

River Cleanup To Be Followed By Habitat Project

Ashtabula River Area of Concern

Ashtabula, Ohio

May 2010

Great Lakes Legacy Act

Although toxic substances have been removed from the Great Lakes over the last 20 years, high concentrations of pollution remain in the bottom of some rivers and harbors.

The Great Lakes Legacy Act of 2002 authorized \$270 million in funding over five years (2004 – 2008) for sediment cleanup in United States Areas of Concern. In 2008, it was re-authorized for two additional years.

In addition to the federal funds available under the Legacy Act, state and local partners are required to contribute the project cost-share. In Ashtabula, state and local partners provided 50 percent of the total project costs, including this habitat project.

For more information

To learn more about EPA's efforts to protect the Ashtabula River and the Great Lakes, visit the following Web sites:

Ashtabula River:

www.epa.gov/glla/ashtabula

Ashtabula River Area of Concern:

www.epa.gov/glnpo/aoc/ashtabula.html

Great Lakes Legacy Act:

www.epa.gov/glla



The 2005-2007 Legacy Act cleanup of the Ashtabula River removed 25,000 pounds of PCBs and other contaminants. Habitat mitigation is taking place near the 5 ½ slip, the area circled in this aerial photo.

For years, navigation in the Ashtabula River was restricted because of a buildup of contaminated sediment. That changed in October 2007 when 500,000 cubic yards of sediment was removed in a cleanup project completed by U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and non-federal partners Ashtabula City Port Authority and Ohio EPA. It was the biggest project funded so far by the Great Lakes Legacy Act.

Now an effort is under way to restore the ecological functioning of the area with a project to improve the habitat for plants, wildlife and fish at a place known as the 5½ slip.

Workers have cleared debris off the peninsula and created a gradual slope from the upland area into the water, including a strip of shallow water along the edge of the river. Native plants have been planted on the land and in the water. In addition, the water habitat has been improved by adding large rocks and fish shelves.

Ashtabula children get involved

As part of the habitat improvement project, EPA is working with an Ashtabula 6th grade after-school program. Over the last four months, EPA staff from the Great Lakes National Program office in Chicago have visited the classroom and worked with the children on projects such as soil testing, growing native plants and collecting live tree branches for later plantings. The culmination will be the children planting native seedlings at the project site.

Lake Erie benefits from sediment cleanup

The Great Lakes Legacy Act cleanup removed contaminated sediment from the Ashtabula River between the Turning Basin at the mouth of Fields Brook and the 5th Street Bridge. The sediment contained a variety of chemicals, including PCBs, or polychlorinated biphenyls.

Removing contaminated sediment from the Ashtabula River has also reduced the flow of contaminants from the river into Lake Erie and provided a healthier habitat for fish and other aquatic life.

To further ensure an improved habitat and as a follow-up to the cleanup, a “Post-Dredging Habitat Plan for the Ashtabula River” provides a blueprint to restore the various areas of the Ashtabula River Area of Concern.



Crews prepare the peninsula at 5 ½ slip for habitat restoration work.

Project Partners

Working with EPA on the habitat restoration project are U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Ohio EPA, Ashtabula River Cooperation Group II, Ashtabula City Port Authority, Afterschool Discovery Inc., and Norfolk Southern Corp.

Background

The Ashtabula River flows into Lake Erie’s central basin at Ashtabula. Draining an area of 137 square miles in Ohio and western Pennsylvania, the watershed is rural except for concentrated industrial development areas around the Fields Brook tributary and east of the mouth of the Ashtabula River. Part of the Ashtabula River basin is a Great Lakes Area of Concern, AOC, and includes the lower two miles of the river and outer harbor.

Since 1983, fish consumption advisories have been posted for the Ashtabula AOC due to PCBs. Although a Superfund cleanup of contaminated sediments in the Fields Brook tributary was done in 2003, the Ashtabula River was contaminated until the Legacy Act project remediation.

Ashtabula River AOC

From the 1940s through the late 1970s, unregulated discharges and mismanagement of hazardous waste contaminated the sediment in the Ashtabula River, and the aquatic life there was impaired as a result. This pollution also prevented regular dredging of the sediment, seriously impeding the commercial and recreational navigation of the river.



A group of 6th grade students is helping restore habitat along the Ashtabula River, and learning about the environment.