



**State Water Plan Update
Ohio Water Resources Regional Committee Meeting**

April 26, 2022
1:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.
Virtual Meeting via Microsoft Teams
In-Person Rachael Carson Building

Committee Members in Attendance:

Erin Kepple Adams	Annie Quinn
Duane Goodsell	Ron Rohall
Matthew Genchur	Deb Simko
Kevin Halloran	Robert Softcheck
Ronald Musser	John St. Clair
Christine Phillips	

Committee Members Not in Attendance:

Daniel Dahlkemper	Jason McCabe
Lori Dayton	Mary Ellen Ramage
Sam Dinkins	Jasun Stanton
Chuck Durista	John Walliser
Sheryl Kelly	Donna Lynn Zofcin
Deb Lange	

Others in Attendance:

James Horton – DEP	Monica Gould – Strategic Consulting Partners
Mike Hill – DEP	Bob Whitmore – Strategic Consulting Partners
Dave Jostenski – DEP	

Visitors:

None

Welcome

James Horton, DEP, welcomed everyone to the meeting, explained the meeting was being recorded, and provided helpful hints on the use of the technology. Ron Rohall, Committee Chair, welcomed committee members to the meeting. Attendance was completed through the online participant list.

Minutes

The meeting summary of the January 25, 2022, meeting was approved on a Deb Simko / Erin Kepple Adams motion.

Public Comment

Chair Rohall opened the meeting for public comment. An opportunity to express comments verbally or in the chat box was offered. There was no public comment.

DEP State Water Plan Update

Kristina Peacock-Jones provided an update of what DEP is working on regarding the State Water Plan Update.

The USGS Water Use Data and Research (WUDR) grant data sharing project involving data sharing between agencies (SRBC, DRBC, and USGS) is operational.

The three draft Critical Area Resource Plans (CARPs) are progressing well. The draft Back Creek CARP is complete and has been shared with the Ohio regional committee; the draft Laurel Hill CARP will be shared later. The draft Marsh and Rock Creek Watersheds CARP is still under review and will be shared with the committee upon review. The CARPs will be sent to a list of stakeholders and planning officials within their watershed for review and comment after the regional committee review. Additionally, DEP will host a public hearing specifically to consider the CARP and solicit comments from the public prior to the vote for recommendation. Contingent on not having any edits because of the comment period and public testimony, the CARPs will then return to their regional committees to vote on recommendation to the statewide committee.

The final State Water Plan Update report is currently in the process of being drafted by DEP. It will include regional components, work group products, an assessment of progress since the last plan update, and a strategic plan going forward. We anticipate sharing this draft with the statewide committee at their May meeting before making the report available for public comment as required by Act 220.

The State Water Plan Atlas from 2009 is being developed into a StoryMap as a Digital Atlas.

A public hearing to solicit comments from interested persons on the regional components was held on March 11, 2022. A transcript of the hearing is being prepared and will be sent to committee members when completed. Only one comment was given at the hearings from the Ohio region. No other public comments were received.

The tenth statewide committee meeting was held on March 16, 2022. The eleventh meeting is scheduled for May 11, 2022.

CARP Update

James Horton stated the revised draft Back Creek CARP has been provided to the Critical Area Advisory Committee (CAAC) for review. After review, the CAAC will recommend the CARP move forward for review and a 45-day public comment period from interested planning agencies. The committee reviewed the current list of planning agencies and added additional organizations to the list.

Following comments from the planning agencies a public hearing will be scheduled. After the public hearing, the CARP will be reviewed and recommended for approval by the regional committee at the meeting in July. Following regional committee recommendation for approval, the CARP will be sent to the statewide committee for review and recommendation for approval by the Secretary of DEP.

A Deb Simko / Erin Kepple Adams motion was approved to begin the informal public review and comment process.

Public Hearing Testimony

A public hearing to solicit comments from interested persons on the regional components of the State Water Plan was held on March 11, 2022. One comment was given at the hearings from the Ohio region and was provided by Eric Harder, the Youghiogheny Riverkeeper, from the Mountain Watershed Association. The comments addressed the importance of including abandoned mines in the regional priorities. Committee members concurred that legacy issues are not addressed significantly in the region's priorities and began to edit the regional priorities document. The revised Ohio regions' priorities and regional components document follows.

Regional Components

Specific Regional Priorities

The Ohio region is geologically distinct from the other water planning regions. It is marked by varied elevations, cliffs, landslides, and high-relief areas. This watershed contributes to the larger Mississippi basin and, as such, requires the involvement of several stakeholders in order to maintain water quantity and quality.

Interagency Water Resource Planning

The committee supports a holistic approach to water quality, quantity, and availability. They believe watershed implementation plans (WIPs) and interagency water resources planning can address many water priorities. Organizations that should be involved in interagency water planning include federal, interstate, and state agencies, local municipalities, conservation districts, watershed districts, watershed authorities, nonprofit environmental organizations, and the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers. Plans should identify water resources needed to promote and facilitate economic development including source water protection while maintaining watershed integrity and recreation benefits. They should also evaluate impacts of resource extraction from the Marcellus Shale on water quality, emerging contaminants in water systems, reclaiming of water resources impaired by abandoned mines, and inter-basin transfers of water. Act 167 stormwater planning at the county level is an initial step toward interagency water resource planning.

Water Quality and Quantity

Regional solutions depend upon an integrated approach to water quality and quantity challenges. Water quantity can be defined as a spectrum from too much to too little. Quantity can also vary over time and location. There are critical area resource plans for

two watersheds (Back Creek and Laurel Hill Creek) within the region approaching final recommendation in their process. Quality, which is defined by water usage, can be impacted by quantity - either too high or too low. Increased data collection can inform community input and watershed planning. Planning will help to prioritize natural systems, man-made infrastructure, and water treatment to include creative, diverse, and strategic solutions that can maximize water supply and the quality of our drinking water.

Hazards to communities in the watershed originate from multiple sources:

Excessive amounts of stormwater runoff can cause flooding and damage the quality of the waterways through agricultural runoff, combined sewer overflows (CSOs), sanitary sewer overflows (SSOs), and Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) overflows. Stormwater is significantly impacted by climate change and aging infrastructure. Priority should be given to multi-municipal planning and funding projects that include best management practices referenced in the Pennsylvania Stormwater Best Management Practices Manual, and updates thereto, that use integrated approaches to maximize pollution reduction and mitigate flooding.

Additionally, legacy issues can produce significant contaminants. These issues include the historical coal mining and oil and gas extraction industries that played a key role in the region's development. Abandoned mine lands and drainage can dramatically change the ecology and dynamics of the stream, causing it to not meet its designated uses, harm drinking water and well water systems, and can destroy the economic vitality of the waterways. Orphaned wells that go unplugged cause long-term seeps of petroleum byproducts into the region's river systems, that cause additional ecological degradation. As well as the above issues, byproducts of prior industrial development can include but are not limited to brownfields, PFAS, PFOS, and slag from steel and glass production. Land use plans that address these unique contaminants should be developed for these sites so they do not impact water resources and the land can be restored and gainfully reused.

Farms are vital to the region. The Ohio River valley is home to significant agricultural activities that sustain communities and provide food to the region. However, some agricultural activities come with environmental impacts, therefore conservation measures should be prioritized in a farm plan and through state regulations. Stakeholders within the region are working hard to promote conservation approaches which work alongside agricultural practitioners to create sustainable farming and a sustainable food cycle. The committee encourages the implementation of such practices.

In addition to stormwater management, legacy, and agricultural issues, planning efforts need to address, inter-basin transfers, unsustainable forest management, and the introduction of larger-scale industrial water users, all of which have implications on both quality and quantity.

Region's Uniqueness

What are the Ohio region's unique characteristics that are important considerations in the state's water planning?

- The basin contains the headwaters of the Ohio River, having an impact on 1,000 miles of river downstream through multiple states. Water drains north from West Virginia and south through Ohio and New York before contributing to the larger Ohio River basin.
- The Ohio River basin contains organizations that are unique to the region with a focus on water quality: [The Ohio River Basin Alliance \(ORBA\)](#) and [The Ohio River Valley Water Sanitation Commission \(ORSANCO\)](#).
- Universities, colleges, municipalities, and local foundations within the basin often work together towards solutions to water resource related issues.
- Industry has played a significant economic role throughout the region including steel, coal, and glass and was a nationally significant source for all three resources, especially in the early 1900s.
- The Ohio region's French Creek plays host to the most diverse mussel population in the state.
- Clean water is vital for recreational activities in many watersheds of the basin and are major economic drivers.
- The Ohio River basin is a municipally dense region which can lead to difficulties in coordinating zoning and planning activities.
- The region contains the tribal lands of the Seneca Nation of Indians.
- [The Allegheny National Forest](#) is located in the basin; these protected lands provide conservation and recreation.
- There are many locks and dams within the region including 16 multipurpose flood control dams and 23 navigable locks and dams.
- Rivers are extensively used for transportation with inland ports for sand, gravel, coal, and other commodities. The Port of Pittsburgh is the fourth largest inland port in the United States.
- The region is geographically distinct from the rest of the state due to the Appalachian Mountains. Geologically the Appalachian Mountains are an incised plateau which leads to the appearance of synclines and anticlines from glacial activities. Varying elevations, such as cliffs and high-relief areas, can be prone to landslides. This necessitates different planning and treatment requirements based on location.
- Hydraulic fracking and coal-fired power plants in the region create additional water demands.

Stormwater and Flood Management

What are the region's concerns and recommendations for stormwater and flood management to preserve water quality?

- Stormwater management infrastructure often lacks proper maintenance, partly due to confusion about ownership and the associated responsible parties. Some agreements

have been in place since the 1960s, but these can be difficult to enforce, especially as facilities change ownership, leaving some older facilities without maintenance for decades.

- Education and outreach are needed to tie the concept of stormwater management more closely to flooding, as poor stormwater management can lead to downstream flooding.
- Aging stormwater infrastructure should be assessed by regional authorities for high-frequency, as opposed to high-intensity storm events. Retrofitting aging best management practices and providing groundwater recharge areas for large impervious areas such as parking lots from vacant shopping malls would be beneficial.
- Contaminants from large impervious areas can be transported by stormwater, which can contribute to water quality issues.
- Planning should be completed on a watershed basis and priority should be given to planning upstream and/or at the headwaters.
- [CSOs are common in the Ohio River basin](#) and their removals are ongoing. Impacts occur only during rain events, which makes CSOs both a stormwater concern and a water quality problem.
- Rivers, with their proximity to raw materials (lumber, coal, etc.) and easy transportation served as an ideal location for development. This not only obstructed the floodplain but constrained the gradual geomorphic development of the waterway. Therefore, the redevelopment of older structures on floodplains, which were built prior to local ordinances that would have prevented their original construction, are a concern for the region.
- State guidance on floodplain development is released whenever a new Flood Insurance Rate Map (FIRM) is provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). FIRMs are then enacted via municipalities (through floodplain ordinances and collaboration with neighboring communities) and could benefit from regional planning.

Climate Change Adaptation for Water Resources

How are water resources within the region being impacted by climate change and what could we do to adapt?

- Flooding due to large amounts of impervious surfaces will continue to cause problems as precipitation intensity increases.
- Stakeholders should investigate climate change implications on water supply vulnerability, availability, and reliability.
- Climate change will likely increase the intensity of storms in Pennsylvania but could also extend dry periods. Stakeholders should investigate the implications of flash flooding and potential decreased groundwater recharge.
- Capturing water during high-intensity storm events and continuing to promote ground water recharge will help reduce drought events. Regional authorities should provide incentives for homeowners to utilize rain barrels or route downspouts to swales.

- The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers owns and operates locks and dams within the region which may help with resiliency, provided they are properly maintained. This will require additional infrastructure planning to enhance resiliency.
- There is a need to maintain riparian buffers, particularly in communities at the headwaters of the basin.

An informal approval of the revised Ohio Region Priorities and Region components for the State Water Plan was completed on a Deb Simko / Annie Quinn motion.

Comments in the Chat

- Legacy issues include the historical coal mining and oil extraction industries that played a significant role in our regions development. Abandoned mine drainage can dramatically change the ecology and dynamics of the stream, cause stream death and fish kills, harm drinking water and well water systems, and destroy economic and recreational uses of the waterways. Orphaned wells that go unplugged cause long term seeps of petroleum byproducts into our river systems, that cause additional ecological degradation.
- The Ohio River valley is home to significant agricultural industries that sustain our communities and provide food to our region. However, agricultural activities come with significant environmental impacts if conservation measures are not prioritized by the property and through the state regulations. From cows in streams, to pesticides that run off from crops, farms play a significant role in the water quality issues of our water systems. However, the region is working hard to create significant focus on conservation approaches which work alongside agricultural practices to create sustainable farming and a sustainable food cycle. Farms are vital to our region. This needs the support and funding of the state to be prioritized.
- <https://www.wesa.fm/arts-sports-culture/2013-07-16/the-glass-city-pittsburghs-history-as-the-center-of-the-u-s-glass-business>
- The Glass City: Pittsburgh's History as the Center of the U.S. Glass Business
- By 1920, a whopping 80 percent of all glass made in America came from the Western Pennsylvania-Eastern Ohio-West Virginia Panhandle region.
- <https://archive.triblive.com/news/glass-from-the-past/>
- <https://pittsburghquarterly.com/articles/a-very-brief-history-of-pittsburgh/>
- Freshwater Mussels - The French Creek Watershed contains 27 of Pennsylvania's approximately 65 species of freshwater mussels, the most diverse population of any stream in the state, and any stream further north and east in the nation. Four of these, the Northern Riffleshell (*Epioblasma torulosa rangiana*), Rayed Bean (*Villosa fabalis*), Snuffbox (*Epioblasma triquerta*) and Clubshell (*Pleurobema clava*), are classified as federally endangered in North America, and ten others are endangered in Pennsylvania. Mussels require clean, oxygen-rich water to filter food and absorb dissolved oxygen. In the microscopic larval stage mussels often attach to the gills of fish such as darters and are transported to different sites on the stream. As a result, their distribution and numbers are directly linked to the survival of these host fish.

