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MEDIA CONTACT: Linda Fee Oros or Heidi Griesmer, (614) 644-2160
CITIZEN CONTACT: Mary McCarron, (614) 644-2160

Water Quality in Ohio's Watersheds Improves, According to Ohio EPA Report

A draft [2012 water quality report](#) documents an improvement in the status of Ohio's waterways. Ohio EPA is accepting comments on the report's list of impaired waters until Feb. 6, 2012.

Ohio EPA will hold a public information session on this report, called the 2012 Integrated Report, on Wednesday, Jan. 11, 2012, at 3:30 p.m. at Ohio EPA, 50 West Town Street, Suite 700, Columbus. This will be an opportunity to learn more about the report and its recommendations in more detail and ask questions. Visitors must present a photo I.D.

The report evaluates the status of waterways based on four water quality uses: aquatic life, recreational, human health related to fish consumption and drinking water. The report indicates which waters are meeting goals for these four categories and where improvements are necessary. If a waterway is not meeting goals in any one of these areas, it is listed as impaired. If included on the impaired list, further study is done and a water quality improvement plan is developed. The 2012 list of impaired waterways removes 260 previously listed impairments, mostly due to improved conditions or completed plans. The report adds 244 listings, mostly due to updated data from new water quality studies performed since the last assessment.

Aquatic Life Use Assessment

Ohio EPA's latest study of Ohio's impaired waters demonstrates a slight improvement of one percent (57.7 percent meeting goals, up from 56.7 percent in 2010) in Ohio's 1,538 watershed units.

In Ohio's largest rivers (23 rivers and more than 1200 river miles), 89 percent of assessed miles fully attain aquatic life standards, compared to Ohio's goal of 100 percent attainment by 2020. This percentage is down slightly from the 2010 assessment of 93 percent, largely because three of the rivers recently studied flow through highly urbanized areas, receiving large flow quantities from wastewater treatment facilities. These rivers, the lower Great Miami River (Dayton/Cincinnati metro area), the Cuyahoga River (Akron/Cleveland metro area) and the Scioto River (Columbus metro area) – together with the Sandusky River, show dramatic improvements over measurements made in the 1980s, but are still falling short of water quality goals.

Recreation Use Assessment

To evaluate recreation use, Ohio EPA evaluates the bacteria found in recreational waterways, such as those commonly used for kayaking or canoeing. The frequency of Lake Erie swimming advisories varies widely, with some beaches having no advisories all season, while others post them for half the days between Memorial Day and Labor Day. Beaches located near population areas had the highest number of advisories.

Human Health Use Assessment

When studying fish tissue samples, Ohio EPA found the greatest source of impairment in Ohio's waterways to be legacy contaminants. PCB contamination was the cause of most fish tissue contamination in Ohio, followed by mercury. About 17 percent of the areas assessed attain goals.

Drinking Water Use Assessment

The report found that chemicals of concern for impairment in drinking water supplies are nitrate and atrazine found in runoff from agricultural land use, home and commercial fertilizer application, failing septic systems, unsewered areas and wastewater plant discharges.

In the 1980s, only 21 percent of large rivers met the aquatic life use goals. That number has improved substantially, with 89 percent of large rivers now meeting aquatic life use goals. Upgrades to municipal and industrial wastewater treatment and improvements in agricultural conservation practices contributed for the large improvements over the last 20 years, but there is still need for improvement.

Rivers assessed since the 2010 Integrated Report include the lower Sandusky and Sandusky Bay tributaries, Killbuck Creek, central Ohio River tributaries (Captina, Sunfish, McMahon, Cross, Short, and Wheeling), upper and middle Scioto, middle and lower Great Miami, Southeast Ohio River tributaries (Pine, Ice, and Little Scioto), upper Muskingum and Walhonding River tributaries, Ottawa River (near Lima) and the Sandy Creek basins. [Detailed watershed surveys](#) are available online.

Comments about watersheds recommended for the impaired waters list or other comments about the report can be sent to dsw.webmail@epa.ohio.gov, or Ohio EPA, Division of Surface Water, Attention 303d comments, P.O. Box 1049, Columbus, Ohio 43216-1049. All comments must be received by Feb. 6, 2012. After considering the comments, Ohio EPA will submit a final document to U.S. EPA for approval. The final report must be submitted by Apr. 1, 2012.