



Applying knowledge to improve water quality

# National Water Program

A Partnership of USDA CSREES & Land Grant Colleges and Universities

Winter 2007

## Agriculture, Land Use and Water Quality Reporting and Evaluation by the GLRC's Environment Report



GREAT LAKES REGION

### National Themes:

Conservation and Agricultural Watershed Management, Watershed Management

### Project Description

Each week the Great Lakes Radio Consortium (GLRC) at the University of Michigan creates the *Environment Report*, a satellite feed of environmental news stories that is sent to more than 140 public radio stations in 20 states. Because of the size and demographic makeup of the public radio audience, the *Environment Report* from the GLRC is uniquely positioned to inform the American public about land use and water quality in the Great Lakes. The stories are also available as podcasts at [www.environmentreport.org](http://www.environmentreport.org)

### Actions

Under its current grant from the USDA (years 2005-2009), the GLRC is producing and distributing 120 radio stories focused on the dynamic relationship between the agricultural sector and water quality in the Great Lakes Region and beyond. The stories produced are a combination of longer features (4 to 5 minutes) and shorter commentaries, interview segments and news spots on topics such as sources of water quality impairment, successful water quality initiatives, policy options that could improve water quality, legislation that impacts agricultural policy, and the costs and benefits of remediation. The ultimate goal of these reports is to educate policy makers, farmers, landowners, community leaders, and the general public about the relationship of agricultural policies and actions to regional water quality.

Each month, stories on the *Environment Report* make approximately 5.4 million listener impressions throughout the country. These public radio listeners come from a cross-section of political beliefs and are among America's most educated, most influential, and most civic-minded individuals. As these listeners learn about the relationship between water quality and agriculture, they become more able to make informed decisions with respect to the environment.

Sample story produced by GLRC in 2006:



Dan Gunderson photo

"Sharing Prairie Chickens" explained how states in the Great Lakes Region are working together to preserve prairie chicken habitat and genetic diversity (June, 2006).

Sample story produced by GLRC in 2006:



Stephanie Hemphill photo

"Life After a Forest Fire," described just how quickly a forest can recover after the devastation of a large fire (August, 2006).

## PROJECT CONTACTS

### Mark Brush

Senior Broadcast Producer  
GLRC's *Environment Report*  
Michigan Radio  
535 West William Street  
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48103  
Phone: (734) 764-9210  
Email: brush@glrc.org

## PROJECT PARTNERS

Partners include over 140 radio stations in 20 states. Please visit [www.environmentreport.org](http://www.environmentreport.org) for the most recent station list and for story archives and links.

For more information about the Great Lakes Regional Water Program, please contact:

Rebecca Power  
University of Wisconsin  
Regional Water Liaison  
Phone: (608) 263-3425  
[rebecca.power@uwex.edu](mailto:rebecca.power@uwex.edu)

## Outcomes/Impacts

At the one-year mark in the current four-year USDA grant, 27 radio stories have been produced and broadcast on the *Environment Report*, making approximately 5.4 million listener impressions. In addition, unique visits to [environmentreport.org](http://environmentreport.org), where all the radio stories are archived (both audio and text) nearly doubled between July and October 2005. The Great Lakes Radio Consortium is also in the forefront of expanding digital technologies, having introduced the *Environment Report* as a podcast in March 2005.

## Results

Results of an evaluation of a similar multi-year project with USDA funding (years 2001-2005) indicate that the *Environment Report* has been successful in bringing agriculture and water quality news and concerns to listeners. Comparing 2004 results with 2002 results:

- The number of listeners who considered themselves well-informed about environmental issues increased by 14 percent;
- 95 percent of listeners remembered hearing a report about environmental issues on public radio.
- Listeners had greater awareness of each of the following topics: loss of farmland due to urban sprawl, the effect of pesticides on water quality, the effort of fertilizer or nitrogen on water quality, and the effect of animal feed operations on water quality.

For the current grant (2005-2009), an expanded evaluation of listener knowledge and attitudes is being implemented. In an independent study, the private firm Market Trends Research is seeking to determine if stories on the *Environment Report* in the areas of agriculture, water quality, and land use have an effect on the actual behavior of public radio listeners. A baseline phone survey of listener attitudes and behaviors took place in spring 2006. A comparative phone survey will be conducted in 2009. Results of two focus studies filed to date have indicated that stories on the *Environment Report* have impacts on behaviors such as seeking additional information, sparking discussions with family members, and changing consumer habits.

Sample story produced by GLRC in 2006:



Lester Graham photo

The struggle between farmland preservation and urban development was explored in "Saving Farmland from Sprawl" (September, 2006).



[www.uwex.edu/ces/regionalwaterquality](http://www.uwex.edu/ces/regionalwaterquality)

Website and podcast: [www.environmentreport.org](http://www.environmentreport.org)