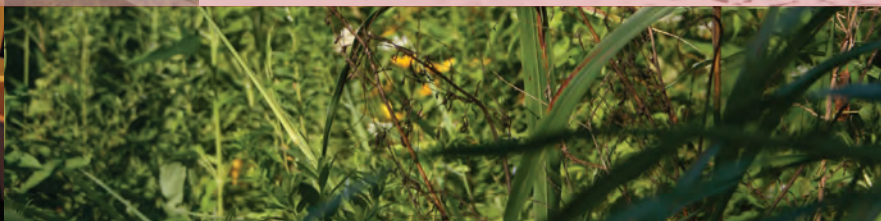




2012

BIG WALNUT WATERSHED PLANNING PARTNERSHIP

BALANCED GROWTH PLAN



morpc

Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission

The Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC), 111 Liberty St., Columbus, OH 43215, 614-228-2663, in conjunction with the Big Walnut Watershed Planning Partnership, prepared this report with funding from the Federal Highway Administration and the Ohio Water Resources Council. The report reflects the views of MORPC and the partnership, which are solely responsible for the content.

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U.S. Department
of Transportation

**Federal Highway
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Water Resources
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Balanced Growth Initiative:

- Watershed scale planning
- Voluntary
- Incentive-based

The Planning Process:

- Identify issue(s)
- Form Big Walnut Planning Partnership
- State goal(s)
- Define Priority Areas
- Select and weight criteria for identification of Priority Areas
- Local review of Priority Areas
- Identify implementation tools
- Local adoption of plan
- State endorsement of plan
- Implementation

Recommendations:

- Locally adopt plan
- Develop local comprehensive plan
- Update comprehensive plan every five years
- Incorporate Priority Areas into local community plans and zoning
- Integrate Implementation Tools where applicable and appropriate
- Continue participating in the Big Walnut Planning Partnership

The Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC), an association of local governments in central Ohio, worked with the Big Walnut Planning Partnership (BWPP) to produce this Big Walnut Watershed Balanced Growth Plan. Balanced Growth is a voluntary, incentive-based planning process designed to protect Ohio's watersheds and facilitate local and regional economic development. The BWPP is made up of 31 communities and many watershed stakeholders that voluntarily agreed to direct the development of the Balanced Growth Plan while MORPC provided technical and administrative guidance.

Land use decisions transform and shape our communities in multiple ways. Growth and development are considered positive for many communities. Development can increase a community's tax base and provide employment opportunities for residents. However, growth can become costly over the long term if not carefully planned to maximize the return on infrastructure investments and protect critical environmental areas. The development of open space or farmland results in increased impervious surface coverage from roads and rooftops. This can negatively impact watershed health by causing greater quantities of stormwater runoff. Greenfield development can also place unnecessary financial burdens on communities if it requires substantial extensions of sewer, water, and road networks. In addition to requiring upfront infrastructure investments, the additional miles of roadway and added sewer and water capacity will be increasingly expensive to maintain over time. This plan addresses the following interrelated issues that influence the environmental and economic health of the Big Walnut Watershed:

Water Quality: The Big Walnut Creek Watershed is large and drains a very diverse landscape from the most rural farm fields to dense urban environments. As a result, water quality varies from exceptional warm water habitat in full attainment to limited resource waters in non-attainment of Clean Water Act standards. Big Walnut Creek is listed on Ohio's 2010 Section 303(d) list of impaired waters. Agricultural run-off, failing home sewage treatment systems, channel modification, and urban stormwater runoff contribute to water quality impairment of the creek and its tributaries. The entire watershed is within the Utica Shale boundaries that have the potential for development using horizontal drilling technology with hydraulic fracturing. Such development under existing methods would result in significant consumptive use of fresh water resources for the watershed.

Growth Management: Population growth is projected in the watershed, particularly in the central portion of the watershed, stretching from the northern end of Franklin County up through central Delaware and Licking County. Future development in the Big Walnut Watershed should be planned to minimize harmful impacts to the watershed, minimize the loss of important agricultural or environmentally sensitive areas, and maximize the efficient use of infrastructure.

Need for Regional Collaboration: Land use decisions made in one community will have impacts that are felt in the surrounding area. Natural features like rivers do not follow political boundaries; therefore, it makes sense to take a multi-jurisdictional approach when planning for water quality protection. The same can be said of economic activity where what happens in one community can impact its neighbors. Working together to secure economic competitiveness stands to benefit every community in the region.

Limited Fiscal Resources: There will be increasingly limited fiscal resources to support future development demands. Communities are

encouraged to consider the full lifecycle costs of new development, including but not limited to the costs to extend and maintain services into new areas of the community. Cost savings could also potentially be achieved by partnering with neighboring communities to address shared concerns or provide services.

The BWPP has worked to address the aforementioned issues by identifying areas across the watershed that are critical for protection (Priority Conservation Areas), particularly well-suited for development or redevelopment activities (Priority Development Areas), or ideal targets for continued or expanded agricultural use (Priority Agricultural Areas). The Priority Areas were identified using a two step process. First, MORPC identified and mapped potential priority areas based on an analysis of objective criteria selected by the BWPP. Following the initial analysis of criteria, each community was asked to review the potential priority areas in their jurisdictions and make adjustments as necessary. Based on this community review, MORPC created Priority Area maps which could continue to be reviewed through the public comment period. Thus, the Priority Area maps in this plan are the result of both a watershed-wide technical analysis and a localized iterative review process. MORPC facilitated partnership discussions during the local review process to encourage consistency and communication between the BWPP jurisdictions.

The BWPP Balanced Growth Plan also includes a suite of implementation tools to assist communities in their efforts to address the issues facing the Big Walnut Watershed. This plan recommends that communities utilize these tools where appropriate in an effort to achieve watershed health, economic competitiveness, and agricultural productivity in line with this planning effort and the communities' wishes.

The designation of an area as a Priority Area does not mandate that the area be conserved, developed, or used for agricultural purposes. Incorporation of the Priority Areas into a community's comprehensive plan or local zoning is recommended but not required. When this plan is finalized, MORPC will work with the BWPP and the Ohio Water Resources Council to achieve state endorsement of the Big Walnut Balanced Growth Plan. State endorsement requires local adoption of the plan by at least 75 percent of the Big Walnut Watershed communities. Upon endorsement, participating BWPP communities will be eligible to access state incentives which are designed to promote activities consistent with the designated Priority Areas.

BACKGROUND

Purpose

This Plan is one of five Balanced Growth Plans being developed in contiguous watersheds in central Ohio as part of a voluntary, local response to a state initiative. The Ohio Balanced Growth Initiative was developed to protect and restore Ohio's watersheds. The Balanced Growth Initiative utilizes a watershed-wide approach for developing a plan that reflects local priorities and achieves protection of shared resources. Balanced Growth Plans are

"Balanced Growth is a voluntary, incentive based strategy to protect and restore [Ohio's watersheds] to assure long-term economic competitiveness, ecological health, and quality of life."

- Ohio Lake Erie Commission

intended to complement local watershed action plans that focus on improving and protecting the physical habitat and chemical water quality of watersheds and their diverse plant and animal communities.

Stakeholders and community representatives in the Big Walnut Watershed have worked together to address the interrelated issues of water quality and economic competitiveness by carefully planning and designating Priority Areas that promote conservation efforts in areas that have significant ecological value, (re)development in areas that efficiently utilize and maximize return on existing infrastructure, and continued agricultural practices in the areas that are most valuable for agricultural activity due to historical, cultural, natural or human created traits.

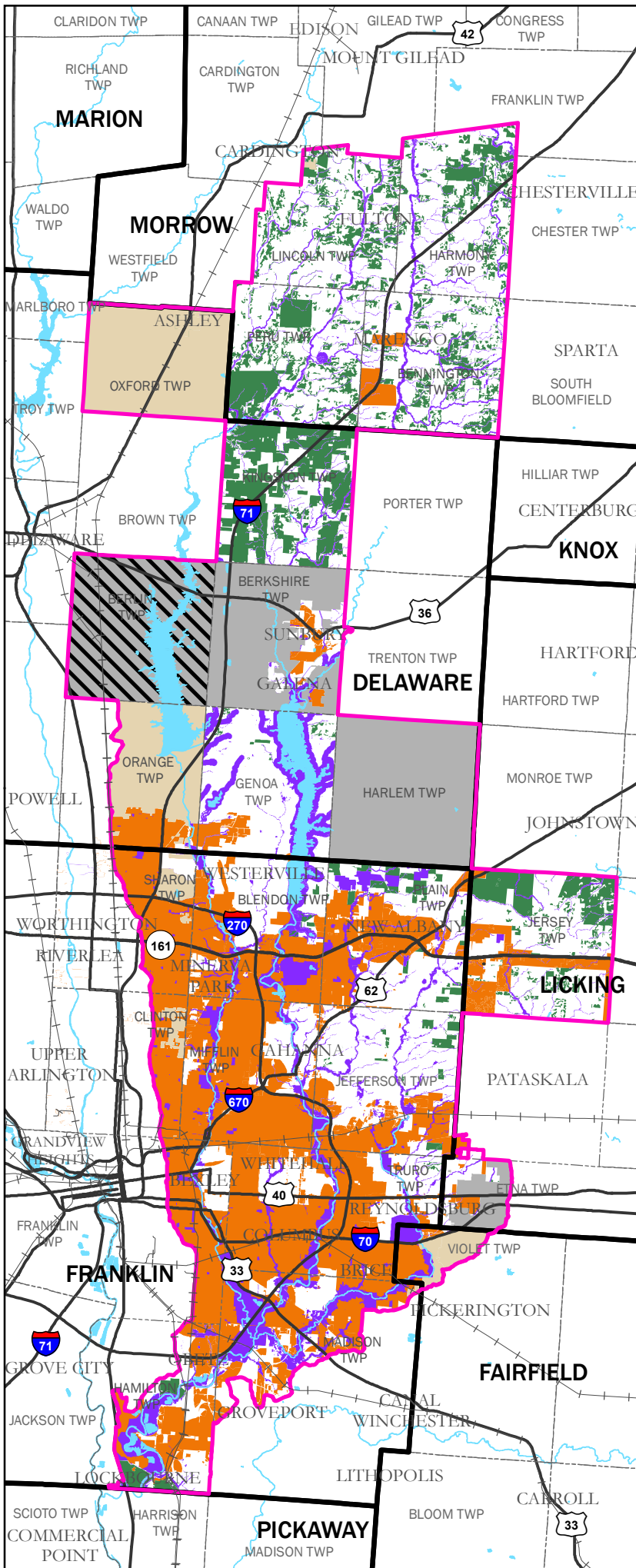
Process

PARTNERSHIP FORMATION AND GOVERNANCE

In 2010, MORPC was awarded a competitive grant from the Ohio Water Resources Council (OWRC) to facilitate the development of a Balanced Growth Plan for the Olentangy Watershed. MORPC leveraged this funding with U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highways Administration Surface Transportation Planning dollars to develop Balanced Growth Plans for four additional central Ohio watersheds, one of which was Big Walnut. MORPC then organized the Big Walnut Planning Partnership (BWPP) to provide guidance throughout the Balanced Growth Planning process. The BWPP, consisting of community representatives and stakeholders, directed the development of this plan while MORPC provided technical assistance, scheduled and facilitated meetings, and developed materials for the partnership.

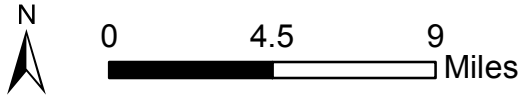
Each participating community was asked to elect a representative to attend partnership meetings and work with fellow delegates in creating the plan. The representatives were

Big Walnut Balanced Growth Watershed Priority Area Analysis



Legend

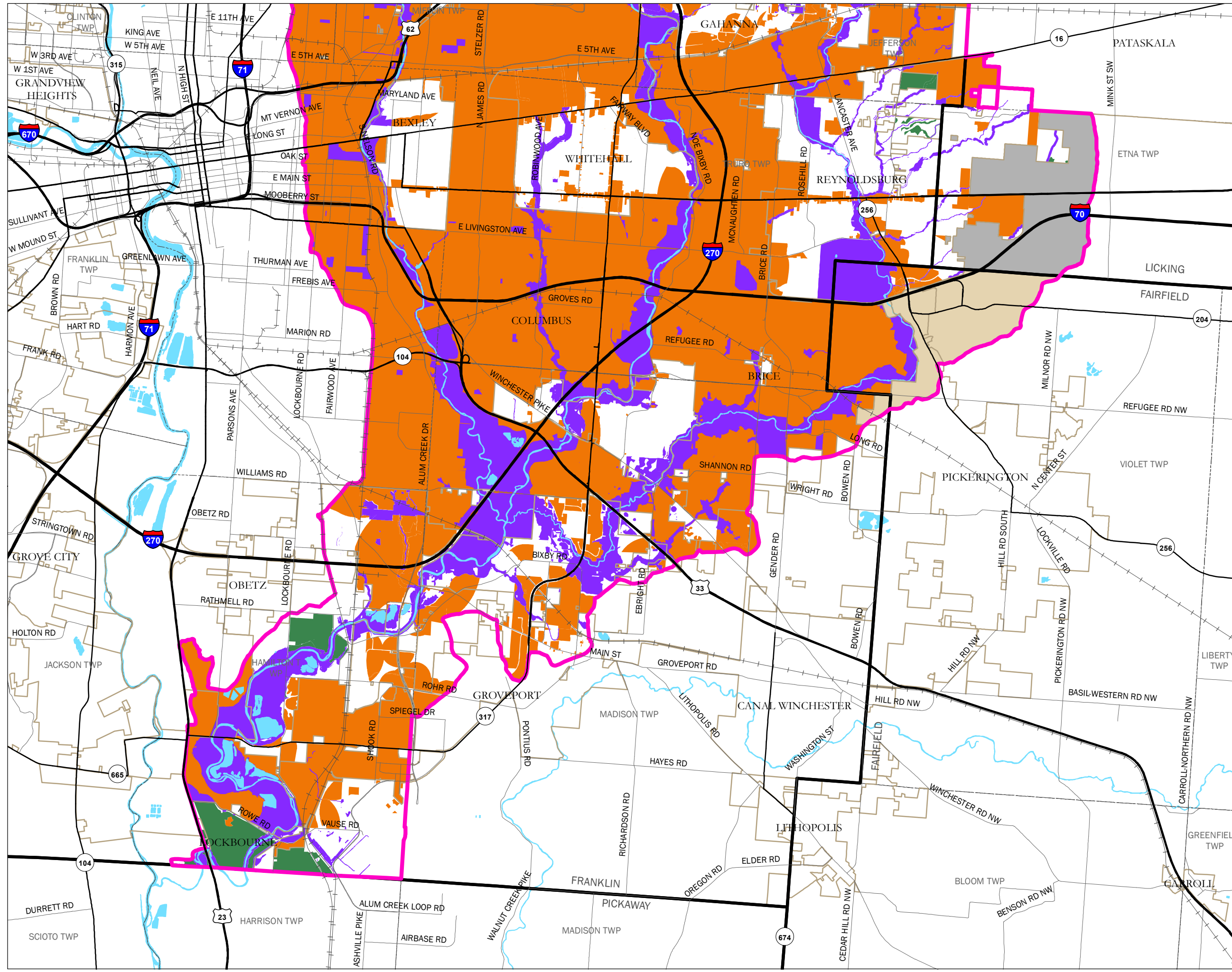
- Priority Conservation Area
- Priority Agricultural Area
- Priority Development Area
- Under Review
- Did Not Participate
- Participated in another Watershed Planning Partnership
- Big Walnut Analysis Area
- County Boundary
- Major Roads
- Railroad
- Water



The information shown on this map is compiled from various sources made available to us which we believe to be reliable.
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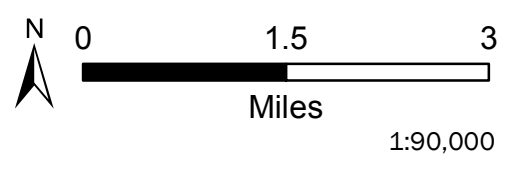
Big Walnut Balanced Growth Watershed

Priority Areas
South



Legend

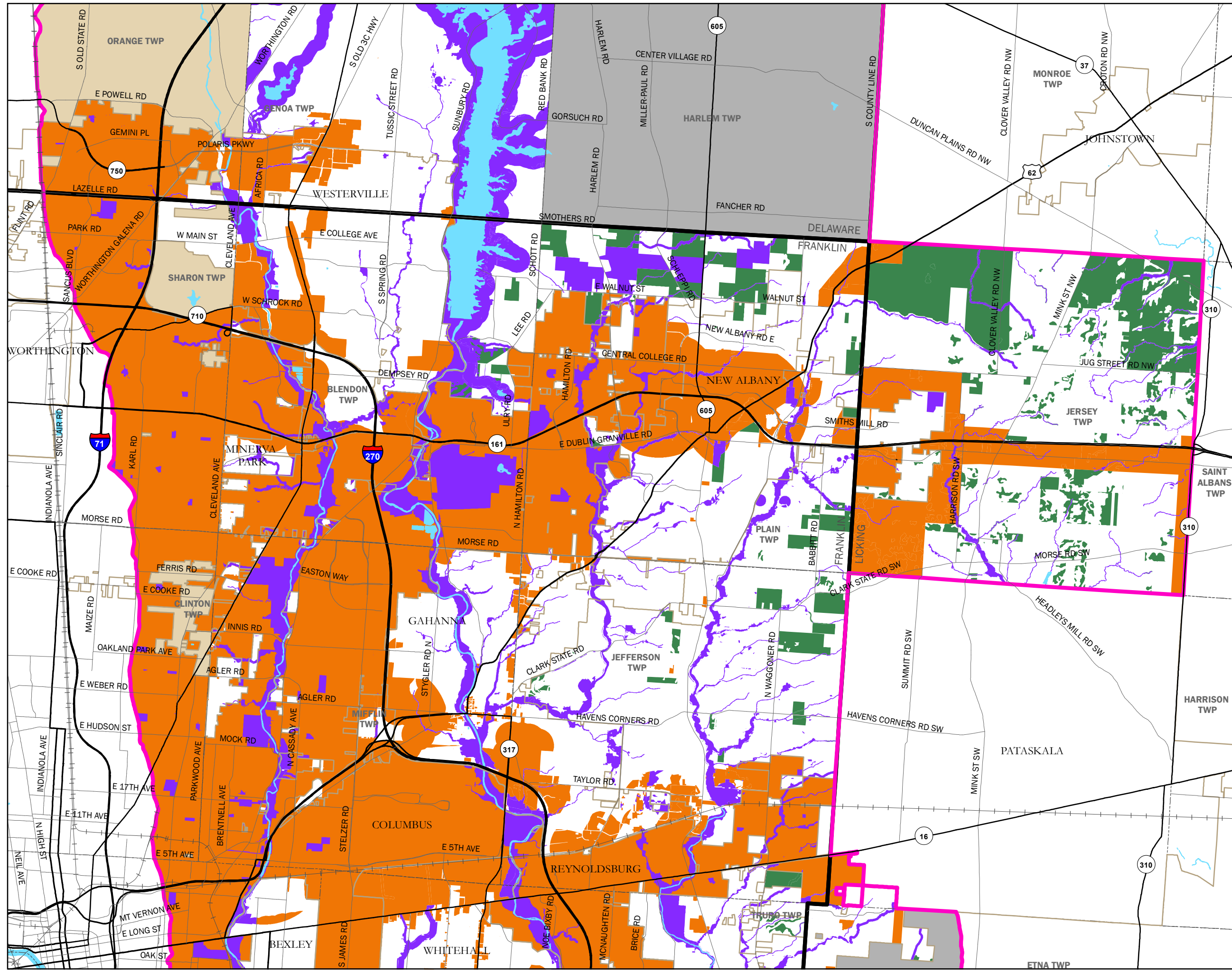
- Priority Conservation Area
- Priority Agricultural Area
- Priority Development Area
- Big Walnut Analysis Area
- Participated in another Watershed Planning Partnership
- Did not participate
- City/ Village
- Township Boundary
- County Boundary
- Water
- Railroad
- Interstate
- US Route
- State Route
- County Road



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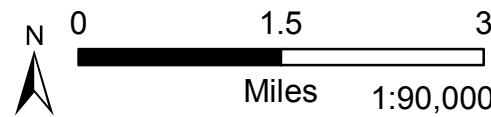
Big Walnut Balanced Growth Watershed

Priority Areas
Lower Central



Legend

- Priority Agricultural Area
- Priority Conservation Area
- Priority Development Area
- Big Walnut Analysis Area
- Participated in another Watershed Planning Partnership
- Did Not Participate
- City /Village
- Township Boundary
- County Boundary
- Water
- Railroad
- Interstate
- US Route
- State Route
- County Road



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March 2012

Balanced Growth Planning in the Big Walnut Watershed

Balanced Growth is a voluntary, incentive based strategy to protect and restore [Ohio's watersheds] to assure long-term economic competitiveness, ecological health, and quality of life."
—BalancedGrowth.Ohio.gov

The development of the Balanced Growth Plan was directed by communities and stakeholders in the Big Walnut watershed. Balanced Growth Planning is a voluntary and incentive-based process that brings people together from across jurisdictional boundaries to create a broader vision for the watershed.

The final Balanced Growth Plan shows Priority Conservation Areas, Priority Development Areas, and Priority Agricultural Areas that have been designated by the Big Walnut Watershed Planning Partnership. The plan also includes an Implementation Toolbox with information about selected tools that can assist communities with implementing the plan. The final plan does not create any requirements or regulations for partnership communities, but does include recommendations.

After achieving local support, MORPC will seek state endorsement for the plan, which will unlock state incentives for implementation.

Recommendations:

- Locally adopt plan
- Develop local comprehensive plan
- Update comprehensive plan every 5 years
- Incorporate Priority Areas into local community plans and zoning
- Integrate Implementation Tools where applicable and appropriate
- Continue participating in the Big Walnut Planning Partnership

Implementation Toolbox:

- Comprehensive Planning
- Stormwater Management
- Low Impact Development
- Natural Areas Establishment
- Stream & Wetland Setbacks
- Woodland/Tree Canopy Protection
- Conservation Development
- Transfer of Development Rights
- Brownfield Redevelopment
- Exactions and Impact Fees
- Complete Streets
- Economic Development Programs
- Farmland Preservation
- Agricultural Conservation Programs
- 208 Planning

For more information, visit our website balancedgrowthplanning.morpc.org