



NEWS

For IMMEDIATE RELEASE (January 19, 2022)

H2Ohio Grant Funding Supports a Healthy Chagrin River and Lake Erie through Lake County Project

Chagrin River habitat will be improved and the river corridor will be protected at the City of Willoughby's Daniels Park and adjacent lands. These improvements are thanks to a \$2.2 million grant awarded to Chagrin River Watershed Partners from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) through the state's H2Ohio Initiative.

At Daniels Park, the East Branch joins the Chagrin River before it flows five miles northward to Lake Erie. Although the East Branch is a state-designated Scenic River and the Chagrin River is relatively healthy in this area, the rivers' health is threatened. Sediment and nutrient pollution caused by riverbank destabilization and habitat alterations are threats to aquatic animals such as fish and macroinvertebrates. The pollution is also a concern for the health of Lake Erie, which supplies drinking water for over 11 million people.

Erosion of riverbanks along the Chagrin River between State Route 84 and Interstate 90 is caused by multiple factors. Lack of adequate vegetation along the river has led to riverbank destabilization. Additionally, the 2005 collapse of a downstream dam at Daniels Park lowered the normal level of the river and altered water flows. Within the channel of the East Branch, deteriorating water intake structures are contributing to stream instability and streambank erosion. "Addressing this erosion is crucial to reduce sediment and nutrient pollution to Lake Erie," described Kimberly Brewster Shefelton, Deputy Director at Chagrin River Watershed Partners. The H2Ohio project will stabilize eroding streambanks, realign the East Branch, and create an oxbow wetland within a portion of the old East Branch channel. The project will also remove dam remnants within the Chagrin River to improve stream hydraulics and aquatic habitat, and remove invasive plant species. Local and state conservation partners will be consulted to ensure that the river restoration will maintain and improve high quality habitat for fish and other wildlife.

Western Reserve Land Conservancy is a key partner for the H2Ohio project, which will also protect 78 acres of important land within the Chagrin River and East Branch corridors, including high quality wetlands. "Permanent protections for the lands along the Chagrin River and the East Branch corridors will ensure that these waters remain clean and healthy," said Brett Rodstrom, vice president for eastern field operations at Western Reserve Land Conservancy. "The Chagrin River and surrounding waters pass through some of Northeast Ohio's prettiest landscapes. We're excited that H2Ohio and all our partners will be working together to protect these lands now and for future generations." In addition to working together on this H2Ohio project, the Watershed Partners, the Land Conservancy, and the City of Willoughby are working with many other local and regional partners to develop a Chagrin River Corridor and Lakefront Trail Connection plan in western Lake County. This trail planning and public access initiative is funded by the Cleveland Foundation's Lake Geauga-Fund and in collaboration with the Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency and support from 26 local partners and communities. The plan will be completed in the coming months. The land protection components of the H2Ohio project will ensure that the Chagrin River corridor in this area will be protected from development,



ready for connection to the new trail network, and someday opened to the public for recreational access to the Chagrin River and Lake Erie.

This project is a result of a partnership of the Watershed Partners, the Land Conservancy, and the City of Willoughby. Other local stakeholders include Andrews Osborne Academy, Village of Waite Hill, Lake Metroparks, Lake County Stormwater Management Department, Lake County Soil and Water Conservation District, and the Willoughby Burroughs Nature Club. This project will also require coordination with the Ohio Department of Transportation. "This project represents an important collaboration of public, non-profit, and private entities with a focus on conservation and riparian corridor protection," states Willoughby Mayor Bob Fiala. Community members can expect Daniels Park to remain open throughout the course of the project, but areas along the Chagrin River will be temporarily fenced off during construction to maintain safety for all park visitors. Construction is planned for late 2022 and the H2Ohio grant requires all project activities be complete by June 2023. Access to the Chagrin River for fishing and other activities will resume after construction is complete. "We are thrilled to work with such great partners and expand the reach of the H2Ohio initiative," ODNR Director Mary Mertz said. "Each project, no matter how big or small, contributes to a better future for Ohioans and ensures future generations will have access to clean water."

H2Ohio is a comprehensive water quality initiative launched by Governor Mike DeWine in 2019 that is working to strategically address serious water issues that have been building in Ohio for decades. "Providing access to clean water is the ultimate goal of H2Ohio, and this project will contribute toward better water quality in the central Lake Erie Basin," said Governor Mike DeWine. "The Chagrin Scenic River is one of northeast Ohio's beloved natural resources, and we're proud to work with local partners to help ensure that the river is preserved for generations to come." More information can be found at <https://h2.ohio.gov>. This H2Ohio project will improve the health of the Chagrin River, reduce sediment and nutrient pollution to Lake Erie, improve fish habitat for salmonid species such as steelhead, increase safe and public access to the river, and enhance connections to other protected areas in the Chagrin River corridor. Heather Elmer, CRWP Executive Director, expressed: "We are thrilled to be collaborating with our partners on this exciting project that will improve water quality and connect people with the Chagrin River, one of our region's greatest natural assets."

An article about this project published by ODNR can be found here:

<https://ohiodnr.gov/wps/portal/gov/odnr/discover-and-learn/safety-conservation/about-ODNR/news/Project-Protect-Chagrin-River>



Chagrin River Watershed Partners is a nonprofit organization that uses a regional watershed approach to enhance quality of life by preserving rivers, planning for better development, and solving natural resource management problems. Sixteen communities, counties and park districts formed the Watershed Partners in 1996 to address rising infrastructure costs because of flooding, erosion, and water pollution. Today, the Partners' 36 members represent over 91% of the land area in the watershed and it works with partner watershed organizations across Ohio's Central Lake Erie Basin. For more information about the Watershed Partners, visit www.crwpp.org.

Please see attached photos.

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For more information, contact:

Kimberly Brewster Shefelton, Deputy Director, Chagrin River Watershed Partners, Inc.
(440) 975-2870 ext. 1006 kbrewster@crwp.org

Jeffry Hayes, Assistant Regional Scenic River Manager – Northeast Ohio, Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Natural Areas and Preserves, (614) 546-8067 jeffry.hayes@dnr.ohio.gov





Figure 1. State Scenic East Branch of the Chagrin River as it flows through property to be permanently protected through the H2Ohio project. Photo source: Chagrin River Watershed Partners, August 1, 2019.



Figure 1. Open water amphibian and macroinvertebrate habitat within a 25-acre wetland to be permanently protected through the H2Ohio project. Photo source: Chagrin River Watershed Partners, August 1, 2019.





Figure 3. The Chagrin River as it flows adjacent to land to be permanently protected through the H2Ohio project. Photo source: Chagrin River Watershed Partners, July 18, 2019.



Figure 4. Forested floodplain habitat on land to be permanently protected through the H2Ohio project. Photo source: Chagrin River Watershed Partners, July 18, 2019.



Figure 5. The mainstem of the Chagrin River at Daniel's Park. Photo source: Chagrin River Watershed Partners, June 26, 2018.



Figure 6. Former City water intake structures contribute to erosion and sedimentation at the mouth of the East Branch. Photo source: Chagrin River Watershed Partners, June 26, 2018.



Figure 7. Former City water intake structures contribute to erosion and sedimentation at the mouth of the East Branch. Photo source: Chagrin River Watershed Partners, June 26, 2018.