

# Nonpoint Source Pollution

Why are some of Indiana's waterways too dirty for swimming, fishing, or drinking? Why are native plants and animals disappearing from state rivers, lakes, and coastal waters?

Over 100 million tons of soil erodes annually from Indiana's landscape. Much of that soil enters the state's waterways as sediment. Sedimentation and polluted stormwater runoff affect the use of Indiana's waters.

Today, nonpoint source (NPS) pollution remains the state's largest source of water quality problems. It's the main reason that many of Indiana's surveyed rivers, lakes, and coastal waters are not clean enough to meet basic uses such as fishing or swimming.

NPS pollution occurs when rainfall, snowmelt, or irrigation water runs over land or through the ground, picks up pollutants and sediment, and deposits them into rivers, lakes, and coastal waters or introduces them into groundwater. NPS pollution is widespread and can occur any time activities disturb land or water.

Imagine the path a drop of rain takes from the time it hits the ground to when it reaches a river. Any pollutant it picks up on its journey has the potential to become part of the NPS pollution problem.

Agriculture, forestry, grazing, urban runoff, construction, recreational boating, septic systems, physical changes to stream channels, and habitat degradation are all potential sources of NPS pollution. Even careless or uninformed household management can also contribute to NPS pollution problems.

The most common NPS pollutants are sediment and nutrients. These wash into water bodies from agricultural land and animal feeding operations, construction sites, and other

areas of disturbance. Other common NPS pollutants include pesticides, pathogens (bacteria and viruses), salts, oil, grease, toxic chemicals, and heavy metals. The United States annually spends millions of dollars to restore and protect the areas damaged by NPS pollutants.

Since most nonpoint source pollution is caused by land-based activities, each of us may be contributing to the pollution without even being aware of it. Some of the ways you can make a difference include:

- Place all trash in receptacles; never throw down a storm drain.
- Keep roadways, street gutters, and walkways swept and clear of soil, grass, and debris.
- Use environmentally safe cleaning products that do not contain phosphorus or other toxic chemicals.
- Recycle all used motor oil by taking it to an authorized service station or local recycling center.
- When washing your vehicle, direct the flow of water into the grass or gravel. Never let it flow into the street gutters or storm drains.
- Reduce the amount of pesticides and fertilizers applied to plants and lawns (read the directions carefully).
- Use biological methods and traps to reduce insects, weeds, and fungus instead of toxic insecticides and herbicides. Never apply pesticides or herbicides near wells.
- Plant grass or other plants in exposed soil areas.
- Inspect your septic system annually; pump the septic tank every three to five years.

