



State of Ohio Environmental Protection Agency

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NEWS RELEASE

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Ohio EPA Holding Meeting on Beaver Creek and Grand Lake St. Marys Watershed Water Quality

Bacteria and nutrient levels in the Beaver Creek and Grand Lake St. Marys watershed have created major water quality issues for the region, according to an Ohio EPA study. The study will be discussed at a public meeting on Wednesday, February 21, 2007.

The meeting will be held in the Central Services Building, 220 West Livingston St., Celina, beginning at 10:30 a.m. Ohio EPA is writing a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) report and needs public input on the findings and recommended solutions in the study.

The watershed includes Mercer and Auglaize counties and the communities of Celina, Chickasaw, Coldwater, Montezuma, St. Henry and St. Marys. Celina obtains its drinking water from Grand Lake St. Marys.

Grand Lake St. Marys is Ohio's largest inland lake. In this study, the lake itself was sampled, but an allowable load calculation was not done because TMDL criteria have not been established for Ohio's lakes. The study focused on the lake tributaries of Barnes Creek, Little Chickasaw and Chickasaw creeks, Prairie Creek, Burntwood Creek and Coldwater Creek, which drain to the lake, and Beaver Creek downstream of the lake. The sampling was conducted in 1999, 2005 and 2006.

Beaver Creek and the rest of the Grand Lake St. Marys watershed have significant impairments caused by high levels of bacteria from livestock operations and failing residential septic system and nutrients such as phosphorus and nitrates from row crop agriculture and livestock. About 80 percent of the area is agricultural land use, and there are numerous confined animal feeding operations in the watershed.

The study analysis suggests that a partial solution may be possible with increased use of conservation farming practices, such as conservation tillage, vegetative filter strips and nutrient management plans to prevent excessive application of fertilizers. Practices that may be more effective at reducing excess nitrate levels include improved manure management, storage and composting and field practices such as winter cover crops. Upgrades to failing home septic systems would help reduce nutrient and bacteria impacts. Any combination of these practices would lead to significant improvements in the conditions of the streams and the lake.

Ohio is required by the federal Clean Water Act to identify waters that do not meet water quality standards and develop methods to bring the affected waters into compliance. This is the TMDL program. It determines the maximum load of pollutants a water body can receive on a daily basis without violating water quality standards. The TMDL program can improve water quality by taking a comprehensive look at all pollution sources.

At the February 21 meeting, Ohio EPA staff will be joined by the Grand Lake/Wabash Watershed Alliance and a Tetra Tech consultant to discuss the Agency's findings. Public feedback at the meeting will be used to complete the draft TMDL report which will be released to the public for further comment before being sent to U.S. EPA

for approval.

A fact sheet about the Beaver Creek and Grand Lake St. Marys watershed will be available online at <http://www.epa.state.oh.us/dsw/tmdl/index.html> after February 15, 2007.

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