

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Formation of the Accord

It has been well documented that the Big Darby Watershed is one of the most biologically diverse aquatic systems in the Midwest and is among the top warm freshwater habitats in the nation. The Big Darby Watershed is home to 38 state and federally listed aquatic species. The sustainability of the Big and Little Darby Creeks is of critical importance so that they continue to be healthy, biologically diverse, and a recreational treasure for current and future generations.

The Big Darby Watershed also represents the largest undeveloped area in Franklin County. With the continued growth of Central Ohio, the watershed has experienced increased development pressures in recent years. Due to the unique nature of the Big and Little Darby Creeks, any development within their watersheds must be carefully planned and managed.

In July 2004, elected officials from jurisdictions that comprise the Big Darby Watershed in Franklin County gathered to discuss the importance of protecting the watershed and the need for a common vision for future development. Jurisdictions involved included Brown, Prairie, Pleasant, Norwich and Washington Townships; the Cities of Columbus Hilliard, and Grove City; the Village of Harrisburg; and Franklin County.

The historic meeting of Big Darby jurisdictions followed years of studies and planning activities by each jurisdiction and various other organizations. These efforts have contributed to a common



Big Darby Creek

Source: *The Nature Conservancy/Anthony Sasson*

understanding of the importance of the watershed, the quality of the waterways and the vision of each jurisdiction, and have served as a foundation of the Big Darby Accord planning effort.

In addition to the comprehensive planning activities, two recent initiatives have brought together representatives of multiple jurisdictions and interests to address watershed issues: the ESDA External Advisory Group and the Hellbranch Watershed Forum. The Big Darby Accord Plan is the culmination of these efforts.

ESDA External Advisory Group

The EPA-approved *Columbus Metropolitan Facilities Plan Update* (November 3, 2000) establishes a goal “to protect critical water resources, especially in the Darby Watershed.” This plan designates an Environmentally Sensitive Development Area (ESDA) that includes most of the Big Darby

Watershed in Franklin County.

The plan recognizes that while “the City of Columbus will ultimately provide centralized service within a portion of it, no service whatsoever shall be provided within the ESDA until the following conditions are met for the area to be served:

- Riparian buffer restrictions are in place;
- Comprehensive stormwater management planning has occurred;
- Conservation development restrictions are in place which involve the concept of clustering development to preserve tracts of open space, including farmland; and
- Adequate public facilities, including roadways, exist or are planned to support any proposed development.”

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The Hellbranch Watershed Forum

The Hellbranch Watershed Forum was created by a cooperative agreement signed May 22, 2002 by elected officials of Franklin County; the cities of Columbus, Hilliard, and Grove City; and Brown, Norwich, Pleasant, and Prairie townships. The Forum was organized to collaboratively develop consistent stormwater policies and regulations, develop a pilot restoration project, and cooperate in and support a watershed plan for responsible development and stewardship of the Hellbranch Watershed. Work completed as part of the Hellbranch Watershed Forum effort has been incorporated into the Big Darby Accord effort.

Planning Area

The Big Darby Watershed covers 555 square miles of central Ohio just west of the Columbus metropolitan area (see Figure 1.1). Big Darby Creek originates in Logan County and flows more than 80 miles before joining the Scioto River near Circleville, Ohio. Land use is predominately row crop agricultural, except for the watershed's suburbanizing eastern edge along the border of Madison and Franklin Counties, and in Union County.

The Big Darby Accord planning area (shown in Figure 1.3) is 84 square miles in size, or about 56,000 acres, and represents about 15% of the total watershed. Major stream

corridors within the planning area include Big Darby Creek, Little Darby Creek, Hellbranch Run, Clover Groff and Hamilton Ditches (herein referred to as Runs).

The Big Darby Accord planning area encompasses the portion of the Big Darby watershed within Franklin County and includes the area associated with the City of Columbus' adopted Hellbranch Run Watershed Protection Overlay and the established Environmentally Sensitive Development Area (ESDA). The limits of the planning area are primarily defined by the US Geological Survey hydrologic unit code boundary for the Big Darby Creek Watershed in Franklin County. Those limits have been refined and extended by using the 2-foot contour interval mapping published by the Franklin County Auditor. It is recognized that some sites located at the eastern edge of the planning area may not actually be part of the Big Darby watershed. It is not the intent of the Accord that the plan's provisions apply to sites outside of natural drainage area of the Big Darby Watershed. This will require consideration on a site-by-site basis during the implementation process.

Aside from the County which includes all jurisdictions, the largest jurisdiction by land area within the planning area is Pleasant Township with 24,000 acres, or 45% of the planning area. Grove City, although part of the Accord, does not have any land within the actual planning area boundary. Figure 1.2 shows the acreage for each jurisdiction based on GIS mapping.

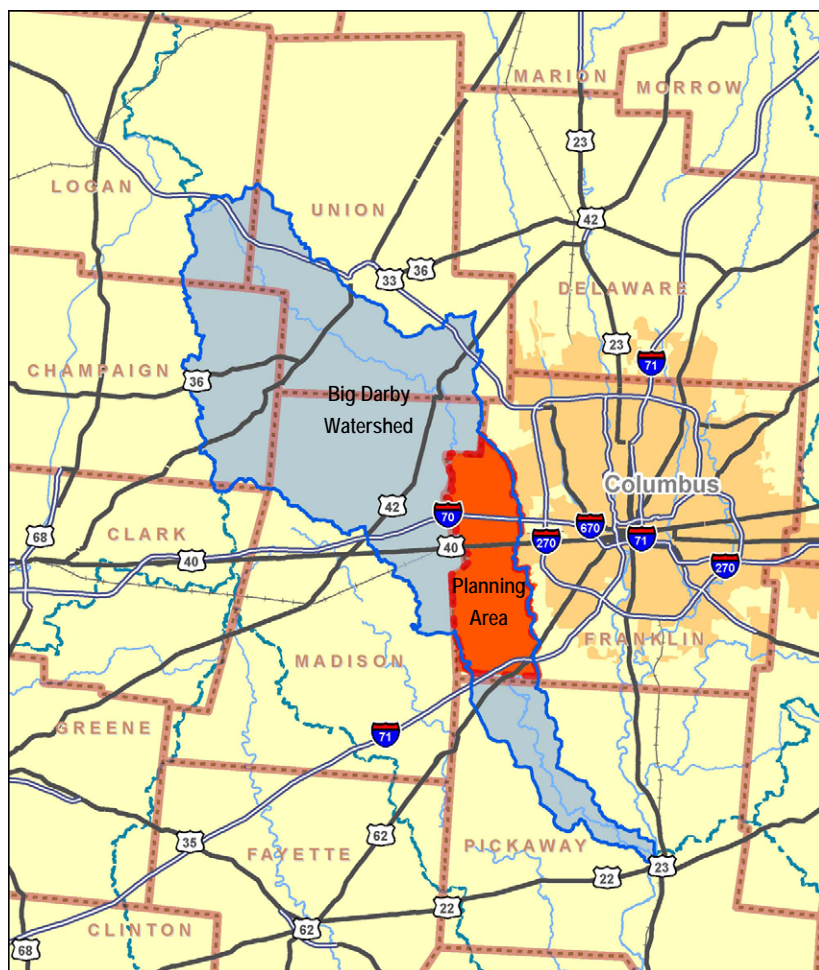
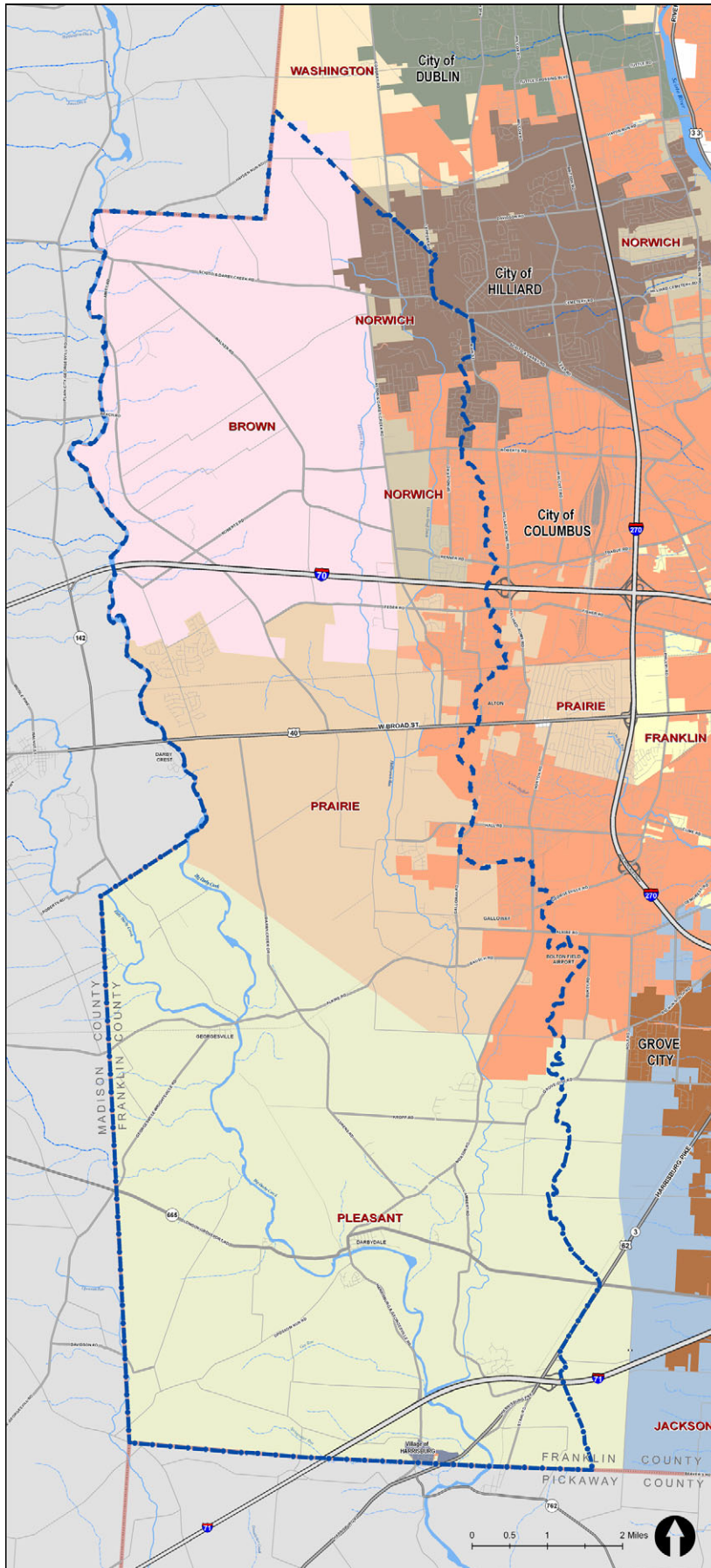


Figure 1.1 Planning Area (orange) within Big Darby Creek Watershed (blue)

Source: EDAW



Jurisdiction	Acres	% of Planning Area
Brown	13,840	25.67
Norwich	1,025	1.90
Prairie	10,530	19.53
Pleasant	24,018	44.54
Washington	8.7	0.02
Columbus	3,102	5.75
Hilliard	1,209	2.24
Harrisburg	82	0.15

Figure 1.2 Acres Per Jurisdiction within Planning Area

Note: Acreages are estimates.

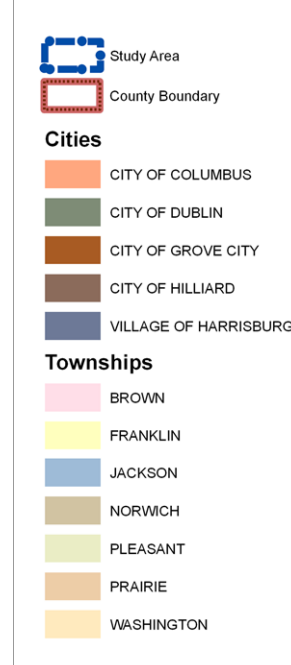


Figure 1.3 Accord Jurisdictions and Planning Area

Mission Statement

The Big Darby Accord consists of local governments within the Franklin County area of the Big Darby Creek Watershed. The mission of the Big Darby Accord is to cooperatively develop a multi-jurisdictional plan and accompanying preservation and growth strategies, capable of implementation, oversight, and enforcement, which are designed to:

- Preserve, protect and improve, when possible, the Big Darby Watershed's unique ecosystem by utilizing the best available science, engineering and land use planning practices;
- Promote responsible growth by taking measures to provide for adequate public services and facilities and promote a full spectrum of housing choice, as well as adequate educational, recreational, and civic opportunities, for citizens of each jurisdiction and for Central Ohio;
- Create a partnership that recognizes the identity, aspirations, rights, and duties of all jurisdictions and that develops methods of cooperation among the partners through means which include the cooperative utilization of public services and facilities; and
- Capitalize on the results of other efforts by considering local comprehensive plans, as well as the work of the Environmentally Sensitive Development Area External Advisory Group, the Hellbranch Watershed Forum, the 21st Century Growth Policy Team, and other local planning and zoning efforts, in the development of the plan.

sensitive areas. This approach promotes a responsible growth pattern as recommended in the mission statement.

A general land use plan that recognizes existing sewer and wastewater treatment capacities, while taking into account the rights accorded watershed landowners under current zoning

The plan will work within the limits of existing sewage conveyance system and treatment capacities. At the same time, the plan will recognize zoning and development rights that are currently in place. The plan will identify practical and equitable mechanisms of preserving these rights while striving to protect water quality by focusing density in key locations. Through this approach, the plan will seek a balance on both a regional and project-specific basis where appropriate.

1.2 Big Darby Accord Plan Principles

The Accord has developed a set of Plan Principles that has guided the development of the Plan. The principles have been instrumental in achieving consensus among the Accord jurisdictions and have directly shaped the land use map and planning process. As the Accord moves forward to implement the Plan, the Plan Principles will provide direction for decision making to local officials and to the public to ensure that actions, both individually and collectively, are achieving the Mission of the Accord.

Protection of environmentally sensitive areas

The general land use plan protects environmentally sensitive areas in a green infrastructure of approximately 20,000 acres. The

green infrastructure includes floodplains, wetlands, groundwater and surface flow exchange areas, special habitat areas, wooded areas, and areas with groundwater pollution potential. These elements contribute to the Darby's unique ecosystem and should be protected and preserved according to the mission statement, Accord recommendations, and regulatory requirements, such as Ohio EPA's (OEPA) 208 plan.

A general land use plan that balances environmental protection and responsible growth

Development is managed and focused in a sustainable town center and a range of conservation-style development patterns, which will create opportunities for open space preservation. The land use pattern offers a mix of uses, maximizes access to infrastructure, and guides development to less

Growth areas will be served by adequate public facilities, particularly central sewer

Central sewer service is planned for identified growth areas including the town center and existing contract service areas pending available capacity. Central sewer service is not planned, or anticipated for, a majority of the planning area, including areas associated with lower density conservation development. Non-centralized services would be subject to standards and inspection programs to ensure the systems are functioning properly. Such a program should be consistent with Accord recommendations and regulatory requirements, such as Ohio EPA's 208 plan.

A development policy that provides for mechanisms to acquire environmentally sensitive areas

Development of policies and procedures that link new development to the provision of green space within the environmentally sensitive areas of the land use plan, both regionally and within the same site, is encouraged. These green spaces would provide permanent protection of the environmentally sensitive resources.

A memorandum of understanding (MOU) among Accord members to implement the agreed upon plan

The MOU represents a commitment to continue to implement the plan and work together to leverage resources. The MOU encourages consistency and compliance across political boundaries. As a primary step in a long-term implementation process, the MOU underscores the importance of adaptive management techniques to monitor plan implementation.

Development without the condition of annexation

The City of Columbus is offering the limited extension of water and sewer services without the condition of annexation. As part of the Accord process, the City of Columbus is identifying conditions that must be met to qualify for utility extensions into unincorporated areas. This will require consideration of existing utility contracts, design and cost implications, capacity, provision of a full range of housing options, revenue sharing and compliance with Accord provisions.

Mechanisms for cooperative revenue sharing among Accord members

Through the creation of joint economic development districts (JEDD), cooperative economic development agreements (CEDA), and/or community authorities, Accord members can structure specific agreements to allow revenue sharing across political boundaries as development comes on line. Cooperative agreements and new revenues can be

established to help provide community resources and amenities and to initiate joint projects in the planning area, including open space. The general criteria may include, among other things, establishing an amount of millage to be collected by a Community Authority and the manner in which the proceeds would be used.

Water quality, biological integrity, and adaptive management

This plan relies on the principle of adaptive management, an ongoing process. This includes prediction, monitoring, inspection, enforcement, and ongoing planning to continue to maintain and pursue aggressive Ohio EPA water quality goals that will improve the water quality and biological integrity of the Big Darby Watershed. Pursuit of this objective is balanced with the understanding that, while Accord provisions can apply to the entire watershed, they can only address the Franklin County portion of the overall watershed.



Source: EDAW

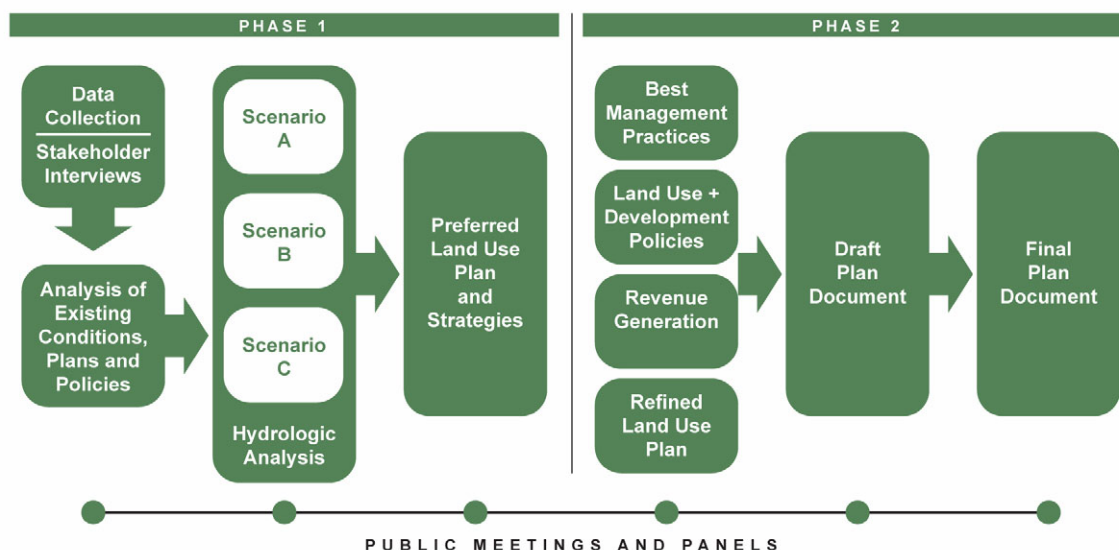


Figure 1.4 Big Darby Accord Planning Process Diagram

1.3 Planning Process

The Big Darby Accord planning process was initiated in April 2005. The ten jurisdictions that form the Accord have guided the planning process with the help of a subcommittee, referred to as the Group of Four (G4). The G4 representatives were ambassadors of the process, guiding the consultant team, communicating with the public, and conveying feedback from all ten jurisdictions into the process.

Figure 1.4 represents the overall planning process from initiation to plan completion.

Phase 1

- Data collection, outreach and stakeholder interviews
- Inventory and analysis of existing conditions, plans, and policies
- Land use scenario development and hydrological model application
- Development of preliminary land use plan map

Phase 2

- Best management practices analyses
- Tools and programs for conservation and development
- Revenue generation and agreements
- Draft Plan development
- Final Plan

The planning process has included a variety of opportunities for public feedback including stakeholder interviews, small focus groups, four public meetings, a project website (<http://www.franklincountyohio.gov/BigDarbyAccord>), email notifications, press releases, a hotline number, and mailings. In addition, events such as panel discussions have been sponsored by individual jurisdictions and other organizations to provide education and outreach to interested citizens on planning topics that relate to the future of the watershed. Interest in the Accord process has been strong with good attendance at public events.

In addition, a stakeholder group comprised of representatives from various agencies met consistently over the course of the planning effort to provide guidance to the planning team and Accord

jurisdictions. Members included representatives from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources; Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, Metro Parks, Darby Creek Association; The Nature Conservancy; Franklin Soil and Water Conservation District; Columbus and Franklin County Housing Trust Corporation; Building Industry Association of Central Ohio; and United Way of Central Ohio.

Combined, these efforts have reached residents and interested citizens and generated healthy dialogue around key plan issues. This input has directly shaped the



June 2005 Accord Public Meeting
Source: EDAW



Big Darby Creek Tributary

Source: *The Nature Conservancy/Anthony Sasson*

plan and guided policies and standards that are described in the following sections of this plan. The Accord process is an example of a successful regional collaborative planning process that should be considered throughout the Darby Watershed.

The Big Darby Accord Plan is intended to serve as a multi-jurisdictional guide for development and conservation.

It is the goal of the Accord that each jurisdiction work towards adoption and implementation of the plan and its provisions. It is recognized that application of the Plan at the local level will require flexibility to allow for varying and unanticipated circumstances. Plan implementation will also require monitoring and periodic updates to ensure currency.

Adoption of this Plan at the local level will require a process that meets each jurisdiction's requirements for policy adoption. It is anticipated that adoption will include additional public meetings, and input and endorsement by the locally elected officials. Following

the adoption of the Big Darby Accord Plan, each jurisdiction will then need to review their zoning code to determine how to implement the land use plan. This too will involve a process of public discussion and endorsement by the locally elected officials.

The Big Darby Accord Plan will be implemented over the next twenty to thirty years; therefore, the plan has built-in flexibility to adapt to changing community needs and new technologies.

Implementation efforts among the Accord jurisdictions, partner agencies and organizations, and property owners are already underway. The success of this planning effort will lie in the ability of the Accord and others to work together in the pursuit of the Mission. Over time this plan will need to be updated to adapt to new technologies and changing land uses to ensure water quality goals are being met and programs and policies are relevant. This planning effort should serve as a model for cooperative planning in the watershed.

1.4 Report Format

This document is set up in five sections and an appendix, briefly described as follows:

Section 1: Introduction – provides an overview of how the planning process was initiated, describes the Accord Mission and Principles and the plan process.

Section 2: Plan Framework – describes the factors instrumental to the development of the land use plan including natural resources, available infrastructure and current policies.

Section 3: Land Use – identifies the conservation and development strategy for the planning area.

Section 4: Policies – sets forth policies that will be needed in order to meet the Mission and implement the plan related to open space, development, water quality, and coordination.

Section 5: Implementation – identifies a series of programs and revenue sources for plan implementation.

Appendix: The appendix is structured to provide background information that supports the plan recommendations. Appendices A through F provide additional information related to water quality, funding, planning data sources, development review, considerations for a stormwater utility and draft recommendations related to alternative community wastewater systems.

