Ohio Environmental Protection Agency

News Release

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Ohio EPA Reports Exceptional Results for Sunfish Creek Watershed

Exceptional communities of aquatic insects and pollution-intolerant fish were found in the Sunfish Creek watershed in Southeast Ohio, according to Ohio EPA's latest water quality report for the area. The report demonstrates the Sunfish Creek watershed has improved over the past 26 years the Agency has monitored it.

In 2009, Ohio EPA evaluated 18 sites in the watershed, including Sunfish Creek and some direct Ohio River tributaries in Monroe and Washington counties. The study was used to determine aquatic life and recreational use potential. Seventeen sites fully met the designated or recommended aquatic life use and only one site was in partial attainment due to limited natural habitat.

Ohio EPA tested eight locations in the Sunfish Creek watershed for E. coli bacteria, and all were in full attainment of the designated recreational use except Newell Run; this creek is affected by waterfowl feces and failing home sewage treatment systems. Elevated bacteria levels also were noted in Sunfish Creek below Woodsfield, most likely due to discharges from combined sewer overflows (CSOs) during heavy rain events. The village's wastewater discharge permit contains a compliance schedule to eliminate four CSOs when new storm sewers are installed over the next decade.

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. More information is online about Ohio EPA's Total Maximum Daily Load Program.

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. Then, the Agency shares this information with local governments, landowners and citizens so they can develop plans to maintain and/or restore waterways impacted by identified sources of pollution. Sources could range from sewage treatment plants, industrial facilities and coal mines to low-head dams and urban and rural runoff. Stakeholders also can use the information to request 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.

Study results for Sunfish Creek are online. Information about Ohio EPA's 2009 and 2010 studies on dozens of other Ohio River tributaries in Jefferson, Belmont, Monroe and Washington counties also is online, including reports for Captina and McMahon Creeks.

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