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Project XL: Clermont County, Ohio

WHAT IS PROJECT XL?

Project XL, which stands for "eXcellence and Leadership," is a national initiative that tests innovative ways of achieving better and more cost-effective public health and environmental protection. Project XL encourages local public sector and community organizations to test new ideas that demonstrate community-designed and directed strategies for achieving greater environmental quality consistent with community economic goals. The information and lessons learned from Project XL are being used to assist the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in redesigning its current regulatory and policy-setting approaches. Project XL encourages testing of cleaner, cheaper, and smarter ways to attain environmental results superior to those achieved under current regulations and policies. It also requires substantial involvement by stakeholders, i.e. the people and organizations affected by EPA's decisions. EPA hopes that these projects will provide opportunities for everyone to think "outside the box" of our current system and to find solutions to obstacles that limit environmental performance.

SUMMARY OF THE CLERMONT COUNTY PROJECT

Through Project XL, Clermont County has entered into a multi-phase agreement with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (OEPA) to develop an innovative plan that will help Clermont maintain a balance between economic growth and preservation of its rural character and, in particular, protect the area's water quality. The primary goal of Phase I is to create a comprehensive watershed management plan that will provide an integrated framework for achieving a variety of more narrowly-defined water quality goals in subsequent phases.

SUPERIOR ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE

This multi-phased approach is expected to achieve superior environmental performance through greater local responsibility and management of point and non-point sources of water quality. The proposed project is comprehensive in scope and will include water quality related development issues such as land use, development procedures, open space and farmland preservation, economic development, and smart growth. Clermont County is investing in watershed management controls not currently required by federal regulations and offering them much sooner than would otherwise be required under state regulations. Because rapid development in the watershed is expected to degrade water quality in spite of existing regulations and practices, the goal for this XL project is to obtain superior environmental performance with "indicators showing no adverse trends in water quality." Consequently, this innovative project should result in environmental benefits sooner than would be realized under current and anticipated regulations.

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FLEXIBILITY

While regulatory flexibility is a primary motivation for Clermont County's involvement in the XL project, no regulatory flexibility is being requested during Phase I of this agreement. However, types of tools needed to manage and protect the water resources will likely require flexibility. These tools may include land use planning, storm water ordinances, erosion and sediment control measures, riparian and buffer zone management, and implementation of urban and agricultural best management practices. Some of the current impediments to water quality protection are lack of authority in land use planning and limited ordinances for storm water, sediment, and erosion control.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Clermont County has engaged stakeholders in identifying problems, establishing goals, determining data needs, reviewing monitoring results, and identifying potential management actions. Some of these stakeholders include the local community, OEPA, and local environmental groups. One local environmental group that has indicated significant interest in the project can be found at www.oeq.net. Clermont also has established a Science Advisory Committee that includes academic, industrial, and environmental groups.

APPROACHES TO BE TESTED

Can using an innovative watershed management plan involving point and non-point sources improve environmental conditions for a rapidly growing community?

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