

Chapter 9

Watershed Planning Approaches in Northeast Ohio

This chapter discusses current voluntary approaches to watershed planning in Northeast Ohio and makes recommendations for enhancing the role of voluntary watershed planning efforts within the region. It includes a profile of Northeast Ohio's major watershed planning organizations.

Introduction

Over the past decade organized watershed planning groups have emerged in four of the five major river basins in the Northeast Ohio 208 Lake Erie basin planning area. These include the Cuyahoga River Remedial Action Plan (RAP) Coordinating Committee, established in 1988;¹ the Black River Remedial Action Plan Coordinating Committee, established in 1991; the Grand River Partners, Inc. established in the early 1990s; and the Chagrin River Watershed Partners, established in 1996. Another less formal group, the Upper Cuyahoga River Task Force was also organized in the early 1990s. A Middle Cuyahoga River Stakeholders committee was organized in 1999. Each of these groups have been organized under different auspices, for different purposes, and approach watershed planning and management issues differently. Taken together the emergence of these groups constitutes a significant and valuable regional planning resource for advancing coordinated approaches to watershed issues by public management agencies and other stakeholder groups, and for building public awareness and responsibility for water quality.

Watersheds are becoming recognized as a new form of community or 'neighborhood' around which citizens and public agencies can organize to address environmental problems.

This 208 Plan recognizes the importance of Northeast Ohio's watershed groups, and recommends actions to sustain and enhance their varying roles.

Recommendation 9-1: Local, county and state water quality management agencies are encouraged to participate in and support the major watershed planning groups currently existing in the area. These groups are the Cuyahoga River Remedial Action Plan Coordinating Committee, the Black River Remedial Action Plan Coordinating Committee, the Chagrin River Watershed Partners, the Grand River Partners, Inc., the Middle Cuyahoga River Stakeholders, and the Upper Cuyahoga River Task Force.

¹ Both the Cuyahoga River RAP Coordinating Committee and the Black River RAP Coordinating Committee were established by Ohio EPA with community input to respond to provisions of the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement which called for the development of a Remedial Action Plan to restore 14 beneficial uses in each of the Areas of Concern in the Great Lakes basin. The Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement also called for the establishment of Lakewide Management Plans (LaMPs) for each of the Great Lakes for the purpose restoring beneficial uses in each lake. A Lake Erie LaMP was formed in 1993.

Recommendation 9-2: While no specific organizational model is endorsed, the following principles are encouraged for organizing watershed planning groups:

- a) watershed planning groups should foster broad stakeholder involvement including local, county, regional, state and federal jurisdictions, and businesses and community organizations with a stake in the river; and utilize stakeholders in goal-setting for the watershed.
- b) watershed planning groups should pursue a community based approach that relies on the leadership and technical support of local public management agencies;
- c) watershed planning groups should emphasize voluntary coordination of management strategies to complement the regulatory programs of local and state agencies;
- d) watershed planning groups should emphasize public education, awareness and involvement programs to more fully engage the public in an understanding of watershed issues; and
- e) watershed planning groups should facilitate voluntary technical collaboration among local and state agencies in efforts to address watershed issues and support implementation of water quality measures by local management agencies.

Recommendation 9-3: Ohio EPA and ODNR are encouraged to actively consult with watershed groups on the design, funding and implementation of watershed and nonpoint source projects proposed for a watershed.

Recommendation 9-4: The State of Ohio should provide base funding to support watershed planning groups that satisfy the criteria of public accountability, local government/agency involvement, technical competence, sustainability, and adequate public involvement.

Policy 9-1: NOACA will pursue the formation of a watershed group for the Rocky River, the one remaining major Northeast Ohio Lake Erie basin tributaries without a major watershed organization to facilitate watershed planning cooperation among local management agencies and other stakeholders consistent with the principles outlined in Recommendation 9-2.

Discussion

Water quality problems transcend the boundaries of political jurisdictions. Management responsibilities of water quality agencies are often functionally compartmentalized with sewer agencies focusing on sewers and point source discharge issues, health departments focusing on on-site systems and associated water quality and public health problems, municipalities and counties are concerned with storm water issues and other nonpoint source problems, and so on.

A watershed approach is critical to an adequate assessment water quality problems leading to greater awareness of the priority problems to be addressed. The implementation of management solutions through watershed cooperation holds the promise of much more effective, efficient solutions as well. It can be a catalyst for better coordination and innovative strategies by existing management agencies.

Nonpoint source problems can only be understood and effectively addressed on a watershed basis. A watershed focus is indispensable to identifying the nonpoint factors impacting streams. Nonpoint solutions must also take into consideration actions at the landowner and household level. A watershed planning group provides a focal point for mobilizing action at this level. It can facilitate the substantial cooperation needed to implement solutions.

Watershed approaches are not mandated in the State of Ohio and would seem to be complicated by the State Constitution's allocation of primary land management responsibility to local units of government. In the near term new legislation to establish watershed management authorities is unlikely. However, as the Northeast Ohio experience attests, much can be accomplished with voluntary watershed associations, and these should be encouraged.

APPENDIX 9-1 PROFILE OF MAJOR WATERSHED GROUPS IN NORTHEAST OHIO

A. Cuyahoga River Remedial Action Plan (RAP) Coordinating Committee

Watershed area: Cuyahoga River below the Ohio Edison Dam in Akron at River Mile 45 and the near shore area of Lake Erie between Edgewater Beach and Euclid Beach.

Legal authority or basis: Community planning committee appointed by Ohio EPA Director.

Charge or mission: To plan for and promote the restoration of beneficial uses in the Cuyahoga River Area of Concern as spelled out in the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement.

Constituent members: Thirty-three stakeholder organizations including local public agencies, river dependent or impacting businesses, community and environmental organizations, and state and federal agencies have been appointed by Ohio EPA to form a Cuyahoga River RAP Coordinating Committee (CCC).

Resources-staff and funding base: a non-profit organization, Cuyahoga River Community Planning Organization (CRCPO), which is funded with foundation grants, public grants, and member contributions provides primary staff and is augmented by assigned staff from Ohio EPA and NOACA, and volunteered contributed efforts of Coordinating Committee member organizations.

Organization or operating procedures: the Coordinating Committee has operated since 1988. It meets five to six times annually. Its chair is appointed directly by the Ohio EPA Director to serve as an impartial consensus builder. Its work plan, most recently updated in March 1999, spells out work goals and an organizational structure to achieve those goals. A number of subcommittees, technical advisory groups and work groups have been established, including a Steering Committee which also meets five to six times annually whose members also serve as the Board of Directors of the CRCPO.

Watershed Planning Functions:

Planning or planning coordination	Yes
Regulatory or implementation responsibility	No
Technical assistance	Yes
Research or implementation demonstrations	Yes
Public involvement	Yes
Government advisory role	Yes
Monitoring	No

Major accomplishments include the completion of a Stage One Report Addressing Impairments to Beneficial Uses and Sources and Causes in the Cuyahoga River Area of Concern. The Cuyahoga River RAP has completed a number of implementation activities, research studies, community awareness and education programs, and has fostered a number of partnerships with stakeholder organizations to promote river restoration. These are detailed in "Program Strategies 1999-2003 of the Cuyahoga River RAP Coordinating Committee" (March 25, 1999).

Key contacts: Secretary, Cuyahoga River RAP Coordinating Committee
Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency
1299 Superior Avenue
Cleveland, Ohio 44114

CRCPO Program Manager
1299 Superior Avenue
Cleveland, Ohio 44114

Cuyahoga River RAP Coordinator
Ohio EPA Northeast District Office
Twinsburg, Ohio 44087-1969

B. Black River Remedial Action Plan Coordinating Committee

Watershed area: Black River watershed

Legal authority or basis: Community planning committee appointed by Ohio EPA Director.

Charge or mission: To plan for and promote the restoration of beneficial uses in the Black River Area of Concern as spelled out in the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement.

Constituent members: Twenty-five stakeholder organizations including local public agencies, river dependent or impacting businesses, community and environmental organizations, and state and federal agencies.

Resources-staff and funding base: Assigned staff from Ohio EPA and NOACA, and contributed volunteer efforts of Coordinating Committee member organizations.

Organization or operating procedures: the Coordinating Committee has operated since 1991. It meets six times annually. Its chair is appointed directly by the Ohio EPA Director to serve as an impartial consensus builder. Its strategic plan, most recently updated in January, 1997, spells out work goals and an organizational structure to achieve those goals.

Watershed Planning Functions:

Planning or planning coordination	Yes
Regulatory or implementation responsibility	No
Technical assistance	Yes
Research or implementation demonstrations	Yes
Public involvement	Yes
Advisory	Yes
Monitoring	No

Major accomplishments: Stage One Report, Riparian Zone Recommendations, Input to Scenic River evaluation, Urban Sediment Control Recommendations, Cosponsor IJC Symposium: Protecting What Has Been Gained in the Black River. The Black River RAP has several ongoing implementation activities, research studies, community awareness and education programs, and has fostered a number of partnerships with stakeholder organizations to promote river restoration.

Key contacts: Coordinating Committee Chairman
Lorain County General Health District
9880 South Murray Ridge Road
Elyria, Ohio 44035

Secretary, Cuyahoga River RAP Coordinating Committee
Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency
1299 Superior Avenue
Cleveland, Ohio 44114

Black River RAP Coordinator
Ohio EPA Northeast District Office
Twinsburg, Ohio 44087-1969

C. Grand River Partners, Inc. (GRPI)

Watershed area: 712 square mile watershed area.

Legal authority or basis: Nonprofit organization.

Charge or mission:

GRPI is organized and operated with the goals of preserving and restoring the ecology, the open spaces, the natural, recreational, agricultural and scenic resources of the Grand River Watershed in Ashtabula, Geauga, Lake, Portage, and Trumbull Counties. The organization cooperates with and supports the goals and interests of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, as well as local Soil and Water Conservation Districts, park districts, and other related publicly supported charitable organizations. GRPI's goals are achieved by uniting residents, landowners, businesses and communities in the stewardship of natural resources.

Constituent members: Individuals, institutions, businesses, park districts, soil and water conservation districts, conservancy groups, and state and federal public agencies.

Resources-staff and funding base: full time Executive Director
Funding sources include membership donations, other donations and grants.

Organization or operating procedures: Board of Trustees

Watershed Planning Functions:

Planning or planning coordination	Yes
Regulatory or implementation responsibility	No
Technical assistance	Yes
Research or implementation demonstrations	No
Public involvement	Yes
Advisory	Yes
Monitoring	No

Major accomplishments: 11 conservation easements of 536 acres, 2 purchased parcels of 97.3 acres, a Riparian Corridor Protection Plan.

Key contact: Executive Director
Grand River Partners, Inc.
Lake Erie College, Box M25
391 West Washington Street
Painesville, Ohio 44077

D. Chagrin River Watershed Partners, Inc. (CRWP)

Watershed Area: Chagrin River Watershed: 265 square miles

Legal authority or basis: CRWP was incorporated in 1996 as an Ohio nonprofit corporation and qualifies as a charitable organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and as a public charity under Section 509 (a)(2)

Charge or mission: The purpose of CRWP is to preserve and enhance the Chagrin River watershed as a high quality natural resource. CRWP represents a coalition of member cities, townships, villages, counties and park districts sharing information and working collectively and individually to solve local and watershed wide problems in a manner that ensures a sustainable future for the Chagrin River watershed.

Constituent members: Current members include: City of Aurora, Bainbridge Township, Village of Bentleyville, Chagrin Falls Township, Village of Chagrin Falls, Claridon Township, Cleveland Metroparks, County of Cuyahoga, City of Eastlake, Village of Gates Mills, Geauga Park District, Village of Hunting Valley, City of Kirtland, Village of Kirtland Hills, County of Lake, Lake MetroParks, Mayfield Village, City of Mayfield Heights, Munson Township, Village of Orange, City of Pepper Pike, Russell Township, City of Solon, Village of Waite Hill, City of Willoughby, and City of Willoughby Hills

Resources-staff and funding base: Full time Executive Director & Associate Director, one part time administrative support person. The Partner's principal operating funds come from local governments and park districts located in the Chagrin River watershed. Member dues are established based on a combination of their location (corridor or upland partners), amount of assessed valuation of land within the watershed or government function. Additional funding is provided by and federal and foundation grants.

Organization or operating procedures: Each Member in good standing appoints a Trustee to the Board. The Board of Trustees also elects up to 7 At Large Trustees. The Board meets quarterly. A separate Executive Committee comprised of the President, Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary and two additional individuals who oversee day-to-day operations. A separate Technical Advisory Committee comprised of agency, and private citizens provides technical advice on CRWP activities.

Watershed Planning Functions:

Planning or planning coordination	Yes
Regulatory or implementation responsibility	No

Technical assistance	No
Research or implementation demonstrations	Yes
Public involvement	Yes
Advisory	Yes
Monitoring	No

Major accomplishments: Provided technical assistance to Members on a variety of projects including update of local flood hazard ordinances; developing model riparian buffer, wetland, steep slopes, storm water management ordinances/resolutions; hosted conferences on watershed issues; secured designation of Chagrin River in Flood Mitigation and Riverine Restoration Program as authorized by the Water Resources Development Act of 1999.

Key contact: Executive Director
Chagrin River Watershed Partners
2705 River Road
Willoughby Hills, OH 44094

E. Upper Cuyahoga River Watershed Task Force

Watershed Area: 131,200 acres

Legal authority or basis: None - Participation is Voluntary

Charge or mission: The purpose of the group is to facilitate the exchange of information regarding ways and means to ameliorate water quality problems in the Upper Cuyahoga.

Constituent members: State and local agencies, individuals, soil and water conservation districts, conservation groups, and local elected officials.

Resources-staff and funding base: None

Organization or operating procedures: ODNR and City of Akron coordinate quarterly meetings.

Watershed Planning Functions:

Planning or planning coordination	Yes
Regulatory or implementation responsibility	No
Technical assistance	Yes
Research or implementation demonstrations	Yes
Public involvement	Yes
Advisory	Yes
Monitoring	No

Major accomplishments: Facilitated meetings and symposia regarding water quality problems. Also facilitated roadside drainage best management practices demonstrative projects by constituent members.

Key contact: Chair, Upper Cuyahoga River Watershed Task Force
c/o ODNR Division of Soil and Water Conservation
70 Wonderlust Pl.
Painesville, OH 44077

F. Middle Cuyahoga River Stakeholders

Watershed Area: 3,169.7 acres

Legal authority or basis: None - Participation is Voluntary

Charge or mission: The purpose of the group is to facilitate the exchange of information regarding ways and means to ameliorate water quality problems in the Middle Cuyahoga.

Constituent members: State and local agencies, individuals, soil and water conservation districts, conservation groups, and local elected officials.

Resources-staff and funding base: None

Organization or operating procedures: NEFCO coordinates meetings as needed but generally twice yearly.

Watershed Planning Functions:

Planning or planning coordination	Yes
Regulatory or implementation responsibility	No
Technical assistance	Yes
Research or implementation demonstrations	No
Public involvement	Yes
Advisory	Yes
Monitoring	No

Major accomplishments: Facilitated TMDL discussion on the Middle Cuyahoga.

Key contact: Executive Director
Northeast Ohio Four County Regional Planning
and Development Organization
969 Copley Road
Akron, OH 44320-2992