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**COMMISSIONER AGENCY RECEIVES CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP AWARD**

Extensive efforts undertaken by Franklin County to protect the local environment were recently praised by Franklin Soil and Water during its 62<sup>nd</sup> Annual Banquet ceremony held on October 23, 2008. In recognition of the County's commitment to the development and implementation of riparian setbacks in the Big Darby Creek watershed, Franklin Soil and Water presented a *Conservation Stewardship Award* to the Franklin County Economic Development and Planning Department.

In particular, Franklin County Commissioners were commended for amending existing zoning regulations in order to establish buffer zones around waterways in the Big Darby Creek watershed. Commissioners unanimously approved this resolution (#382-08) in April, and noted that these stream setbacks were further evidence of the County's dedication to promoting the mutually compatible goals of environmental protection and economic growth. Commissioners outlined their commitment to sustainable principles in a separate resolution (#683-06) two years ago, and believe that protecting the Big Darby Creek watershed will help to preserve the environmental legacy left behind for future residents.

"The Big Darby Creek watershed is one of Franklin County's most unique natural assets, and it is essential that we work with our regional partners to preserve this environmental treasure," said Commission President Marilyn Brown. "I am honored that the County has received this award from Franklin Soil and Water, and I am proud of the progress we have made through collaboration and partnership."

As the home to dozens of aquatic species, including several state and federally listed species, the Big Darby Creek is one of the most diverse natural features in central Ohio. The Creek represents an important physical element within Franklin County, and supporting setbacks is a tool that the County can use to protect riparian area functions such as flood control, erosion control, and water quality protection. These impacts benefit both human and natural communities, and are expected to result in economic and environmental improvements throughout the watershed.

"The buffer zones are important to protect the biological diversity and health of the Big Darby Creek," said Commissioner Mary Jo Kilroy. "We need continued vigilance to protect this valuable community resource."

“Ohio Soil and Water Districts partner throughout Ohio with local government, particularly counties. As a democratically elected body, they are dedicated to environmental sustainability and a new “green” way of living---- both in spirit and deeds,” said Commissioner Paula Brooks. “That they have chosen to honor our outstanding Economic Development and Planning staff for protecting our water and soil speaks volumes to our staff’s dedication, too, to this better, safer environment for ALL Franklin County families.”

“This was an important step forward in protecting the Big Darby and will maintain and improve the biological diversity and aquatic life use designations, achieve sediment, pollutant, and nutrient removal, and maintain stream functionality,” according to Emily Weber, Assistant Director of Franklin Soil and Water. “The stream setbacks implemented are unique in that they take into account the watershed size draining to the stream, floodplain, and other natural resource features such as soils and slope.”

The stream setback regulations follow guidelines established by the Big Darby Accord, and were developed by the Franklin County Economic Development and Planning Department in coordination with Franklin Soil and Water. Supporting riparian setbacks represents an important element of the County’s ongoing efforts to implement the principles of the Darby Accord.