

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 The Great Lakes and the S.S. Lapointe Drain Watershed

“America’s Great Lakes — Superior, Michigan, Huron, Erie and Ontario — hold 21 percent of the world’s surface fresh water and host habitat for a variety of fish and wildlife species of concern. They provide drinking water for more than 40 million people and economic benefits from fishing and recreation. The Great Lakes Region is also a major agricultural area, with more than 55 million acres of land under production. All of these uses impact the Great Lakes ecosystem. With the CCA (Critical Conservation Area) designation, USDA will build on existing strong partnerships in the Great Lakes Region to provide approaches and tools for producers to better manage nutrients and sediment on agricultural land. Accelerated conservation on private lands will help improve water quality, leading to better habitat for fish and wildlife and increased economic opportunities, including maintaining agricultural productivity in this vital region.” (USDA-NRCS Website 2014)

S.S. Lapointe Drain Watershed (**Figure 2**), encompassing 11,776 acres, is part of the Ottawa - Stony River watershed and is located in Erie Township in Monroe County. This watershed is a major agricultural area that feeds directly into Lake Erie and contributes to the phosphorus and algae problems that plague the Western Lake Erie Basin. Lake Erie Luna Pier Beach, also located in the Ottawa- Stony Watershed and the Otter Creek-Frontal Lake Erie subwatershed, is included in the S.S. Lapointe Drain Watershed. Lake Erie Luna Pier Beach was placed on the Section 303 (d) list due to impairment of recreational uses as indicated by the presence of elevated *E.coli* levels.

The overarching goal of the S.S. Lapointe Drain Watershed Management Plan is to engage citizens and the governments that represent them in on the ground actions and best management practices to improve water quality.

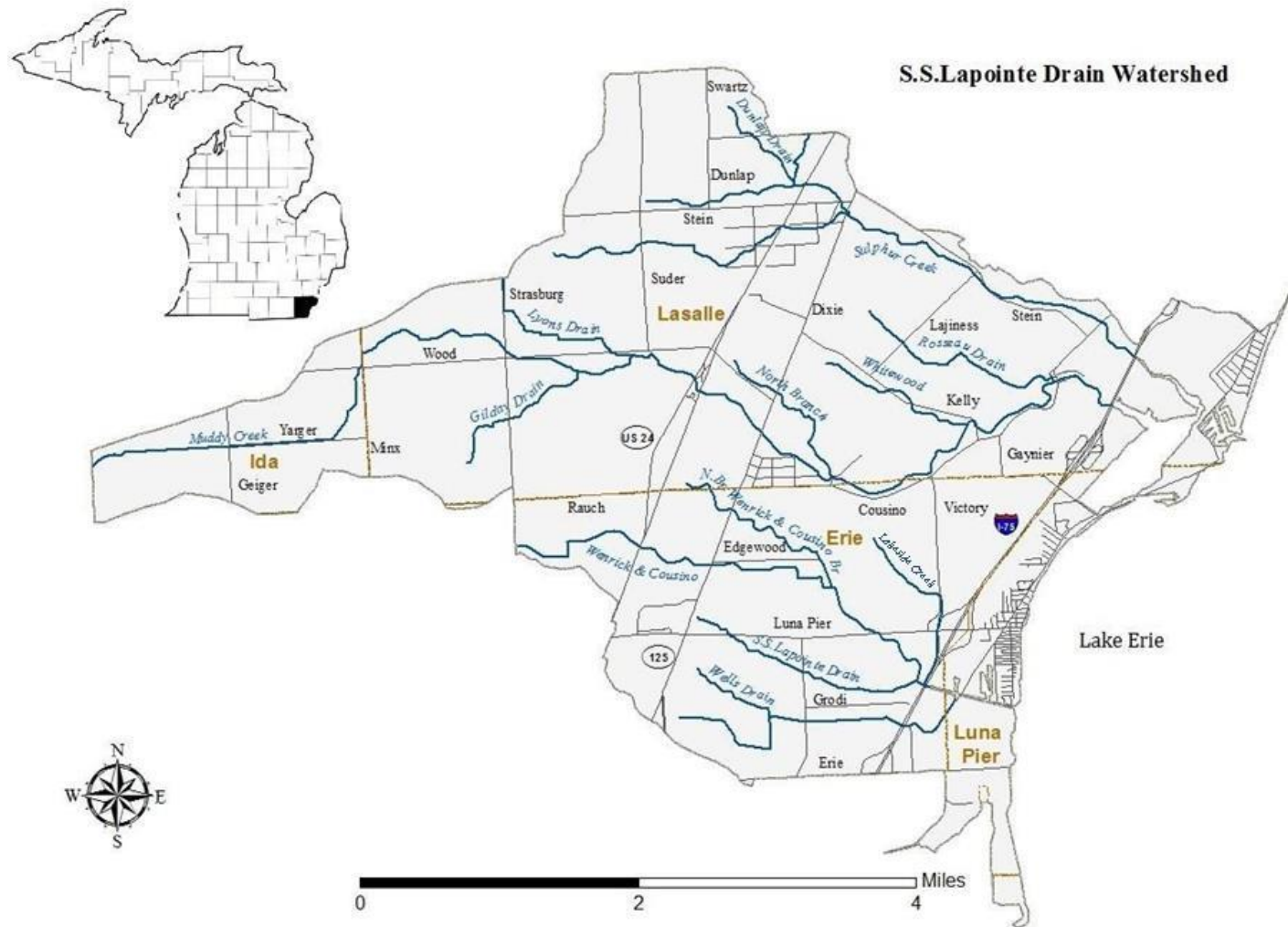


Figure 2 S.S. Lapointe Drain Watershed Map

2.2 Purpose of the Watershed Plan

The purpose of a watershed management plan is to guide watershed-related outreach, research and implementation projects to ensure continued and measurable progress over time in addressing water quality issues. The watershed management plan provides the roadmap for water quality improvement activities for approximately the next ten years. The goals and objectives in this plan have been prioritized to ensure that the most pressing water quality issues are addressed.

2.3 Stakeholder Participation

The kickoff meeting for the S.S. Lapointe Drain (SSLD) Watershed Management Planning Project occurred on April 22, 2014. Invitation letters were sent to a diverse group of stakeholders explaining the goal of the project was to address water quality impairment issues in the watershed. A press release describing the project and announcing the meeting was sent to various media outlets. Representatives from the MDEQ and the River Raisin Institute (RRI) presented an overview of the MDEQ Nonpoint Source Program, including the definition of a watershed and how a watershed management plan helps. The specific S.S. Lapointe water quality concerns were addressed as well as the process of establishing a Steering Committee. Attendees were asked to consider joining the Steering Committee. A question and answer time concluded the meeting.

In June 2014 Monroe County officials and the RRI Board of Directors participated in a tour of the SSLD Watershed. Tour stops included Mason Consolidated Schools Waste Water Treatment Plant (WWTP), three S.S. Lapointe Drain road crossings and the channel where the S.S. Lapointe Drain flows into Lake Erie, including the Luna Pier beach shoreline. The Monroe County Drain Commissioner and the Monroe County Health Department Environmental Health Director provided explanations and answered questions throughout the tour.

The SSLD Steering Committee was established and began meeting in July 2014. Representatives from the Monroe Conservation District, Monroe County Health Department, Monroe County Drain Commissioner's office, the Monroe County Planning department, local government officials, public works staff, MDEQ, Nonpoint Source Program staff, River Raisin Watershed Council, and marina owners comprised the watershed steering committee. The Steering Committee called for farmer participation and distributed a flyer inviting farmers to get involved in the project in a number of different ways.

The Steering Committee provided input in the development of the landowner survey at its December 2014 meeting. The members took the survey during the meeting and shared suggestions for clarifications, additions, deletions. Committee members agreed with administering the survey before the spring planting season so as to maximize the response from the growers.

The Steering Committee planned and conducted a Public Meeting in January 2015. A press release announcing the meeting and inviting residents to attend was sent to various media outlets. Notice of the Public Meeting regarding the SSLD Watershed Management Planning Project was posted in the local township offices, city hall, posted on the local government websites and included in newsletters to citizens. The purpose of the public meeting was to remind attendees of the reason for the project and explain the planning process, the specific S.S. Lapointe Drain water quality concerns, what is a TMDL, the

environmental monitoring, sampling sites, timeline and protocol, on the ground inventory and the landowner survey. The public meeting was broadcast live on Monroe Public Access Cable Television and the recording was posted online.

A landowner public opinion survey was distributed to 373 non-farming landowners in the SSLD Watershed and 205 farm households in the spring of 2015. The purpose of the survey was to collect information to help shape the outreach and education programs and the provision of technical and financial assistance to farmers and non-farming landowners in the watershed. The actions of two key groups - agricultural producers and residential landowners - impact water quality significantly. The data from this social monitoring effort provided insight into the knowledge, attitudes and behaviors of these stakeholder groups. By better understanding stakeholders and their willingness to make certain changes, the most appropriate BMPs have been recommended for this watershed. The survey results also helped us understand the barriers to agricultural and residential BMPs implementation and helped determine the most appropriate messages and delivery mechanisms to increase behavioral changes in the SSLD watershed to achieve pollutant reduction. Participants were assured that survey responses would be completely confidential. The option of completing the survey online was provided as well as the chance to win a \$50 gift card to a local hardware store. A press release was sent to various media outlets informing the public of the landowner survey. Results of the public opinion survey are discussed in the I/E (Appendix I) part of this plan.

In May 2015 RRI Executive Director presented the S.S. Lapointe Drain Management Planning Project as part of the Monroe County Commissioners' Public Forum *"What Is Monroe County Doing about the Lake Erie Algae Problem?"*

Involvement with the Guardians of Luna Pier Waterways, a local non-profit organization concerned with the canals in Luna Pier, began in 2016. The group learned about the SSLD project through an IHM Sisters publication in which an article about the project appeared. It is the hope that collaboration in addressing water quality issues will take shape as awareness of possible actions grows.

The RRI Board of Directors has been very involved in the oversight and implementation of the SSLD WMP. In addition to receiving regular board meeting updates, many board members have volunteered for on the ground environmental monitoring, provided clerical assistance, reviewed or written articles about the project and shared the goals of the project within their circles of influence.