

Removal Recommendation for the Recreational Access Beneficial Use Impairment (BUI #10b) in the Cuyahoga River Area of Concern (AOC)



Background

Because of its location on the Cuyahoga River and proximity to Lake Erie, the City of Cleveland was destined to become an important industrial center and shipping hub. The construction of the Ohio & Pennsylvania Canal and the Ohio & Erie Canal, the industrial destiny of the areas was cemented. The Ohio & Pennsylvania Canal ran from New Castle, PA to Akron, Ohio where it met the Ohio & Erie Canal. These two canal systems linked Lake Erie south to the Ohio River and east to Pennsylvania. With the canals, coal from Pennsylvania and West Virginia could meet iron ore from Minnesota, by way of Lake Erie, and Cleveland met its destiny as an important steel production center.

But the legacies of its past boon also brought the environmental degradation that caused the river to be designated as one of the most degraded locations in the Great Lakes. The Cuyahoga River had been seen less as a natural resource and more as a slow moving dump that occasionally ignited. Over the years, the river had ignited thirteen times.

The Cuyahoga River from the Gorge Dam to the mouth at Lake Erie, associated tributaries and nearshore areas plus a few nearby Lake Erie tributaries were sufficiently degraded that these areas were designated as a Great Lakes Area of Concern under the 1987 Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement (GLWQA). The reach between Akron and Cleveland had become so degraded it was considered to be devoid of fish and often oil slicks were commonplace. At one time, the degradation of the river was sign of prosperity but the degraded aspect of that prosperity also caused citizens to turn their backs to the river but with industrial operations lining the riverbanks and lake shore, few areas remained for public access.

An Area of Concern is an area where severe environmental degradation is located. The AOC designation necessitated the formation of a local remedial action plan (RAP). The remedial action plan identifies which of up to fourteen beneficial use impairments exist and offers remedial measures for restoration. At the start of the Cuyahoga River Remedial Action Plan process, the AOC Advisory Committee determined, in the 1992 Stage 1 Report, that nine of the original fourteen beneficial use impairments (BUIs) existed in the AOC.

In 1992, it was understandable that few residents wanted to spend their valuable recreation time along the river and lakeshore in their degraded state. If the area could be restored, there remained limitations for public access. With foresight, the Advisory Committee determined that once the river system recovered, a lack of public access to the river system would preclude recreational opportunities.

“Without access to the river and nearshore area, the potential for recreational use of the water would go unrealized. Improved access goes hand-in-hand with water quality to relieve these beneficial uses of their ‘impaired status.’”

From Cuyahoga River AOC Stage One Report 1995 Update

The Committee, therefore, broadened the recreational use BUI to include a secondary component, general public access to the water resource.

The Recreational Access BUI



This impairment (Recreational Access) is not a GLWQA designated impairment and does not have formal qualitative or quantitative targets for its removal. In the 1992 Stage 1 Report, the AOC Advisory Committee discussed both active and passive recreational uses along with general public access facilities. An active recreational use would include bike/hike trails, fishing, boating and swimming. Passive recreational use would include dining (restaurants with outside dining or inside dining with views of the river or lake), cruise ship excursions, or wildlife watching and picnicking in parkland settings.

As this is a locally driven BUI, both the listing and removal of this BUI is based on the evaluation of amount of public access facilities by the Cuyahoga River AOC Advisory Committee. Although the Stage 1 Report and subsequent updates stated that “access is described in terms of miles of publicly-accessible river bank or shore line,” no definitive number of miles of public access was set by the AOC Advisory Committee as a removal target for the recreational use component.

Areas of the Cuyahoga AOC Designated Impaired for Recreational Access

The November 1995 Stage 1 Update Report identified two areas of the Cuyahoga River AOC as having limited public access and therefore having impairment to recreational access (Figure 1), primarily with active and passive recreational use access:

1. Navigation Channel - Impaired
2. Cleveland Harbor and Lakefront (Nearshore Area) – Impaired in places



Figure 1. Map of Areas Impaired for Recreational Access



Figure 2. Industrial Valley

It should be noted that the 1995 Update Report did not list the mainstem reach between the National Recreation Area and the Navigation Channel as impaired for recreational public access, but the report did note that a four-mile reach, known as the Industrial Valley (Figure 2), is dominated by heavy industrial land uses and “had no public access at all.”

Understandably, due to safety and security issues, few areas in the Industrial Valley reach can be utilized for water or land-based public recreation and will continue to have limited abilities to supply public access. Upstream of this stretch, however, the Ohio & Erie Canal Reservation provides 2.3 miles of river frontage, 350 acres of active and passive recreation, including more than 7 miles of bike/hike pathways with the associated Towpath Trail Bike/Hike.

Public Access Improvements

This local BUI was designated, by the AOC Advisory Committee in the 1992 Stage 1 Report and subsequent 1995 Update Report. Since 1995, improvements to Recreational Access were made by various organizations, typically municipalities and park districts, in a parallel effort to the restoration of the formal BUIs in the Cuyahoga River AOC. As no formal target was described in either the Stage 1 Report or Update, the Advisory Council determined the status of this BUI from the amount of Recreational Access improvements created since 1992. Now, a mosaic of both passive and active public access facilities in and around the Navigation Channel and along the Lake Erie shoreline have been created sufficient to allow the AOC Advisory Council to recommend the removal of this local BUI.

Navigation Channel Area

Public Access Park Facilities

Since 1992, nearly 40 acres of public access park facilities have opened that offered about ¾ of a mile of publically accessible riverfront and many with bike/hike trails along and around the Navigation Channel (Table 1 and Figure 3).

Site	Active Recreation			Passive Recreation	Amount of Access	
	Boating	Hike/Bike	Fishing	Cityscape & Wildlife Viewing	River Frontage (feet)	Facility Area (acres)
Hart Crane Memorial Park			X	X	206	0.5
Settler's Landing Park		X		X	1250	1.5
Wendy Park	X	X	X	X	690	25
Rivergate Park	X	X		X	866	2.8
Scranton Flats Park		X	X	X	730	9
Totals					3742	38.8



Figure 3. Post-1992 Recreational Access Parks in Navigation Channel Area

Bike/Hike Trails

An extensive series of bike and hike trail, called the Towpath Trail, now offers active recreational access in the Cuyahoga River valley (Figures 4 and 5), along the mainstem and the historic Ohio and Erie canal system. Using the Towpath Trail and extensions, the City of Cleveland is linked to the Cuyahoga Valley National Park and beyond. It is part of a nearly 100-mile existing and soon-to-be completed trail system.



Figure 4. Towpath Trail, Courtesy of Cuyahoga Valley National Park



Figure 5. Towpath Trail

Many Cleveland streets in and around the Cuyahoga River mainstem have been re-configured with bicycle lanes and according to the City Planning Commission's Bikeway Master Plan, more routes are being planned (Figure 6.). To help improve the cycling experience, the City of Cleveland and the Downtown Cleveland Alliance has a full service bicycle parking and commuter center a few blocks from the Cuyahoga River.

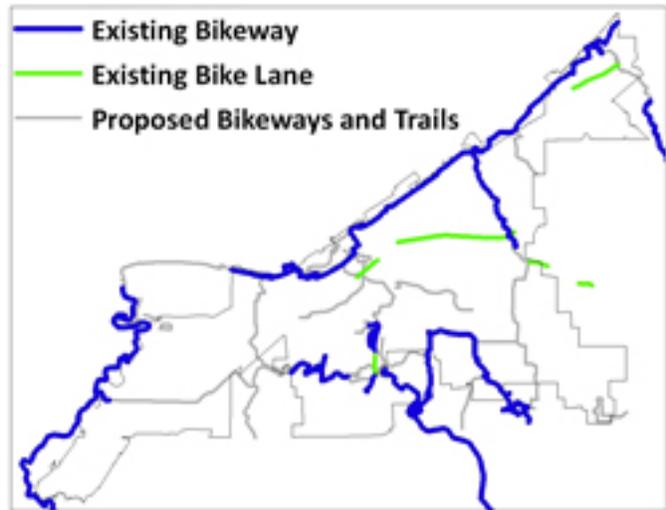


Figure 6. Bikeway Master Plan. Cleveland City Planning Commission

Entertainment Facilities

The AOC Advisory Committee has also recognized that public access for passive recreational use has improved and is likely to continue to increase. The Nautica Entertainment Complex is located across the river from Settlers Landing Park and is anchored by the Powerhouse building, an old riverfront power station facility redesigned to include the Greater Cleveland Aquarium, banquet facility and popular outdoor concert venue.



Figure 7. Greater Cleveland Aquarium

The Nautica complex offers a range of local restaurants and an extensive riverfront boardwalk. Aside from the Nautica complex, future riverfront plans include:

- The 20-acre Canal Basin Park that will provide an additional 580 feet of riverfront public access.
- The Flats East Bank development will include office tower, trendy hotel, state of the art fitness club, and a range of local restaurants, some with indoor-outdoor glass enclosed patios for riverside viewing.

Water Based Facilities

Several fishing charters and river/lake cruises have continued to allow people to get on the waters of Lake Erie and the lower Cuyahoga River. A few rental boat/kayak/personal watercraft ventures operate in the lower Cuyahoga River Navigation Channel area. The National Service has three access sites for paddlers within the Cuyahoga Valley National Park (Boston Store Visitor Center, Red Lock, and Station Road Bridge Trailhead).





Figure 8. ODNR Paddling Sport Access in the Cuyahoga Mainstem

Kayaking opportunities now exist for the 12-mile stretch of the mainstem, from the Cuyahoga Valley Recreation Area to Lake Erie at Wendy Park (Figure 8). For personal safety and security, personal watercraft use is generally restricted to the extreme lowest reach of the river plus an extensive area along the eastern shore-arm of the Lake Erie shoreline.

Aside from the Hart Crane Memorial Park, Wendy Park and Scranton Flats Park, the Cleveland

Metroparks currently has thirteen major fishing areas, many along the Cuyahoga River mainstem.

Lake Erie Nearshore Areas
Public Access Park Facilities

The Stage 1 Report designated the Lake Erie Nearshore area as “Impaired in places” but stopped short of noting where the impairments were located. Since 1992, there have been significant improvements in public access facilities along the Lake Erie nearshore. A total of more than 9000 feet of lakefront and 118 acres of facilities have been provided or improved. (Figure 9 and Table 2)



Figure 9. Post-1992 Lake Erie Nearshore Parks

Table 2. Lake Erie Nearshore Park Facilities (Opened or Improved After 1992)

Site	Active Recreation			Passive Recreation	Amount of Access	
	Boating	Hike/Bike	Fishing	Cityscape & Wildlife Viewing	Lakeshore Frontage (feet)	Facility Area (acres)
North Coast Harbor/East 9 th Pier, including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voinovich Bicentennial Park • Rock & Roll Hall of Fame • Great Lakes Science Center • First Energy Stadium 	X	X	X	X	3000	5
Lakefront Nature Preserve		X (Hiking Only)		X	4400	88
Wendy Park	X	X	X	X	1890	25
Totals					9290	118

Water-based Recreation

Numerous marinas and public boat ramps are now open to bring people to the Lake Erie nearshore areas, including Whiskey Island, East 55th Street and Wildwood Marinas, Lakeside, Forest City and Intercity Yacht Club and the Shoreby Club. In addition, in some areas, boats, kayaks and personal watercraft are available to rent. Some park facilities provide areas for nearshore fishing activities.



Figure 10. Cleveland Lakefront Bikeway. Cleveland City Planning Commission

Bike/Hike Trails

The Cleveland Lakefront Bikeway provides both off-road and on-street passage along the entire 17-mile length of Cleveland's Lake Erie shoreline within the Cuyahoga River AOC (Figure 10). In addition, the Lakefront Bikeway connects to the Towpath Trail. In 2014 Bicycling Magazine named Cleveland as one of the Top 50 Bike-Friendly Cities in the nation.

Conclusions

Although the AOC Advisory Committee didn't specify specific removal criteria for this BUI, the Committee recognized the addition or improvement of:

- More than 13,000 feet (almost 2.5 miles) of riverfront and lakefront access,
- Nearly 157 acres of recreational park facilities and
- More than 25 miles of bike/hike trails and a network of streets configured for bicycling

The Strategic Implementation Sub-Committee determined these improvements in public access facilities in the AOC were sufficient to recommend to the Cuyahoga River AOC Advisory Committee that the Recreational Access BUI should be removed in the Cuyahoga River AOC.

The AOC Advisory Committee unanimously voted to proceed with actions to remove the BUI in the January 21, 2016 meeting.

Recommendation

Based on improvements to public access facilities, the Cuyahoga River Remedial Action Plan Advisory Council and Ohio EPA request concurrence with this recommendation to remove the Recreational Access BUI the Cuyahoga River AOC. This recommendation is made with the support of staff from Ohio EPA and in accordance with the process and criteria set forth in the Delisting Targets for Ohio Areas of Concern (Ohio EPA, 2016).

References and Bibliography

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