

**OHIO LAKE ERIE COMMISSION AWARDS NEARLY \$200,000
TO MEDINA COUNTY FOR LAKE ERIE WATERSHED PILOT PROJECT**

Projects support Governor Taft's Lake Erie Protection and Restoration Plan

TOLEDO , OH – A total of \$596,514 in state grants to fund watershed-protection pilot projects in the Toledo , Cleveland and Medina areas were approved September 14, 2005 by the Ohio Lake Erie Commission (OLEC). The grants advance the Balanced Growth component of Governor Bob Taft's Lake Erie Protection and Restoration Plan by promoting voluntary, orderly growth and conservation at the local level as a means of protecting water quality and other resources in the Lake Erie basin.

“These grants support locally driven watershed planning partnerships in three diverse settings – urban, suburban and rural – helping to demonstrate how Balanced Growth practices and planning approaches can improve watersheds and water quality throughout the Lake Erie basin,” said Ohio Department of Natural Resources Director Sam Speck, the commission’s chairman. “Through these projects, our hope is to provide voluntary, community-based models that can be adapted to the needs of other communities as a means of promoting growth while protecting water,” Speck said.

The Medina County Soil & Water Conservation District, which received \$196,657 in grant funding, will be administering the project entitled “The Rocky River Upper West Branch Watershed Balanced Growth Plan.” The plan will complement current efforts being undertaken by the Rocky River Watershed Council to implement a Watershed Action Plan, and will build upon a Land Use Compatibility Study prepared in 2004 by the Joint Economic Planning Committee of the Medina County Economic Development Corporation. The watersheds within the study area include parts of nine townships and two municipalities within Medina County. Agencies and organizations that will be involved in the development of the watershed balanced growth plan include the Rocky River Watershed Council, Department of Planning Services, County Sanitary Engineer, Economic Development Corporation, County Highway Engineer, Medina County Park District, NOACA, Emergency Management Agency, Homebuilders Association and the Medina-Summit Land Conservancy.

The purpose of the plan will be to identify Priority Conservation Areas to protect critically important ecological, recreational, agricultural, heritage, public access, and other critical areas, and Priority Development Areas where growth and/or redevelopment should be supported. The concept is that the location of development is key to its impact on water quality. The intent of the pilot program for Medina County is to eventually apply the balanced growth strategies and methods countywide and to identify incentives to guide development and conservation to the most suitable areas.

Funding for the grants, which is provided by the Ohio Water Development Authority and administered by the OLEC, will be distributed to grantees over a three-year period. This project is also supported by the Lake Erie Protection Fund, where funding is provided by citizens of Ohio through their purchase of the Lake Erie License Plate. For additional information on the Rocky River Upper West Branch Watershed Balanced Growth Plan, contact Chris Hartman at the Medina County SWCD office (330-722-2628, ext. 3) or Medina County Commissioner Stephen D. Hambley (330-722-9208).