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Environmental bond issue gains favor with Ohioans

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COLUMBUS - Ohio voters heeded the call of Governor Taft and former U.S. Sen. John Glenn to let the state borrow \$400 million to clean polluted sites and preserve green spaces.

With 98 per cent of the precincts reporting, voters approved Issue 1 by a 57-43 per cent margin - 1,941,814 to 1,479,658.

"We will be able to do more with the streams flowing into Lake Erie near Toledo and northwest Ohio," Mr. Taft said. "It will be good for hunters, good for fishers, and for bikers and hikers because we'll be able to do more with trails."

Opponents said the outcome didn't surprise them. "They had money for TV ads and we didn't; that's the reality of ballot issues in Ohio," said Sandy Buchanan, executive director of Ohio Citizen Action, a statewide consumer and environmental group.

"The governor will have his slush fund to work with, but Ohio still does not have a functioning Environmental Protection Agency," she added.

Backers of Issue 1 - dubbed "brownfields and greenfields" - waged a \$600,000 campaign of TV ads over the past two weeks featuring Mr. Taft and Mr. Glenn wearing earth-tone clothes and strolling by a pond.

The bipartisan duo said half of the \$400 million will be used to clean up polluted urban sites so the land can be redeveloped to spur job growth.

The other \$200 million will be used to provide grants to farmers to preserve farmland, river corridors, forests, and wetlands; to set up cycling and hiking trails, and to improve streams, river basins, and other water sources.

The next step will be for the General Assembly next year to debate and enact legislation outlining the details of how the money will be spent. Backers of Issue 1 included Toledo Mayor Carty Finkbeiner, Lima Mayor David Berger, and the Toledo-Lucas County Port Authority.

"We really look forward to rolling up our sleeves and working with Governor Taft and the new legislature to implement this," said Jack Shaner, a lobbyist with the Ohio Environmental Council, which supported Issue 1.





Even though Issue 1 passed with ease, environmentalists noted that it was defeated in several rural counties. In Van Wert County, for example, the ballot issue was rejected 55-45 per cent.

Mr. Shaner said the key will be to make the bond funds "work all across Ohio, not only in our major metropolitan areas, but also out in the rural and smaller towns across Ohio."

State officials say the borrowing will not require a tax increase, with bond funds repaid by a mixture of general fund dollars and state liquor profits. The state will have to pay about \$212 million in interest over several years, according to the nonpartisan Legislative Budget Office.

Although major environmental groups, including Ohio Citizen Action and the Ohio chapter of the Sierra Club, urged Ohioans to reject Issue 1, the groups did not raise funds for TV or radio commercials.

"It is clear we all have an interest in urban revitalization," said Mr. Jones. "The more we revitalize urban areas, the less pressure there is on rural areas."

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