

Chapter 8

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. In addition, subwatershed groups (i.e. Little Cuyahoga River, Yellow Creek, Tinkers Creek, Pond Brook, Big Creek, West Creek, Doan Brook etc.) have or are being organized.

Introduction

Over the past decade a number of organized watershed planning groups have emerged in the Cuyahoga River basin in the NEFCO CWP Lake Erie basin planning area. These include the Cuyahoga River Remedial Action Plan (RAP) Coordinating Committee, established in 1988;¹ the Upper Cuyahoga River Task Force organized in the early 1990s, and the Middle Cuyahoga River Stakeholders committee, organized in 1999. 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 and subwatersheds are becoming recognized as a new form of community or “neighborhood” around which citizens and public agencies can organize to address environmental problems.

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

Recommendation 8-1: Local, county and state water quality management agencies are encouraged to participate in and support the major watershed and subwatersheds planning groups currently existing in the area. These major watershed groups are the Cuyahoga River Remedial Action Plan Coordinating Committee, the Middle Cuyahoga River Stakeholders, the Upper Cuyahoga River Task

¹The Cuyahoga River RAP Coordinating Committee was 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.

Force, Black River Remedial Action Plan, Chagrin River Watershed Partners, and Grand River Partners. Subwatershed groups are listed above.

Recommendation 8-2: 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 8-3: 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 8-4: 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.

Discussion

Water quality problems transcend the boundaries of political jurisdictions. Management responsibilities of water quality agencies are often functionally compartmentalized with local governments 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 of 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 and subwatershed associations, and these should be encouraged.

APPENDIX 8-1 EXAMPLES OF MAJOR WATERSHED GROUPS IN NORTHEAST OHIO

The following is a sample of major watershed groups in Northeast Ohio. Please contact NEFCO for additional details and new groups.

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

Resources-staff and funding base: a non-profit organization, the 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 2003 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), Stage I update Spring 2002.

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

CRCPO Executive Director
1299 Superior Avenue
Cleveland, Ohio 44114

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

B. 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: Chairperson
City of Akron
Public Utilities Bureau
Water Supply Division
1570 Ravenna Road
Kent, OH 44240

Secretary
Portage County Park District
449 S. Meridian St.
Ravenna, OH 44266

C. Middle Cuyahoga River Stakeholders

Watershed Area: 3,169 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
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