

## Everyday choices matter.

Discarding one piece of litter doesn't seem like a big deal, but if 10% of the people living in Whitley County drop one piece of litter a day that's 3300 pieces of litter every day or more than 23,000 pieces of litter in one week. When it rains, water that is not absorbed by the ground runs off and carries litter into storm drains and waterways.

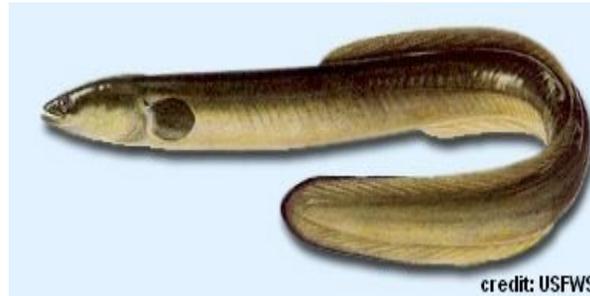


Litter carried to a road culvert by runoff.

**Polluted storm water** runoff is the biggest cause of the pollution that affects over 9,000 miles of Indiana rivers and streams. Both the Blue River and the Eel River are on the State's list of impaired waters, primarily because of polluted storm water.

**Litter pollutes.** Chemical residues and food waste contained in litter are deposited in the environment. The chemicals can be harmful to wildlife on the land or in the water. As litter decomposes in water, it decreases the amount of dissolved oxygen in the water that fish and other aquatic organisms must have to live.

## The American Eel



The Miami Indians named the Eel River, "Ke-na-po-co-mo-co, the river of the snake fish". Parts of the Eel River are listed as impaired waters of the State of Indiana due to high levels of PCBs in collected fish tissue samples. 1986 was the last year an eel was sighted in the Eel River.

**Learn more** about preventing storm water pollution by reading the City of Columbia City MS4 webpage at: [www.columbiacity.net/community/stormwater-2/](http://www.columbiacity.net/community/stormwater-2/)

Or by contacting Jon Gotz at the Whitley County Soil and Water Conservation District:  
260-244-6266 extension 3



*Please, keep it clean!*

## PREVENTING STORM WATER POLLUTION



## LITTER

*City of Columbia City  
Municipal Separate Storm  
Sewer System (MS4)*

*Whitley County  
Soil and Water  
Conservation District*



Cigarette butts outside a public building.



Unrecycled plastics.



Microplastic beads. ( credit: 5 Gyres Institute)

**Cigarette butts** are an unsightly and all too common form of litter. They can choke or disable animals who mistake them for food. Cigarette filters are composed of cellulose acetate which can take as long as five years to decompose. The filters contain toxic chemicals that can leach out in water and harm aquatic life.

**The Problem with Plastic.** Americans recycled less than 6% of the plastic they used in 2001. Most plastics are not biodegradable. Instead, sunlight and weather gradually break these plastics down into smaller and smaller pieces. When it rains, storm water runoff carries these small pieces into our lakes, rivers and streams, and eventually, our oceans. One trawler sample taken from Lake Erie in the summer of 2012 yielded an estimated 600,000 plastic pieces per square kilometer of water surface.

**Toxic chemicals** like PCBs and DDEs attach to the bits of plastic. One study of plastic bits collected from coastal water found chemical concentrations one million times higher than the surrounding seawater. Animals, birds and fish often mistake the bits for food and ingest them. A study of fish collected at intermediate depth from an area of the Pacific Ocean estimated the fish ingest 12,000 to 24,000 tons of plastic each year. Many species of seabirds are known to ingest bits of plastic.

## HOW CAN I HELP?

- ◆ **Don't litter.** Find a recycling container or trash can.
- ◆ Make sure recycling or trash bin lids are securely fastened. Don't set open boxes or containers outside.
- ◆ Keep trash out of truck beds and cover any loads.
- ◆ **Recycle and reuse** as much as possible. Contact the Whitley County Solid Waste District at 260-248-3132 with recycling questions.
- ◆ **Pick up litter.** Pick up one piece a day and that will be 365 fewer pieces of litter in a year.
- ◆ **Organize or join** a community clean-up event. This could be a fundraiser for your club, team or troop.

