

# GREAT LAKES



## Clean Communities Network

Over the past few decades, communities, government, and organizations have made great progress toward increasing awareness of environmental issues and improving ecological health in the Great Lakes region. However, in spite of these great strides toward improvement, overwhelming problems still exist. While research efforts continue to address these problems, new technology and social communication trends present new opportunities to help improve ecological health in the Great Lakes region. The GLCCN project, funded by the Great Lakes Protection Fund and being developed by the Institute of Water Research (IWR) at Michigan State University (MSU), seeks to empower and connect communities and organizations around the Great Lakes to more effectively implement programs to improve ecological health in their watersheds, community, and the Great Lakes Basin.

The GLCCN will use the Internet and social media to help improve or sustain ecological health in communities, and connect environmental practitioners (sustainability managers, watershed groups, state and local government, etc.) with each other. The overall goal is to provide a platform where practitioners can share tools, ideas, and techniques to learn from one another, and more efficiently address their environmental concerns. The GLCCN will provide easy access to environmental tools, measures for gauging ecological impact, social media communication strategies, and instructional and learning material for developing an online environmental system or management plan. With these enhanced capabilities, communities and groups may be better equipped to implement practices and evaluate their effectiveness.

The GLCCN will also provide a collection of materials, tutorials, reviews, and links to existing tools and models to guide users toward the most effective tools and strategies available for addressing environmental problems. Examples include storm water runoff and impervious surfaces, nutrient loading, water conservation, water recharge, beach closure, and other Great Lakes environmental issues.

Through the GLCCN, communities interested in building their own online environmental systems will be able to review the pros and cons of a variety of tools and models, examine which technologies provide the greatest potential for success in addressing specific environmental issues, and learn how social media might be incorporated into their design to engage the broader public.

Several partners will contribute to the development and deployment of the GLCCN, including the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative (GLSLCI), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT), MATRIX of Michigan State University, University of Michigan, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

In order to gauge how effective the GLCCN is at transferring knowledge, technology, and techniques, IWR will work with TNC to develop an ecological score card that will allow communities to generate a baseline ecological score for themselves. After using the GLCCN and implementing new practices, a community can re-evaluate by using the score card to document ecological changes and improvements. Through these improvements communities can achieve different levels of green certification.

The long-term target audiences for this project are urban and rural communities and environmental organizations across the Great Lakes Basin. Four pilot groups; two in Michigan, one in Wisconsin and one in New York; are being targeted for the conceptual testing of the GLCCN. Additionally, up to ten communities will be included as beta-testers.

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If you are interested in learning more about the project or becoming a participant in the GLCCN, please contact Jeremiah Asher at the Institute of Water Research, Michigan State University; [asherjer@msu.edu](mailto:asherjer@msu.edu); or call 517-432-5586.

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