

Restoring Forest Habitat When settlers moved into the Great Lakes region in the 1800s, they cleared patches of forest for farms. Later, loggers cut down more, and still later more land was cleared for factories and cities. In time, almost half of the region's original forest was lost to development. When habitats are lost, the plants and animals that live there are often lost as well.

Today people are working to reverse forest loss in the Great Lakes watershed. Timber companies are cutting trees in ways that are less harmful to forests, and they replant trees in areas that have been logged. The result is that forests around the Great Lakes are now expanding instead of shrinking.

Protecting Precious Wetlands Like forests, wetlands were gradually lost as the Great Lakes region developed. A wetland is an area where the soil is usually wet all year, such as marshes, bogs, and swamps. Wetlands provide habitats for a wide variety of wildlife. At the same time, they help to control flooding during storms.

In the past, wetlands were viewed by many people as worthless bogs, and over time, more than half of the wetlands in the Great Lakes region disappeared. Only in recent years have people begun to see the value of wetlands habitat.

Today public and private groups are working to protect wetland habitats. One way is by creating nature preserves on existing wetlands. Another is by teaching landowners how to protect wetland areas. In some places, developers must create more than one acre of new wetland for every acre they destroy.

Population Pressures

The Great Lakes region has become densely populated. Each yellow dot below represents 2,500 people. The areas that are almost solid yellow have the most people. As the population has grown, forests and wetlands have disappeared. More habitats will be lost unless they are protected from development.

