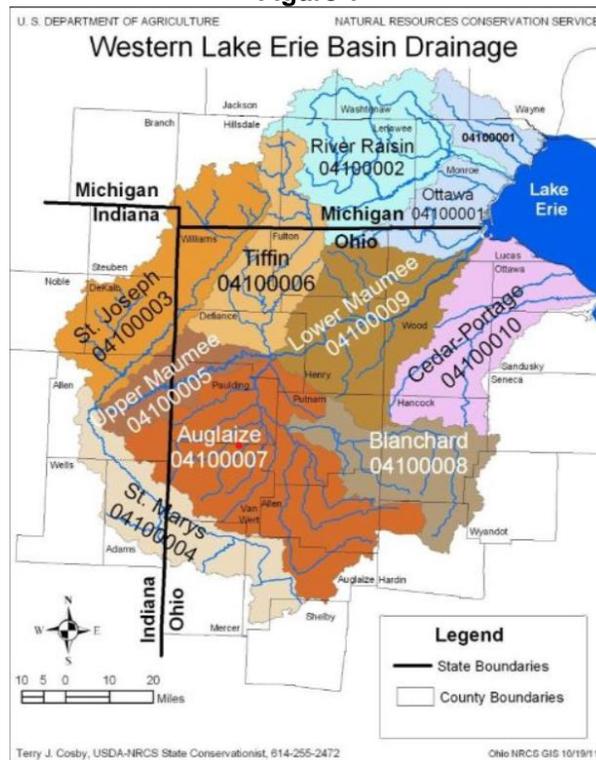
## Introduction

Lake Erie is the fourth largest of the Great Lakes and is one of the dozen largest lakes in the world. It is also the shallowest of the Great Lakes, averaging 62 feet in depth, with a maximum of 210 feet. Because of its shallow nature, its relative warmth, population centers that surround the lake, and the presence of substantial areas of agricultural production, Lake Erie is especially susceptible to nutrient runoff from surrounding farmland and the rivers that feed the lake. Excessive nutrient runoff can cause algal blooms, or large increases in the population of cyanobacteria. These blooms generate unsightly (and unpleasant smelling) masses of blue-green algae that produce toxins hazardous to human health. Moreover, the algae deplete oxygen in the water, which causes dead zones in the water column hazardous to aquatic life.

## The Program

The Agricultural Nutrient Best Management Voluntary Practices Program is a pilot program established within the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD). The program is focused on implementing best management practices for the application of agricultural nutrients (mainly phosphorous). The stated goal is to improve water quality, specifically within the western Lake Erie basin (see [Figure 1](#)).

Figure 1



Public Act 87 of 2021 appropriated \$25.0 million to support the program. Funds may be spent for any of the following purposes:

- Grants, cost sharing, or other incentives to implement priority practices and associated equipment and structures
- Technical support.
- Soil or water quality testing.
- Education outreach and training.

The unspent funds from the original appropriation were designated as a work project appropriation with a tentative completion date of September 30, 2026. According to MDARD's most recent report, as of March 31, 2024, the remaining balance of the appropriation is just over \$17.9 million. The current expenditures and obligations are shown below in [Table 1](#).

**Table 1**

<b>Appropriation</b>	<b>\$25,000,000</b>
<b>Less Expenditures &amp; Obligations</b>	
Staffing Support	320,140
Stony Creek Community Conservation: A Watershed Management Plan	25,000
Meet Water Quality Goals in Western Lake Erie Basin, Phase III	53,600
Great Lakes Watershed Management System Progress Tracking and Assessment	305,638
Deployment of USGS Gage Station in the Headwaters of the Saline River	313,357
Drainage Water Management Edge of Field Research	1,157,858
Western Lake Erie Basin Expanded Water Quality Monitoring Program	4,861,534
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$7,037,127</b>
<b>Remaining Balance</b>	<b>\$17,962,873</b>

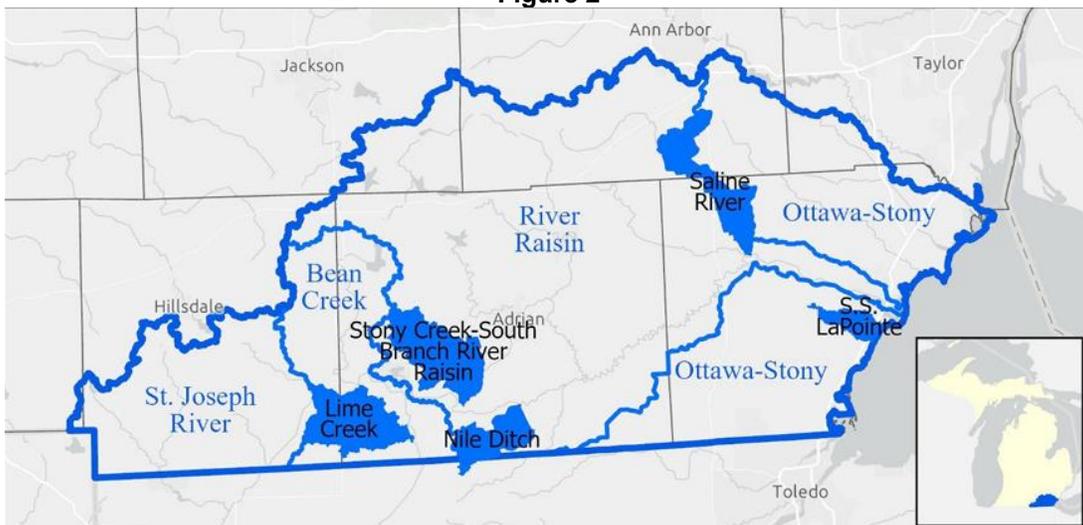
Source: MDARD, "Agricultural Nutrient Best Management Voluntary Practices Program", March 31, 2024.

Note that this is down from a balance of \$24.8 million reported on March 31, 2023.<sup>1</sup>

In collaboration with the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE), the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and other stakeholders, MDARD has developed goals to 1) alter the source, rate, time and placement of nutrients to reduce the amount of nutrients applied to agricultural fields, 2) keep applied nutrients in the field for crops, and 3) implement technologies to intercept or trap nutrients leaving the field before they enter Michigan waters.

According to MDARD's most recent report on the program, it is using a collaborative approach (with EGLE and the DNR) to evaluate and prioritize sites and best management practices in smaller subwatersheds throughout the Western Lake Erie basin. The applicable subwatersheds are shown in [Figure 2](#) below.

**Figure 2**



Source: MDARD, "Agricultural Nutrient Best Management Voluntary Practices Program", March 31, 2024

<sup>1</sup> MDARD, "Agricultural Nutrient Best Management Voluntary Practices Program", March 31, 2023.