

Ohio EPA Response to Comments
Draft Quality Assurance Project Plan – Lower Great Miami River
August 2021

The Draft Quality Assurance Project Plan for the Biological and Water Quality Study of the Lower Great Miami River was made available for stakeholder review and comment from May 12, 2021 to June 11, 2021. The Agency received comments from the Metropolitan Sewer District of Greater Cincinnati (MSDGC), Ohio Manufacturers' Association (OMA), Oxbow, Inc., and the University of Cincinnati (UC).

Comment 1: In the following paragraph titled "Support NPDES Permitting" located on page 19 of the QAPP:

A list of NPDES permitted dischargers in the survey area is presented in Appendix 3. Survey data will be collected to provide the NPDES program with necessary biological and/or chemical sampling data. Stream water and effluent chemistry samples will be collected to specifically assess five wastewater treatment plant (WWTP) and facility discharges at Wausau Paper Towel and Tissue LLC, AK Steel Corporation, Middletown WWTP, Miller Coors USA LLC and LeSourdsville Regional WRF.

This statement is ambiguous as to whether the study is proposed to specifically sample the effluent of these five wastewater treatment plants. MSDGC requests clarification of this paragraph to include an explanation of whether wastewater treatment plant effluent will be sampled. (MSDGC)

Response 1: To improve clarity, the second sentence quoted from page 19 will be amended to the following:

"Stream water and effluent chemistry samples will be collected to specifically assess the area of unexpected impairment found in 2020, as noted in the section A5 above. This includes sampling at six permitted effluent outfalls; two wastewater treatment plant (WWTP) and five industrial facility discharges. All of the NPDES outfalls that will be sampled are shown in red font on Appendix 2."

Comment 2: The bulk of the sampling for this area is concentrated in the northern portion of the watershed. MSDGC requests a more detailed explanation of the sampling location choices. (MSDGC)

Response 2: As stated in report sections A5 - Problem Definition & Background, and B1- Sampling Process and Design, this survey is to specifically address unexpected aquatic life use impairment discovered in 2020. The geographic scope of this study is narrow as it is primarily intending to document if continued decline of the resources is occurring and to identify the causes and sources of this decline.

Comment 3: OMA supports the adaptive management approach to the Lower GMR that provides a methodical process for monitoring the improvements that result from the ongoing phosphorus load reductions by the two large publicly owned treatment works (Dayton and Montgomery County) (POTWs). Once the POTWs complete the ongoing upgrades (expected to be summer 2022), the adaptive management approach must allow time for the river to experience the full benefits of this reduced nutrient enrichment before Ohio EPA performs further monitoring for purposes of evaluating attainment of water quality standards.

Consistent with this approach, we believe that the proposed 2021 sampling in the Lower GMR outlined in the Draft Plan is premature and contrary to the adaptive management approach established by the LAP. The sampling would not generate functional assessment data, since the data would reflect conditions before the largest dischargers complete their upgrades and before the river has time to recover following those improvements. In summary, we request that the Draft Plan be updated to reflect that reassessment of the Lower GMR for attainment of water quality standards should not occur until after the river has had sufficient time (in years) to allow the full benefits of the POTW load reductions to be reflected in the river conditions. As noted in the LAP, a TMDL will only be developed if necessary, after this period of improvement and a subsequent new round of sampling and after development of a new LAP for the Lower GMR. (OMA)

Response 3: The intent of this survey is not to determine the river's aquatic life use response to nutrient limits imposed on plants upstream of the study area. Please see response 2.

Comment 4: If after adequate time for recovery, the Lower GMR still has segments exhibiting impairments, any future TMDL must be narrowly and carefully tailored as necessary to address only those specific impairments. The Lower GMR is a very large watershed that includes many segments that are already in full attainment of water quality standards, especially in the downstream reaches, and furthermore these reaches show signs of continued improvement in water quality. It would be arbitrary and unnecessary for any future TMDL to impose load reductions or other restrictions on dischargers to waters in the Lower GMR that are attaining the applicable water quality standards. Furthermore, any TMDL requirements in impaired segments must address the primary cause of the impairment before imposing load reductions on the small dischargers.

Looking ahead, we appreciate that Ohio EPA will develop a new LAP in the future if impairments remain after the POTW upgrades are complete and the river has time to recover. We look forward to the opportunity to review and comment on future drafts of the LAP for the Lower GMR, should an LAP be necessary, and reserve all rights to provide further comment at that time. (OMA)

Response 4: Thank you for noting that if a TMDL were to be developed for the Lower GMR in the future a new Loading Analysis Plan would first be published. Also please see Response 3 regarding the intent of this particular survey.

Comment 5: In short, we were surprised and disappointed to see that the furthest downstream proposed sampling site on the LGMR is at Miamitown near the point where I-74 crosses the river. This proposed sampling site is approximately 9.2 miles upstream above the confluence of the LGMR and the Whitewater River, and approximately 15.3 miles above the confluence of the LGMR and the Ohio River.

Rumpke Waste Services for a five-fold expansion of a Municipal Solid Waste Landfill along the Ohio-Indiana state line. Fox Run Creek runs directly through this landfill property (known at the Bond Road Site), and drains directly into the Whitewater River, approximately 2.0 miles from its confluence with the LGMR. Sand Run Creek runs along the western edge of the Bond Road Site landfill, and it drains into the Whitewater River approximately 0.6 miles from its confluence with the LGMR.

It is requested that DSW broaden the geographic scope of its sampling to include a site (or sites) below the confluence of the LGMR and the Whitewater River. (Oxbow, Inc.)

Response 5: Please see Response 2 regarding the intent of this survey. Ohio EPA's 2020 survey work carried out in the lower GMR included an assessment site on the lower section of the Whitewater River. The most downstream mainstem GMR assessment site in 2020 was just upstream of the U.S. Rt. 50 bridge (river mile 9.50). While adding sample locations in this area is outside the scope of this survey, Ohio EPA will take this information into consideration when designing the future, targeted biological and water quality study of the lower Great Miami River watershed.

Comment 6: You are covering the traditional sites and long-term threats to the river. Rumpke is planning a major 500-acre landfill between Sand Run and Fox Run at the mouth of the Whitewater River into the Great Miami River. We would like to see a new site in the GMR below the Whitewater River to create more 'before' data to follow the long-term development on that site. The technology will be the state of the art, we realize, but large floods cover the floodway at the mouth of the GMR protected by Oxbow Inc. We have some concerns about the scale of this landfill development. Could you include a lower site below the mouth of the Whitewater River in the Great Miami River where the mixing is not instantaneous across the GMR. This could be a potential problem in 10-30 years and baseline data could be important.

Our Volunteer Water Quality monitoring program (OEPA Level 2) at the UC Center for Field Studies monitors the nutrient and effluent chemistry monthly at all these sites and has for a decade, but we do not do any organismal biocriteria. (UC)

Response 6: Please see Response 2 regarding the intent of this survey. Ohio EPA's 2020 survey work carried out in the lower GMR included an assessment site on the lower section of the

Whitewater River. The most downstream mainstem GMR assessment site in 2020 was just upstream of the U.S. Rt. 50 bridge (river mile 9.50). While adding sample locations in this area is outside the scope of this survey, Ohio EPA will take this information into consideration when designing the future, targeted biological and water quality study of the lower Great Miami River watershed.

End of Response to Comments