



Saginaw Bay Watershed Conference: 'Everything drains into the Saginaw Bay'

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Phragmites reeds along Tobico Marsh in Bay City State Recreation Area.

KOCHVILLE TWP. — Covering 87,000 square miles, the Saginaw Bay Watershed is the largest watershed in the state.

"The Saginaw Bay is one of the most unique and important watersheds in the basin," said Mark Coscarelli, Public Sector Consultants vice president.

Coscarelli talked about the layout and history of the watershed at the **2012 Saginaw Bay Watershed Conference** on Friday at Saginaw Valley State University.

About 200 federal and state government officials and concerned citizens attended the conference, which outlined work to restore the area's water and habitat.

The watershed consists of more than 175 inland lakes and 7,000 miles of rivers and streams, Coscarelli said. About 1.4 million people live across the 22 counties; Bay City, Midland, Saginaw and Flint are the major urban and industrial areas.

With decades of contamination and pollution from agriculture and industry, the U.S. government is focused on funding clean up efforts in the region.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is overseeing the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, a \$475 million, five-year initiative to restore the lakes and watersheds. The federally funded program aims more specifically to clean

up toxins, combat invasive species, and promote near shore health by protecting watersheds from runoff.

In 2012, the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative has \$300 million.

Michelle Selzer, Michigan Department of Environmental Quality analyst, said the restoration issues focus on decreasing eutrophication of the Saginaw Bay and restoring habitat.

The Saginaw Bay is noted as an area of concern for cleanup projects.

"Everything we do in the Saginaw Bay Watershed drains into the Saginaw Bay, both literally and figuratively," she said.

The EPA and MDEQ are partnering with local organizations such as Ducks Unlimited and the Conservation Fund to restore specific areas within the watershed.

With 315 dams in the watershed, Coscarelli said, dam removal is key to restoring the lakes.

Fish and wildlife health is a key issue in the watershed, he said. While the DNR restocks fish populations such as walleye, he said, opening up spawning areas to improve populations is more sustainable.

Follow coverage of the conference:

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