

Living Near Waterways Can Be a Plus or a Minus

By Irene Miles

Decades of industry in the Great Lakes region have left many polluted lakes and rivers. These years of environmental degradation have also taken an economic toll on the communities along these waterways.

John Braden, a University of Illinois economist, found that property values for homes near contaminated waterways can be significantly depressed. With funding, in part, from Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant (IISG), Braden's team looked at houses near the Sheboygan River in Sheboygan County, Wisconsin. This study was complemented by a similar one in Buffalo, New York.



John Braden

Despite the beauty of the Sheboygan River as it passes through Kohler, WI, toxic contaminants can be found in the river sediments.

at actual sales of single family houses in the area from 2002-2004," explained Braden. "And we surveyed 850 residents to understand people's perceptions of the river, and their willingness to pay more for housing if the river is cleaned up."

Using hedonic analysis of property sales, Braden found that for owner-occupied homes within five miles of the Sheboygan River Area of Concern, the overall estimated loss of value is \$158 million, which translates into an 8 percent discount, on average. "The impacts are

Continued on page 6

New Web Site Kicks Off eCycling Campaign
Page 3

Lake Michigan Becomes Classroom for
COSEE Teacher Workshop Page 4

Aquatic Invaders Web Site Spreads
Beyond the Internet Page 7

Living Near Waterways Can Be a Plus or a Minus

Continued from page 1

concentrated in the more populated areas nearest the lower river," he said.

About 14 miles of the Sheboygan River has been designated an Area of Concern by the U.S. EPA, which means that the waters have been significantly impaired by pollutants such as nitrogen, PCBs, and heavy metals. While upper sections of the river have been restored, Braden's study focused on residents living in the lower sections of the river, which have not yet been cleaned up. In survey results, less than 20 percent of respondents viewed the river as environmentally safe.

In the survey, Braden also posed some choices for residents to ascertain the monetary value of a clean river. "Through these hypothetical trade-offs, residents expressed a willingness to pay 10 percent more for single family homes for a full cleanup of the Area of Concern," said Braden. Altogether, that is \$218 million (in 2004 dollars).

"These results give academic weight to concerns that communities have been economically disadvantaged due to their proximity to impaired waters," said Braden. Braden's study in Buffalo found similar results.

For some communities, the Great Lakes Legacy Act has offered an opportunity to turn things

around. The Act authorized \$270 million to remove contaminated sediment from Areas of Concern. So far, this effort has leveraged \$44 million in nonfederal funds to remove over 1,500,000 pounds of contaminants at five completed project sites in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Ohio. Several more sites are in progress or are scheduled for restoration. As the remediation process takes place, IISG, with funding from the U.S. EPA Great Lakes National Program Office (GLNPO), provides information and support to local residents. This support continues as residents work together to develop plans for their restored waterfront.

"We are seeing wonderful improvements in communities after the remediation projects are completed," said Susan Boehme, IISG coastal sediment specialist. "For example, before, in Muskegon, Michigan, children were kept away from Ruddiman Pond and Creek for fear of the contamination. Now it's a place where people canoe and kayak. Weddings and other special events take place on the shores of the pond. In Ashtabula, Ohio and Trenton, Michigan there are more success stories to tell. These cleanups help the communities obtain additional funding to improve shoreline habitat, add marinas and docks, and provide more recreation opportunities."

IISG Wins Two Extension Awards of Excellence

IISG won twice at this year's University of Illinois Extension awards banquet. Two Sea Grant projects were chosen for the 2008 Outstanding or Innovative Programming Team Award.

The award went to *Extension Meets Service Learning*, a new University course, funded through the Provost's office. This course brings together many partners, including college students, grade school students, and community organizations, to raise awareness about invasive aquatic species and the role people can play in preventing their spread. The team is comprised of Robin Goettel, associate director for education, and Terri Hallesy, education

specialist, along with Valerie Werpetinski, U of I Center for Teaching Excellence, and Corey Suski and Joanne Vining, natural resource professors.

Also winning was *Disposal of Unwanted Medicine*, a project funded through U.S. EPA GLNPO that provides tools and information to communities interested in developing unwanted medicine collection programs. Unwanted medicine is often flushed away, ending up in lakes and rivers, impacting aquatic wildlife. Susan Boehme, coastal sediment specialist, and Beth Hinchey Malloy, Great Lakes ecosystem specialist, share this award.