Ohio Environmental Protection Agency

News Release

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Ohio EPA Accepts Comments About Draft Moxahala Creek Watershed Report

The Moxahala Creek watershed met its goals for public drinking water supply use and more than half of its goals for aquatic life use, according to a draft Ohio EPA report available for public comment through March 15. Moxahala Creek flows into the Muskingum River near Zanesville. The entire watershed stretches 302 square miles across Licking, Perry, Muskingum and Morgan counties.

In 2008, Ohio EPA studied the watershed, including Moxahala and Jonathan Creeks. The watershed has been affected by pollution sources, including un-reclaimed coal mine land and acid mine drainage; habitat alterations from in-stream dams; nonpoint source runoff; and failing home sewage treatment systems. Only about 28 percent of the watershed met recreational goals due to bacterial impairment.

Recommendations for the Moxahala Creek Watershed

To improve aquatic life and resume natural stream flow, Ohio EPA recommends investigating the removal of unnecessary dams, like the one at SR 93 on Jonathan Creek and the old mill dam near White Cottage. Dams create stagnant conditions for fish and aquatic insects, decreasing vital dissolved oxygen levels and increasing sedimentation that threatens habitat.

To reduce acid mine drainage (AMD) and restore biological resources, AMD remediation projects are being developed in Black Fork, a sub-watershed of Moxahala Creek, including the Tropic Wetland project and Whitehouse Seep project. The Tropic Wetland Maintenance Project, is designed to treat two underground mine discharges that contribute 80 percent of the pollutant load to Black Fork. In addition, Ohio EPA recommends the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) develop an AMD abatement and treatment plan for Buckeye Fork and Butcherknife Creek. Using this plan, ODNR would identify and implement AMD remediation projects that could restore biological resources in these streams.

To improve recreation and reduce nutrients and bacteria entering streams, Ohio EPA recommends landowners implement agricultural best management practices (e.g., fence livestock off from streams) and regularly inspect and repair (or replace, if need be) home sewage treatment systems.

Some watershed improvements depend on the voluntary cooperation of local residents and land owners. Local governments, groups and citizens can use Ohio EPA's information to develop plans to maintain and/or restore impaired waterways. Stakeholders also can request grants and additional assistance from Ohio EPA and other funding sources for projects that alleviate water quality problems and protect the resource for recreational enjoyment.

Sampling Protocol and Purpose

To monitor and report on the quality of streams throughout Ohio, Ohio EPA employees collect chemical, physical and biological samples from dozens of sites in each study area. Ohio EPA analyzes information about the abundance and variety of fish and aquatic insects, especially those species sensitive to pollution, and the presence of bacteria, metals and nutrients. The Agency has one of the most advanced water quality monitoring programs in the nation, determining the health of rivers and streams by sampling the biology and habitat in addition to water chemistry. Biology and habitat information can be used to show long-term trends in the quality of the water resource.

Ohio EPA looks comprehensively at all pollution sources. This includes point sources, such as wastewater treatment plants and industrial facilities, and nonpoint sources, like urban and rural runoff. To help address impairments, Ohio EPA develops a watershed restoration report, known as a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) report. The TMDL process generally determines the maximum load or amount of pollutants a water body can receive on a daily basis without violating water quality standards. Water quality standards are based on designated uses. These reflect the water's potential to be used by people and support a healthy biological community. The federal Clean Water Act requires Ohio to identify streams that do not meet water quality standards and determine what is needed to bring the affected waters into compliance. Studies take several years to complete.

Comments on the draft Moxahala Creek TMDL report may be submitted by March 15, 2012, to Ohio EPA, Division of Surface Water, Attention: Beth Risley, P.O. Box 1049, Columbus, Ohio 43216-1049, or by email to Beth.Risley@epa.state.oh.us. After considering comments, Ohio EPA will finalize the report and submit it to U.S. EPA for final approval.

Other material related to Ohio EPA's Moxahala Creek watershed study is online and also available for review by calling Ohio EPA's Division of Surface Water at (614) 644-2001.

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