



March 5, 2024

**Preliminary Finding of No Significant Impact
To All Interested Citizens, Organizations, and Government Agencies**

**Mercer County
Wagner Sewer Extension
Loan Number: CS390054-0025**

The attached Environmental Assessment (EA) is for a sewer extension project in Mercer County (Butler Township) which the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency intends to finance through its Water Pollution Control Loan Fund (WPCLF) below-market interest rate revolving loan program. The EA describes the project, its costs, and expected environmental benefits. We would appreciate receiving any comments you may have on the project. Making available this EA and seeking your comments fulfills Ohio EPA's environmental review and public notice requirements for this loan program.

Ohio EPA analyzes environmental effects of proposed projects as part of its WPCLF program review and approval process. We have concluded that the proposed project should not result in significant adverse environmental impacts. More information can be obtained by contacting the person named at the end of the attached EA.

Any comments on our preliminary determination should be sent to the email address of the contact named at the end of the EA. We will not act on this project for 30 calendar days from the date of this notice. In the absence of substantive comments during this period, our preliminary decision will become final. After that, the Mercer County can then proceed with its application for the WPCLF loan.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathleen Courtright".

Kathleen Courtright, Assistant Chief
Division of Environmental & Financial Assistance

Attachment

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Identification

Project: Wagner Sewer Extension
Applicant: Mercer County Commissioners
220 West Livingston Street, Room A201
Celina, Ohio 45822
Loan Number: CS390054-0025

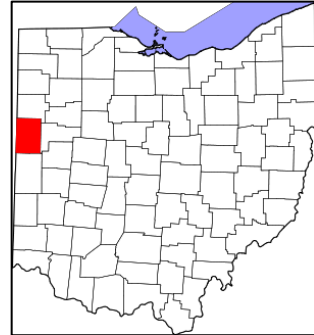


Figure 1. Mercer County

Project Summary

Mercer County (Figure 1) has requested \$800,000 from the Ohio Water Pollution Control Loan Fund (WPCLF) to finance the Wagner Sewer Extension project located in Butler Township. This project involves eliminating the Wagner wastewater treatment plant (WWTP) and installing a new lift station near the plant to convey flows to the Montezuma Club Island WWTP via force main.

History & Existing Conditions

Wagner Subdivision, located in Butler Township, is currently served by a gravity collection system and package WWTP. The existing service area of the collection system consists of residential homes serving approximately 105 residents. The plant is designed for an average daily flow of 7,700 gallons per day (GPD) and experiences up to 62,000 GPD during wet-weather events.

The Wagner WWTP is now 50 years old with several components in need of repair or complete replacement. The plant is not meeting capacity needs and experiences high inflow and infiltration (I/I). High inflows can affect the hydraulic performance of the system and/or overwhelm the infrastructure completely. This causes solids to pass through the plant and prematurely clog the sand filters. The clogs allow for effluent ponding on the sand filters which eventually reaches a depth at which effluent begins to spill over the sides of the filters. If left unresolved, continuous, and increasing ponding of effluent will result in untimely system or component failure.

Population and Flow Projections

The Montezuma Club Island WWTP will receive and treat sanitary sewer flows from the Wagner Subdivision. The new force main alignment will give approximately 34 existing homes the ability to tie into the collection system in addition to a proposed 225-site campground development. The Montezuma Club Island WWTP has sufficient available treatment capacity to handle the additional flows.

Alternatives

1. *Upgrading the Wagner WWTP including installing new flow equalization tanks and pumps:*
This alternative was removed from consideration due to the advanced state of disrepair and issues at the existing plant, as well as the recommendation from regulatory partners to abandon the plant.

2. Complete replacement of the plant as well as upsizing the capacity to accommodate current and future flows:

This alternative was removed from consideration due to the advanced state of disrepair and issues at the existing plant, as well as the recommendation from regulatory partners to abandon the plant.

3. Abandonment of the WWTP and regionalization with the Village of Coldwater's WWTP (1.4 miles away):

This recommendation was removed from consideration as the Village of Coldwater was not receptive to receiving flows from the service area.

4. Abandonment of the WWTP and regionalization with Mercer County's Montezuma Club Island WWTP (2.7 miles away):

Mercer County has indicated that their Montezuma Club Island WWTP has sufficient capacity to accept the anticipated flows from Wagner Subdivision.

Selected Alternative

After considering monetary and nonmonetary factors, Mercer County has determined it is the most cost effective to move forward with Alternative 4.

The proposed project will consist of eliminating the Wagner WWTP and installing a new lift station near the plant to convey flows to the Montezuma Club Island WWTP via force main. The new force main will be approximately 13,650 linear feet and installed primarily via open trench construction. Directional drilling will be utilized to install the force main below three stream crossings while jack and bore will be used for installation below an existing railroad.

Implementation

Mercer County proposes to borrow \$800,000 from the Ohio WPCLF at the regionalization discount rate of zero percent to cover the costs associated with this construction project. For a 30-year loan term, borrowing this amount in WPCLF monies could save Mercer County roughly \$580,862 over the life of the loan compared to the current market rate of four percent. Additionally, Mercer County anticipates using \$500,000 in local funds towards the rest of this project.

The debt associated with this construction project will be recovered from monthly wastewater charges. Under the existing ordinance, sewer rates were increased by 6.5% in 2023. The average monthly residential sewer rate in 2023 was \$24.42. An increase of \$65.36 per month (total of \$89.78) is planned for 2024 to cover the costs associated with the planned WPCLF loan. The average annual residential sewer bill for residents in the Wagner Subdivision will be \$1,077 in 2024. This represents 1.5 percent of the median household income for Mercer County (MHI; \$68,692) and is greater than the Ohio average annual sewer bill of \$489.95.

Construction will begin following loan award and is expected to be completed within six months.

Public Participation

Mercer County Board of Commissioners holds regular meetings every Tuesday and Thursday, which are open to the public. The need for the project and alternatives considered have been discussed at council meetings throughout the past several years, and local news articles have covered the project

development. A public forum will be held to discuss the project and the proposed user charge rate increases.

Ohio EPA is unaware of significant controversy about or opposition to this project. Ohio EPA will make a copy of this document available to the public on the following webpage and will provide it upon request:

<https://epa.ohio.gov/divisions-and-offices/environmental-financial-assistance/announcements>.

Environmental Impacts

The project has the potential to affect the following features, but the effects will be reduced or mitigated to acceptable levels as explained below.

Archaeological and Historical Resources

Sanitary force main installations will take place within the public right-of-way where previous ground disturbances have taken place during road construction, drainage ditch grading, and installation of driveways and stormwater infrastructure. A portion of the project is within a wooded area; however, this work is also occurring in a previously disturbed area. There are no known historical resources within the project area, and it is unlikely that intact archaeological resources are present due to these disturbances. In the event that archaeological discoveries are made during construction, contractors and subcontractors are required under Ohio Revised Code Section 149.53 to notify the Ohio State Historic Preservation Office of any archaeological discoveries in the project area and to cooperate with archaeological and historic survey and salvage work when appropriate.

Terrestrial Habitat, Fish and Wildlife, and Endangered Species

The entire state of Ohio is within the range of several state and federally listed endangered and threatened bat species (Indiana bat, northern long-eared bat, little brown bat, and tricolored bat). During summer months these species roost in trees with loose and exfoliating bark, crevices and cavities, and within leaf clusters. A maximum total of 0.15 acre of tree clearing is expected due to the portion of the project within the wooded area. Large trees and those that exhibit characteristics of potential bat trees will be avoided. Primarily underbrush will be removed. Mercer County will restrict tree clearing to between October 1 and March 31, as recommended by United States Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS) and Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR), to avoid potential impacts to these species.

The project area otherwise contains no typical habitat or suitable habitat for other state and federally listed endangered and threatened species. For these reasons, Ohio EPA has determined that the project is unlikely to adversely impact state and federally listed endangered and threatened species.

Noise, Traffic, Safety, and Aesthetics

It will be the contractor's responsibility to implement construction best management practices to limit erosion, sediment, noise, dust, traffic disruptions, and like factors throughout the duration of the project. Disturbed surfaces will be restored upon construction completion.

Floodplains

A portion of the project site falls within the designated zone of the 100-year floodplain and regulated floodway of Coldwater Creek. Mercer County has coordinated review of this project with the local floodplain administrator to ensure compliance with all local floodplain regulations. There are no short-term or long-term significant adverse impacts to the floodplain anticipated as a result of the proposed project.

Aquatic Habitat

The project includes a total of three stream crossings that includes an unnamed tributary to Hardin Creek, Hardin Creek, and Coldwater Creek. All three force main crossings will be installed via directional drilling to avoid disturbance to the streams and will achieve minimum vertical clearances from the bottom of the stream beds. The unnamed tributary to Hardin Creek runs parallel to the proposed sewer line; impacts to the stream will be avoided by keeping disturbance associated with construction not only out of the stream channel, but also, the vegetation along the channel. The top of bank limits which encompass the vegetation limits have all been clearly marked on the plans for the contractor along with a note indicating that any disturbance to the creek banks is to be avoided and disturbance adjacent to the top of banks should be minimized. Sediment and erosion controls will be used during the construction to minimize run-off from construction-related activities. Areas disturbed by the project will be stabilized and restored after the construction.

Wetlands and Surface Water Resources

Mercer County conducted a wetland delineation for the project area and determined that one wetland is within the wooded area north of the project area. Work within the wooded area is being completed at a higher elevation than the wetland. This wetland area has been clearly identified on the construction plans and will be marked and avoided during construction.

Unaffected Resources

The following resources are not present and therefore will not be impacted by this project: Coastal Zones, Wild and Scenic Rivers, and Ground Water Resources including Sole Source Aquifers and Source Water Assessment and Protection areas. Additionally, there will be no change in current Energy Use, Air Quality, or Land Use as it pertains to public space, nor will there be any impacts to the Wagner subdivision Drinking Water.

Conclusion

Based upon Ohio EPA's review of the planning information and the materials presented in this Environmental Assessment, we have concluded that there will be no significant adverse impacts from the proposed project as it relates to the environmental features discussed previously. This is because these features do not exist in the project area, the features exist but will not be adversely affected, or the impacts will be temporary and mitigated. Rather, completion of this regionalization project will improve the water quality for residents within the Wagner subdivision, address future expansion, and eliminate any concerns with the existing Wagner WWTP.

Contact information

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Figure 2. Wagner sewer extension project area



Figure 3. 100-year floodplain and delineated wetland area