



A Citizen's Guide to Stormwater

Michigan rivers and tributaries stretch across hundreds of square miles in Michigan, including highlands and lowlands. The rivers carry rain and snowmelt runoff, or stormwater runoff, into inland lakes and the Great Lakes. The quantity of stormwater entering our rivers, lakes, and streams along with the pollutants it carries can degrade aquatic habitat and water quality. We can all take simple steps to reduce stormwater pollution. After all, the cheapest way to stop pollution is at the source.



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What is stormwater pollution and where does it come from?

Actually, it comes from all of us. Even if we don't mean to, many of our everyday actions add to stormwater pollution. Stormwater picks up oil, metals and salts, pet waste, fertilizer, grass clippings and other materials left on sidewalks and streets before it enters a catch basin.

In most areas with storm sewer systems, this polluted runoff washes from the catch basins straight into the nearest lake or river without being treated.



Stormwater is different than wastewater from toilets and sinks, which goes to a treatment plant before being discharged into the river.



What else is polluting Michigan's rivers?

Bacteria is also a serious problem. *E. coli* is the strain of bacteria that people hear about most, because it indicates the presence of other disease-causing bacteria. *E. coli* lives in the digestive systems of humans and animals, and can be found in sewage. In some places, sanitary sewers have been incorrectly connected to storm drains, causing sewage to enter our waterways. Cracks and leaks also allow stormwater to get into sanitary sewers during major storms, overwhelming our treatment plants and causing sewage overflows. Fixing these problems is expensive and time-consuming, but our communities are working hard to correct them.

5 SIMPLE WAYS YOU CAN HELP MICHIGAN RIVERS

1

Use a pooper scooper! Bacteria, parasites and viruses from pet waste can easily wash into storm drains and end up in the river without being treated.

Limit your pesticide and fertilizer use. Pesticides are one of the biggest pollutants of all. Limit fertilizer use, and make it a habit to sweep your grass clippings onto the lawn rather than into a catch basin. See tip cards #2 and #3 for more information on lawn care.

2

3

Check your vehicles for fuel and oil leaks. When it rains, grease and oil drippings wash into storm drains, and go straight into our rivers and streams.

Wash your car on the lawn or go to a car wash (where the water goes to a wastewater treatment plant). Dirt and oils you wash off can harm fish and animals if it goes straight in the storm drain. Grass filters pollutants — and you'll water your lawn at the same time!

4

5

Only Rain Down the Drain! In other words, use trash cans! Even if it means a slight inconvenience for you, it's better off for everyone who shares Michigan's rivers.