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U.S. Senate Legislation Would Restore Protections to Ohio's Wetlands, Lakes, and Streams

Columbus, OH – Yesterday Senator Sherrod Brown helped introduce the Clean Water Restoration Act, a bill intended to restore historic safeguards to wetlands, lakes and streams in Ohio and across the nation. Passage of the legislation is essential to restore Lake Erie and the other Great Lakes.

“Reinstating Clean Water Act protections to Ohio’s wetlands, lakes and streams is vital for our economic recovery and the restoration of the Great Lakes,” said Rick Graham, president of the Izaak Walton League of America, Ohio Division. “Ohio’s citizens will benefit from the swift passage of this bill.”

Ohio Senator Brown is an original co-sponsor of the Clean Water Restoration Act, which was introduced by Sen. Russ Feingold (D-WI).

“We applaud Senator Brown for leading the effort to pass this important bill,” said Kristy Meyer, director of agricultural & clean water programs for the Ohio Environmental Council. “We hope the Senate and House will take action quickly to restore protections to Ohio’s waters. Delay will further jeopardize our wetlands, streams and other sources of clean water, leaving them vulnerable to pollution and destruction.”

The legislation restores Clean Water Act protections that were placed in doubt by U.S. Supreme Court and Bush Administration decisions. These decisions placed millions of acres of so-called “isolated” wetlands and lakes, intermittently flowing streams, and wetlands adjacent to these streams at risk of losing federal safeguards.

“This legislation stops the roll-back of protections for our nation’s waters and re-affirms safeguards that Congress originally intended,” said Graham. “The passage of this bill is essential for Ohio’s water quality, economic recovery, and recreational opportunities.”

Ohio Senator George Voinovich is expected to have much influence over the bill, through his position of Ranking Minority Member of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, to which the bill has been assigned.

“Senators Brown and Voinovich can stand up for the millions of people who depend on Lake Erie and the other Great Lakes by helping push this legislation through the Environment and Public Works Committee so that the full Senate and House can act now to fully protect Ohio’s water and economy,” said Meyer. “Delay will only make the problems worse and the solutions more costly.”

Passage of the Clean Water Restoration Act is essential to protect and restore wetlands—a core component of the multi-year effort to restore the Great Lakes. Ohio is 2nd only to California in wetland lost, at 90%. The Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy has a long-term goal of restoring 1 million acres of high quality wetlands in the region.

Wetlands provide essential services for people. Healthy wetlands supply and recharge drinking water; improve water quality; prevent erosion; provide habitat for wildlife, waterfowl, and fish; and support multi-billion dollar hunting, fishing, bird-watching and boating opportunities in the Great Lakes states.

In Ohio, according to *The Tinkers Creek Watershed Comprehensive Wetland Assessment and Prioritization Plan for 2007/2008*, one acre of wetland provides \$130,572 of ecosystem services outside of a park system, and \$361,995 per wetland acre within a park system.

“Quick passage of the Clean Water Restoration Act,” said Meyer, “will benefit Ohio, Lake Erie, and our economy. The time to act is now.”

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The mission of the Ohio Environmental Council (OEC) is to secure healthy air, land, and water for all who call Ohio home. The OEC is Ohio’s leading advocate for fresh air, clean water, and sustainable land use. The OEC has a 40-year history of innovation, pragmatism, and success. Using legislative initiatives, legal action, scientific principles, and statewide partnerships, the OEC secures a healthier environment for Ohio’s families and communities. For more information, visit www.theOEC.org.