Recent Article in the Columbus Dispatch

After the public comment period, Ohio EPA staff will review all comments and complete a review of the draft permit for the project before making a final decision to approve or deny the permit, Ohio EPA spokeswoman Dina Pierce said in an email. People can email comments to: [epa.dswcomments@epa.ohio.gov](mailto:epa.dswcomments@epa.ohio.gov).

**Plain City water treatment plant expansion: What it means for Big Darby Creek**

The projected cost of the wastewater treatment plant expansion project is $19 million to $20 million, said Haley Lupton, Plain City's village administrator. Village officials would like to begin the project this fall, she said.

The expansion is needed because Plain City expects 1,000 more housing units in the next three to five years, she said.

But environmentalists have many concerns.

**Opinion:**[More aquatic creatures will follow catfish to extinction if Big Darby Creek not protected](https://www.dispatch.com/story/opinion/2021/11/03/rare-mussels-danger-extinction-pollution-ohio-creek/6181997001/)

John Tetzloff, president of the Darby Creek Association, said his and other groups haven't heard back from the Ohio EPA  about their many objections to the permit. He said the plant expansion and the contaminant levels the permit would allow would have catastrophic impacts that the Ohio EPA is not considering.

"They are not observing the impact on mussels," Tetzloff said, including four endangered species that live in the creek near Plain City.

"There's a likelihood that it will harm, if not eliminate, mussels downstream of the discharge," he said.

Anthony Sasson, a research associate for the Midwest Biodiversity Institute, a nonprofit environmental group, said he believes the Ohio EPA is not simultaneously looking at urban wastewater and stormwater impacts.

"This is a chance to establish a threshold," Sasson said. He and Tetzloff said they don't believe the permit would meet federal standards for ammonia.

According to the United States Geological Survey, a study of the St. Croix River, which forms a boundary between Minnesota and Wisconsin, found that elevated ammonia concentrations in river sediments posed a serious threat to mussels, and that even federal standards many not be enough to protect juvenile mussels.

**Water and development issues between Columbus, Plain City**

In 2019, the city of Columbus [withdrew its application to expand water and sewer service boundaries to Plain City](https://www.dispatch.com/story/news/politics/county/2019/10/30/columbus-won-t-make-plain/2402261007/) and nearby areas of Madison and Union counties because the village wanted to have exclusive rights to provide water and sewer service in the designated service area.

The village had approached Columbus because it had been looking to annex land to expand. Developers have been unable to build dense residential developments in the Franklin County part of Big Darby Creek's watershed because of Big Darby Accord restrictions.

In a petition to the Ohio EPA in 2018, Columbus said Plain City was expecting to add 11,486 residential units to its service area over the next two decades. Nearly all of them (11,129) were expected to be in the Route 161 corridor between Plain City and Franklin County.

Sasson said an ultimate build-out is a big threat to the Darby.

"Why the EPA has not had this comprehensively analyzed, I don’t know," he said.

"You can’t turn back the clock. We do these things one at a time," Sasson said. "It's hard to shift the direction of the Titanic."

In the meantime, to the south of Plain City, some West Jefferson-area residents are concerned about a planned apartment complex to be built in the Big Darby watershed.

Cleveland-area developer [Redwood Living](https://www.dispatch.com/story/lifestyle/home-garden/2021/08/06/single-story-ranch-apartments-no-mortgage/8044127002/) wants to build about 150 apartments on 43.7 acres at the northwest corner of Routes 40 and 142. The site is near the Little Darby Creek.

Resident Doris Picken, who lives near the site, said she is concerned about the environmental impact.

"Nobody is paying attention to what it is going to do with the Darby," she said. "There's a wetland right below (the proposed project site)."

Julia Cumming, program administrator at the Madison Soil and Water Conservation District, said she'd like to see the stormwater ponds for the apartment complex placed outside the woods and a hillside slope.

The West Jefferson Village Council on Monday approved the annexation of the property, said Jimmy John Hall, village clerk. The council will vote on an ordinance to set the zoning for the site on July 5.

After that, the developer would go to the village's planning and zoning commission for final site approval.

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