

**First Hearing Report  
Warren #129 Watershed  
Drainage Petition per O.R.C. 6131  
November 3, 2025**

This report has been prepared for the preliminary hearing on a drainage improvement petition filed by Richard R. Lehner and Earl E. Lehner and others on April 16, 2025. The original petition has been signed by three individuals representing 10 of the 114 parcels in the watershed.

The course and termini of the requested improvements are quoted from the petition as follows:

*“In Delaware County, Troy Township, within the Warren #129 watershed and generally following, but not limited to, the course and termini of existing improvements.”*

The following is the nature of the work requested, as quoted from the petition:

*“To generally improve the drainage, both surface and subsurface, to a good and sufficient outlet, by replacing, repairing or altering the existing improvements as required and/or creating new surface and subsurface drainage mains or laterals, as requested by this petition.”*

The petition was amended by Scott Svonovec and Regina Svonovec on August 12, 2025 to include a request for improvements within the Hills #195 and Mooney #132 watershed, a lateral and subwatershed to the Warren #129 watershed. The Commissioners accepted this amendment on August 28, 2025.

**Petition Process**

This petition has been submitted according to Section 6131 of the Ohio Revised Code (O.R.C.), which authorizes the Board of Commissioners to act on behalf of benefited property owners to make drainage improvements. If the Board of Commissioners decides to proceed with a project, the costs related to the improvements and the development of plans, reports and schedules are assessed to the landowners in the watershed according to the benefit received to their watershed acreage. These special assessments will be added to the property taxes for each property and can be spread over a maximum of a 15-year period. Property owners may also choose to pay their assessment in a lump sum payment prior to placement on their property taxes. Additionally, the improvements will be placed on the Delaware County drainage maintenance program in perpetuity, per O.R.C. Section 6137, and the annual maintenance assessment will appear on property tax statements as a special assessment in the same manner as the construction assessments. These annual maintenance assessments are generally in the range of two to five percent of the construction assessment.

The decision to approve a petition project is a 3-step process. First, a viewing of the proposed improvement is conducted for the Commissioners to familiarize themselves with the watershed and general conditions. The Commissioners conducted the viewing for this project by drone video on August 11, 2025. Next, a preliminary hearing is held to consider the initial feasibility of the proposal. It is this preliminary First Hearing that is before us today. If this petition is approved, a final hearing will be conducted to further consider this petition. At that time, final details such as engineering plans and specifications, cost estimates, and a proposed schedule of assessments will be known.

### **Existing Conditions**

The Delaware Soil & Water Conservation District and Delaware County Engineer's Office have made the following observations of the watershed using onsite evaluation, and a review of available historic records, aerial photography, topographic mapping, soils mapping, and drone video:

- The Warren #129 watershed, as defined for this hearing, measures approximately 813 acres. The predominant land use within the watershed is agricultural with significant areas of rural residential, and smaller area of woods, commercial, and road rights-of-way.
- Improvements have been made in the watershed utilizing the drainage petition process in 1890, 1893, 1907, 1911, 1912, and 1919.
- The existing drainage system does not appear to be functioning at optimum capacity due to a lack of comprehensive maintenance and the generally deteriorated condition of the infrastructure. Several "blowouts" have been observed along the length of the subsurface drain pipe. This indicates potential structural deficiencies in the material and can be an indicator the subsurface drain system is not fully functional. These structural issues can also increase the frequency of surface flows, or flood routing, through the area as drainage water normally flowing through the subsurface drain pipe is forced to the surface. These conditions are indicators of an overburdened, unmaintained, and aged drainage infrastructure. While the existing drainage system still provides some degree of drainage benefit, it does not appear to meet the specifications of a good and sufficient outlet for either agricultural or rural residential drainage.

## Estimate of Cost, Factors Favorable/Unfavorable, Benefit vs Cost

O.R.C. 6131 requires the County Engineer to state, in a report, factors favorable and unfavorable to a proposed project, estimate the cost of the project, and state an opinion as to whether the benefits of the project exceed the cost. The following information is presented for your consideration:

### Construction Estimate

The proposed project would begin at the junction of the Warren #129 drainage system and the Delaware Run Drainage Maintenance Project (#0319) and extend upstream to Troy Road. The major items of work would include surface drain shaping and grading, subsurface drain pipe replacement, clearing of brush and vegetation, seeding and mulching of disturbed areas, and the installation of erosion control measures. For the purpose of clarity, the estimate has been divided into the Warren #129 Main and the Mooney #132/Hills #195 Amendment.

#### Project Estimate – Warren #129 Main

Construction	\$ 424,610.00
Project Administration, Survey, and Engineering	\$ 20,000.00
Drainage Maintenance (O.R.C. 6137) first year start up (5% of construction estimate)	\$ 21,230.00

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**PROJECT ESTIMATE – Warren #129 Main: \$ 465,840.00**

#### Project Estimate – Mooney #132/Hills #195 Amendment

Construction	\$ 361,680.00
Project Administration, Survey, and Engineering	\$ 20,000.00
Drainage Maintenance (O.R.C. 6137) first year start up (5% of construction estimate)	\$ 18,084.00

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**PROJECT ESTIMATE – Mooney #132/Hills #195 Amendment: \$ 399,764.00**

**TOTAL COMBINED PROJECT ESTIMATE: \$ 865,804.00**

#### **NOTES:**

- It is important to understand that the above estimates are preliminary and made in the absence of a current detailed topographic survey of the project area.
- The above estimate does not contain a contingency amount. The amount of necessary contingency would be evaluated as part of the survey and engineering design of the project, and added to the estimate presented at the Final Hearing. Contingency cost is

typically estimated at 10-20% of the final construction estimate. As an example, a 15% contingency would add approximately \$86,000 to the construction estimate.

- This estimate assumes complete reconstruction of the drainage system will be necessary. If during the course of survey and engineering, it is determined components of the current system do not require improvement, they may be considered for acceptance into the Drainage Maintenance Program in their present condition.
- Should the project fail to be approved at the final hearing the benefiting land owners, as defined by O.R.C. 6131, may still be responsible for the cost of project administration, survey, and engineering design.

### **Assessments**

If the project moves forward to the second hearing, the Ohio Revised Code instructs the County Engineer to calculate the assessments to individual property owners based on the benefits received from the improvements for the various properties in the watershed. O.R.C. 6131 states that *“Uplands that have been removed from their natural state by deforestation, cultivation, artificial drainage, urban development, or other human methods shall be considered to be benefited by an improvement that is required to dispose of the accelerated flow of water from the uplands.”* Benefits are further defined by the O.R.C. as “elimination or reduction of damage from flood; removal of water conditions that jeopardize public health, safety, or welfare; and increased value of land resulting from the improvement.”

It should be noted that property owners are only assessed for those improvements that are located downstream from their properties. No property is assessed for improvements located upstream. The public agencies that own rights-of-way for public roads and other public lands are also assessed for both construction and maintenance costs in the same manner as private property owners.

**Individual parcel assessments are not calculated for the preliminary hearing and are only calculated if the petition moves forward to a second, or final, hearing.**

### **Factors Favorable/Unfavorable**

#### **Factors favorable to the improvement:**

1. Improved surface and subsurface drainage in the watershed.
2. Improved outlet for subsurface drainage components of household sewage treatment systems and for residential drainage systems.
3. Reduction of future deterioration of surface and subsurface drainage infrastructure.
4. Annual inspections, maintenance, and protection of the improvement in perpetuity.

### **Factors unfavorable to the improvement:**

1. Temporary land use disruption during construction.
2. Cost of construction and maintenance may be a burden to some landowners.
3. Removal of existing trees and brush in improvement area.

### **Benefits versus Cost**

Assessments for property within the watershed are calculated based on the benefits derived from as well as the contribution to the drainage system. The benefits to agricultural lands are realized differently from what is commonly seen for residential properties, however, both types of land use are commonly recognized to have benefit from a good and sufficient drainage outlet.

A publication by The Ohio State University Extension titled "Returns to Farm Drainage" details several studies, conducted by Ohio State researchers, on the effects of drainage on crop yields. The studies show that fields with good drainage will produce higher yields than fields that have poor drainage. A recently completed 25-year study showed that subsurface drainage increased corn yields by 24%-39%, and increased soybean yields by 13%-46%. The same study also analyzed the return on investment for installing subsurface drainage in a field, and found that for corn, \$4 is returned for every \$1 invested, and for soybeans, \$3 is returned for every \$1 invested.

There are approximately 500 acres in the watershed currently being used for agricultural production. The average estimated yield increases for the soil types present in the watershed, given the appropriate drainage improvements are in place, are approximately 46 bushels per acre for corn and 14 bushels per acre for soybeans. Using current two-year average crop prices from the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service of \$4.32 per bushel for corn and \$11.40 per bushel for soybeans, it can be estimated that drainage improvements can potentially produce an average annual benefit of \$89,500. This estimate assumes an even distribution of corn and soybeans in the watershed. To state it generally, the benefits of drainage will equal the increased yield multiplied by the market price.

The increased value or benefit for residential and commercial properties is much more subjective and difficult to quantify. The lack of an adequate drainage outlet can dramatically affect the seasonal usability of a property and deteriorate the condition of household sewage treatment systems potentially limiting the value of homes for resale. Should existing systems fail, the cost to perform repairs, or construct alternate sewage treatment systems, can range from the thousands to tens of thousands of dollars. It would also be reasonable to consider the cost of environmental degradation due to residential sewage treatment systems that may not be functioning properly. Other benefits that are commonly perceived as a result of drainage improvements focus on quality of life and positive neighborhood perception. Communities that have planned and maintained storm water drainage infrastructures generally have higher resale values than those communities that are known to have a history of drainage problems or flooding.

## Conclusions

Based on all of the information gathered and generated for this project, I believe this project is technically feasible and would adequately serve the project area's drainage needs. The testimony brought to the Board by the landowners, however, as to whether the benefits of this project exceed the costs, should be given significant consideration in the decision to move forward with this project.

Should the current petition be approved to proceed to a final hearing, the petition bond will be returned and detailed plans, specifications, estimated costs, and a schedule of assessments would be prepared. Additionally, a benefit versus cost analysis will also be performed to further determine the feasibility of advancing this proposed project.

Prepared by,

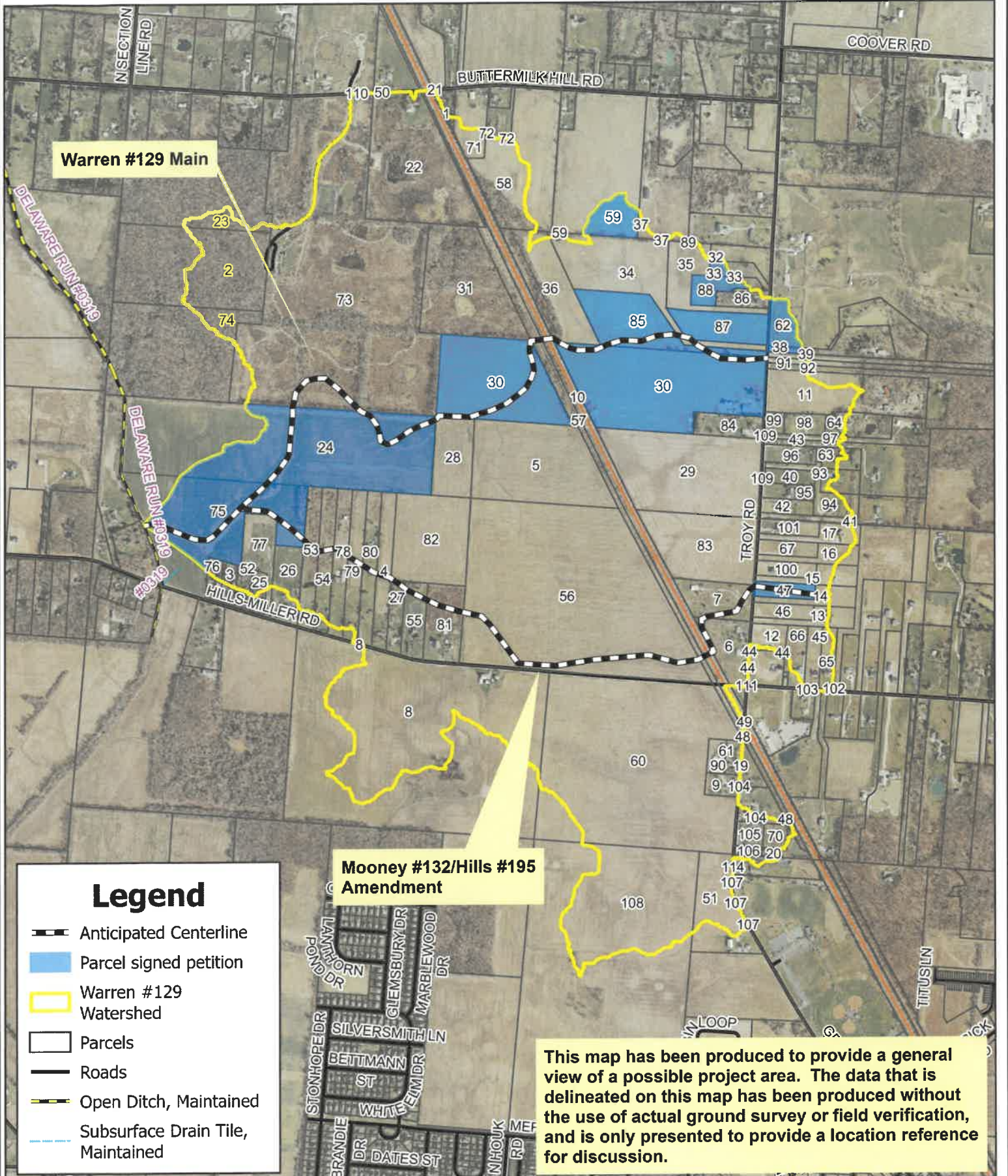


Bret Bacon  
Deputy Administrator  
Delaware Soil and Water Conservation District

Approved by,



Chris Bauserman P.E., P.S.  
Delaware County Engineer



Warren #129 Main

Mooney #132/Hills #195 Amendment

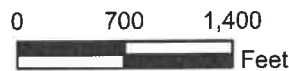
This map has been produced to provide a general view of a possible project area. The data that is delineated on this map has been produced without the use of actual ground survey or field verification, and is only presented to provide a location reference for discussion.

### Legend

- Anticipated Centerline
- Parcel signed petition
- Warren #129 Watershed
- Parcels
- Roads
- Open Ditch, Maintained
- Subsurface Drain Tile, Maintained



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Note: The Delaware SWCD makes no guarantee or warranty as to the accuracy of the information on this map.

