

## Restoring Our Resources Saginaw River and Saginaw Bay

*When hazardous substances enter the environment, fish, wildlife and other natural resources can be injured. The Department of the Interior, along with State, Tribal and other Federal partners, act as “trustees” for these resources. Trustees seek to identify the natural resources injured and determine the extent of the injuries, to recover damages from those responsible, and to plan and carry out natural resource restoration activities. These efforts are possible under the Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration Program, the goal of which is to restore natural resources injured by contamination. The Department, along with other trustees, is accomplishing this goal in the Saginaw River and Bay areas in Michigan, bringing a cleaner, healthier environment to the people of the area.*

### The Problem

Between the 1940s and early 1970s, industrial facilities and wastewater treatment plants on the Saginaw River, Michigan, released PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) and related compounds into the Saginaw River. These releases caused major environmental damage to the ecosystem of the Saginaw Bay. Saginaw Bay is regarded as one of the prime walleye fishing and waterfowl hunting areas in the Great Lakes and also drains into Lake Huron, so contaminants from the Bay pose far reaching risks if not contained and halted.

Contamination has impacted fish and wildlife resources in the



Saginaw River and Bay, resulting in advisories against human consumption of fish for all species of fish in the River, and many species of fish in the Bay. Also, bald eagle reproduction is significantly lower in these areas than found in less contaminated areas.

### The Solution

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, along with our co-trustees (the State of Michigan and the Saginaw Chippewa Tribe), performed a Natural Resource Damage Assessment. The co-trustee group recently reached a negotiated settlement for natural resource damages with General Motors Corporation and the cities of Bay City and Saginaw. The settlement will provide for substantial cleanup of river contamination and then for protection and restoration of fish and wildlife habitats in the Saginaw River and Bay. The settlement is one of the largest achieved by the Department of the Interior as the lead federal agency to recover natural resource damages.



*Industrial wastewater discharge is a common source of pollutants to the Great Lakes. Photo courtesy of Minnesota Sea Grant.*

## The Restoration

The settlement will result in the removal of 345,000 cubic yards of contaminated sediments, or about 90 percent of the mass of PCBs in the lower river. Dredging is expected to begin in 1999. Although not all risk will be removed, experts believe that additional restoration dredging would significantly increase the physical injury to habitat while providing little additional removal of PCBs. The settlement also provides for acquisition, restoration and protection for more than 1,600 acres of habitat, as well as restoration for acquired lands that had been drained for agricultural use. Restoration will also include fish habitat between Saginaw Bay and Tobico Marsh, and for the Green Point Environmental Learning Center in Saginaw. Boat launches and nature viewing opportunities will be provided at two sites on the river in Bay City, and at one site on the bay in Essexville to



*The diversity of the Saginaw Bay Shoreline is seen in this shot, south of Fish Point with a natural wetland (left) and a drained wetland for agricultural land (right). USFWS photo by Frank Horvath*

compensate the public for injuries to the state's resources.

## The Benefits

The settlement and pending restoration is expected to result in a cleaner and healthier ecosystem for natural resources and people through the removal of PCBs from the Saginaw River. This means fewer PCBs in fish, wildlife and

people who eat fish. Another benefit will be the enhanced recreational opportunities and improved economic possibilities for the area as the stigma of contamination is replaced with knowing that the watershed is a cleaner and safer place with rich natural resources for use by the American people.

*For more information, contact:  
The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, East Lansing Field Office,  
2651 Coolidge Road, East Lansing, MI 48823; (517) 351-2555. Also, visit the USFWS's web site <http://www.fws.gov>.*

March 16, 1999



*Saginaw Bay's Tawas Point is a natural sand spit. Protected areas like this are important fish spawning and bird habitats on the Great Lakes shoreline. USFWS photo by Frank Horvath*