

BLACK RIVER ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Area of Concern Annual Report



2021



YEAR IN REVIEW

3rd and 100th.

In January 2021, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced the removal of the 100th Beneficial Use Impairment (BUI) from a U.S. Area of Concern (AOC), a historic milestone in restoring the Great Lakes. **The accomplishment occurred at the Black River AOC** near Lorain, Ohio -- one of the 43 AOCs identified by the United States and Canada in the mid-1980s as the most environmentally degraded areas in the Great Lakes ecosystem. At the Black River AOC, EPA removed the *degradation of aesthetics* beneficial use impairment that was caused by environmental issues dating back decades, including upland erosion, mill dams, stream channelization and modifications, litter/trash dumping, and oil and grease deposition. This was the third BUI removal for the Black River from an original nine impairments. Following this removal, other federal, state, and municipal programs now in place will address future sources of aesthetic degradation.

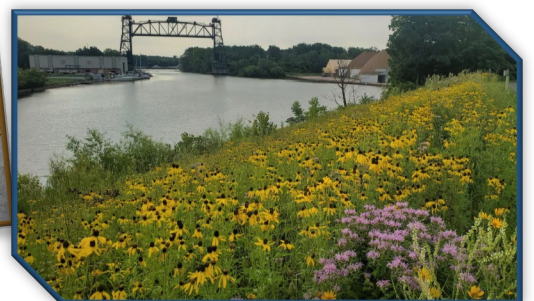
Read more @ www.epa.gov/great-lakes-aocs/black-river-aoc#buis

Management Actions COMPLETE!!

For each AOC, a management action list includes all projects necessary to remove the relevant BUIs and, hence, delist the AOC. Once all the management actions necessary for removing all BUIs have been completed, the AOC may move into the *Management Actions Complete* phase. These actions may not result in the immediate removal of a set of BUIs, but they are expected to allow environmental conditions to improve over time.

****As of the end of 2020, the Black River has entered the Management Actions Complete phase****

Under a consent decree from U.S. EPA, U.S. Steel dredged 50,000 cubic yards of PAH-contaminated sediment near the company's coking complex from 1989 to 1990. Since then, EPA and partners have worked to restore the AOC by identifying six habitat restoration management actions. As of 2020, all six of these management actions are substantially complete. Work completed as part of these management actions included installing fish shelves, restoring and constructing wetland, and restoring native streambank vegetation, among other projects. The success of these projects will continue to improve plant and animal populations, help remove BUIs, and contribute to the eventual delisting of the AOC.

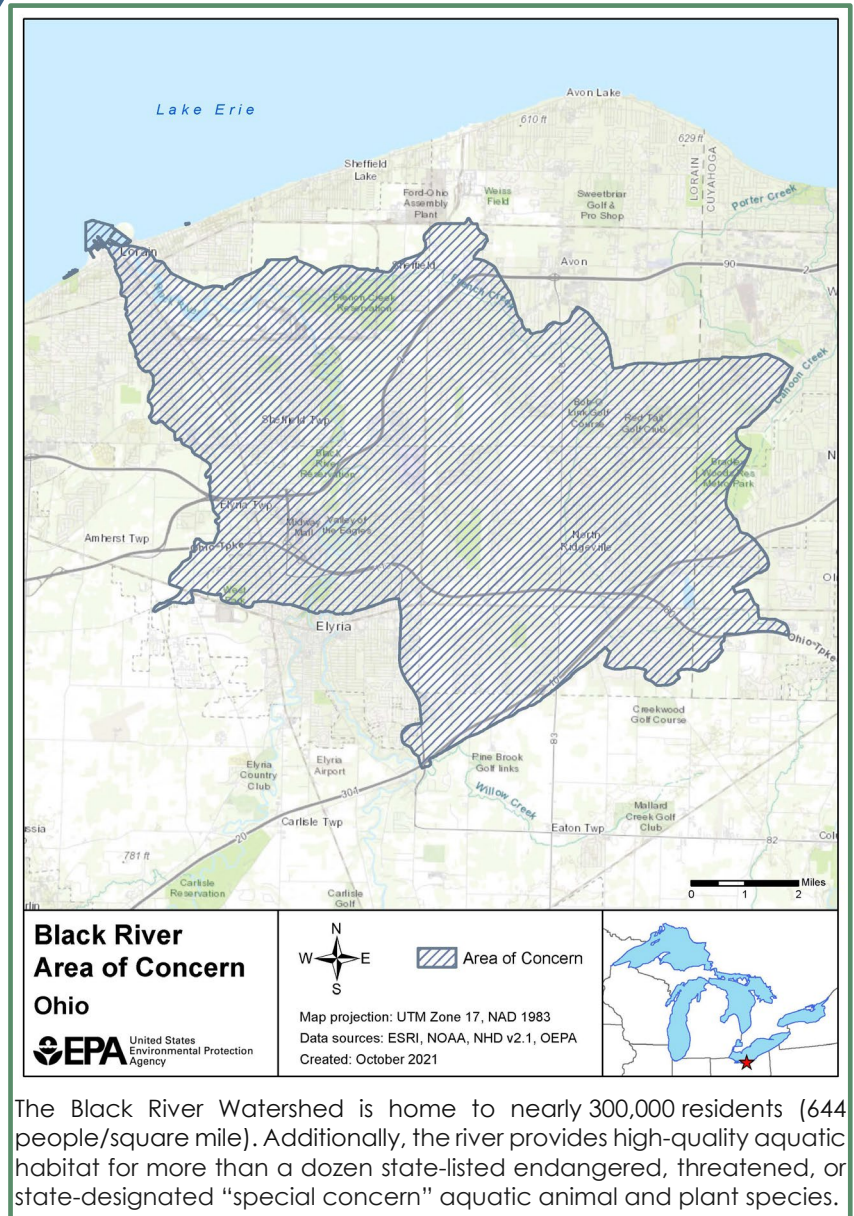


NEXT STEPS

The Path to Delisting

Four of the nine beneficial use impairments designated on the Black River have met their restoration targets and have been removed.

- **Restrictions on Fish and Wildlife Consumption**
- Removed 2016
- **Eutrophication or Undesirable Algae**
- Removed 2017
- **Degradation of Aesthetics**
- Removed 2021
- **Restrictions on Dredging Activities**
- Removed 2022
- **Degradation of Fish and Wildlife Populations**
- **Beach Closings**
- **Degradation of Benthos**
- **Fish Tumors or Other Deformities**
- **Loss of Fish and Wildlife Habitat**



So, what happens next? **Monitoring.** Data are collected to assess whether BUI restoration targets have been met. Studies may span several years and are a collaboration between federal agencies, State agencies, Tribes, and other partners. Once monitoring verifies the BUI removal criteria have been met, and upon review & approval by EPA, a BUI can be removed. Once monitoring has shown that the restoration targets for all designated BUIs have been met, the State or EPA can initiate the process of formally delisting the AOC. As the AOC becomes closer to delisting, the Black River Watershed will continue to see ecological benefits of a healthy environment and likely the economic benefits that result from an accessible, healthy waterfront. Because of these efforts, those who live in the area have the potential to see an improved overall quality of life tied to restored local natural resources.

THE COMMITTEE

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The Black River Advisory Committee (BRAC) was established to provide state and federal agencies local stakeholder input into the Area of Concern Program and Remedial Action Planning processes. Coordinating with other agencies, the BRAC's goal is to advise on restoration activities to address the Beneficial Use Impairments established by the U.S. - Canada Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement (GLWQA).

Located west of Cleveland in Northern Ohio, the Black River watershed drains into Lake Erie in the city of Lorain. The Black River was once nicknamed the "river of fish tumors" due to its long history of industrial, agricultural, and urban uses. This led to its inability to maintain aquatic life and support beneficial uses to such a degree that it was designated an Area of Concern (AOC) in 1987.

The Black River's Area of Concern encompasses the entire Black River mainstem from the mouth at Lake Erie to approximately River Mile 15, the French Creek Watershed, the Lorain Harbor area, and the nearby shoreline including two Lake Erie Beaches: Century Park and Lakeview Park.

In 2016, LoCo 'Yaks became the first non-governmental organization to facilitate for the AOC. The nonprofit provides staff for the committee, manages documentation, coordinates BRAC activities, and facilitates community outreach throughout Lorain County.

Members of the Executive Committee:

Don Romancak, *Chair* – Lorain County Community Development Coordinator

Max Schaefer, *Vice-Chair* – Main Street Lorain

Kate Golden, *City Liaison* – Storm Water Manager, City of Lorain

Tom Brown – Lorain Port and Finance Authority

Jill Lis – Lorain County Public Health

Jennifer Bracken / Jason Matyac – Lorain County Metro Parks

Jennifer Scott-Wasilk – Sandstone EHS Services, LLC

Matthew Nahorn – Beaver Creek Watershed

Julie Mackey – OSU Extension Lorain County

Kate Pilacky – Western Reserve Land Conservancy

Steve Holland – Local Stakeholder

John Sabo – Retired

Marijoy Halitzka – Lorain City landowner & farmer



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