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NEWS RELEASE

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BLACK RIVER REACHES TWO MILESTONES IN CLEANUP JOURNEY

Lorain, OH -- Governor Bob Taft and Ohio EPA Director Chris Jones celebrated Earth Day today with a tour of the Lake Erie shore, highlighting efforts by state government and its partners to protect and restore Ohio's Great Lake.

"No single resource better demonstrates the spirit of Earth Day and the strides we have made toward improving our environment," Governor Taft said of Lake Erie. "And no resource is a stronger reminder of the challenges that remain."

The first stop on the Earth Day tour was Black River Landing in downtown Lorain, where Governor Taft celebrated progress made toward cleanup of the Black River. Identified by the International Joint Commission (IJC) as one of Lake Erie's most contaminated tributaries, the Black River is now recovering thanks to combined federal, state and local efforts. Governor Taft announced two milestones in the river's journey toward full cleanup.

First, a 21-year-old contact advisory on the lower five miles of the river (between the mouth and the E. 31st Street bridge) has been lifted by the Ohio Department of Health. The advisory was issued in 1983 because bottom-feeding fish caught there had excessive numbers of liver and lip cancers. The tumors were linked to toxic industrial wastes in river bottom sediments. In 1990, 50,000 cubic yards of contaminated sediment were removed from the river bottom. Over time, water quality and the fish community have gradually improved, leading the State to lift the contact advisory.

In addition, U.S. EPA has just declared the Black River to be "in recovery" for fish tumors and deformities -- one of several reasons for which the river was considered impaired by IJC. Ohio EPA and the Black River Remedial Action Plan Coordinating Committee (Black River RAP) documented the improved health of the fish community in a February 2004 application to U.S. EPA. The upgraded status recognizes that no additional actions are necessary to further reduce fish tumor incidences and natural processes should complete the recovery. Monitoring will continue.

Director Jones said, "When I think of the most noteworthy environmental success stories, a common ingredient is partnerships -- people from many walks of life, professional disciplines and personal passions who work together toward a common goal. That certainly is the case with the Black River RAP. I thank them for their dedication and congratulate them on these successes."

The Black River RAP Coordinating Committee was appointed by the director of Ohio EPA in 1991. It includes more than 25 public and private entities and individuals. The group's task is to identify pollution problems and implement solutions throughout the watershed. In the last decade, remarkable progress has been made. These improvements are largely due to the determination and hard work of the RAP Coordinating Committee.

As part of the Earth Day tour, Governor Taft also toured the Old Woman Creek State Nature Preserve near Huron and stopped at Maumee Bay State Park, near Toledo, to celebrate the state's acquisition of North Bass Island.

As chairman of the Council of Great Lakes Governors, Governor Taft has provided leadership in regional efforts to improve the health and well-being of all the Great Lakes – the world's most extensive fresh water resource.