Grand Lake St. Marys is a 21 square mile lake located in west central Ohio and has been influenced by the local and natural recovery within Auglaize and Mercer Counties, West Central Ohio since its creation. As the health of the lake and its invasive population has declined, so has the economy. However, the health of the lake in recent years has felt the drastic cumulative effect of gradual land use changes, related to both growth and development surrounding the immediate lake area and the agriculture industry located within the surrounding watershed.

These impacts have affected both recreational and economic activities throughout the lake community. Although various steps were taken to reduce the loads of phosphorus entering the lake basin from development over the years, the lake’s water quality continues to suffer from nutrient inputs and other water quality degradation issues leading to dangerous levels of algae microcystis toxin. These bloom-out causes public health and safety concerns, as well as significant economic consequences. Overall, the OEPa was forced to close the lake to all recreational activity. Overall, the lake is in the scope of a functional watershed and ecological collapse. Despite improved conservation practices over the years, algae blooms are clear indicators of the ecosystem inability to process and utilize the excess and accumulated nutrients.

A Strategic Plan was formulated to provide a framework and drive for restoration of the lake, communities and the local economy. This comprehensive management tool to implement solutions for economic and lakes improvements and revitalization. The Strategic Plan was pursued on the developing economic opportunities and strategies that allow for a local and lake based supplemental revenue sharing program that is both environmentally sustainable and economically important. This planning process targeting problem created by current and past activities and applying new environmental and economic paradigms to the future offers a challenging, yet urgent and exciting opportunity for the communities that have come to rely on the lake and watershed.