



**Cuyahoga River AOC Advisory Committee
MINUTES
7.14.2025**

Akron Water Supply-Water Plant Division – 1570 Ravenna Rd, Kent, OH 44240

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

Introductions

Attendees:

Voting Members: Sarah Barrow, Carly Beck, Zach Cebula, Donna Friedman, Jennifer Grieser, Pat Gsellman, Scott Hardy, Bill Hughes, Tom LaPlante, Erica Matheny, Elaine Price, Bryce Pulley, Mike Sekerak, Megan Shaeffer, Megan Smith, Jordyn Stoll, Meghan Tinker Paynter, Katie Wells, Christina Znidarsic

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

Guests: Mackenzie Kaser, Elaine Marsh, Mike Toth, Paul Christensen, Thomas Rayburn, Anna Zaremba, Gabriella Eisel, Emily Kao, Bob Gardin, Alyssa Mills, Rebecca Wilkerson, Chris Davis, Jennie Brancho, David Passarelli

Approval of Minutes of April 14th, 2025 – *Motion to approve by B. Hughes, seconded by S. Barrow. All in favor with no abstentions.*

Public Comment

Old Business

- Great Lakes Day Recap (March 6th, 2025) – B. Hughes, L. DeYoung
- Ohio AOC Summit (April 1st, 2025) – J. Grieser
- Letter of Support Request for Organic Connects Inc.'s LEEJ Grant Application – W. Long Jones
 - Notified of grant award of \$75,000 for the OLEC Community Grant (renamed).
- Coastal States Organization's statement of support for NOAA's Coastal Management Program – J. Grieser

New Business

- LOS Request for Mayfield Sands NOAA Great Lakes Fish Habitat Restoration Partnership Grants – J. Grieser
 - It will be determined whether the Mayfield Sands Restoration Project will be considered 'Complete' for the Management Action Project (MAP) with only Phases 1 and 2 based on funding availability for the remaining phases.
 - The Mayfield Sands habitat restoration project will implement Phases 3–6 of a larger effort to restore 5,850 linear feet of stream, stabilize 10,850 feet of streambank, and enhance 27 acres of riparian

corridor in the Euclid Creek Watershed. The grant request will be for over \$5M (budget is yet to be finalized).

Motion to approve the letter of support for the Mayfield Sands NOAA Great Lakes Fish Habitat Restoration Partnership Grants was made by C Beck, seconded J. Stoll. All in favor with no abstentions.

- USGS Research Financial Support for Matt Acre – J. Grieser
 - An overview was shared regarding the potential defunding of Dr. Matt Acre’s ecosystem monitoring position with USGS.
 - The University of Akron offered a temporary role and office space for Dr. Acre, contingent upon additional financial support for a total of \$100,000 per year.
 - Summit Metro Parks committed \$40,000/year.
 - Dr. Acre’s work includes biological monitoring tied to the Gorge Dam removal, with valuable insights on fish spawning and migratory patterns.
 - He was interviewed for the Free the Falls podcast on October 30, 2024.
 - The SIP Subcommittee expressed strong support, noting that Dr. Acre’s efforts exceed typical agency data collection.
 - Dr. Acre’s research integrates telemetry, ecological surveys, and habitat mapping to connect lake and river dynamics within the context of ongoing restoration efforts.
 - To proceed, discussion is needed with Ohio EPA regarding the redirection of existing contractual funds, and his scope of work must explicitly support BUI removals and delisting activities.

Motion to approve financial support not to exceed \$40,000, contingent upon a defined scope of work that includes data sharing and approval by the SIP Subcommittee, Cuyahoga SWCD, and Ohio EPA, was made by M. Tinker Paynter, seconded by C Beck. All in favor with no abstentions.

- Healing Our Waters GLRI Field Trips – N. Lopez
 - Cuyahoga SWCD, on behalf of the Cuyahoga River AOC, will host a restoration tour on August 26, 2025, to showcase the impact of Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) funding. Featured project sites will include:
 - Gorge GLLA Sediment Cleanup and Dam Removal
 - Cascade Valley View Restoration
 - Little Cuyahoga River Parkway Restoration
 - The tour will be attended by congressional members, elected officials, and local leaders. In addition, Organic Connects will coordinate youth participation with up to 10 students from the region. Due to a 55-person limit on the bus, the event will be invitation-only.
 - Official invitations have been sent, and committee members are encouraged to support outreach efforts as appropriate.
- 2025 State of the Great Lakes, The City Club of Cleveland – B. Hughes
 - The 2025 State of the Great Lakes will be held on August 14, 2025 and will feature keynote speaker Dr. Chris Winslow (Ohio Sea Grant & OSU Stone Lab) with a focus on ecosystem health, climate impacts, and science-based policy in the Great Lakes region.
 - Members are encouraged to sponsor tables through their organization. If individuals would like to attend, please notify B. Hughes to coordinate a table together.
 - Cuyahoga SWCD will sponsor one table and reserve two seats for Advisory Committee members.

USEPA Great Lakes National Program Office Update – S. LaGory

- New USEPA Region 5 Administrator – Anne Vogel
- The Muskegon AOC is in the process of delisting.

Ohio Lake Erie Commission (OLEC) Update – H. Boesinger

- Great Lakes AOC Cross-Agency Partnership Summit (ACAPS) – September 16-18, 2025 in Toledo, OH
 - The reframed multi-day meeting will be narrowly focused on AOC program planning.
 - Travel scholarships will be available for up to 1-2 members. Priority will be given to new members on a first-come, first-served basis.
- GLNPO has requested that the MAP name be updated to “Gorge Great Lakes Legacy Act (GLLA) Sediment Cleanup Project and the Gorge Dam Removal” to more accurately reflect the project's scope.
- For BUI 6 (Degradation of Benthos), EnviroScience will begin sampling in August to evaluate the Lacustrine Index of Community Integrity (LICI) at two locations: River Mile 5.9 of the Cuyahoga River and Euclid Creek.

Facilitating Organization Update (Cuyahoga SWCD) – N. Lopez

- Financial Overview & Reporting
 - The facilitating grant of \$157,500 has expended 25% of its funds, with 58% of the project timeline remaining.
 - A few originally proposed expenses for the budget were diverted, such as the ArcGIS Story Map. Under the ‘Contractual’ budget, only 4% have been expended.
- Groundwater Training
 - As part of the AOC-EJ-DEI Engagement & Participation deliverables, this 3-hour virtual training will be made available to all Advisory Committee members and their alternates.
 - A total of 25 trainings has been purchased and further instructions on how to sign up will be shared soon.
- 2025 OFSWCD Summer Supervisor School – July 27-29, 2025
 - As part of Cuyahoga SWCD’s Urban Tour on July 28th, there will be a presentation highlighting the work of the Cuyahoga River AOC at the Watershed Stewardship Center.

Subcommittee Updates

Governance – K. Wells

- July 11th Meeting Recap
 - Annual Member Self-Reflection Survey was reviewed and finalized. It will be distributed for completion by the end of July.
 - 2025 Operating Procedures Update – the workgroup is finalizing a draft to be reviewed by the subcommittee.
 - Advisory Committee Member applications will open in the Fall.

Public Engagement – S. Hardy

- Many thanks were extended to members who participated in events this year:
 - CSU Earth Fest (4/23) – N. Lopez
 - Cuy. Falls Sustainability Expo (4/26) – M. Shaeffer
 - Ohio Stormwater Conference (5/8) – E. Matheny
 - Cleveland Drinking Water Festival (5/10) – N. Lopez, C. Beck

- NEO Adventure Fest (5/17) – S. Barrow
- Free the Falls Public Meeting (5/19) – T. LaPlante
- WPC National Public Works & Safety Week Open House – W. Long Jones, J. Jones, S. Hardy
- 4 Miles 4 Water (5/31) – N. Lopez
- There are a couple of remaining outreach events that need support. Members who have not participated yet were encouraged to sign up.

Strategic Implementation – J. Stoll

- July 9th Meeting Recap
 - Cleveland DMMP NEPA Scoping Document – Comment Letter
 - Explicitly outlines links to remaining BUIs
 - Encourages removing open-lake disposal of any capacity
 - Prioritizes restoration-focused reuse of dredged material
 - Motion to submit public comments on behalf of the Cuyahoga River AOC for the Cleveland Harbor Dredged Material Management Plan by E. Price, seconded by P. Gsellman. All in favor with K. Wells abstaining.*
 - MAP Updates
 - Little Cuyahoga River Fish Barrier Removals – additional funding was approved in 2025. H. Ullinger has taken over project management. Engagement and design funding for a pocket park has been included in the budget. Construction and community engagement is estimated to begin later this year or early 2026.
 - Gorge Great Lakes Legacy Act (GLLA) Sediment Cleanup – Severson Environmental Services Inc. has been contracted. Sediment removal is expected to begin later this year and tentatively completed by the end of 2027. Closeout and disposal site restoration work to continue through 2028.
 - Gorge Dam Removal – with 90% design complete, additional GLRI funds were secured for finalizing. The dam removal is planned for 2027–2028, with dam pool restoration through 2029.
 - CROC – the project design is paused after site stability issues were discovered, but the budget ceiling has been reached and an amended agreement is needed to continue. Thus, construction is likely delayed for several years.
 - East of Boston Mills Ski Area – it is currently on hold to reassess funding. Early data suggests benthos targets are being met post-removal of the Brecksville Canal Diversion Dam. There are fish and habitat assessment surveys planned for 2025.
 - Station Road Area – hydraulic modeling has been completed, along with an alternative formation report. With funds remaining, U.S. EPA and USACE are evaluating how to use remaining funds to support erosion and habitat improvements.
 - East 185th Spillway – construction is delayed to 2026 due to right-of-entry issues with the railroad.
 - Brandywine Creek Restoration – additional funding has been secured by West Creek Conservancy (WCC). OLEC plans to coordinate the next steps with WCC.
 - Story Map Updates
 - NEORS, CSWCD, and OLEC have worked together to finalize an interactive application to showcase the MAPs.

- Content feedback will be accepted from the Advisory Committee through the next two weeks before final publication.

Announcements Pertinent to BUI Delisting Activities

- West Creek Flume and Stabilization Ribbon Cutting and Project Tour – July 18th, 2025
- Cuyahoga River Next – updates shared by E. Price.
- There are officially barges in the Gorge dam pool, signaling the beginning of the end of a decades-long effort.

Cuyahoga AOC Committee 2025 Quarterly Meeting Schedule – Oct. 20 (Cuy. Falls)

Adjourn

Site Visit to Davey Tree SEED Campus Tour (11a-12p)