Ohio Environmental Protection Agency

News Release

Public Interest Center | P.O. Box 1049 | Columbus, OH | 43216-1049

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Ohio EPA Accepts Comments About Draft Salt Creek Watershed Report; Study Notes Exceptional Biology, Bacterial Impairment in Muskingum County

Due to the presence of rare fish, like northern madtoms and slenderhead darters, the 145-square-mile Salt Creek (Muskingum River basin) watershed got high ratings for fish and aquatic insects, according to a draft Ohio EPA report released for public comment. In Kent Run and Buffalo Fork, biological scores ranged from very good to exceptional. While all sites in the 13 streams Ohio EPA studied in 2008 met goals for aquatic life and drinking water uses, only three of 23 sites met recreational use goals due to the bacterial impairment from failing home septic systems and agricultural practices.

Recommendations for the Salt Creek Watershed

Although the biology and physical habitat of most streams in the Salt Creek watershed scored well, fencing off cattle could improve streamside corridor stability and decrease manure (and bacteria) in the streams. Ohio EPA also recommends appropriate manure management; increased streamside vegetation to filter runoff; and regular inspections of home septic systems to ensure the systems are in working order.

Ohio EPA can address some of the water quality problems in the Salt Creek watershed through regulatory actions like permitting, but other actions require the voluntary cooperation of local residents and landowners. To achieve continued improvements, Ohio EPA will work with federal, state and local partners, like the watershed group organized by the Muskingum County Soil and Water Conservation District.

Local governments, citizens and other stakeholders can use Ohio EPA's information to:

- develop plans to maintain and/or restore impaired waterways; and
- request grants and additional assistance from Ohio EPA and other funding sources for projects that alleviate water quality problems and protect the resource for drinking water and recreational enjoyment.

Sampling Protocol and Purpose

As part of Ohio EPA's continuous effort 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. The Agency has one of the most advanced water quality monitoring programs in the nation, determining the health of rivers and streams by sampling stream biology and habitat in addition to water chemistry. 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. 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 from identified pollution sources, Ohio EPA develops a watershed restoration report, known as a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) report. The TMDL process generally determines the maximum load 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 Salt Creek TMDL report may be submitted by April 11, 2011, 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 Salt Creek watershed study is online and also available for review by first calling Ohio EPA's Division of Surface Water at (614) 644-2001.

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