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Ohio EPA Launches Studies of Additional Ohio River Tributaries, Reports Exceptional Results for Captina Creek

Ohio EPA is studying several Ohio River tributaries this summer, including Cross Creek, Short Creek and Wheeling Creek in Jefferson and Belmont counties. Ohio EPA is also announcing some results from its studies last year in about a dozen other streams in Belmont, Monroe and Washington counties. These streams all drain into the Ohio River.

Sampling Protocol and Purpose

Ohio EPA staff will collect chemical, physical and biological samples through the fall from dozens of sites in the study areas. Samplers all carry a photo ID and may request private property access from landowners if needed. The Agency has one of the most advanced water quality measurement programs in the nation, determining the health of rivers and streams through biological data and aquatic habitat, not just chemical data.

The abundance and variety of fish and aquatic insects, especially those sensitive to pollution, and the presence of bacteria, metals and nutrients provide vital information Ohio EPA shares with local governments, landowners and citizens so they can develop plans to maintain and/or restore waterways impacted by identified sources of pollution (e.g., sewage treatment plants, industrial facilities, coal mines, low-head dams and other stream modifications, and urban and rural sources of runoff). Stakeholders also can use the data to request assistance from Ohio EPA and other funding sources for projects that prevent stream impairment and protect drinking water quality and recreational enjoyment.

Sampling Results from Tributaries Studied in 2009

Ohio EPA sampled Captina, McMahan, Sunfish, Weegee, Pipe and Mill Creeks and Big, Newell, Narrows and Leith Runs in 2009 and continues to review data. A Captina Creek report is now available and reports for McMahan and Sunfish Creeks will be soon.

Captina Creek Watershed

Ohio EPA has studied the 180-square-mile Captina Creek watershed in Belmont and Monroe counties for more than two decades and released this latest report after evaluating data gathered in 2008 and 2009.

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A good indicator of high water quality is an elevated level of biodiversity. Ohio EPA samplers found State-endangered Eastern Hellbender salamanders, 84 types of aquatic insects and 56 kinds of fish (18 percent of which were pollution-sensitive) in Captina Creek. All 11 sites sampled in Captina Creek's mainstem had exceptional biological communities. Samples were collected from a total of 32 sites, 94 percent of which were fully meeting their designated or recommended aquatic life uses. The other two streams (South Fork Captina Creek and Cat Run) partially attained such goals; sparse habitat and a natural waterfall affected fish migration, but insect scores still ranked very high.

The seven locations tested for E. coli levels fully attained their designated recreation use. Elevated nutrients were found in North Fork Captina Creek downstream from Barnesville's wastewater treatment plant. The village received a \$1.7 million federal stimulus subsidy from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and a \$734,000 low-interest Ohio EPA loan to upgrade its sludge storage system and improve water quality.

Elevated levels of total dissolved solids, metals and conductivity were found in Captina Creek, Perkins Run and Piney Creek below local mine discharges, and contaminated sediments were found downstream from where coal slurry spills occurred. Ohio EPA didn't observe the sediments causing biological impairment during sampling, but chronic exposure may result in future aquatic life impacts.

More Information

Ohio EPA's Captina Creek Watershed Technical Support Document:

www.epa.ohio.gov/portals/35/documents/CaptinaCreekTSD2009.pdf

Belmont Soil and Water Conservation District Captina Creek Watershed Action Plan:

www.belmontswcd.org/WAP.htm

Ohio EPA's 2009 Central Ohio River Tributaries Study:

www.epa.ohio.gov/dsw/tmdl/monitoring_CentralOhioRiverTributaries.aspx

Ohio EPA's Total Maximum Daily Load Program:

www.epa.ohio.gov/portals/47/facts/tmdl_fact_sheet.pdf