

# 2014 Annual Report



*Historical photo: unloading at the shipyard. Courtesy of Lorain County General Health District archive.*

## Bringing Back the Black River

*Working to restore and protect the environmental resources of the Black River watershed through a collaborative and science-based approach that improves the ecological, economic, and community health of all its present and future inhabitants.*

*Our River, Our Responsibility.*

## **Message to our Stakeholders – Purpose**

In October of 2014, the Ohio EPA developed a new framework for reorganizing and implementing Ohio’s Remedial Action Program. The Black River Remedial Action Plan (RAP) has re-aligned itself with a focused strategy on restoring the Area of Concern (AOC). The former RAP, now known as the Black River AOC Advisory Committee, serves to identify strategic priorities and management actions that will lead to the removal of Beneficial Use Impairments (BUIs) and AOC de-listing.

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](http://www.blackriveraoc.com).

## **Black River AOC Advisory Committee Meetings**

Three AOC Advisory Committee meetings were held in 2014; 3/13/14, 7/10/14, and 11/13/14. Meeting business focused on BUI removal updates, state guidance for delisting AOCs, and routine updates on projects occurring within the AOC. Meeting agendas and minutes can be found at [www.blackriveraoc.com](http://www.blackriveraoc.com).

## **Black River AOC Outreach Events**

### **Video Premiere: Bringing Back the Black River**

A significant effort to increase awareness of the restoration efforts in the lower Black River was the development of a video documentary, *Bringing Back the Black River*. The premiere was held at the historic Palace Theater in Lorain, Ohio on April 26, 2014. A crowd of more than 100 people were in attendance to view the video that was a collaboration of numerous stakeholders including the Ohio EPA, City of Lorain, Lorain County agencies, Lorain County Community College, and the general public. It can be viewed on [www.blackriveraoc.com](http://www.blackriveraoc.com) and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Fx8Lk2iw60>.

### **Black River Clean-Up**

The 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Black River Clean-up was held May 3-4, 2014. This event was organized by LoCo ‘Yaks, a Lorain County Kayak & Paddle Sports Group, and active AOC Committee member. Over 280 volunteers “took back the Black” and removed 19.29 tons of trash, 660 pounds of scrap metal, and 125 tires, with a total of 21.995 tons of debris removed.

### **Black River Kayak-A-Thon**

The City of Lorain hosted the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Black River Kayak-A-Thon on Saturday, June 28, 2014, welcoming over 40 racers and casual paddlers to the Black River. The Kayak-A-Thon featured competitive races and a casual float for kayakers and canoers. Long and short races were included, each of which was separated into several classes based on type of paddle craft.

Racers completed either a 6-mile short race or a 13-mile long race travelling from the Wharf to Monkey Island, back to the Erie Avenue Bridge, back to Monkey Island, and finishing at the Wharf. There was also a casual float, which



*2014 Black River Kayak-A-Thon  
Courtesy of Coldwater Consulting*

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 Reservation, located off Old Colorado Avenue in Sheffield Lake while racers started at the Black River Wharf Boat Launch off 14<sup>th</sup> Street.

Participants in the float were encouraged to stop at designated locations to learn about the restoration projects and get “tokens” that were later exchanged for prizes at the awards ceremony held at the International Festival at Black River Landing. Prizes were also awarded for first, second and third place finishers in the long and short kayak races and canoe race.

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; and stream bank stabilization. The Kayak-A-Thon also serves to encourage water recreation and promote ecotourism on the Black River.

The event was organized and funded by the City of Lorain, with planning assistance provided by Lorain County Community Development Department, Lorain County Metro Parks, Lorain Port Authority, Lorain County General Health District, Sheffield Village, LoCo ‘Yaks and Coldwater Consulting, LLC. Financial support was provided by several sponsors including United Steel-workers District 1, Lorain County, Terminal Ready-Mix, Coldwater Consulting, West River Paddle Sports, Arcadis-US, Brown and Caldwell, and Great Lakes Kayaking.

For more information about future events or the Black River Kayak-a-Thon, as well as the City’s efforts, visit [www.lorainblackriver.com](http://www.lorainblackriver.com).

### ***Black River AOC Implementation and Demonstration Projects***

#### **Lower Black River Restoration Progress**

As of December 2014, the City of Lorain had secured twelve grants to complete ecological restoration activities within the Black River AOC. These grants included a \$6.3 million American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) grant awarded by the Ohio EPA in 2010, and a total of \$5.3 million in funding from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI), which was awarded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Ohio EPA, U.S. Forest Service, and the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) in 2011-2014. Other partners assisting the City with these grant projects include the Lorain Port Authority, Lorain County Metro Parks, Lorain Growth Corporation, Lorain County, and other county organizations.

In 2014, the ODNR Rookery Restoration project was completed, which involved removal of over 100,000 cubic yards of steel slag from an area adjacent to the existing Heron Rookery, restoring floodplain connection and hydrology. The material was removed by the City’s recycling brokerage contractor as in-kind match for the project. Following removal of the slag, 500 native trees, 1,000 native shrubs, and native seed were installed across the approximately 4-acre project area, much of which is anticipated to develop into floodplain wetlands.

The City also obtained \$1,347,644 from NOAA for the Lower Black River Landing and Heron Rookery Restoration Project. This project stabilized eroding banks and installed fish habitat shelves and other in-stream habitat at two locations. The first site was the Black River Landing, near River Mile 0.8. The second site was near the Heron Rookery at River Mile 3.0 and will extend bank restoration and fish habitat shelves that were completed during the ARRA project.

The City also obtained \$175,000 from NOAA for assessment of what is referred to as the Heron Rookery Restoration Phase II. An abandoned “basic oxygen process” (BOP) lagoon is present in this area, which must be remediated prior to riparian restoration. The City utilized these funds to assess subsoil conditions in the area to inform remedial and restoration design, which would be funded through a future grant.

The City also received \$88,000 from the U.S. Forest Service for near-shore plantings along River Miles 3.0 to 6.0. These plantings will consist primarily of live cuttings of willow and dogwood species that will be planted along the river to improve in-stream and near-shore habitat. Monitoring of habitat and biological communities also continued in 2014 to track success of the projects and evaluate progress made with respect to BUIs.



*ODNR Rookery Restoration Project During Construction / Slag Excavation: Courtesy of City of Lorain*



*ODNR Rookery Restoration Project Immediately After Construction: Courtesy of Coldwater Consulting*

### **Lorain County Invasive Species Removal Projects**

Lorain County completed the second year of their \$973,500 USEPA “Challenge Grant” in 2014. The project was sponsored NOAA and was intended to remove invasive species (particularly *Phragmites*) along the lower six miles of the Black River while also creating 20 part-time jobs in Lorain County. The project aims to control invasive species within a 40-acre area and also plant native shrubs and herbaceous seed mix to restore a native plant community. The sites were the old Lorain City landfill, the IRG property near the Henderson Road bridge, and the Colorado Industrial Park. Through 2014, the project employed a total of 69 people, 11 of which moved on to full-time employment elsewhere. Assessment and monitoring of the project will continue into 2015.



*Black River Civilian Conservation Corps: Courtesy of Lyn Ickes*

In 2014, the County was awarded approximately \$500,000 from USEPA for Phase II of the project, which aimed to control invasive species within an additional 30 acres along the lower Black River. This project also sustained the Black River Civilian Conservation Corps (BRCCC) which will continue to provide jobs and training for local citizens. The Phase II project controlled *Phragmites* primarily, but will also target purple loosestrife, narrow-leaved/hybrid cattail, and Japanese knotweed. Sites included old steel mill property along river miles 3-6, the gypsum plant, and Monkey Island.



Status of Black River AOC Beneficial Use Impairments

Beneficial Use Impairment		Status	Discussion
BUI 1:	Restrictions on Fish Consumption	Impaired	Impairment remains in Black River mainstem, East and West Branches, Findley Lake
	Restrictions on Wildlife Consumption	Not Impaired	Consumption restriction for snapping turtles is not considered to be an impairment
BUI 2:	Tainting of Fish and Wildlife Flavor	Not Impaired	No documented reports of fish or wildlife tainting in AOC
BUI 3:	Degradation of Fish Populations	Impaired	Impairment remains in Black River mainstem. Improving in French Creek, East and West Branches
	Degradation of Wildlife Populations	Not Impaired	No documented reports of problems with wildlife populations, including sentinel species, in the AOC
BUI 4:	Fish Tumors or Other Deformities	In Recovery	Impairment remains in lower mainstem, new tumor study is being planned
BUI 5:	Bird or Animal Deformities or Reproductive Problems	Not Impaired	No documented reports of problems with bird or animal deformities or reproductive problems in the AOC
BUI 6:	Degradation of Benthos	Impaired	Not impaired in the East Branch. Impairment remains in Black River mainstem and French Creek. Improvements seen in West Branch
BUI 7:	Restrictions on Dredging Activities	Impaired	Impairment remains in mainstem federal shipping channel
BUI 8:	Eutrophication	Impaired	Impairment remains in Black River Mainstem
	Undesirable Algae	Impaired	Conditions causing persistent algal problems in Findley and Brentwood Lakes and East Branch have improved.
BUI 9:	Restrictions on Drinking Water Consumption or Taste & Odor Problems	Not Impaired	No persistent problems drinking water consumption or taste or odor problems documented in the AOC
BUI 10:	Beach Closings (Recreational Contact)	Impaired	Impairment remains for Lake Erie beaches. Conditions improving in remainder of AOC
BUI 11:	Degradation of Aesthetics	Impaired	Impairment remains in Black River mainstem. Improving in French Creek, East and West Branches
BUI 12:	Added Costs to Agriculture or Industry	Not Impaired	No documented problems with added costs to agriculture or industry in AOC
BUI 13:	Degradation of Phytoplankton and Zooplankton Populations	NA	No documented problems for inland lakes in the AOC. Not applicable to river and streams.
BUI 14:	Loss of Fish Habitat	Impaired	Impaired in Black River mainstem and French Creek. Improvements seen in remainder of AOC
	Loss of Wildlife Habitat	Not Impaired	No documented problems with loss of wildlife habitat in AOC

### ***Future Black River AOC Activities***

The Black River AOC Advisory Committee will continue to work with the Ohio EPA and the USEPA to determine the management actions needed to complete the restoration of the AOC, remove BUIs, and bring the AOC to a near-term AOC and closer to de-listing. Committee discussions have been underway to re-size the boundary of the AOC in efforts to facilitate the de-listing process. This effort is still in development, as it entails a justification for demonstrating that the upper Black River watershed is comparable to other watersheds with similar land uses that are not AOCs.

BUIs that have been under discussion for removal from the AOC include fish and wildlife consumption, eutrophication/undesirable algae, and the degradation of aesthetics. Data has been provided to the AOC Advisory Committee from the Ohio EPA for consideration of BUI removals. These are likely to be removed in the next 1-3 years.

The AOC Advisory Committee will continue to structure itself according to the new State guidance and will have a larger role in facilitating community and public involvement.

### ***Contact Information***

Black River AOC Facilitating Organization: Lorain County General Health District

- Jill Lis, R.S., (440) 284-3224, [jlis@loraincountyhealth.com](mailto:jlis@loraincountyhealth.com)
- Stephanie Lesco, (440) 284-3263, [slesco@loraincountyhealth.com](mailto:slesco@loraincountyhealth.com)

Black River AOC Advisory Committee:

- Chair: Don Romancak, Director, Lorain County Community Development Department  
(440) 328-2323, [dromancak@loraincounty.us](mailto:dromancak@loraincounty.us)
- Co-Chair: Derek Feuerstein, Chief of Staff, City of Lorain  
(440) 204-2011, [Derek\\_Feuerstein@cityoflorain.org](mailto:Derek_Feuerstein@cityoflorain.org)
- Liaison: Kate Hoffmann, Storm Water Manager, City of Lorain  
(440) 204-2003, [Kathryn\\_Hoffmann@cityoflorain.org](mailto:Kathryn_Hoffmann@cityoflorain.org)

Ohio EPA District AOC Coordinator

- Ted Conlin, (330) 963-1131, [ted.conlin@epa.ohio.gov](mailto:ted.conlin@epa.ohio.gov)