

FOR RELEASE: August 20, 2010
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Projects Targeted for Grand Lake St. Marys Improvements

More Than \$1.5 Million Awarded in Six Grants

A recent state plan to improve near-term and long-term water quality conditions in Grand Lake St. Marys is being implemented with assistance from five grants from Ohio EPA administered funds and funding from the Ohio Department of Agriculture. These resources will fully or partially pay for specific in-lake and watershed-wide projects.

The grants also are part of a continuing effort to address decades-old water quality issues in the lake's watershed and suggested improvements laid out in a 2006 Ohio EPA water quality study and the 2008 Wabash River/Grand Lake St. Marys watershed plan. A severe cyanobacteria (blue-green algae) bloom this summer has dealt a crippling blow to the local economy.

The current grants will provide more than \$1.5 million in funding. Combined with other state, local and federal funds, more than \$6.8 million has been committed to watershed and in-lake improvements in 2009 and 2010.

Grants recently awarded by Ohio EPA include:

- A \$250,000 federal Clean Water Act Section 319 grant awarded to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources to conduct pilot projects involving the application of aluminum sulfate (alum) in selected areas in Grand Lake St. Marys. The alum projects are designed to capture phosphorus in the water column and carry it to the bottom of the lake, taking away a key nutrient for cyanobacteria.
- A \$484,000 Section 319 grant awarded to the Mercer County Commissioners to develop a wetlands and treatment train approach to reducing nutrients. The series of measures will be implemented in the Prairie Creek embayment of Grand Lake St. Marys (Franklin Township). This project features constructed and restored wetlands along Prairie Creek and a floating wetlands, isolation berm and aeration system in the embayment. The wetlands and a treatment train in the creek are intended to reduce the sediment movement and nutrients going into Grand Lake St. Marys.
- A \$60,000 Surface Water Improvement Fund (SWIF) grant awarded to Mercer County to install and evaluate a water aeration and circulation device known as an Airy-Gator. The aeration unit will be installed in a lake embayment in Franklin Township. The unit is intended to improve dissolved oxygen levels in the water column, induce water flow in the embayment and establish a cap on sediments. The objective is to reduce cyanobacteria in the vicinity of the aeration system.

- A \$90,540 Section 319 grant awarded to St. Marys Township to install a bed load sediment collector in Barnes Creek upstream from Grand Lake Saint Marys. This installation is intended to reduce nutrient and sediment loading to the lake and incidentally reduce blue-green algae. Using monitoring data from 2009, it is estimated that the sediment collector will remove approximately 41.5 tons of sediment annually or approximately 10 percent of the annual sediment load entering the lake from Barnes Creek.
- \$495,000 in Section 319 funds were awarded to Ohio EPA for contracting with USDA-NRCS to provide targeted conservation planning in the Beaver/Coldwater Creek and Grassy/Monroe Creek subwatersheds in the Grand Lake area. This project goal is to complete farm-scale conservation plans on 35 percent of the acres in 2010 and 2011. In 2012 the project will emphasize installation of targeted buffer installation on critical areas, wetland restoration, drainage water management and other traditional EQIP practices.

In addition, a \$25,000 pilot project, funded by the Ohio Department of Agriculture, will support a 2.5-acre study, conducted by Algaeventure Systems, Inc., on an area of the lake that contains high levels of blue-green algae. This project involves adding silica (sand) to the study area, which will allow non-toxic, nutrient-rich diatom dominant algae to thrive and out-compete the harmful blue-green algae. This process is intended to produce a cleaner lake and productive fisheries.

These new projects will work in conjunction with a 2009 Section 319 grant that Ohio EPA awarded to the Mercer County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD). The \$191,650 grant has been used to implement a series of agricultural best management practices and home sewage treatment system improvements in the Grand Lake St. Marys watershed. When concluded, the project will result in the installation of five milk house wastewater treatment systems, 18 home septic system replacements and two repairs and 10 tile control structures.

Also, the Mercer SWCD is conducting education and outreach activities such as a quarterly newsletter to all 4,800 households in the region and home sewage treatment system education and maintenance brochures.

Section 319 of the federal Clean Water Act created a national program to control nonpoint source pollution, including runoff from fields and urban areas as well as habitat alteration resulting from ditching streams and other sources. Ohio Surface Water Improvement Fund grants are for projects designed to reduce pollution coming from sources away from stream banks and improve water quality in Ohio's lakes and rivers.