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NEWS RELEASE

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Ohio EPA Releases Final Report on Beaver Creek and Grand Lake St. Marys Watershed Water Quality

Conservation farming practices, improved manure management and upgraded home septic systems would lead to major improvements in the Beaver Creek-Grand Lake St. Marys watershed, according to a report on local water quality by Ohio EPA.

Citizens groups within the watershed have been working with local agricultural and government agencies to achieve improvements within the rural watershed. Bacteria, sediment and nutrient levels in local streams have created significant water quality problems in the streams and in Grand Lake St. Marys. The lake is a popular recreation site and is the source of drinking water for Celina.

Ohio EPA's report details impairments to the streams and suggests how water quality can be improved. The report, approved by U.S. EPA this month, builds on the results of a comprehensive study of the chemical, biological and habitat conditions of the lake's tributaries.

The report does not contain timetables, and not every recommendation can be achieved through state regulations. Ohio EPA is committed to working with the Grand Lake Wabash Watershed Alliance to implement the updated watershed action plan, which is expected to receive state endorsement later this year. Local officials, landowners and conservation agencies are encouraged to be part of this ongoing effort to improve water quality.

The watershed includes Mercer and Auglaize counties and the communities of Celina, Chickasaw, Coldwater, Montezuma, St. Henry and St. Marys. 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.

Streams in the watershed are impaired primarily by high levels of bacteria from livestock operations and failing residential septic systems. In addition, livestock and row crop agriculture runoff allow phosphorus and nitrates to enter the streams and lake, resulting in heavy algal growth. Stream channel modification can contribute excess soil to streams that leads to damaged aquatic life habitat and downstream transport to 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 Total Maximum Daily Load (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 and engaging the local community in solutions.

The report was discussed at a public meeting in February 2007. The final report is available online at http://www.epa.state.oh.us/dsw/tmdl/index.html.

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