



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

July 14, 2022
3:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.
Virtual Meeting via Microsoft Teams
In-Person Rachael Carson Building

Committee Members in Attendance:

Erin Kepple Adams	Ronald Musser
Lori Dayton	Annie Quinn
Sam Dinkins	Mary Ellen Ramage
Chuck Durista	Ron Rohall
Matthew Genchur	Deb Simko
Duane Goodsell	Jasun Stanton
Kevin Halloran	John St. Clair

Committee Members Not in Attendance:

Daniel Dahlkemper	Jason McCabe
Sheryl Kelly	Robert Softcheck
Deb Lange	John Walliser
	Donna Lynn Zofcin

Others in Attendance:

James Horton – DEP	Bob Whitmore – Strategic Consulting Partners
Mike Hill – DEP	
Susan Weaver – DEP	

Visitors:

Lauri Jones
Eric Mauck
Carla Ruddock
Eric Harder

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. James informed the committee that Kristina Peacock-Jones has moved to a new position within the Abandoned Mines Division of DEP and is being replaced by Acting Director Susan Weaver. Ron Rohall, committee chair, welcomed committee members to the meeting. Attendance was completed through the online participant list.

Minutes

The meeting summary of the April 26, 2022, meeting was approved on a Deb Simko / Duane Goodsell 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

Susan Weaver provided an update of what DEP is working on regarding the State Water Plan Update.

DEP and the Ohio Critical Area Advisory Committee have been working together to receive agency review comments on the Back Creek Critical Area Resource Plan (CARP) and incorporate recommendations where appropriate into the document. The hearing after today's meeting will seek to take in public testimony which will be added to the planning agency review testimony. Once DEP has received all comments, formal edits will be made to the document before the Ohio committee will again review and consider it for recommendation to the statewide committee.

The Marsh and Rock Creek and Laurel Hill Creek CARPs are progressing well. They are currently passing through internal review and undergoing final edits before being shared with their respective committees. Once the draft CARPs have been reviewed by their committee and approved by DEP with any additional edits, they will be sent to a list of stakeholders and planning officials within their watershed for review and comment. Additionally, DEP will host public hearings specifically to consider each CARP and solicit comments from the public prior to the vote for recommendation. Contingent on not having any edits as a result 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 has been compiled and is currently in the process of being internally reviewed and edited 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 July 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. We hope to share this with the statewide committee in their September meeting.

The eleventh statewide committee meeting was held on May 11. The twelfth meeting is scheduled for August 17.

Regional Components

The Ohio Regional Committee members reviewed the revised Regional Priorities and the edits that have been made to the previous document. The revised Ohio Regional Priorities was approved unanimously on a Chuck Durista / Mary Ellen Ramage motion. The Regional Priorities approved by the Ohio Regional Committee follows.

Ohio

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 shale gas resource extraction 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 may 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 soil and groundwater contamination and disposal of wastes. Land use plans that address these brownfield sites should be developed 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 1900s¹.
- 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 basin² 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.

¹ A Very Short History of Pittsburgh <https://pittsburghquarterly.com/articles/a-very-brief-history-of-pittsburgh/> and The Glass City: Pittsburgh's History as the Center of the U.S. Glass Business <https://www.wesa.fm/arts-sports-culture/2013-07-16/the-glass-city-pittsburghs-history-as-the-center-of-the-u-s-glass-business>

² Freshwater Mussels <https://www.frenchcreekconservancy.org/freshwater-mussels/#:~:text=The%20French%20Creek%20Watershed%20contains,and%20east%20in%20the%20nation>

- 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.

CARPs

Mike Hill provided a presentation on the Back Creek CARP and the approval process.

Next Steps

Chair Rohall thanked all committee members for their attendance, time, work, and effort through all the priority revisions.

James Horton, DEP staff, provided an overview of the committee's future work.

- The recommended regional committee documents will be provided to the statewide committee.
- Ohio regional committee is scheduled to meet on October 25 and the committee will complete a debrief of the planning process and develop a plan for moving forward and future activities.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:45 pm on a Chuck Durista / Deb Simko motion.