



## Darby Creek Association

John Tetzloff, President  
2726 Camden Rd.  
Columbus, OH 43221  
Phone: (614) 288-0313  
Email: jftetzloff@aol.com

### **Mando Ditch Petition**

### **Comments to Franklin County Commissioners from the Darby Creek Association**

May 19, 2021

Franklin County Commissioners

Dear Franklin County Commissioners,

The Darby Creek Association is submitting the following comments concerning the proposed Mando Ditch expansion in Brown Township. Overall, we are concerned that this project, as it is currently planned, will have a significant negative impact on Big Darby Creek, the National and State Scenic River that will receive the extra runoff associated with this project.

Landowners were informed of this proposal in April, and the ditch "view" for the Commissioners was conducted on May 5. The present drainage system flows into tributaries that flow into Big Darby in western Franklin County. As you know, preservation of Big Darby has long been a goal of national, state and local efforts, and the creek enjoys special protections from a targeted state stormwater permit and the Big Darby Accord plan, which Franklin County helped create and implement. Such efforts have included the expenditure of well over \$100 million in conservation efforts such as land acquisition, stream restoration and park operations, among others costs. However, none of the resulting protections govern projects such as the Mando Ditch expansion, and for this reason we urge the Commissioners and the Franklin County Engineer to take special care to design this project to address negative impacts that a standard ditching project would have on the creek.

Our main concern with this project is its potentially negative effect on Big Darby's delicate habitat stability. Because such large drainage projects increase the speed and volume of runoff, they have the potential to cause channel impacts that are quite similar to the negative impacts of large development projects. Accelerated discharges will cause "flashy" flows to streams, creating an unnatural flow pattern, accelerating tributary and main channel erosion, destabilizing substrates, and pushing pollutants into the system at an unnatural rate. Such impacts are well documented in Ohio as causes of stream degradation, especially in developed and developing areas.

As you know, Big Darby is a National and State Scenic River because of its outstanding stream biology. In 2014, Ohio EPA recorded some of the best biological scores in the Big Darby Creek ever recorded in Ohio. However, there is substantial evidence that rare mussel species—the most sensitive of aquatic organisms—are declining and are at considerable risk of being lost,

largely because of the accumulated effects of urbanization, removal of wetlands, and drainage projects associated with agriculture and expanding residential development. It is thus imperative that all new drainage projects be reexamined to determine 1) if they are truly necessary, and 2) if they are deemed necessary, how they can be designed to have little impact on the natural hydrology of the stream system.

Regarding the first point, we believe that landowners in the Darby watershed should expect some level of poor drainage when they move into western Franklin County, an area that has historically been slow to drain and is characterized by a high level of hydric soils. We believe that part of the tradeoff of living in a rural area next to a highly sensitive natural resource is that you will experience occasional and seasonal standing water. In our view it is unreasonable for a Darby landowner to expect the same level of drainage that they would experience in a more urban setting closer to the city center. For this reason, we urge the Commissioners and the Franklin County Engineer to study the typical extent and duration of issues with standing water in the Mando Ditch area, and consider whether the issues are really worth the cost of “improvements,” both in terms of funding the drainage project and, what is in our view the greater cost, damage to Central Ohio’s most treasured natural resource.

We would also like to point out that recent years (2017-2019) have seen some very high amounts of precipitation. Some residents might think that the flooding is getting worse, when in fact we have been experiencing an unusually wet period. (Based on the precipitation record for Central Ohio, 1895-2020, 2017 through 2019 were the 6<sup>th</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> wettest years on record, respectively, in a total of 126 years (Source: Midwestern Regional Climate Center, cli-MATE: MRCC Application Tools Environment, provided by Aaron Wilson, CFAES-OSU Extension Climate Specialist, State Climate Office of Ohio, 4/30/2021).)

Regarding the second point—how a drainage project could be redesigned—we believe there are many options the county could explore. In general, there are techniques that can be used to provide a reasonable level of “improved” drainage while still maintaining a natural, or nearly natural hydrology to the stream system. If this project moves forward we urge the County to explore these options, and work with entities such as OSU and Metro Parks to design an environmentally protective project.

We would also like to alert the County to the fact that federally endangered mussels species (northern riffleshell and clubshell) have in recent years been placed by US Fish and Wildlife, in partnership with The Ohio State University, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources and the Columbus Zoo, in riffles just downstream of where runoff from this project would discharge into Big Darby. The reintroductions of these mussels are part of a national effort to save these species from extinction, and this project must take the utmost caution in disturbing the sites. Given that these federally endangered species could be affected by this project we recommend that the County consult with the local US Fish and Wildlife office for advice on this project as they have jurisdiction over these species.

Another point of emphasis is that the discharge from this project would flow into an old quarry pond that discharges to a small tributary to Big Darby Creek at River Mile 47.7 within Prairie Oaks Metro Park. The culvert that allows water to exit the quarry has been degraded. Metro Parks was evaluating replacing this culvert before the proposed Mando Ditch project. The Mando Ditch project could negatively impact this tributary stream, which enters Big Darby Creek about 0.3 miles downstream of the Prairie Oaks pedestrian bridge over Big Darby Creek. The volume and flow regime of water and impact to this tributary needs to be evaluated and addressed before this project is approved.

Finally, we believe that this project should not use the Patterson Ditch route, as this route has been abandoned in past years and is recovering. Using this route would extensively damage one of the better-quality woods in Brown Township. The old Patterson Ditch goes through homesites along Patterson Road and is abandoned, with no upkeep in recent decades. Trees, other plants and wildlife have recovered over several decades and has created a woods of relatively good quality. This route goes through these mature woods on the south side of Patterson Road (Figure 2, below; ~40.0045, -83.2318). A route through these woods would lead to significant environmental degradation. These woods are recovering, are a positive asset, and should not be disturbed.

Summary:

- Drainage projects mimic impervious surfaces because, among other stresses, they lead to flashy stream flows and stream degradation.
- Rare species are present in Big Darby Creek downstream of the point to which this project would discharge its flow.
- Protection of Big Darby Creek should be a major focus if this project proceeds.
- If this project proceeds, it should be well-planned, well-reviewed and proven to minimize negative impacts.
- This project should not use the Patterson Ditch route, as this route has been abandoned in and is recovering. Using this route would extensively damage one of the better-quality woods in Brown Township.
- Implementing this project is unlikely to eliminate flooding in the area.

Thank you for your attention to these concerns. Please direct any questions to Anthony Sasson, [asasson@aol.com](mailto:asasson@aol.com), 614 519-9291.

John Tetzloff  
President, Darby Creek Association  
[jftetzloff@aol.com](mailto:jftetzloff@aol.com)

cc: Jim Ramsey, Franklin County Drainage Engineer's office,  
[jramsey@franklincountyengineer.org](mailto:jramsey@franklincountyengineer.org)  
Steve Studenmund, Metro Parks, [studenmund@metroparks.net](mailto:studenmund@metroparks.net)





Figure 1. Tributary flowing into Big Darby Creek at River Mile 47.7, Prairie Oaks Metro Park.



Figure 2. Patterson Road woods, south side of Patterson Road, about one mile east of Amity Road (~40.0045, -83.2318).