



State of Ohio Environmental Protection Agency

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NEWS RELEASE

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Ohio EPA Launches Study of Water Quality in Central Ohio River Tributaries

This summer, Ohio EPA began a new study of Ohio River tributaries in five watersheds spanning Washington, Monroe and Belmont counties. These tributaries, known as the Central Ohio River Tributaries, include McMahan Creek, Captina Creek, Sunfish Creek, Weege Creek, Pipe Creek, Big Run, Newell Run, Narrows Run, Leith Run and Mill Creek. These tributaries flow into the Ohio River at various locations along the eastern and southeastern border of the state.

Through October, Ohio EPA staff will continue to collect chemical, physical and biological sampling data from 67 sites in the study area to learn where water, sediment and aquatic communities are healthy. All Ohio EPA employees carry a photo identification and will request permission from private landowners if access to their property is needed for sampling.

The information staff gathers will be part of a plan to maintain and, where necessary, restore water quality. The sampling will reveal what pollutants are present in the water and characterize the impacts from point source dischargers and nonpoint sources of pollution, including sewage, urban and rural runoff, stream modification and coal mining activities.

Another goal of the sampling effort is to identify where Ohio EPA needs to focus work with local governments, landowners and concerned citizens to find solutions to problems. Ohio EPA is especially seeking local community involvement. Recently, the Belmont Soil and Water Conservation District Office hired a watershed coordinator to develop an action plan specifically for Captina Creek. Additionally, reclamation is planned for Big Run. Furthermore, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources' Division of Mineral Resources Management will be developing an acid mine drainage abatement and treatment plan for McMahan Creek.

Ohio EPA has one of the most advanced water quality measurement programs in the nation, determining the health of rivers and streams through biological data (e.g., fish and bugs), not just chemical data (e.g., bacteria, metals, nutrients). The abundance and variety of collected species, especially those sensitive to pollution, provide vital information Ohio EPA uses to strategically focus funding and other resources for pollution prevention projects. Some fish are temporarily stunned, caught, studied and released. Others are collected for tissue monitoring of parameters like pesticides, PCBs, mercury and lead. Aquatic habitat also is evaluated.

This sampling of the Central Ohio River Tributaries is the first step in developing a water quality restoration plan for impaired portions of the watersheds. Pollution sources can contribute to impairment and affect recreational enjoyment and the quality of drinking water obtained from the watersheds' lakes (e.g., Woodsfield reservoir and three Barnesville reservoirs). Ohio EPA also spent the summer sampling these four reservoirs as part of a separate Inland Lakes Monitoring Program. For more information on this program and lake sampling in Barnesville, go to:

www.epa.ohio.gov/dsw/inland_lakes/index.aspx
www.epa.ohio.gov/portals/47/nr/2009/august/BarnesvilleNR.pdf.

The federal Clean Water Act mandates that states develop and implement a watershed restoration plan called a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL). A TMDL also signifies the maximum amount of pollutants a creek or river can receive on a daily basis without violating water quality standards. Sampling aims to identify the source and type of pollutants present in the water and the waterways that fail to meet state standards. Such in-depth monitoring is a major investment of Ohio EPA resources. More information on the TMDL program is at: www.epa.ohio.gov/portals/47/facts/tmdl_fact_sheet.pdf.

Each year, Ohio EPA collects data from streams and rivers in five to seven different areas of the state. A total of 300 to 400 sampling sites are examined, and each site is sampled more than once. Sampling locations are generally chosen upstream and downstream from sewage treatment plants, industrial discharges, tributaries, streams, dams and where there have been significant changes in land use practices. If Ohio EPA finds that the stream is not meeting water quality goals, then additional measurements may be taken.

The results can take time. Over the course of several months, the data is processed, evaluated and synthesized into tables and written summaries. Typically, Ohio EPA will prepare a report about the survey's findings and send an announcement to local newspapers. Frequently, Ohio EPA offers a public meeting about the findings in the local area about one year after the study's launch. To find out the results of a study, one can also e-mail DSW_TMDL@epa.state.oh.us with the watershed of interest mentioned in the subject line.

More information about the Central Ohio River Tributaries study is at:
www.epa.ohio.gov/dsw/tmdl/monitoring_CentralOhioRiverTributaries.aspx.