
Message to our Stakeholders

Sponsored by the Ohio EPA through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI), the Black River AOC Advisory Committee (BRAC) assists with funding requests and project designation along the lower six miles of the Black River watershed, extending from Elyria through Sheffield Village and Lorain, before emptying into Lake Erie. While removing the river's label of "Area of Concern" (AOC) is the number one priority, the committee also strives to provide community awareness and create public involvement. With an anticipated de-listing date of 2021, the committee's current focus is on project completion, Beneficial Use Impairment (BUI) removal documentation, and community inclusion.

In 2016, due to a change in regulations, the Black River AOC Advisory Committee voted to accept LoCo 'Yaks as their new Facilitating Organization. LoCo 'Yaks' first support grant with the committee began October 1st 2016, was extended in August, commencing March 31, 2018.

The purpose of this Annual Report is to inform the watershed community and our stakeholders of the progress made on removing BUIs and restoring the AOC. If you would like more information on any of the topics covered, or would like to join the effort to restore the Black River, please contact any of the AOC Advisory Committee members listed at the end of this report, or go to www.blackriveraoc.com.

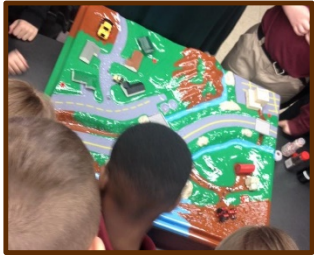


Quarterly Meetings

Due to the six-month extension of the BRAC support grant, six regular quarterly meetings were held in the 2016-2018 grant cycle: October 26, 2016; February 6, 2017; April 3, 2017; July 18, 2017; October 16, 2017; and February 26, 2018. Meeting business focused on updates on restoration projects occurring within the AOC, BUI removal updates, and Management Action Plan accordance. Meeting agendas and minutes can be found at www.blackriveraoc.com. All meetings are open to the public, and the summer meeting specifically targets news media, new members, and area stakeholders. With a pre-meeting luncheon, and riverboat site tours afterwards, a larger-than-normal meeting attendance was experienced and both riverboats were at maximum capacity. Regular quarterly meeting attendance has also increased, as well as our active and voting members lists.

Community Outreach Events

Marine Debris Prevention Clinics



Purchasing an EnviroScape Watershed Model and designing an educational program to discuss storm drains, marine debris prevention, and various BRAC activities & events, has created a greater community awareness of AOC project results as well as the enormous effort behind restoring the river. Presenting at various watershed festivals and sharing our clinics with school kids, community groups, businesses, and local activists, has allowed the LoCo 'Yaks to inform others of the river's status, progress, and prospective future, while educating on ways everyone can help protect our waterways.

5th Annual Black River Clean-Up (BRCU)

In 2017, this event brought in 320 volunteers who removed 14.39 tons of debris from the Black River, her banks and adjacent lands. This total includes more than 1,350 pounds of scrap metal and 254 tires that were repurposed or recycled. In the last five years, BRCU has removed 86.7 tons of marine debris. Without this group of dedicated and hard-working volunteers, the river would not be nearly as close to de-listing. Grassroots community groups are key to the overall success of any environmental rehabilitation/ preservation achievement. Those nearest to nature are continuing to make a great effort for change in order for the rehabilitative grant dollars to continue working for the health of the black River.

7th Annual Kayak-A-Thon

The City of Lorain hosted the Annual Black River Kayak-A-Thon on Saturday, June 24, 2017, welcoming over 80 racers and casual paddlers to the Black River. The Kayak-A-Thon featured competitive races and a casual float for kayakers, canoeists, and SUPers. Long and short races were included, each of which was separated into several classes based on type and length of paddle craft. There was also a casual float, which allowed participants to view several of the restoration project areas located along the river. Casual float participants launched their boats from the Lorain County Metro Parks French Creek kayak launch, located in Sheffield Lake, while racers started at the Lorain Port Authority's Black River Wharf Boat Launch.

Participants in the float were encouraged to stop at designated locations to learn about the restoration projects and get rubber tokens that were later exchanged for prizes at the awards ceremony, which was also held at the Wharf. Racers were awarded prizes for first, second, & third place finishers in both the long and short races.

The Kayak-A-Thon is a public outreach activity intended to showcase the restoration work that has been accomplished by the City and other partners on the Black River. This restoration work has included the removal of slag (a by-product from ore smelting) from the floodplain; creation of fish shelves near the heron rookery; stream bank stabilization, invasive vegetation removal, and native live-stake plantings. The Kayak-A-Thon also serves to encourage water recreation and promote eco-tourism on the Black River.

Organizational and monetary support for the Kayak-A-Thon included the City of Lorain, Lorain County, Coldwater Consulting, Brown and Caldwell, Amec Foster Wheeler, West River Paddling Co., Aloha SUP, and LoCo 'Yaks.

Lake Erie Starts Here Stenciling

In November, city of Lorain residents received notification of the Lake Erie Starts Here storm drain stenciling initiative. Residents were invited to register online to have their neighborhood storm drains stenciled. Before the weather turned too cold, volunteers were able to label 111 drains throughout the city. With plenty of paint and stencils waiting for warmer asphalt, this program will continue throughout the county until further notice. Partnerships among the City of Lorain, LoCo 'Yaks, and BRAC have made this a very successful drive.

Restoration Awareness Signs

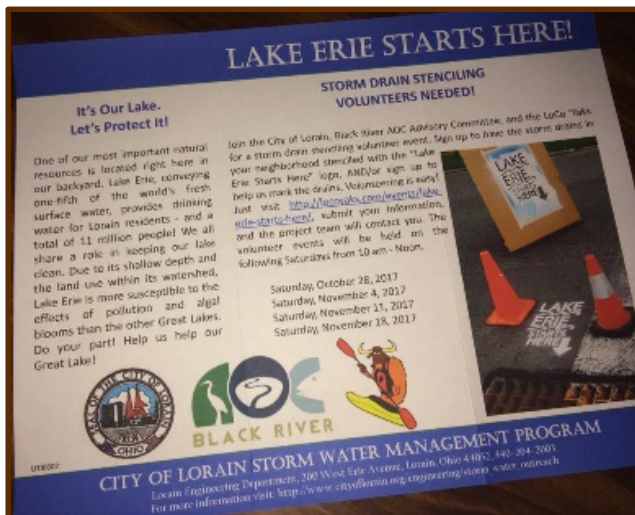
Four, weather-resistant aluminum awareness signs for invasive vegetation control (2 of each pictured below) were purchased from Signarama in North Olmsted and will be installed near designated projects throughout the watershed and along the river. The Phase I/ II signs are replacements for banners that were destroyed by nature.

BRAC Brochures

Informative brochures were printed describing the mission and goals of the BRAC for the general public. Included are informative facts and summaries of BRAC community outreach activities. For copies, please contact the BRAC's facilitators.

Black River Summit

The 1st Black River Summit was held at the Lorain Palace Theater on Thursday, March 29 at 9am. Keynote speakers were Tinka Hyde, director of the Great Lakes National Program Office (GLNPO) in Chicago, and Mayor Antamarian of Kenosha, WI. Kenosha was once very similar to what Lorain still is. Having rehabbed their river from an AOC, redevelopment has begun in a post-industrial era, and the tides are turning for a once gloomy city. Inspiring stories of success were shared, sparking a glimmer of hope throughout the eyes of the concerned citizens in attendance. With over 150 people in the audience, feedback was positive and the roots have been established for an annual event. Following the presentation, the public was invited to stay for a viewing for *The Black River: A Future As Dark As Its Name?* and *Bringing Back The Black River*, while the speakers and VIPs took a bus tour to a luncheon and several restoration project sites. Media coverage was abundant and requests for interviews were still coming in days after the event.



Lorain County Board of Commissioners & Lorain County Community Development

**Invasive Vegetation Control
in the Lower Black River Area of Concern,
Challenge Grant, Phase 1
NOAA \$924,825.00**

**Invasive Vegetation Control
in the Lower Black River Area of Concern, Phase II
USEPA \$499,496.00**

Lorain County Board of Commissioners & Lorain County Community Development

**Invasive Vegetation Control
in the Black River and
Lake Erie Tributaries,
Phase III
USEPA \$634,889.00**

Lower Black River Restoration Projects Updates

City of Lorain:

- 1) Lower Black River AOC Remediation & Restoration Program
 - a. Seep Site
 - i. Construction of the Seep Remediation System has been completed. Monthly effluent sampling and monitoring are on-going to ensure that the system reaches equilibrium and continues to operate as designed.
 - b. Black River Fish Shelf Site
 - i. Design was completed, the project went out for bid, and a contractor was selected. Construction was initiated in late 2017 and scheduled to conclude in mid-2018.
 - c. Reclamation Site
 - i. Collection and analysis of various field data was completed throughout 2017 to inform the remediation design alternatives. Constituent-specific treatment technologies have been identified and design-related activities will continue into 2018.
- 2) Lakeview Park Beach Beneficial Use Impairments
 - a. Gathering and review of existing data was performed to facilitate the development of a hydrodynamic model.
 - b. The Quality Assurance Project Plan was completed in anticipation of field data collection and analytical processes to follow in 2018.

Lorain County:

- 1) Willow Creek Stream Restoration Project
 - a. Final Completion of the project was achieved and in doing so, restored 0.3 miles and 0.75 acres of riparian corridor and floodplain habitat respectively along Willow Creek within the Eaton Township Park. 10.84 acres of wetland habitat was enhanced at the Margaret Peak Nature Preserve.
 - b. Planning and coordination of additional upland habitat restoration that will utilize remaining funds in 2018 was initiated.
 - c. A Supplemental Assistance Agreement was executed on 9/18/2017 to provide funding for stream, riparian, and floodplain restoration activities on Fortune Ditch at the Margaret Peak Nature Preserve.
- 2) Fortune Ditch Stream Restoration Project
 - a. On 9/18/2017 a Supplemental Assistance Agreement to the Willow Creek Stream Restoration and Enhancement grant was executed to provide funding for the Fortune Ditch Stream Restoration Project at the Margaret Peak Nature Preserve.
- 3) Invasive Vegetation Control in the Lower Black River Area of Concern, Phase II
 - a. As of 12/31/2017, 62 acres of invasive vegetation has been controlled
- 4) Invasive Vegetation Control in the Black River and Lake Erie Tributaries, Phase III
 - a. As of 12/31/2017, 36 acres of invasive vegetation has been controlled

BUI Status

Beneficial Use Impairments (BUIs): An **impairment** of **beneficial uses** means a change in the chemical, physical or biological integrity of the Great Lakes system sufficient to cause any of 14 specific, defining properties. The Black River's BUIs and their statuses are listed below:

	BUI	STATUS
1	Restrictions on Fish and Wildlife Consumption	REMOVED
2	Tainting of Fish and Wildlife Flavor	N/A
3	Degraded Fish and Wildlife Populations	IMPAIRED
4	Fish Tumors or Other Deformities	IN RECOVERY
5	Bird or Animal Deformities or Reproductive Problems	N/A
6	Degradation of Benthos	IMPAIRED
7	Restrictions on Dredging Activities	IMPAIRED
8	Eutrophication or Undesirable Algae	REMOVED
9	Restrictions on Drinking Water Consumption or Taste, and Odor Problems	N/A
10	Beach Closings	IMPAIRED
11	Degradation of Aesthetics	IMPAIRED
12	Added Costs to Agriculture or Industry	N/A
13	Degradation of Phytoplankton and Zooplankton Populations	N/A
14	Loss of Fish and Wildlife Habitat	IMPAIRED

Management Actions Plan

“Management actions ... are the reasonable and realistic actions that could be taken to remove the relevant BUIs and, hence, delist the AOC. These actions may not result in the immediate removal of a set of BUIs, but they are expected to remove the contaminant threat that will allow environmental conditions to improve over time and lead to eventual delisting of the AOC. All management actions necessary for delisting are considered implemented once those actions have commenced and the work is completed over the life of the project.” [\[www.epa.gov\]](http://www.epa.gov)

In 2017, BRAC’s Management Actions Plan was amended because new data indicated that revisions would be needed to ensure achievement of the programmatic goals. In a letter from Tinka Hyde, Director of the Great Lakes National Program Office, the EPA agreed “that modifying the revised management actions as [proposed] will result in completing all necessary actions for removing BUIs at this AOC,” and accepted our revisions. With these changes, BRAC has set a timeline goal of September 2019 for completion of all management actions.

Other Committee News

New BRAC Logo

With the reorganization of the committee over the last few years, the time came for re-branding. Coordinating with graphic design students at Lorain County Community College, and several weeks of discussion, BRAC selected a new logo to represent the AOC. Once de-listed, the logo will transition with the group into a watershed protection. Thanks to Genesis Rivera for the logo design.



Regional AOC Conference

In March 2017, the Regional AOC Conference was in Grand Rapids, MI, with outstanding representation from the Ohio AOCs, Black River had more than eight delegates in attendance. Several topics were discussed and presented, offering all who attended new ideas and varying perspectives on the work still to be completed. At our next quarterly meeting, the committee confirmed that although the end result will change BRAC’s purpose and direction, and end our government funding, the most important part of this work is *saving the river*, first and foremost. The societal and economic benefits of de-listing an AOC are well-beyond anything an impaired river can offer.

Outlook & Future Events

The BRAC’s journey to rehabilitate the Black River has been a decades-long adventure, but thanks to the Ohio EPA through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI), if we complete our management actions by the end of 2019, we hope to be ready for de-listing just a few short years later.

In the meantime, our grant cycle for 2018 began April 1st with new and continuing community outreach projects. With plenty of paint and drains available, the Lake Erie Starts Here storm drain stenciling program will continue throughout the year as long as the streets are warm and dry. The Marine Debris Prevention Clinics have also continued to be very popular with county schools, and with the addition of Helpful Homeowner Clinics we expect to be busier than ever sharing information to help every citizen do their part to aid our watershed. Additionally, with a coordinating grant from the Western Reserve Land Conservancy, virtual reality tours will be ready for public presentation later this summer. For more information on community outreach events or to volunteer your services, please contact the facilitating organization.

Contact Information

Black River AOC Advisory Committee Facilitating Organization: LoCo 'Yaks www.locoyaks.com

- ◆ Stephanie Moore Koscho
(419) 239-3779, LoCo 'Yaks Co-Founder & CFO
- ◆ Robb Koscho
(440) 308-7296, LoCo 'Yaks Co-Founder & Executive Director
- ◆ lorainblackriveraocac@gmail.com



Black River AOC Advisory Committee

- ◆ Chair – Don Romancak, Director, Lorain County Community Development Department
(440) 328-2323, dromancak@loraincounty.us
- ◆ Vice-Chair – Tom Brown, Executive Director, Lorain Port Authority
(440) 204-2269, tbrown@lorainportauthority.com
- ◆ Liaison – Kate Golden, Storm Water Manager, City of Lorain
(440) 204-2003, Kathryn_Golden@cityoflorain.org



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