

Fishing for Facts



Water is the most common substance on Earth. It is found as ground water, in oceans, seas, rivers, lakes, ponds and streams. There are two forms of water. The water found in the seas and oceans has salt. Lake, river, stream and pond water has no salt. There is one exception. *Estuaries*, where ocean meets fresh water have both salt and fresh water. When *tides* come in, the water is saltier and when tides go out, there is less salt in the water.

Water pollution is one of our greatest environmental problems. Our waterways are not as clean as they should be. Our water worldwide has become polluted because of pesticides and other chemicals running off the land into our water. Sometimes people and industry pollute accidentally but sometimes this dumping is done purposefully. In our area of the United States and the nation of Canada we depend on the Great Lakes and the waterways, rivers, smaller lakes, streams and underground water supply. We need clean water for our homes, schools, recreation, transportation, business and industry. The Great Lakes and all the surrounding land are called the **Great Lakes Basin**.

Many of us have learned the names of the Great Lakes by using the word *HOMES*. Each letter stands for a Great Lake: Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie and Superior.

Today we know that chemicals like PCB hurt the fish and birds. Fish like perch and walleye developed tumors. Salmon and trout had so much of the chemicals in them that people are still warned not to eat too much of these sport fish from the Great Lakes. The bald eagle became an endangered species because they ate fish containing the pesticides.

The shells of their eggs became weak and their young did not hatch. Because of efforts to stop poaching, reducing chemicals in the water and protecting nesting sites, the eagle has been restored and is now protected, not endangered. However, there are new threats. Ships going through the St. Lawrence Seaway brought unwanted species that hurt native species. The lamprey eel, sculpin fish and zebra mussels are three of these unwanted and harmful species.



Because citizens became alarmed and took voluntary action for the common good, many organizations and conservation clubs were formed. **Conservation** is the way we attempt to manage, use wisely and protect our natural resources. Businesses, industry and governments also saw the need to stop pollution and they also took action. The United States government now has the Environmental Protection Agency. Canada and the United States have a Joint Commission to protect the Great Lakes. Each state that shares one of the Great Lakes has a Department of Environmental Quality. Grassroots service movements have been formed in communities to monitor and protect our Great Lakes Basin. Yearly river cleanups like the Rouge River Project involve youth and community volunteers to restore this once great river. Youth take active roles in letter writing campaigns, water quality testing, and other service projects to insure the health of the water. They are making a difference by preserving this heritage for the future.

