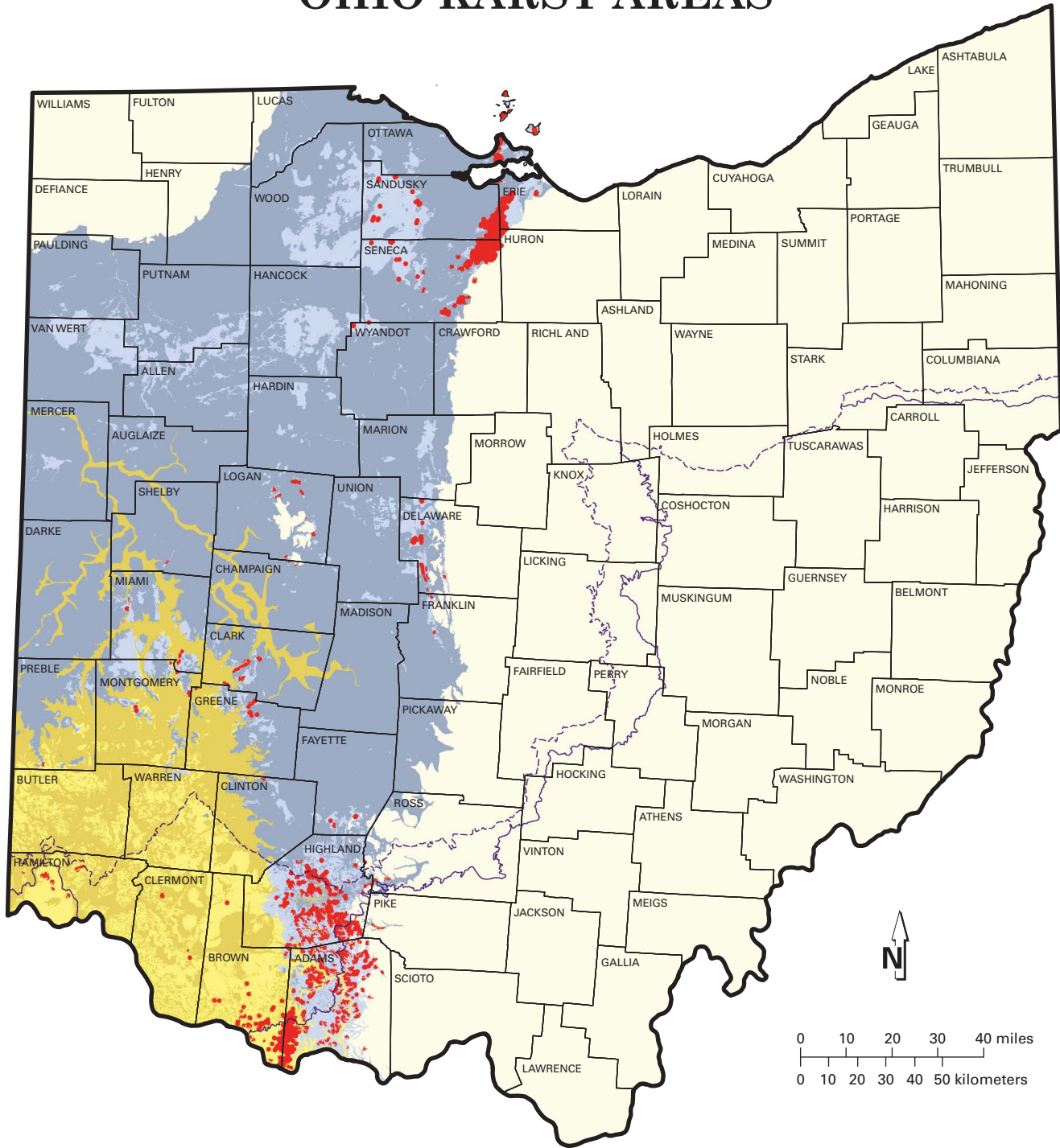










# OHIO KARST AREAS



## EXPLANATION

- |   |   |   |  |
|---|---|---|--|
|  | Silurian- and Devonian-age carbonate bedrock overlain by less than 20 feet of glacial drift and/or alluvium   |  | Probable karst areas                     |
|  | Silurian- and Devonian-age carbonate bedrock overlain by more than 20 feet of glacial drift and/or alluvium   |  | Area not known to contain karst features |
|  | Interbedded Ordovician-age limestone and shale overlain by less than 20 feet of glacial drift and/or alluvium |  | Wisconsinan Glacial Margin               |
|  | Interbedded Ordovician-age limestone and shale overlain by more than 20 feet of glacial drift and/or alluvium |  | Illinoian Glacial Margin                 |



# OHIO KARST AREAS

Karst is a landform that develops on or in limestone, dolomite, or gypsum by dissolution and that is characterized by the presence of characteristic features such as sinkholes, underground (or internal) drainage through solution-enlarged fractures (joints), and caves. While karst landforms and features are commonly striking in appearance and host to some of Ohio's rarest fauna, they also can be a significant geologic hazard. Sudden collapse of an underground cavern or opening of a sinkhole can cause surface subsidence that can severely damage or destroy any overlying structure such as a building, bridge, or highway. Improperly backfilled sinkholes are prone to both gradual and sudden subsidence, and similarly threaten overlying structures. Sewage, animal wastes, and agricultural, industrial, and ice-control chemicals entering sinkholes as surface drainage are conducted directly and quickly into the ground-water system, thereby posing a severe threat to potable water supplies. Because of such risks, many of the nation's state geological surveys, and the U.S. Geological Survey, are actively mapping and characterizing the nation's karst regions.

The five most significant Ohio karst regions are described below.

## BELLEVUE-CASTALIA KARST PLAIN

The Bellevue-Castalia Karst Plain occupies portions of northeastern Seneca County, northwestern Huron County, southeastern Sandusky County, and western Erie County. Adjacent karst terrain in portions of Ottawa County, including the Marblehead Peninsula, Catawba Island, and the Bass Islands, is related in geologic origin to the Bellevue-Castalia Karst Plain. The area is underlain by up to 175 feet of Devonian carbonates (Delaware Limestone, Columbus Limestone, Lucas Dolomite, and Amherstburg Dolomite) overlying Silurian dolomite, anhydrite, and gypsum of the Bass Islands Dolomite and Salina Group.

The Bellevue-Castalia Karst Plain is believed to contain more sinkholes than any of Ohio's other karst regions. Huge, irregularly shaped, closed depressions up to 270 acres in size and commonly enclosing smaller, circular-closed depressions 5 to 80 feet in diameter pockmark the land between the village of Flat Rock in northeastern Seneca County and Castalia in western Erie County. Surface drainage on the plain is very limited, and many of the streams which are present disappear into sinkholes called swallow holes.

Karst in the Bellevue-Castalia and Lake Erie islands region is due to collapse of overlying carbonate rocks into voids created by the dissolution and removal of underlying gypsum beds. According to Verber and Stansbery (1953, *Ohio Journal of Science*), ground water is introduced into Salina Group anhydrite ( $\text{CaSO}_4$ ) through pores and fractures in the overlying carbonates. The anhydrite chemically reacts with the water to form gypsum ( $\text{CaSO}_4 \cdot 2\text{H}_2\text{O}$ ), undergoing a 33 to 62 percent increase in volume in the process. This swelling lifts overlying strata, thereby opening fractures and creating massive passageways for conduction of greater volumes of ground water through the Silurian Bass Islands Dolomite and into underlying Salina Group strata. Gypsum, being readily soluble in water, is dissolved, creating huge voids. Overlying carbonates then collapse or break down, leaving surface depressions similar to those resulting from roof failure of an underground mine.

## DISSECTED NIAGARA ESCARPMENT

The dissected Niagara Escarpment of southwestern Ohio includes the largest single area of karst terrain in the state and the greatest number of surveyed caves. It also is estimated to include the second-largest number of sinkholes in the state. The area is underlain by Silurian rocks of the Peebles Dolomite, Lilley Formation, Bisher Formation, Estill Shale, and Noland Formation in Adams, Highland, and Clinton Counties and the Cedarville Dolomite, Springfield Dolomite, Euphemia Dolomite, Massie Shale, Laurel Dolomite, Osgood Shale, and Dayton Formation in Greene, Clark, Miami, Montgomery, and Preble Counties. The Peebles-Lilley-Bisher sequence and the Cedarville-Springfield-Euphemia sequence constitute the Lockport Group.

Most karst features along the Niagara Escarpment in southwestern Ohio are developed in Lockport Group strata. More than 100 sinkholes and caves developed in the Lockport have been documented in the field, and more than 1,000 probable sinkholes in the Lockport have been identified on aerial photographs, soils maps, and topographic maps. As with most karst terrain, sinkholes developed on the Niagara Escarpment commonly show linear orientations aligned with prevailing joint trends in the area. The greatest concentration of sinkholes on the escarpment is south of the Wiscon-

sinan glacial border in southern Highland and Adams Counties, where highly dissected ridges capped by Silurian carbonate rocks rise 150 to 200 feet above surrounding drainage. Illinoian till in these areas is thin to absent, and soils are completely leached with respect to calcium and calcium-magnesium carbonate. Such geologic settings are ideal for active karst processes, as downward-percolating, naturally acidic rain water is not buffered until it has dissolved some of the underlying carbonate bedrock. Other significant karst features of the Niagara Escarpment include small caves in escarpment re-entrants created by the valleys of the Great Miami and Stillwater Rivers in Miami County.

## BELLEFONTAINE OUTLIER

The Bellefontaine Outlier in Logan and northern Champaign Counties is an erosionally resistant "island" of Devonian carbonates capped by Ohio Shale and surrounded by a "sea" of Silurian strata. Though completely glaciated, the outlier was such an impediment to Ice Age glaciers that it repeatedly separated advancing ice sheets into two glacial lobes—the Miami Lobe on the west and the Scioto Lobe on the east. Most Ohioans recognize the outlier as the location of Campbell Hill—the highest point in the state at an elevation of 1,549 feet above mean sea level.

Although it is not known for having an especially well-developed karst terrain, the outlier is the location of Ohio's largest known cave, Ohio Caverns. The greatest sinkhole concentrations are present in McArthur and Rushcreek Townships of Logan County, where the density of sinkholes in some areas approaches 30 per square mile. Sinkholes here typically occur in upland areas of Devonian Lucas Dolomite or Columbus Limestone that are 30 to 50 feet or more above surrounding drainage and are covered by less than 20 feet of glacial drift and/or Ohio Shale.

## SCIOTO AND OLENTANGY RIVER GORGES

The uplands adjacent to the gorges of the Scioto and Olentangy Rivers in northern Franklin and southern Delaware Counties include areas of well-developed, active karst terrain. These uplands also are among the most rapidly developing areas of the state, which means karst should be a consideration in site assessments for commercial and residential construction projects.

The Scioto River in this area has been incised to a depth of 50 to 100 feet into underlying bedrock, creating a shallow gorge. The floor, walls, and adjacent uplands of the gorge consist of Devonian Delaware and Columbus Limestones mantled by up to 20 feet of Wisconsin till. Sinkhole concentrations up to 1 sinkhole per acre are not uncommon in Concord, Scioto, and Radnor Townships of Delaware County. The sinkholes range in diameter from about 10 to 100 feet and commonly are aligned linearly along major joint systems.

The Olentangy River is approximately 5 miles east of the Scioto River in southern Delaware County and occupies a gorge that is narrower and up to 50 feet deeper than the Scioto River gorge. The floor and the lower half of the walls along the Olentangy gorge are composed of Delaware and Columbus Limestones, the upper half of the walls is composed of Devonian Ohio and Olentangy Shales mantled by a thin veneer of glacial drift. Karst terrain has developed along portions of the gorge in a manner similar to karst terrain along the Scioto River.

## ORDOVICIAN UPLANDS

The Ordovician uplands of southwestern Ohio are the location of surprisingly well-developed karst terrain despite the large component of shale in local bedrock. Numerous sinkholes are present in Ordovician rocks of Adams, Brown, Clermont, and Hamilton Counties.

The carbonate-rich members of the Grant Lake Formation (Bellevue and Mount Auburn), Grant Lake Limestone (Bellevue and Straight Creek), and the upper portion of the Arnheim formation are the Ordovician units most prone to karstification; however, the shale-rich (70 percent shale, 30 percent limestone) Waynesville Formation also has been subjected to a surprising amount of karst development in southeastern Brown and southwestern Adams Counties, just north of the Ohio River.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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