

# Stream Quality Monitoring 2015 Annual Report Conneaut Creek State Wild & Scenic River

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## **Introduction**

### **Ohio Scenic Rivers Program**

With more than 60,000 miles of streams, Ohio is a water-rich state. Many of Ohio's streams support thriving plant and animal communities, including Ohio's state designated scenic rivers. Administered by the Ohio Division of Watercraft, the Ohio Scenic Rivers Program oversees 14 state designated scenic river systems, comprising 800 river miles along 26 stream segments. These streams represent some of the best of Ohio's waterways.

### **Stream Quality Monitoring Project**

Developed in 1983, the Stream Quality Monitoring (SQM) Project uses volunteers who assist in aquatic macroinvertebrate monitoring to compile biological and water quality data on the state's scenic rivers. The SQM project is an excellent, simple and cost-effective method of assessing a stream's health.

Aquatic macroinvertebrate organisms lack a backbone (invertebrate), are large enough to view with the naked eye (macro), and spend at least a portion of their lives in the water (aquatic). Macroinvertebrates, such as various aquatic insects (e.g. mayfly, stonefly), are good indicators stream health. When negative impacts to a stream occur, the result may show a decline or absence of certain macroinvertebrate species.

Through consistent monitoring in the SQM Project, changes observed in the macroinvertebrate community help the Ohio Scenic Rivers Program in detecting and addressing potential impacts to a stream. The Ohio Scenic Rivers Program compiles volunteer field assessment information into a statewide database. The database serves as a tool to track short- and long-term changes and trends over time.

### **SQM Project Relies on Volunteers**

Coordinated by the Division of Watercraft's Scenic Rivers Program, the SQM Project provides opportunities for public participation in scenic river protection efforts. Many local, youth and conservation organizations, individuals, and families are committed to monitoring more than 150 stations along Ohio's scenic rivers.

SQM volunteers collect macroinvertebrate data from selected monitoring stations, also referred to as monitoring sites or reference stations, three times during the monitoring season. Volunteers complete field assessment forms that document taxonomy, tolerance, and abundance of collected organisms.

### **SQM Annual Report**

The information collected by volunteers has become a critical tool for documenting the health of Ohio's state scenic, wild, and recreational rivers. This report is a compilation of field data collected during 2015 by volunteers and staff. It also represents a year of dedication and commitment shown to Ohio's special waterways by thousands of SQM volunteers.

## Conneaut Creek State Wild & Scenic River Overview

On October 6, 2005, Conneaut Creek was designated a State Wild and Scenic River by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources. The wild portion is more than 16 miles and flows from the Ohio-Pennsylvania state line at river mile 23.83 downstream to the Creek Road bridge crossing at river mile 7.39. From the Creek Road bridge crossing at river mile 7.39 downstream to the Penn Central railroad bridge crossing (known locally as “The Arches”) at river mile 2.0 lies the scenic portion. Conneaut Creek is one of only three waterways in the state to receive the wild designation. This top honor recognizes Conneaut Creek as one of the most naturally occurring streams remaining in Ohio.

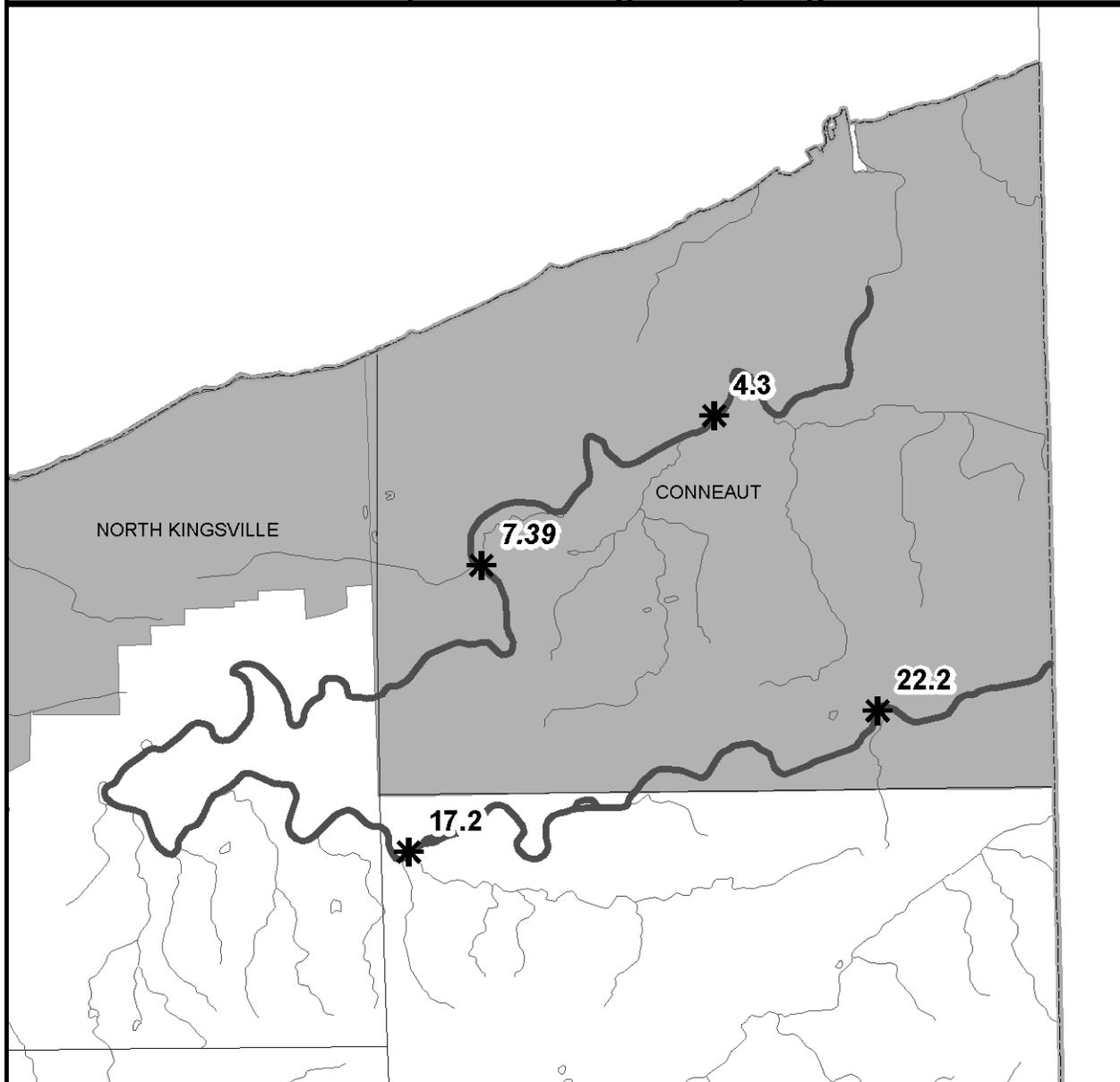
Conneaut Creek has an extensive forested corridor, which varies from 25 feet wide up to a mile wide. As a result, the creek is one of the most biologically diverse of all Lake Erie tributaries. Recent surveys resulted in the identification of 78 fish species, 32 species of amphibians and reptiles, and 90 bird species in or along Conneaut Creek. The surveys also revealed 33 threatened and endangered plant and animal species as well.

Although Conneaut Creek is presently in excellent condition, the potential for future adverse impacts to the watershed still exist from non-point source pollution, timbering, filling of wetlands and floodplains, and the development of oil and gas. Like most rivers in northeast Ohio, Conneaut Creek is experiencing increased development pressure. Although steep shale cliffs hinder residential and riverfront development in many areas, development in other areas is less restricted, often occurring within view of the river. A non-profit group, the Friends of Conneaut Creek, is currently working with the Ohio Scenic Rivers Program, local governments and conservation organizations to increase preservation efforts and access points along the creek.

For additional information about Conneaut Creek State Wild and Scenic River, including conservation options for landowners and ways to participate in the preservation of this important resource, contact the Northeast Ohio Regional Scenic River Manager at 330-298-9195. For online information, visit [watercraft.ohiodnr.gov](http://watercraft.ohiodnr.gov).

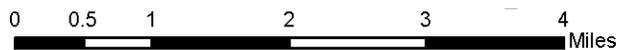


# Conneaut Creek Stream Quality Monitoring Sampling Stations



### Legend

- \*** SQM Station
- Bold=** Reference Station
- Italic=* Non-reference Station
- Scenic River Designation
- Streams
- County Boundary
- Township Boundary
- City Boundary



## 2015 Stream Quality Monitoring Participants

Whether their contribution was a one-time event or a recurring adventure in stream exploration, the individuals listed below played a significant role in protecting Conneaut Creek State Wild and Scenic River. Their time and dedication to this river and the Stream Quality Monitoring Project is greatly appreciated.

### **River Mile 4.3 - Center Road Bridge**

Watercraft SQM Volunteer Training Workshop  
Conneaut High School Zoology Class – Mrs. Woods  
Kevin & Trudy Mueller  
Kristy and Mark Belaney

### **River Mile 5.3 – Parrish Road Bridge**

Kevin & Trudy Mueller

### **River Mile 7.39 - Creek Road Covered Road Bridge**

Sandy Alan & Dale Harrison & Brad Hunter

### **River Mile 10.3 – The Nierzejewski Property (*Private, non-reference station*)**

### **River Mile 17.2 - State Road Covered Bridge**

Pat and Doug Taylor  
Bill and Ann Marie Kickel

### **River Mile 22.2 – Middle Road Covered Bridge (*non-reference station*)**

Mike Kennedy

The continued success of the Stream Quality Monitoring Project depends on the commitment and dedication of these (and other) volunteers and participants. We would like to recognize volunteers *Kevin and Trudy Mueller; Sandy and Alan Harrison; and Bill and Ann Marie Kickel* for monitoring three times or more during the season. If you would like to participate as a volunteer in Ohio's Stream Quality Monitoring Project, please contact the Northeast Stream Quality Monitoring Coordinator at 330-298-9195 or for more information online, visit [watercraft.ohiodnr.gov/SQM](http://watercraft.ohiodnr.gov/SQM).

## Stream Quality Monitoring Station Descriptions

Stream quality monitoring (SQM) stations along the Conneaut Creek have been selected based upon their ease of access, macroinvertebrate habitat and adequate sampling areas. Wherever possible, sampling stations are located on public property or where public access to the riffle areas is convenient and safe. Following are brief summaries of the stream quality monitoring stations located on Conneaut Creek.

### **River Mile 4.3 - Center Road Bridge**

The sampling area at this station is located immediately upstream from the bridge. Access to the river is relatively easy with ample parking directly across from the CLYO Field. This is also a popular fishing location used year round depending on weather conditions.

The streambed is composed largely of cobblestones and gravel with occasional boulders. The habitat is quite good and contributes to the wide variety of organisms usually collected here.

### **River Mile 5.30 – Parrish Road Bridge**

This station was added in 2009 and is located immediately downstream of the old overhead steel truss bridge that has been closed for many years. To arrive at this site one must travel down Parrish Road from the south side of Conneaut Creek. Parking is adequate with easy access to the sampling area.

The riffle area is composed of a mixture of sand, gravel, and cobblestones, which makes for excellent macroinvertebrate habitat. A small number of boulders can be seen at the site.

### **River Mile 7.39 - Creek Road Covered Bridge**

Access to this sampling station is down a relatively steep path leading to the river. The site is a popular fishing area and is heavily used by the public despite the challenging terrain. The composition of the streambed at this location consists predominately of gravel and cobblestones with a small percentage of sand. Habitat in the area is very good as reflected by the large number of pollution-intolerant organisms collected at this site.

### **River Mile 10.3 – The Nierzejewski Property (*Private, non-reference station*)**

This station is located on private property and is sampled solely by the landowners. The substrate quality is very good with a high percentage of sand, gravel, and cobblestones. No samples were taken during the 2013 season.

### **River Mile 17.2 - State Road Covered Bridge**

The riffle area at this site is located slightly downstream of the covered bridge adjacent to a small island located on the left side of the creek channel. Adequate parking and easy access to the creek make this area ideal for the aquatic sampler.

The streambed is composed of a relatively equal mixture of cobblestones and gravel where the sampler can find a diverse macroinvertebrate population.

### **River Mile 22.2 – Middle Road Covered Bridge (*non-reference station*)**

Prior to performing a sample at this location, permission must be obtained from the property owner at the southeast corner of the bridge. This site along the creek is also a popular spot for sport fishing. The predominant substrate in this riffle is extremely slippery shale bedrock that is not a desirable habitat for macroinvertebrates. If macroinvertebrates are found, they tend to be Group 1, pollution-intolerant organisms.

## Sampling Results and General Trends

During the 2015 SQM season, assessments were consistently taken despite heavy precipitation during the spring and summer seasons. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Northeast Ohio received 13 inches of precipitation between the months of May-June, setting the record for highest recorded precipitation for northeast Ohio. Rainfall amounts totaled 6 inches over average precipitation between the months of May-June alone. Despite poor sampling conditions to start, northeast Ohio received around average precipitation between late summer and fall seasons making it easy on volunteers and ODNR staff to complete assessments. Stream Quality Monitoring sample results for Conneaut Creek ranged from good to excellent. Overall, the 2015 sampling results from Conneaut Creek indicate a good diversity of insects, especially the pollution sensitive species (e.g. stonefly, damselfly, mayfly, etc.)

On Conneaut Creek volunteers and ODNR staff conducted a total of 13 assessments at 5 official monitoring sites in 2015. Conneaut Creek recorded an average CIV of 23.85, which falls within the excellent range for water quality. The CIV recorded in 2015 was consistent with the 2014 score of 24. An average of 10 macroinvertebrates orders was found per assessment on Conneaut Creek.

Data collected by SQM Project volunteers and ODNR staff is used as a water quality-screening method. The data helps to detect significant changes in stream quality based on CIV data from sites monitored for many years. If there is a significant decline in the average CIV, potential problems that may be causing stream degradation can be investigated and addressed.

The staff of the Ohio Scenic Rivers Program appreciates the assistance we received from our dedicated volunteer monitors. It is only through their efforts that it was possible to complete the SQM samples along Conneaut Creek during 2015. Working together has produced significant results but more help is needed. For more information please contact the Northeast Stream Quality Monitoring Coordinator at 330-298-9195 or find more information online at [watercraft.ohiodnr.gov/SQM](http://watercraft.ohiodnr.gov/SQM).

## Total Suspended Solids (TSS)

In 1999, the Scenic Rivers Program added Total Suspended Solids (TSS) monitoring to the Ohio SQM Project. The purpose of this addition is to estimate the amount of soil sediments impacting a stream by estimating the turbidity of the water. These sediments are attributed to problems originating upstream of the sampling site. The equipment is calibrated to predict TSS at 90% accuracy. The measurements are accurate enough to determine the changes in sediment rates in a stream at a given location and time.

Variables such as amount of precipitation, slope and gradient of the river system, soil type, time of year data is collected, amount of development, amount of riparian corridor, velocity of the river flow, and the amount of waste water effluent have an effect on the TSS value.

Precipitation amount is important because of the increased potential for sediments to be carried into the river during a rain event. The TSS value may appear higher than normal if precipitation amounts are not taken into account. Since large rain events usually happen in the spring and early summer, the time of year the samples are taken could affect the TSS score. The gradient of the stream is important as well. Sediments do not settle out as easily in high gradient streams because the velocity of the water washes it downstream. In low gradient streams, sediment has a chance to settle out, resulting in a lower TSS value. Soil types affect TSS values because some soil types erode faster than others. A better understanding of the types of soils within the watershed may give way to a better understanding of the baseline TSS values for a stream.

Development in an area can cause changes in the TSS score. Areas cleared for new buildings are often not covered, causing an acute rise in the amount of suspended solids in nearby streams. Impermeable surfaces can also cause chronic elevation of TSS values because there is no buffer to absorb or trap runoff. Wastewater treatment plant effluent would only affect TSS scores in low flow situations, and only if the plant employs only primary or secondary treatment.

The actual process of taking a sample is simple. Using a clear Lucite sediment stick developed by the Lake Soil and Water Conservation District, a water sample is collected from the stream. Keeping the sample materials suspended, water is then poured out of the tube until the 0.4-inch target dot is visible on the tube bottom. A reading of the water column height is taken from the markings on the stick to the nearest  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch. A conversion table is then used to convert the sediment stick reading to a TSS measurement in the form of an estimate of the weight of solids suspended in the water column (mg/l).

The TSS measurement can be used to estimate water quality with the following scale:

- TSS <10 mg/l = excellent water quality
- TSS 10-28 mg/l = normal water quality
- TSS 29-133 mg/l = impaired water quality
- TSS >133 mg/l = severely impacted water quality

**2015 TSS Results:** A total of 13 TSS readings were taken in Conneaut Creek. The median was <6.2 mg/L of TSS, which corresponds to the excellent range. The data set ranged from <6.2 mg/L to as high as 24 mg/L of total suspended solids.

## Comparisons of Collected Stream Quality Monitoring Data

Frequent monitoring of the same reference station is performed a minimum of three times per year consistently year after year. An assessment of the diversity and tolerance levels of taxonomy collected generates the Cumulative Index Value (CIV) for the site on a given date. Field assessment results are basic indicators of long-term changes in a stream's macroinvertebrate community and help the Scenic River's staff identify pronounced stream quality problems.

Table 1 identifies the 20 macroinvertebrates assessed and their general tolerance to pollutants. Pollution-intolerant organisms, such as those listed in Group I, require unpolluted, high quality water in order to survive. Pollution-tolerant organisms, such as those listed in Group III, are extremely tolerant of deteriorated water conditions.

**Table 1. Macroinvertebrate Pollution Tolerance**

<b>Group I Taxa Pollution Intolerant</b>	<b>Group II Taxa Moderately Tolerant</b>	<b>Group III Taxa Pollution Tolerant</b>
Water Penny Beetle Larvae (WP) Mayfly Nymphs (MF) Stonefly Nymphs (ST) Dobsonfly Larvae (DO) Caddisfly Larvae (CD) Riffle Beetle Adult (RI) Other Snails (OS)	Damselfly Nymphs (DA) Dragonfly Nymphs (DR) Crane Fly Larvae (CR) Beetle Larvae (BL) Crayfish (CF) Scuds (SC) Clams (CL) Aquatic Sowbugs (SW)	Black Fly Larvae (BF) Aquatic Worms (AW) Midge Larvae (MI) Pouch Snails (PS) Leeches (LE)

Table 2 represents the mean Cumulative Index Values (CIVs) for each Stream Quality Monitoring reference station sampled on the river during 2015. In addition, the table uses symbols (♦) to indicate those macroinvertebrates found to be present at least once during the year at the respective reference station. Each macroinvertebrate is identified by a 2-letter code given in Table 1. CIVs of 23 or greater indicate *Excellent* stream quality; CIVs of 17-22 indicate *Good* stream quality; CIVs ranging from 11-16 suggest *Fair* stream quality; and CIVs of 10 or less reflect *Poor* stream quality. Situated beside the CIV are the symbols + (improved), = (equal), or – (declined) indicating the relationship to the previous year's CIV.

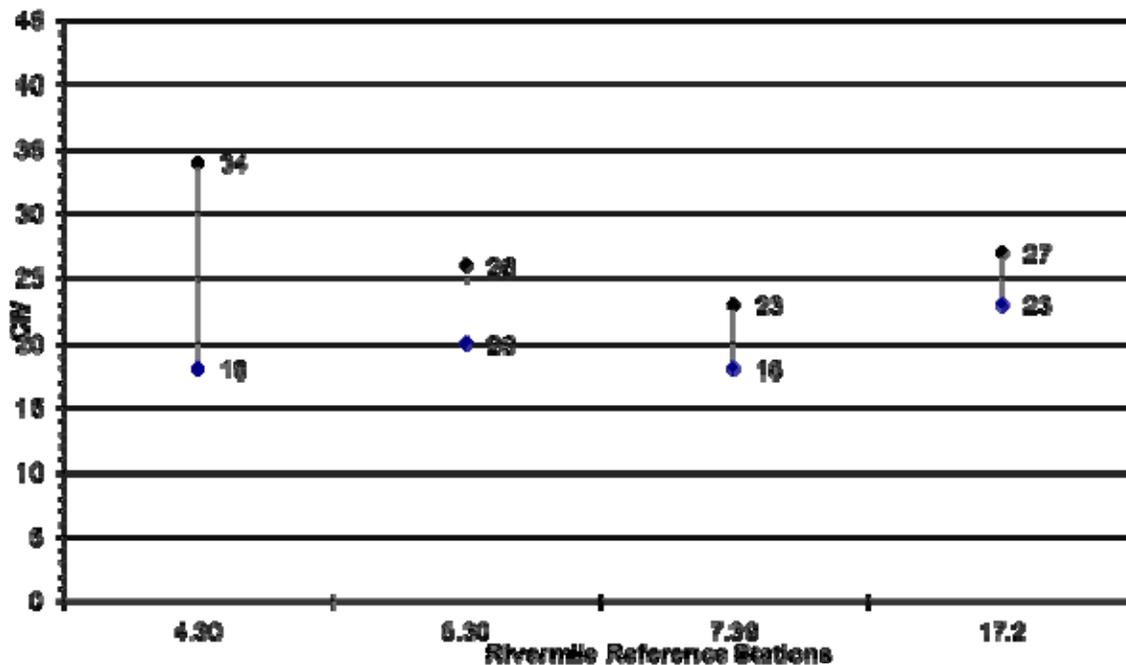
For the full range of CIVs attained at all sites monitored during the year including non-reference stations, please see the *Appendix*.

**Table 2. Conneaut Creek 2015 Mean CIVs by Reference Station**

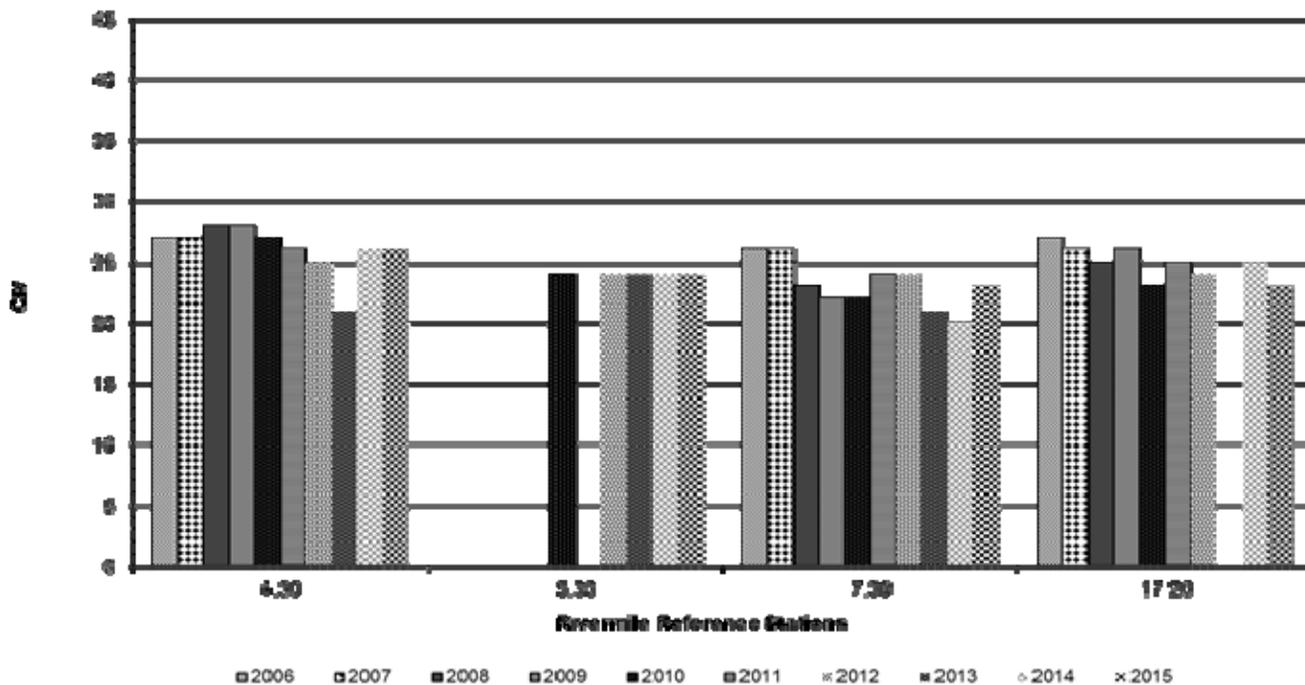
<b>RM</b>	<b>W P</b>	<b>M F</b>	<b>S T</b>	<b>D O</b>	<b>C D</b>	<b>R I</b>	<b>O S</b>	<b>D A</b>	<b>D R</b>	<b>C R</b>	<b>B L</b>	<b>C F</b>	<b>S C</b>	<b>C L</b>	<b>S W</b>	<b>B F</b>	<b>A W</b>	<b>M I</b>	<b>P S</b>	<b>L E</b>	<b>CIV</b>
4.3	♦	♦	♦	♦	♦	♦	♦	♦	♦		♦	♦		♦		♦	♦	♦			26+
5.3	♦	♦	♦	♦	♦	♦			♦	♦	♦	♦				♦		♦			24=
7.39	♦	♦	♦	♦	♦	♦		♦		♦	♦	♦		♦		♦	♦	♦			23+
17.2	♦	♦	♦	♦	♦	♦		♦		♦		♦	♦		♦		♦		♦		23-

Figure 1 represents the maximum and minimum range of CIVs recorded during the year for each reference station. Figure 2 represents mean CIVs at each reference station over many years.

**Figure 1. Conneaut Creek 2015 Maximum and Minimum CIV Ranges**



**Figure 2. Conneaut Creek 2015 Mean CIVs**



## Qualitative Habitat Evaluation Index (QHEI)

The Qualitative Habitat Evaluation Index (QHEI) is a system developed and employed by the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (OEPA) to measure physical habitat conditions in and around rivers and streams in Ohio. During 2011, SQM staff tested the QHEI to gather baseline measurements at reference stations on several of Ohio's scenic rivers. It is anticipated that such measurements will become yet another annual tool that will be used to monitor habitat and water quality conditions on all Ohio Scenic Rivers.

Habitat conditions are re-evaluated every five years. SQM staff and volunteers are scheduled to perform evaluations next in 2016. Until then, results from the 2011 QHEI are included below. When attempting to interpret this data, it is important to recognize that OEPA generally concludes that any site receiving a QHEI value greater than 60 meets current warm water habitat (WWH) standards. Meeting WWH standards suggests that such locations should be adequate for supporting reproducing communities of fish and macroinvertebrate life. Sites attaining QHEI scores of greater than 80 are generally believed to contain exceptional habitat conditions for warm water communities.

The following table has been prepared to assist with determining the relationship between habitat conditions, measured by the QHEI, and macroinvertebrate community performance, measured by the Cumulative Index Value, at each of the reference stations on selected rivers.

**Table 3. Conneaut Creek Wild & Scenic River 2011 QHEI & SQM Assessment Data**

<b>Reference Station</b>	<b>QHEI</b>	<b>2011 Average CIV</b>	<b>SQM Assessment</b>
RM 4.3	87	26	Excellent
RM 7.39	82	24	Excellent
RM 17.2	77	25	Excellent

## Appendix

### 2015 Data by Monitoring Station

CONNEAUT CREEK																						
RM	DATE	W P	M F	S T	D O	C D	R I	O S	D A	D R	C R	B L	C F	S C	C L	S W	B F	A W	M I	P S	L E	CIV
4.30	6/24/2015	B	B	B	A	B	C	A	A	A		A	A		A		A		A			33
4.30	7/25/2015	A	A	A		A	B			A			A					B	A			21
4.30	9/26/2015	A	A	A		A	B		A			A	A					A	A			23
5.30	6/24/2015	B	B	B	A	B	C					B	A				B		B			24
5.30	7/14/2015	A	A	B	A	A	C			A	A											22
5.30	9/24/2015	B	A	B	A	B	B			B	A		A						B			25
7.39	6/24/2015	B	B	B	A	B	B					A	B				A		B			24
7.39	7/5/2015	A	A	A	A		B		A		A		A						A			22
7.39	8/13/2015		A	B	A	A	B				A	B	A					B				22
7.39	11/4/2015	A	B	B	A	A	A		A			A			A			A				25
17.20	5/15/2015		A	B		A	A		A		A		A					A			A	20
17.20	7/26/2015	B	A	A		A	A		A		A			A				B	A		A	24
17.20	9/13/2015	B	A	A	A		B				A		B	A		A		B	A			25