Cuyahoga River AOC Advisory Committee
MINUTES
4.14.2025
Cuyahoga Land Bank – 812 Huron Rd E Cleveland, OH 44115

Quarterly Advisory Committee Meeting (9-10:30a)

Welcome

Attendees:
Voting Members: Sarah Barrow, Carly Beck, Peter Bode, Zach Cebula, Donna Friedman, Jennifer Grieser, Pat Gsellman, Scott Hardy, Jennifer Heard, Bill Hughes, Tom LaPlante, Whitnye Long Jones, Pamela Davis (alt. for Joe MacDonald), Erica Matheny, Elaine Price, Mackenzie Kaser (alt. for Bryce Pulley), Mike Sekerak, Megan Shaeffer, Megan Smith, Meghan Tinker Paynter, Heather Ullinger, Katie Wells, Christina Znidarsic

Ex-Officio/Resource: Hannah Boesinger, Beth Sparks-Jackson, John Brodt, Nichole Lopez (CSWCD – Staff), Kristin Hall (CSWCD – Staff)

Guests: John Timmons, Emily Bacha, Rebecca Wilkerson, Jennie Brancho, Vince Adamus, Doug Sawyer, Emily Collins

Approval of Minutes of January 13th, 2025 – *Motion to approve by B. Hughes, seconded by K. Wells. All in favor with no abstentions.*

Public Comment – None.

Presentation

- Cuyahoga County's Fresh Water Institute – E. Bacha, Program Director
    - The Fresh Water Institute is focused on fostering freshwater stewardship in the region through three pillars:
        - Education & Research – youth programming, community science, and regional water-based research.
        - Water Economy – strengthening the regional water economy through innovation and collaboration.
        - Advocacy & Access – uniting public, private, and nonprofit sectors in advancing shared freshwater goals.

Old Business

- Cuyahoga County's Fresh Water Institute, Founding Member Opportunity – B. Hughes

- Expectations include, but are not limited to, contributing funding, advancing shared advocacy agenda, helping support the region's water economy pipeline, hosting water-related high school and college internships, and having a presence at convenings of different organizations.
- No membership fee
- It was noted the limits of the Advisory Committee within the geographic boundaries of the AOC. In that regard, it was discussed that:
  - Federal advocacy includes the entirety of the Great Lakes region
  - Watershed areas are not defined by political boundaries
  - Enhances our support for water stewardship outside of the AOC

Motion for the Advisory Committee to become a founding member of the Cuyahoga County's Fresh Water Institute by B. Hughes, seconded by D. Friedman. All in favor with no abstentions.

- Newly Elected Members Short Introductions – All New Members
- Review of Advisory Committee Member Commitments and Requirements – J. Grieser
  - Submission Required: Conflict of Interest Form and Signed Alt. Appt. Letter
  - New Member Orientation: February 3rd, 2025

New Business

- Great Lakes Day Recap (March 6th, 2025) – B. Hughes, L. DeYoung
  - Lobbying opportunity hosted by the Healing Our Waters Great Lakes Coalition
  - The Coalition's policy agenda included:
    - Reauthorizing the GLRI Act of 2025 – main focus, discussions showed bipartisan support.
    - Investing in Water Infrastructure Programs (i.e. Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Fund) – resulted in mixed reactions since it is viewed as grants instead of permanent funding.
    - Passing a Clean Water Farm Bill – it was minimally discussed.
  - Over 80 advocates from across the region met with congressional staffers that overall, were receptive to the importance of protecting and restoring the Great Lakes.
- Ohio AOC Summit (April 1st, 2025) – J. Grieser
  - The summit is hosted by OLEC every ~18 months featuring updates from all Ohio AOCs, GLNPO, and state/federal partners.
  - Attendees (H. Boesinger, W. Long Jones, S. Hardy, K. Wells, B. Sparks-Jackson, C. Beck, K. Hall, N. Lopez, and J. Grieser) shared takeaways and highlights, including:
    - Recognition of strong public engagement in the Cuyahoga River AOC
    - Discussion on lacustrine challenges and innovative MAPs and non-MAPs
    - Update on Black River AOC nearing delisting
    - Acknowledgment of GLNPO's funding support, particularly for the Gorge Dam removal project
      - Suggestion made to create a 'thank you' video for GLNPO
- Letter of Support Request – Organic Connects Inc.'s Lake Erie Environmental Justice Grant Application
  - Grant Request = $75,000
  - Project Name: 'Hands-on, Place-based Great Lakes Environmental Educational Opportunities'
    - Includes high school (CMSD and beyond) and college students (Oberlin and CWRU)
    - To increase waterfront access, recreation on the Cuyahoga River, Lake Erie water quality testing and research, and Great Lakes education and history.

        - Highlights will be field trips to Stone Laboratory and Gorge Dam
        - Project Timeline: July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026
        - Will expand Organic Connects' programming to include AOC-specific education

Motion to approve the letter of support for Organic Connects Inc.'s LEEJ Grant Application for 'Hands-on, Place-based Great Lakes Environmental Educational Opportunities' *was made by K. Wells, seconded by C. Beck. All in favor and one abstention by W. Long Jones.*

USEPA Great Lakes National Program Office Update – L. Medley

- The Great Lakes Restorative Initiative (GLRI) was approved under a continuing resolution until September '25 at 2024 funding levels.

OLEC Update – H. Boesinger

- Great Lakes AOC Meeting (GL AOC): Sept. 16-18 in Toledo, OH (subject to federal guidance)
- Lake Erie Protection Fund Grant Funding is due May 5th, 2025
- Lake Erie Environmental Justice Grant is due April 30th, 2025
- The Navigational Dredging BUI is set to have an evaluation completed by the USACE this summer.
    - Potential impact from CROC sediment remediation project has been noted.
- AOC and non-AOC areas are facing challenges meeting LICI targets (Lacustrine Index of Community Integrity)
    - Cuyahoga River AOC only has two relevant locations (RM 5.9 + Euclid Creek)
    - Raises questions about current metrics to remove applicable BUIs
- Management Action Project (MAP) Updates:
    - The Wood Creek Fish Barrier Removal is underway with design to be completed in 2025
    - The Little Cuyahoga River projects were awarded funding in March by GLNPO with construction to begin Summer 2025
    - The Gorge Dam Removal (Sediment Remediation) project received notice to proceed. Contractors are to begin mobilizing at the end of May and sediment dredging is to begin in the Fall 2025, continuing through 2027. Summit Metro Parks is expected to schedule a press release soon and set up a public meeting in May. The remaining design details are to be coordinated by the City of Akron.
- Cuyahoga River AOC Delisting Timeline – delayed due to project setbacks until more information from multiple projects is available.

Facilitating Organization Update (Cuyahoga SWCD) – N. Lopez

- Financial Overview & Reporting
    - The facilitating grant of $157,500 has expended 13% of its funds, with 66% of the project timeline remaining.
    - More expenses planned to prepare for the upcoming outreach season.
- 2024 Annual Report – complete and to be distributed!
- REI Groundwater Training by ThirdSpace Action Lab
    - As part of the AOC-EJ-DEI Engagement & Participation deliverables, this 3-hour virtual training will be made available to all Advisory Committee members.
    - More details will be provided soon.

Subcommittee Updates

Governance – K. Wells

- Welcome Vice Chair: Dr. Erica Matheny
- The Advisory Committee Operation Procedures are set to be updated in the Summer 2025.
  - Updates will include, but are not limited to, clarifying the definition of a "vacancy," establishing the criteria for member election consideration, and providing guidance on the Advisory Committee's role in advocacy efforts.
- Annual Self-Reflection Survey preparation will commence soon.
- April 11th Meeting Recap – subcommittee members have volunteered for various efforts planned for the year, such as new member recruitment.

Public Engagement – S. Hardy

- 2025 Outreach Calendar
  - The focus for this year will be on engaging new audiences in different geographic areas.
  - The survey previously shared will dictate priority events based on ranked options.
  - The sign-up sheet will be made available on the SharePoint folder.
- Healing Our Waters GLRI Field Trips
  - Cuyahoga SWCD applied for a grant on behalf of the Advisory Committee to tour three different MAPs to highlight the crucial role of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) in facilitating these projects and accelerating the recovery of the Cuyahoga River.
  - The notice of the award will be shared at the end of April.
  - The tour is tentatively scheduled for the end of June and will engage local, state, and federal officials, as well as high school students.
- Indigenous Engagement – M. Shaeffer
  - Summit Metro Parks has tried to engage indigenous communities for almost a decade.
  - Presentations on local efforts have been shared with Summit SWCD, TCWP, EECO, Five Rivers, CLEB, and ODNR.
  - There is no history of such interactions by the Advisory Committee and M. Shaeffer is willing to lead a working group to initiate efforts.
- Participation & Sustainability of Events
  - Reminder to all active voting members of responsibility to assist with at least one outreach/education event each year.
- 2024 Champion of the River – the City of Cuyahoga Falls passed a Resolution of Support for the Cuyahoga River AOC.

Strategic Implementation – C. Beck

- AOC Story Map Update – NEORSD has tentatively completed the application and will transfer admin to N. Lopez (CSWCD) for final updates.

Announcements Pertinent to BUI Delisting Activities

Cuyahoga AOC Committee 2024 Quarterly Meeting Schedule – Jul. 14 (Kent), Oct. 20 (Cuy. Falls)

Adjourn