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Do you know where your drinking water comes from?

**GREEN
PORTAGE**
 Edith Chase



Portage County is a headwaters county! As rain or snow falls, the water flows into headwaters — small streams that join to form larger streams and rivers — the source of life-giving drinking water. The map shows a dark line through the middle of Portage County. A drop of rain that falls on the west side of this line would flow into the Cuyahoga River and Lake Erie. A raindrop that falls on the east side of this line would run into the Mahoning River, then into the Ohio River — a real continental divide.

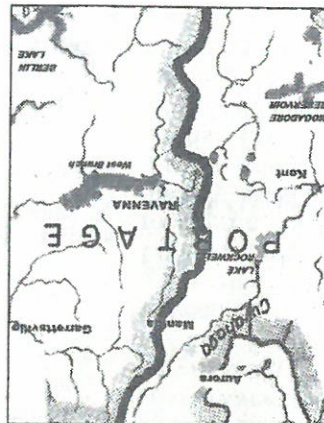
Portage County has many wetlands because of the glaciers that covered much of Ohio thousands of years ago. Wetlands can act like a sponge, filtering out pollutants and soaking up storm water runoff, releasing it later when we need it during the dry season.

Drinking water for Ravenna comes from the water treatment plant at Lake Hodgson (Ravenna Township). Most of the rest of the surface water in Portage County is collected in four large reservoirs to serve cities outside the county.

Lake Rockwell (Franklin Township) collects water from the Cuyahoga River to serve Akron area residents and industry. Mogadore Reservoir (Brimfield and Sutherland Townships), also in the Cuyahoga watershed, is used as backup for West Branch Reservoir (Charles-town Township) and Berlin Lake (Deerfield Township) collect water from the Mahoning River water-shed to serve people and industry in the Warren and Youngstown area.

These facts leave most of Portage County residents dependent on ground water for drinking water — either county or municipal wells or their own water wells. Our county has wells in Shalersville, Brimfield, and Sutherland townships. The city of Kent and the villages of Hiram, Mantua, and Windham have their own wells.

Threats occur to both water quality and quantity. Water moving across the landscape or infiltrating the ground picks up sediment, nutri-



Water in western Portage County flows into the Cuyahoga River and Lake Erie, while water in eastern Portage County flows into the Mahoning River and the Ohio River.

ents, and other potential pollutants used on the land and transports them to lakes or rivers, or to ground water. A 100-year old storm has a 1 percent chance of occurring in any given year. The resulting flood can be very destructive and can pose a threat to property and human life.

What can we do to help? First: Use conservation easements to protect environmentally sensitive areas, such as wetlands, headwaters, slopes, and flood plains. Second: Employ resource conservation — Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle!

Residents can reduce their use of water. They can also invest in water- and energy-saving appliances at home, which will save consumers money in the long run. Coal-fired power plants use so much cooling water that saving electricity is an important way to cut water use.

Plant a tree. Shade keeps people and water cool-er and supports higher quality fish. Landscaping with native plants helps keep the raindrop where it falls. Reduce use of fertilizer and pesticides on lawns and gardens. Proper care of septic systems is critical because failing septic systems are a big problem in Portage County.

Developers can use quality site design and green space preservation to increase the attractiveness of residential and commercial development. They can minimize impervious surfaces such as roads and parking lots. Special areas can be set aside as parks or natural areas. Such projects protect the rural atmosphere, drainage patterns, agricultural uses, and historical structures. The use of conservation easements can reduce flooding and ground water contamination while improving property values and quality of life.

Some important protected wetlands and headwaters in Portage County include the Kent Bog State Nature Preserve, Towners Woods, Chagrin Headwaters Preserve in Mantua, and Eagle Creek State Nature Preserve in Nelson Township.

Clean water benefits all of us, our children, and our grandchildren.

Edith Chase has followed Cuyahoga River and Lake Erie issues since moving to Franklin Township 50 years ago. Green Portage is a monthly feature of the Record-Courier in cooperation with the Portage Park District.