

# Chapter 8

## Watershed Planning Approaches in The NEFCO Region

**This chapter discusses current voluntary approaches to watershed planning in the NEFCO Region and makes recommendations for enhancing the role of voluntary watershed planning efforts within the region. The chapter profiles a few watershed planning organizations.**

### **Introduction**

The major remaining sources of impairment to local streams and lakes are the combination of nonpoint source (NPS) pollution and habitat alteration. Unlike with point source discharges through the NPDES program, Ohio EPA has limited regulatory authority over land-use practices that alter aquatic habitat and cause NPS pollution. Consequently, Ohio EPA and ODNR have been promoting community-based watershed planning efforts throughout the state. A number of watershed groups are active in the NEFCO region. These groups have been organized under different auspices, for different purposes, and approach watershed planning and management issues differently. These groups constitute 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.

This Clean Water Plan recognizes the importance of regional 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. For this plan a major watershed group is an organized, community-based effort focused on the protection and/or restoration of surface water resources in a defined watershed or basin. These major watershed groups in the NEFCO region are the Cuyahoga River Remedial Action Plan (RAP) Coordinating Committee<sup>1</sup>, Tinkers Creek Watershed Partners, Friends of Yellow Creek, Middle Cuyahoga River Watershed Partners, Chagrin River Watershed Partners, and the Nimishillen Creek Watershed Partners. The Cuyahoga River RAP is also currently organizing community-based watershed planning efforts in the Furnace Run and Brandywine Creek Watersheds, both tributary to the Cuyahoga River.

**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; and
- f) Watershed planning groups should consider creating a document(s) that will provide the greatest benefit in attracting funding for implementation of water quality measures by local management agencies.

**Recommendation 8-3:** Ohio EPA and ODNR are encouraged to be actively involved with watershed groups in the planning, funding and implementation of watershed and nonpoint source projects.

**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 imperative for adequately assessing water quality problems and identifying priority areas. Cooperative, watershed-wide strategies provide more efficient and effective management solutions.

Nonpoint source problems can only be understood and successfully managed on a watershed basis. A watershed focus is essential for identifying the nonpoint factors impacting streams. Nonpoint solutions must also consider actions at the landowner and household level. A watershed planning group can facilitate cooperative efforts 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 example illustrates, much can be accomplished with voluntary watershed and subwatershed associations, and these should be encouraged.

The Ohio EPA, ODNR and other state agencies over the last decade have embraced the concept of community-based watershed planning. ODNR's Watershed Coordinator program provides grants to fund a local, full-time person to organize, develop, and implement watershed action plans. The Ohio Lake Erie Commission (OLEC) and the Ohio Water Resources Council (OWRC) developed and provide funding for Balanced Growth Initiative plans. Both Balanced Growth and watershed action plans have funding incentives linked to completed and approved plans. In the NEFCO region the Upper Tuscarawas River, Tinkers Creek, Middle Cuyahoga River, Grand River, and Sugar Creek have all been awarded watershed coordinator grants. The Cuyahoga River RAP is currently working on balanced growth plans for Furnace Run and Brandywine Creek in the Lower Cuyahoga River Watershed and the Chagrin River Watershed Partners have completed a balanced growth plan for their watershed.

## APPENDIX 8-1 EXAMPLES OF MAJOR WATERSHED GROUPS IN THE NEFCO REGION

The following is a sample of watershed groups in the NEFCO Region. Please contact NEFCO for additional details and new groups.

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

**Watershed area:** Cuyahoga River from the Ohio Edison Dam pool 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-five 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 three to four times annually. Its chair is appointed directly by the Ohio EPA Director to serve as an impartial consensus builder. Its work plan 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:** Chairman, Cuyahoga River RAP Coordinating Committee  
Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency  
1299 Superior Avenue  
Cleveland, OH 44114

CRCPO Executive Director  
1299 Superior Avenue  
Cleveland, OH 44114

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

## **B. Middle Cuyahoga River Watershed Partners**

**Watershed Area:** 130 square miles

**Legal authority or basis:** None - Participation is Voluntary

**Charge or mission:** The purpose of the group is to facilitate the development of a watershed action plan 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:** ODNR Watershed Coordinator Planning Grant

**Organization or operating procedures:** NEFCO received a four-year watershed coordinator planning grant in 2009 to develop a watershed action plan. Several watershed communities are providing funding or in-kind services to support the position. The Watershed Coordinator is organizes planning meeting with stakeholders to assist in writing the action plan. The partners have been meeting six to twelve times per year since the start of the grant. The partners intend on continuing to meet as a watershed group after the completion of the watershed plan to implement recommended water quality actions.

**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:** The Watershed Coordinator and partners completed the draft Middle Cuyahoga River Watershed Action Plan in June, 2011. Held multiple clean-up events along the Middle Cuyahoga River.

**Key contact:** Middle Cuyahoga River Watershed Coordinator  
Northeast Ohio Four County Regional Planning and Development Organization  
180 East South Street  
Akron, OH 44311

**C. Nimishillen Creek Watershed Partners**

**Watershed Area:** Nimishillen Creek

**Legal authority or basis:** voluntary group of stakeholders within the Nimishillen Creek watershed.

**Charge or mission:** The mission of this group is “to promote the restoration of water quality to fishable, swimmable standards and to protect the Creek corridor.”

**Constituent members:** Stakeholders include state and local agencies, citizens, businesses, soil and water conservation districts, conservation groups, universities, and local elected officials.

**Resources-staff and funding base:** None

**Organization or operating procedures:** This group meets six to nine times a year. The Partners adopted bylaws and elected officials in 2004.

**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  
Monitoring

Yes  
No

**Major accomplishments:** Completion of the fully state endorsed *Nimishillen Creek Watershed – State Action Plan* in 2007. Organizes the annual coordination of the Nimishillen Creek Litter Elimination, Awareness, and Prevention (LEAP) cleanup. Secured funding for an environmental laboratory at Walsh University.

**Key contact:** Upper Tuscarawas River Watershed Coordinator  
NEFCO  
180 East South Street  
Akron, OH 44311

#### **D. Upper Sugar Creek Farmers Group**

**Watershed area:** Upper Sugar Creek

**Legal authority or basis:** This is a volunteer assemblage of local farmers in the Upper Sugar Creek Watershed. The group is sponsored by the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center.

**Charge or mission:** The group seeks to balance economic and environmental pressures on its land and improve water quality.

**Organizational information:** The Upper Sugar Creek Farmer Partners are located in the Smithville area. The group contains conventional farmers of mixed operations and sees itself as for and by farmers in a learning circle with Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center (OARDC) researchers on the Agroecosystems Management Team and the Wayne Soil and Water Conservation District. (SWCD).

#### **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	No
Monitoring	Yes

**Major accomplishments:** The Upper Sugar Creek Farmers Partners has received numerous federal grants to support a wide range of projects. The group maintains several miles of buffered streams through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). With the assistance of OARDC staff, the group conducts NRCS Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans and Conservation Plans. With the collaboration of local farmers, the OARDC performs an on-going comprehensive chemical and biological monitoring program and various other research analyses.

**Approved by the NEFCO General Policy Board**

**Key contact:** Richard Moore  
Sugar Creek Project  
Agroecosystem Management Program  
OARDC/OSU  
201B Thorne Hall  
1680 Madison Avenue  
Wooster, OH 44691

## **E. Friends of Yellow Creek**

**Watershed area:** 31.2 square miles

**Legal authority or basis:** None - Participation is Voluntary

**Charge or mission:** To preserve, protect and enhance the aesthetic, physical, and biological integrity of the Yellow Creek Watershed. This mission shall be accomplished through actions such as monitoring, education, conservation and restoration.

**Constituent members:** Bath Township, Bath Park Board, University of Akron, Summit County Engineer's office, and Bath Township property owners.

**Resources-staff and funding base:** Bath Township has provided basic funding along with in-kind office and support staff. The Friends have also received grant funds from Ohio EPA, Ohio Department of Agriculture, and other sources for restoration projects.

**Organization or operating procedures:** Friends of Yellow Creek meet on the third Monday of every month. They have an elected Chair, Vice-Chair, and Secretary

### **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	Yes

**Major accomplishments** include the start of water quality monitoring in Yellow Creek. Past projects include creation of a vernal pool, restoration of erodible soils, installation of two rain gardens, stream restoration project, and installation of permeable pavement at a parking lot in the watershed.



**Key contacts:** Chair  
Friends of Yellow Creek  
P. O. Box 1111  
Bath, OH 44210

**F. Chagrin River Watershed Partners, Inc.**

**Watershed area:** 267 square miles

**Legal authority or basis:** Non-profit Organization

**Charge or mission:** The Chagrin River Watershed Partners will strive to preserve and enhance the scenic and environmental quality of the ecosystem of the Chagrin River and its watershed in a manner that assures a sustainable future for people, plants and animals.

**Constituent members:** A collaboration of 36 cities, villages, townships, counties, and park districts.

**Resources-staff and funding base:** Annual dues payments from member communities, foundation grants, and grants from State and Federal agencies.

**Organization or operating procedures:** The staff is directed by the Board of Trustees and the Executive Committee to provide technical assistance to members and develop cost effective solutions to minimize new, and address current water quality and quantity problems.

**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	Yes

**Major accomplishments:** Completed a watershed action plan and balanced growth plan for the watershed. Published model ordinances for riparian and wetland setbacks. Implemented several stream and wetland protection and restoration projects.

**Key contacts:** Director  
P.O. Box 229  
Willoughby, OH 44096-0229  
440-975-3870

**G. Tinkers Creek Watershed Partners**

**Watershed area:** 96.4 square miles

**Legal authority or basis:** Non-profit Organization

**Charge or mission:** The mission of the Tinker's Creek Watershed Partners is to protect and restore water quality and habitats of the Tinker's Creek Watershed through community partnership.

**Constituent members:** 17 Member Communities and 50+ Individual/Family Memberships

**Resources-staff and funding base:** Membership dues and various grants.

**Organization or operating procedures:** Guided by a Board of Directors. No paid staff.

**Watershed Planning Functions:**

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

**Major accomplishments:** Stream clean-ups. Support the creation of a watershed action plan.

**Key contacts:** P.O. Box 444  
Twinsburg, OH 44087  
330-562-9681