

Ducks Unlimited

LEADER
IN WETLANDS
CONSERVATION

DU SPECIAL REPORT

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H2Ohio Program Is a Game Changer for Great Lakes Conservation

Ducks Unlimited has joined with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and more than 40 other organizations to implement H2Ohio, a data-driven water-quality plan to reduce harmful algal blooms, improve wastewater infrastructure, and prevent lead contamination across Ohio.

Ohio Governor Mike DeWine's H2Ohio plan involves agriculture groups, conservation organizations, universities, local and state governments, and the private sector. The Ohio General Assembly has invested \$172 million in the plan for two years to find targeted solutions for water-quality improvement. A major component of the plan is the restoration and enhancement of wetlands, which filter nutrients before they reach waterways.

"Priorities for the H2Ohio initiative are centered around preventing harmful algal blooms and improving overall water quality in Lake Erie, a critical source of drinking water for 12 million people," Governor DeWine said. "We appreciate Ducks Unlimited, a recognized leader in wetland conservation, for their partnership in support of this critically important endeavor."

In the first phase of funding, the H2Ohio program has allocated \$7.1 million to DU for five wetland conser-



vation projects. "H2Ohio is unlike anything the state has ever seen in terms of a financial investment in water quality and habitat," said Russ Terry, DU's regional biologist covering Ohio. "This is a game changer for the state, and for Ducks Unlimited this is an opportunity to ramp up our efforts in Ohio, particularly in the western Lake Erie Basin."

H2Ohio funding was granted to DU to purchase 278 acres in Wyandot County, directly east of Andreoff Wildlife Area. A system of pumps and water-control structures will be used to funnel runoff from the surrounding agricultural watershed into the restored wetlands, which will remove nutrients and sediments from the water. When restoration work is complete, DU will donate the new habitat complex to the Ohio DNR to be included in the wildlife area.

DU will also use H2Ohio funds to design and install wetland-management infrastructure on Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge. On the Navarre Marsh Unit,

DU will design and install two pumps that will be used to manage water levels on 630 acres of coastal marsh for the primary purpose of nutrient and sediment reduction. Nutrient-rich water from Lake Erie will be pumped into the marshes, where it will be filtered by natural processes before being returned to the lake.

In addition, DU will restore two managed wetlands totaling 100 acres on Little Portage Wildlife Area at the confluence of the Portage and Little Portage Rivers in Ottawa County. DU will collaborate with the Ohio DNR to design wetland-management infrastructure that will divert agricultural runoff into the wetlands, preventing nutrients from flowing directly into the Little Portage River.

Moreover, DU is working with the Ohio DNR to improve water quality on the Delaware Wildlife Area. Water will be pumped from the Delaware Reservoir through a series of enhanced or restored wetlands, which will remove nutrients and sediments before the water flows back into the reservoir.

Finally, DU will use H2Ohio funds to work with several conservation partners to restore a 23-acre emergent wetland in Ottawa County on private land. The project features a pump station that will divert surface and subsurface drainage from adjacent agricultural land into the restored wetland, where nutrients will be removed from the water before it reaches Lake Erie.

"Clean water is at the core of healthy wildlife habitat and the good health of Ohio's residents," said Jamie Rader, director of operations for DU's Great Lakes/Atlantic Region. "Governor DeWine's H2Ohio plan will ensure that people, ducks, fish, and wildlife have clean water for generations. Ducks Unlimited appreciates his leadership and the opportunity to work with Ohio DNR Director Mary Mertz to utilize H2Ohio to restore and protect these crucial wetland habitats."

For more information about this initiative, visit h2.ohio.gov.



As part of the H2Ohio program, DU will receive \$7.1 million for wetland conservation work such as this project on Andreoff Wildlife Area.