

NEWS RELEASE

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State & local partners address water quality in Grand Lake St. Marys Watershed *Initial research findings balanced by improved conservation practices*

COLUMBUS, OH—First year findings from a three-year study funded by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) show some degradation of a Grand Lake St. Marys tributary, however, increased use of conservation measures will help restore water quality, according to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR).

The study, which is being conducted by the National Center for Water Quality Research at Heidelberg University, is focusing on Chickasaw Creek because it is representative of the Grand Lake St. Marys watershed. The purpose of the study is to look at the conditions of water entering Grand Lake St. Marys and determine the impact of conservation practices as they are applied in the next two years.

Analysis of the study's first year data indicate that concentrations of suspended solids were higher in Chickasaw Creek than in Rock Creek and Lost Creek, two comparable streams in northwest Ohio. Total phosphorus concentrations exceeded the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency's target nutrient goal on more than 80 percent of the days sampled. A complete copy of the report may be found at www.oh.nrcs.usda.gov/technical.

“Most of the annual delivery of nutrients to the creek occurred on only a few days with high flows of water, mostly associated with rainfall or snowmelt,” explained Terry Cosby, State Conservationist, NRCS. “If local producers continue to increase conservation practices, such as planting cover crops and constructing sufficient manure storage facilities, they will help reduce the amount of nutrients delivered to Grand Lake St. Marys tributaries.”

Last year, ODNR, with the Ohio Department of Agriculture and the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, introduced a cooperative plan to improve Grand Lake St. Marys' water quality by curbing excessive nutrient load, which is contributing to the problems highlighted in the NRCS study. The plan outlines strategic actions that the state and local partners, such as NRCS, local soil and water conservation districts and landowners, can take to achieve improved lake water quality goals.

According to a recent progress report, the cooperative plan is showing signs of early successes. About 23 percent of the cropland in the watershed is now covered by an approved Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan and more than 110 agricultural producers are attending nutrient management training. As a result, five manure storage structures were built and two feedlots were covered as runoff control measures in 2009. A full copy of the *Grand Lake St. Marys Progress Report* may be found at www.dnr.state.oh.us/tabid/22790/Default.aspx.

“Assembling a strategy to reduce nutrients going into Grand Lake St. Marys is not enough,” said ODNR Director Sean Logan. “That’s why I’m pleased that one year later, partnerships have been formed, improvements to local agricultural operations have been made and there is overwhelming support for actively reducing pollutants in the watershed. Recent monitoring report findings should only serve to increase local and state initiatives to address the challenges at Grand Lake St. Marys.”

The Grand Lake St. Marys watershed encompasses 59,160 acres across Mercer and Auglaize counties in western Ohio. Not only is it a popular recreational lake, but Grand Lake St. Marys serves as a community drinking water resource.

Improving Grand Lake St. Marys’ water quality is in large part connected to proper nutrient management in the watershed and taking in-lake, near shore and tributary channel actions that will also help improve lake health. Many livestock operators, agricultural producers and landowners are already working with local soil and water conservation districts to implement conservation practices using the financial incentives associated with Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) funding from NRCS.

Senator Sherrod Brown and Governor Ted Strickland recently secured EQIP funding which will be used to create buffer strips along creeks running into Grand Lake St. Marys, including Chickasaw. Some of the \$1 million funding will be used to address land management practices, such as developing grass buffers, and planting cover crops. Funds will also help operators who are interested in constructing additional manure storage to avoid winter application and reduce runoff.

Significant progress is being made in the GLSM watershed by local operators who are implementing additional conservation practices. The Kevin Bettinger family, farming south of Coldwater in the Coldwater Creek sub-watershed, completed a Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan for the farm which includes a steer finishing operation. Lot runoff goes into a lagoon and liquids are applied according to the plan in late summer to a cover crop, which controls erosion and improves soil quality while safely cycling manure and other nutrients through the soil and vegetation. The Bettingers have also placed filter strips along all the drainage ways and creeks on their farm.

Efforts such as those adopted by the Bettingers and others in the agricultural community, in addition to other measures, such as upgrading domestic sewage treatment, controlling construction site erosion and sediment, restoring wetlands and reducing non-agricultural nutrient applications, will help ensure the recovery of Grand Lake St. Marys.

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