

Ohio News Watch

Maumee watershed gains \$5 million to fund cleanup

By TIM WHITE

ONE of the Midwest's largest foundations is supporting a multi-state strategy to restore portions of the environmentally distressed Maumee watershed. The Chicago-based Joyce Foundation has awarded \$5 million in grants to a total of four national and local organizations in a quest to aid the recovery of the 8,316-square-mile Maumee watershed, the largest river system in the Great Lakes region.

Citing an Ohio EPA report that says more than 40% of the streams in the Ohio portion of the Maumee watershed do not meet Clean Water Act standards, the proposal refers to the 130-mile Maumee River as "the largest contributor of so-called nonpoint-source pollution in Lake Erie."

Ecologically fragile

The mouth of the Maumee in Toledo has been designated "an area of concern" by the International Joint Commission, which monitors Great Lakes water quality for Canada and the United States. The groups plan to improve conditions that deposit some 5 million tons of eroded soil that contains pesticides, fertilizer, toxic chemicals and other forms of potentially harmful runoff every year into Lake Erie. Erie is called "the smallest and most ecologically fragile of the nation's Great Lakes."

Key Points

- The Joyce Foundation is funding a plan to begin cleanup of the Maumee River.
- Four different environmental groups will concentrate on restoration projects.
- Environmental Defense is focusing on the agricultural effort.

"The Great Lakes face serious threats to their health, and we need to attack those problems at their source," says Ellen Alberding president of the Joyce Foundation. "By investing in the recovery of the Maumee River, we hope to lay the groundwork for the long-term restoration of Lake Erie and establish a model that can be adopted elsewhere in the Great Lakes region."

"Our grants represent only a down payment on the clean-up of the Maumee watershed, but they strategically set the stage for local partners to leverage the funding necessary to make larger improvements. And projects of this size allow us to test the effectiveness of our methods and perfect them for use on a larger scale," she adds.

The coordinated restoration effort will span portions of Ohio, Indiana and Michigan that reside in the Maumee watershed. It will rely on the expertise of some of four different environmental organizations: American Rivers, Environmental Defense, Maumee Remedial Action Plan and The Nature Conservancy.

"Working with farmers, who are the front line of conservation, offers one of the greatest opportunities to make significant progress in restoring the Maumee River and the Western Lake Erie Basin," says Terry Noto, a consultant

for Environmental Defense. "By combining the generous Joyce Foundation grant with federal and state incentive programs, we can partner with farmers to help them produce from their lands not only food and fiber, but clean water and a healthy Maumee River, as well."

Once an expanse of forested wetland, the area bordering the Maumee has been converted over the years into a mosaic of landscapes. Each contributing its own stresses to the river's water quality. As a result of its scope in the watershed, farming offers one of the largest opportunities to improve water quality, Noto says.

Focus on farmers

"While widespread farming has drained wetlands and contributed significant amounts of insecticides, fertilizers and sediments into the water, many farmers are or stand ready and eager to implement changes that will ensure the water that flows from their fields helps restore, not harm, the health of the Maumee," adds Noto.

Suburban communities have contributed increasing amounts of road, sewer and landscaping runoff. At the river's mouth in Toledo, inadequate storm-water treatment has led to large releases of untreated storm water and sewage into the river — an average of 624 million gallons annually between 1997 and 2001.

"Scientists have told us that the Great Lakes are on the brink of ecological breakdown, and we know that two of the key reasons are heavily polluted rivers that feed the Great Lakes and severely depleted wetlands and stream-side vegetation that used to filter out contaminants," says Sam Speck, former

Project partners

■ With assets of \$900 million, the **Joyce Foundation** supports efforts to strengthen public policies to improve the quality of life in the Midwest region. Joyce makes over \$9 million in grants each year to groups working to protect the natural environment of the Great Lakes. www.joycefdn.org

■ Founded in 1973, **American River** is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting and restoring healthy natural rivers for the benefit of people, wildlife and nature. It has more than 65,000 supporters nationwide. www.americanrivers.org

■ **Environmental Defense** represents more than 500,000 members. Since 1967, it has linked science, economics, law and innovative private-sector partnerships to create solutions to environmental problems. www.environmentaldefense.org

■ **The Maumee Remedial Action Plan** is a community-based volunteer organization involving agencies, organizations and citizens interested in water quality within the lower Maumee River in northwest Ohio and other rivers and streams in the region. www.maumeerap.org

■ **The Nature Conservancy** preserves plants, animals and natural communities by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive. It has more than 1 million members and has protected more than 15 million acres in the United States and more than 102 million acres in Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific. nature.org

head of the ODNR. "The Maumee project is an attempt to begin repairing one of those major Great Lakes arteries as we continue to push for comprehensive restoration of the entire Great Lakes system."

Volume 303 ■ Number 3

Contents

Ohio NewsWatch 1

Opinion & Mailbox 11

Crops 13

Machinery & Technology 20

Midwest Extra MX1

Marketplace Extra M1

Conservation 26

Farm Management 28

Livestock 33

Buckeye Living 36

Marketing 39

Contact us:

Editor: Tim White, twhite@farmprogress.com
117 West Main St., Suite 202, Lancaster, OH 43130. Phone: 740-654-6500

Contributing Editors: Tom J. Bechman, Cherry Brieser Stout, Dan Crummett, Alan Newport, John Otte, Len Richardson, Holly Spangler, Rod Swoboda, Lon Tonneson, Arian Suderman, John Vogel

Executive Editor: Frank Holdmeyer
Corporate Editorial Director: Willie Vogt

Sales: Tom Shearing, 585-786-0611

Subscription questions: 1-800-441-1410
For additional sales and company information, see the last page of the Marketplace section.

POSTMASTER: Please send address corrections to *Ohio Farmer*, 191 S. Gary Ave., Carol Stream IL 60188.



Keep up on ag news in the region. Check out www.ohiofarmer.com. We feature updates on a wide range of topics, marketing data and weather information you can put to work in your operation.

Watershed facts

THE Maumee River system spans three states and provides drinking water to approximately 400,000 people. The 130-mile Maumee is the largest river in the Great Lakes system. It flows from Fort Wayne, Ind., to Toledo, Ohio, where it meets up with Lake Erie. The entire Maumee watershed encompasses 8,316 square miles and includes 3,941 stream miles. It has the largest drainage area of any river in the Great Lakes basin. Approximately 1.7 million people live in and rely on the Maumee watershed.

Once a massive, forested wetland, the banks of the Maumee River and its tributaries are home to the richest farmland in the Great Lakes region. Years ago, much of the area's forested wetlands were deforested and drained to make way for agriculture. The loss of wetland and streamside buffers that act as natural filters and the fact that drainage ditches help speed runoff means significant amounts of sediment and nutrients can flow into the Maumee.

All sediment and pollutants flow downstream to Lake Erie. The Maumee River is one of the largest sources of



Lake Erie pollution. Western Lake Erie is the shallowest, warmest and most biologically productive part of the Great Lakes system; however, it has been severely damaged over the years by loss of wetlands and extensive pollution. The Maumee is one of the reasons

that Lake Erie continues to suffer, carrying approximately 5 million tons of eroded soil per year to Lake Erie. Each year, the Army Corps of Engineers dredges approximately 850,000 cubic yards of contaminated sediments out of Toledo Harbor.