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## **Ohio EPA Accepts Comments About Draft Paint Creek Watershed Report**

The lower portion of Paint Creek has exceptional biological quality, according to a draft Ohio EPA [report](#) available for public comment through Feb. 10.

Across the entire 1,142-square-mile watershed located in south Central Ohio, 70 percent of the sites Ohio EPA studied in 2006 for biological health and recreation use fully met aquatic life use goals; however, nearly half of the 117-mile-long river's mainstem is only partially meeting goals for aquatic life and only 40 percent met recreation use goals due to bacterial impairment. The watershed includes tributaries in parts of Fayette, Highland, Ross, Clark, Clinton, Madison, Pike, Pickaway and Greene counties.

### **Recommendations for the Paint Creek Watershed**

Although the biology in the Paint Creek watershed scored well for the most part, approximately nine percent of the tributaries failed to meet any aquatic life use goals, while 47 percent of the river and 20 percent of other streams were only partially attained these goals.

Since most of the land use in the watershed is agricultural, Paint Creek is substantially impacted by cropland runoff which results in elevated nutrients and fine sediment in the stream system. Man-made drainage improvements also have impaired the waterways. Solutions include taking measures to reduce losses of nutrients from crop fields, further reducing conventional tillage, establishing streamside buffer strips and protecting stream banks from erosion and runoff.

Ohio EPA determined that bacteria (*E. coli*) problems in the watershed primarily resulted from failing home septic systems. The Agency recommends that failing systems be fixed or replaced. These systems can be inspected by local health departments, which often work with state and federal partners to administer assistance for people who could benefit from home septic system upgrades.

Ohio EPA also found that some of the bacteria problems resulted from storm sewer runoff and poorly treated wastewater discharged from regulated sewage treatment plants. Solutions include lowering these facilities' permitted effluent limits, as well as reducing their overflows and bypasses of raw and partially treated sewage.

Some watershed improvements are dependent on the voluntary cooperation of local residents and land owners. Ohio EPA will work with federal, state and local partners, like the groups and citizens who are active in the Paint Creek watershed group. Together, they developed a [plan](#) to protect and improve water quality in Paint Creek.

Local governments 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 also takes a comprehensive look 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 Paint Creek TMDL report may be submitted by Feb. 10, 2012, to Ohio EPA, Division of Surface Water, Attention: Gregg Sablak, P.O. Box 1049, Columbus, Ohio 43216-1049, or by email to [Gregg.Sablak@epa.state.oh.us](mailto:Gregg.Sablak@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 Paint Creek watershed study is [online](#) and also available for review by calling Ohio EPA's Division of Surface Water at (614) 644-2001.