

## Treasuring The Chagrin River and Its Watershed

Residents of Gates Mills are fortunate to have the Chagrin River, which was designated a State Scenic River in 1979, and its tributaries meandering through our village. One seventh of its 50-mile length passes through our community.

Formed by glacial activity thousands of years ago, it was called the Elk River in the early 1800's as the first settlers arrived in the valley. Later, it was renamed the Shaguin in honor of a French trader. A subsequent modification led to its current name of Chagrin.

The mouth of the Chagrin River terminates in the town of Eastlake where it enters Lake Erie. Along the way, it is fed by a 267-square-mile watershed. The term "watershed" describes an area of land that drains down to the lowest point. Rain, spring water, and snowmelt move toward lower areas through a network of both underground and surface pathways. The Gates Mills portion of this watershed is a 175-square-mile network of tributaries, many unnamed, which collect and transfer this runoff to the river as it travels through our village. From headwaters to outflow, the river crosses portions of Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake and Portage counties. In total size the river and its watershed are just a bit larger than Lake County, Ohio's smallest county.

The river valley is a defining feature of our community. It provides a variety of topography, scenic vistas, fishing and boating opportunities, thus enhancing neighboring property values. Many people who live in or visit the area do so because of our water feature.

Because it passes through so many communities, it is understandable that both the Chagrin River and Lake Erie are extremely vulnerable to manmade and natural disasters. One of the best ways to protect the Chagrin River Watershed is to maintain open space, including riparian setbacks, along the banks of the river and its tributaries. Over the years, many property owners have chosen to preserve their land by making provision for either no or limited development. Among the most common practices are land donation and conservation easements. In its role as steward for the protection of our local open spaces, the Gates Mills Land Conservancy is available to discuss and assist any landowners who are interested in preserving their property.