



## FACT SHEET

February 2015

### Western Lake Erie Basin (WLEB), OH, IN, MI Section 441 of the Water Resources Development Act of 1999 General Investigations

#### Location

- The WLEB includes the watersheds of the Maumee, Portage, and Ottawa Rivers, in Northwest OH, Northeastern IN, and Southeast MI that are major tributaries to the WLEB

#### Project Description

- Comprehensive investigation of measures to improve fish and wildlife habitat, navigation, flood damage reduction, recreation, and water quality in the WLEB, including the Maumee, Ottawa and Portage River watersheds
- The combined watersheds have a drainage area of approximately 7,200 square miles, with the Maumee River contributing about 24 percent of the surface water flow into Lake Erie
- A primary issue is flood damage reduction and restoration of fish and wildlife habitat. The Blanchard River has experienced severe flooding each year since 2007 causing tens of millions of dollars in damages to communities within the watershed, especially Findlay and Ottawa
- Equally important is pollution from non-point source discharges, particularly agricultural runoff. Non-point source pollutants and suspended sediments degrade water quality and contribute to the approximately 800,000 cubic yards (CY) of sediment dredged annually from the Maumee River navigation channel
- Feasibility phase is cost-shared 50% Federal and 50% non-Federal for Section 441 of WRDA 1999

#### Importance

- 5 of the 6 highest floods on the Blanchard River have occurred since 2007, causing tens of millions of dollars in damages, with the last occurrence in December 2013. Flooding in 2007 resulted in a Federal Disaster Declaration. In addition, frequent flooding has impacted the quality of life in the watershed and hindered economic development efforts. Active USACE leadership and participation is critical in solving and implementing flood risk management measures
- The watershed management plan will provide a framework for sustainable development in the watershed by examining comprehensive ecosystem restoration opportunities including habitat and wetland restoration, prevention of future environmental losses, elimination of bacterial loadings and pollutants of concern, improvements to navigation channels, and analysis of flood control operations to ensure that they are meeting evolving conditions

#### Consequences

- Without additional funding, design and construction for the flood risk management efforts on the Blanchard will not be developed. Due to the frequency in flooding, delay in implementing flood risk management measures could result in additional damages from future flooding
- In addition, the Western Lake Erie Basin watershed stakeholders will continue to work in the watershed on a project by project basis without the benefit of a watershed plan that can be relied upon for comprehensive and multipurpose solutions to their complex water resource problems

Project Phase	Est. Fed. Cost of Phase	Federal Funding Thru FY14	FY15 Requirement	FY15 Budget	FY16 Requirement	FY16 Budget
Feasibility	\$15,000k	\$4,791k	\$1,500k	\$0	\$0	\$0
WS Assessment	\$150k	\$0	\$150k	\$0	\$150k	\$0

### **Project Sponsor/Customer**

- Customers include numerous state agencies, non-governmental organizations and local municipalities in the states of OH, IN and MI. Federal partners include: NRCS, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and U.S. Geological Survey (USGS)
- Hancock County signed a Feasibility Study Cost Share Agreement on 30 Sep 2008 for a WLEB Blanchard Watershed Interim Feasibility Study for Ecosystem Restoration and Flood Risk Management.

### **Congressional Interests**

- Representative Marcy Kaptur D-OH-09
- Representative Robert Latta R-OH-05
- Representative Jim Jordan R-OH-04
- Senator Robert Portman R-OH
- Senator Sherrod Brown, D-OH
- Representative Marlin Stutzman R-IN-3
- Representative Luke Messer R-IN-6
- Senator Joe Donnelly D-IN
- Senator Dan Coats R-IN
- Representative Debbie Dingell D-MI-12
- Representative Timothy Walberg R-MI-7
- Senator Gary Peters D-MI
- Senator Debbie Stabenow D-MI

### **Current Status**

- USACE is involved with the Western Lake Erie Partnership, including Federal, state, and local agencies, which works to coordinate efforts to improve the watershed. USEPA recently has indicated they wish for the Partnership to take a more active role in the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative with the opportunity for direct funding. In addition, the WLEB is also involved in the new Urban Waters Partnership looking for opportunities to improve water quality and reconnect urban areas with their water bodies
- In support of the Urban Waters Partnership, USACE is preparing a Feasibility Study for a storm water treatment wetland along the Ottawa

River at the site of the former Jeep Assembly Plant

- The Blanchard River phase of the study has been revised to include flood risk management projects. Project received \$1.5M of Federal funds in FY14 to complete Feasibility Study for Findlay area with Chief's Report scheduled for spring of 2016.
- Construction of flood risk management projects in the Ottawa area has received non-Federal funds to complete implementation. USACE regulatory is prepared to work with local officials in a possible upcoming Section 404 permit action.
- Work toward defining Existing Conditions in Maumee Bay and initial development of Habitat Restoration Unit alternatives to improve terrestrial and aquatic habitat in Maumee Bay through the beneficial use of dredged material has been completed. Identification of a Project Sponsor which has the ability and desire to construct a project is required in order for the feasibility study to progress further
- FY10 GLRI funding was used to develop a priority list of wetland and aquatic restoration projects. The study also included implementation of innovative technologies to quantify and assess sediment and nutrient concentrations associated with Blanchard River flood events in waters discharging through the Maumee River to Lake Erie. A portion of future funds could be used to commence a Section 729 Watershed Assessment of the Lower Maumee Watershed.

### **Issues**

- Lack of funding in immediate outyears will result in the inability to initiate Preliminary Design and Construction efforts to address flooding in the Blanchard Watershed, nor to commence the Section 729 Lower Maumee Watershed Assessment.





Project Manager: Michael Pniewski, (419) 726-9121 [michael.d.pniewski@usace.army.mil](mailto:michael.d.pniewski@usace.army.mil)