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News

Park districts get grants for Chagrin River

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By Jeffrey L. Frischkorn

JFrischkorn@News-Herald.com

Lake Metroparks and the Geauga Park District have been given nearly \$750,000 in federal funds to help keep the Chagrin River flowing clean.

The money is coming from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, channeled through the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency. The Ohio EPA, which awarded \$400,000 to the Geauga Park District, said those funds will help restore the river's headwaters in the county. At the same time, the Ohio EPA is awarding Lake Metroparks \$349,584 with the money earmarked for reestablishing a flood plain along the stream's main stem.

Partnering with the Western Reserve Land Conservancy, the Geauga Park District will use its grant, along with a \$425,000 local match, to turn the 212-acre former Orchard Hills Golf Course in Chester Township into a natural riparian area.

The Geauga Park District also will remove two low-head dams and use natural channel design and native plantings to restore 1,325 feet of headwater streams, 2 acres of wetlands and 2 acres of riparian forest. An additional 175 feet of culverted stream will be opened to sunlight and 40 acres of high quality riparian areas will be permanently protected through a conservation easement.

"We had our fingers crossed that the money would come through since this is the first time that we've been involved in a restoration effort of this size," said Tom Curtin, the Geauga Park District's executive director. "To do this on such an important stream as the Chagrin River makes it all that more exciting."

Lake Metroparks will use its grant and a \$233,056 local match to reconnect the Chagrin River's main stem to its natural floodplain on 45 acres at the agency's Pleasant Valley Park in Willoughby Hills.

In addition to removing a 650-foot earthen levee, the agency will restore 3.9 acres of previously existing wetlands and 6 acres of wet meadow area.

Lake Metroparks also will work to control invasive plants on 11.4 acres and plant native trees and shrubs on 17 additional acres.

"The property that we purchased along the Chagrin River in Willoughby Hills was once a nursery. We will use these funds to continue our efforts to enhance and restore the wildlife habitat associated with this property," said Steve Madewell, Lake Metroparks executive director.

When complete, both projects are expected to improve overall water quality in the watershed.

"While this is federal money that is available to all states, in Ohio our agency administers the program, reviews all proposed projects and awards the money. This money is good for the Chagrin River watershed," Ohio EPA spokesman Mike Settles said.

To be eligible, grant recipients must contribute at least a 40 percent match consisting of cash or in-kind contributions or services. Grants of up to \$500,000 are awarded for three-year periods.

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