

# Rocky River Backyard Buffers Program

## SUMMARY

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The Rocky River drains 294 square miles of Medina, Cuyahoga, Lorain and Summit Counties in Northeast Ohio, including 28 separate municipalities and townships, before flowing into Lake Erie west of Cleveland. Only 14% of the watershed is considered to be in urban land use, but the remaining unprotected areas, especially agricultural areas, face high residential development pressures. While nearly 30 miles of the Main Stem and East Branch are permanently protected in public parks, the numerous headwater streams have been, and continue to be, encroached upon by roads, fields, back yards and parking lots. Increases in flooding, bank erosion, and sediment and nutrient inputs, coupled with physical channel alterations and habitat degradation, are often attributed in part to riparian deforestation.

The Rocky River Watershed Action Plan, endorsed by the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency and the Ohio Department of Natural Resources in 2006, states that “maintenance of functioning riparian corridors along the streams of the Rocky River is the single most important action that can be taken to maintain water quality in the stream and to minimize problems from future development.”

The goal of the Rocky River Backyard Buffers Program is to restore stream water quality and function in urban and suburban areas of the watershed through the establishment of forested riparian buffers on residential property.

Through the program, brochures describing the importance of forested riparian buffers and explaining how to enroll in the program were sent to the 11,125 streamside property owners in the Cuyahoga and Medina County portions of the Rocky River Watershed. 566 riparian landowners (5.1%) enrolled in the program. **Overall, 16,500 tree and shrub seedlings were distributed to 184 riparian property owners. Those receiving seedlings own a combined 5.7 miles of stream, and had enrolled 9.8 miles (29.6 acres) of 25 foot-wide riparian corridor in the program.** Demand for seedlings to plant in the riparian corridor far exceeded the ability of the program to supply seedlings, providing future opportunities for riparian reforestation in the Rocky River Watershed.