



# ANNUAL REPORT

## 2015

### **Cuyahoga SWCD Mission**

To promote conservation of land and aquatic resources in a developed environment through stewardship, education and technical assistance

### **Highlights 2015**

- Cuyahoga SWCD sports its new image
- Increased working agreements with communities
- Storm Water Program expands
- Thousands of trees are planted
- Watershed Stream Maintenance Guide
- Weekly Blog posts are shared on the website

## CUYAHOGA SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION DISTRICT

Cuyahoga Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) marked its 66<sup>th</sup> year as a key promoter of natural resource protection in Cuyahoga County. Established in 1949 as a political subdivision of the state of Ohio and organized in Cuyahoga County, the Cuyahoga SWCD was first on the scene in promoting the importance of the county's soil and water resources. Operating under Ohio Revised Code 1515, with oversight by the Ohio Soil and Water Conservation Commission and governed by five unpaid, locally elected Supervisors, the SWCD continues to serve in its unique role.

The five elected Supervisors and three Associate Supervisors provided strong support and guidance to assist the Cuyahoga SWCD reaching its 2015 goals, which targeted the priorities outlined in the current Strategic Plan. Those priorities are to:

- Advocate for and provide urban soil and water conservation services and programs
- Work in cooperation with other public/private entities to assist in the achievement of Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) targets for impaired local watersheds, as well as providing significant assistance in meeting the bi-national targets to be established for the conservation of Lake Erie
- Establish and maintain strategic alliances to advance soil and water conservation
- Expand the organizational capacity of Cuyahoga SWCD
- Increase community and stakeholder awareness of Cuyahoga SWCD

The overall Cuyahoga SWCD program is county-wide. Currently the SWCD has working agreements with 27 communities (78% of the county's population) who rely on the SWCD's expertise to implement their mandated storm water pollution prevention programs. This year, two additional communities asked the Cuyahoga SWCD to assist in the implementation of their storm water management programs. Funding from the 27 communities was augmented by funding from Cuyahoga County and State of Ohio. Water quality improvement projects, stream and habitat restoration projects and educational projects were funded through various other grants.

Getting conservation on the ground is a top priority of the ten person staff. Staff understands the importance of good collaborative relationships and relied on its strong partnerships with other agencies, including the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), other public and private agencies, volunteers and seasonal interns to accomplish its annual goals. All programs were aimed at broadening the understanding of best environmental practices and encouraging behavioral changes to help get those practices regularly implemented.

The Cuyahoga SWCD performs work tasks under three program areas: Conservation Education, Storm Water Pollution Prevention and Watershed Management.

## Conservation Education Program

Cuyahoga SWCD has educated the public about soil and water resources since its inception in 1949. Education is provided through annual events and programs for targeted audiences and the general public, written materials, social media and direct technical assistance.



Water flowing from all Cuyahoga County streams eventually ends up—pollution and all in Lake Erie. ***“Honey, I Shrunk the Lawn”*** was the 2015 environmental theme. The theme was incorporated in the public involvement/public education efforts that were implemented throughout the county. Additional efforts provided tailored messages and events for the 24 communities that utilized the SWCD for their Public Involvement/Public Education (PIPE) programs. Staff instilled the importance of taking action in our own backyards to help protect local streams and our great Lake Erie. Programs and events aimed to inspire a change in behavior. Offerings included public involvement activities, such as stream monitoring, habitat restoration and the importance of native plants, and stream clean up events, which illustrated the importance of taking action and encouraged the public to adopt changes in their behavior for the benefit of a cleaner environment.

Including the efforts that were implemented through the Watershed Programs, approximately 84,500 households were directly reached by the Conservation Education program. Cuyahoga SWCD’s fact sheets, brochures, newsletters and posters were distributed to local libraries, nature centers and placed in local city hall lobbies, as well as at various events that were held throughout the county.

- Newsletters-5600 copies distributed three times per year across the county
- Rain barrel workshops and composting-13
- Green cleaning workshops-6
- Growing Success from the Ground Up workshops-3
- Storm Water Training Workshops-2
- Conservation tours-4

- Other workshops for the general public, teachers, and community partners-15
- National Wildlife Federation Backyard Habitat Stewards-12 participants were certified
- Participation in various county-wide conservation education programs/events, such as EarthFest, Public Works Day, and presentations to civic groups, students, and scout groups.

The SWCD revamped its brand in 2014 with an updated logo and website. Not only does the website look good, users have commented on the ease of navigating the site. Monthly calendars provide easy access to the various public programs and users can easily contact the SWCD staff through the site. A new feature in 2015 was the weekly blog posts written by staff about timely environmental or program-related topics.

### **Public Involvement and Public Education highlights**

- Stormwater Articles and Educational Materials, including monthly conservation tips and seasonal messages
- Shrink Your Lawn- Landscaping with Native Plants brochure mailed to 39,000 homes.
- Shrink Your Lawn-Landscaping with Native Plants poster
- Monthly Conservation Tips – 12
- Blog posts – 52 messages on topics related to pollution prevention, illegal dumping, storm water management and nutrient reduction
- Students (200) linked in to a Google Hangout to learn about a career as a conservationist.



17<sup>th</sup> Annual Big Creek Watershed Cleanup

### **New Yard: Alternatives to the ‘Perfect’ Green Lawn**

More than 100 people attended the Northeast Ohio Public Involvement Public Education (NEOPIPE) workgroup’s event that featured author, Anita Sanchez. Ms. Sanchez spoke about her book *“Teeth of the Lion: The Story of the Beloved and Despised Dandelion”* and offered her perspective on the home landscape that involves using less chemicals and more native plants to filter pollutants and soak in rain and storm water pollutants.



Trees and seedlings planted along Euclid Creek as part of 2015 Riparian Tree & Shrub Planting Program

## Euclid Creek and Rocky River Watershed Programs

The Euclid Creek and Rocky River watershed programs are aimed at protecting, restoring and preserving healthy watersheds through watershed planning, public education and collaboration among the watersheds' many stakeholders. Charged with implementing the state-endorsed watershed action plans, the staff seeks funding and works with partners to address impairments in their watersheds through special projects, ongoing environmental education programs and events.

Both watershed programs' successes are achieved through strong collaboration with conservation partner agencies, local officials, watershed residents and excellent staff support.

This year the success of the **Euclid Creek Watershed Program** and the unique partnership between Cuyahoga SWCD, Euclid Creek Watershed Council and the Friends of Euclid Creek were celebrated in the first Euclid Creek Watershed Summit. Program partners shared their historical perspectives of activities in the watershed from 2002 to the present. In addition to implementing the Public Involvement & Public Education (PIPE) Program for the nine watershed communities, other efforts centered on implementing goals in the state-approved Watershed Action Plan that identifies water quality concerns and actions to address those concerns, some of which are also tied into the Cuyahoga Area of Concern's efforts to delist impairments to water quality and habitat.

The Euclid Creek Watershed Coordinator provided technical and organizational/administrative support to the local government-oriented Euclid Creek Watershed Council and the Technical and PIPE Committees. The Watershed Council and PIPE Committees have work plans laying out an annual strategy for the outreach program, project planning, and grant development/assistance.

## 2015 Program Highlights:

- Program activities reduced pollutant loading to the Euclid Creek and its tributaries by 180 pounds of phosphorous.
- The Euclid Creek Riparian Tree and Shrub Planting Program was implemented in 2015 with \$13,700 in funding from an Ohio Lake Erie Commission grant. Streamside property owners (109) enrolled in the program and received 429 trees and 4,725 seedlings to plant along their stream. Those receiving seedlings own a combined 3.8 miles of stream in the watershed. Roughly 30 miles of Euclid Creek is above ground and ~13 miles is culverted below ground, so reforestation 13% of the stream is outstanding.

Estimating a 20% survival rate for the seedlings and an 80% survival rate for the 3-gallon trees, over 1 million gallons of storm water will be captured by the trees over 10 years of growth with an ecosystem services benefit of \$11,836. At 20 years, the benefit of the trees will be in capturing over 4.5 million gallons of storm water with an ecosystem services benefit of \$49,930 – quite the return on this grant's investment (*i-Tree calculations*).

## Public Involvement and Public Education Highlights:

- Assisted an Eagle Scout candidate with rain garden installation at Euclid Municipal Parking lot.
- Installed first volunteer rain garden in Mayfield Heights with the help of Mayfield Middle School Student Council students at the Mayfield Heights Community Center.
- Ongoing volunteer stream monitoring of 5 sites on a monthly basis.
- Day in the Life of Euclid Creek – hands-on water quality monitoring day in the watershed.
- Coordinated invasive plant pulls (3), Wildwood Park Spring and Fall clean up days (2), Rain Barrel Workshops (4), Green Cleaning Workshops (2), distribution of watershed newsletters (3), and monthly program broadcast emails to Euclid Creek enthusiasts.



Mayfield Heights Middle School students at the newly installed Mayfield Heights Rain



On the other side of the county, the **Rocky River Watershed Program** is equally robust. Unlike the mostly urban Euclid Creek watershed, the Rocky River watershed encompasses rural, suburban and urban communities, which provides opportunities to implement farm-related pollution prevention programs, as well as the usual programs that Cuyahoga SWCD administers.

### Achieving Warm Water Habitat Status!!!

Stream monitoring performed by OEPA, NEORSD and Cleveland Metroparks indicates that all 11.8 miles of the Main Stem of the Rocky River are now in complete attainment of its Warmwater Habitat (WWH) designated aquatic life use. ***This is the first time that the Main Stem has met its Clean Water Act goals for biology.*** The West Branch is also in complete attainment, as well as the entire East Branch, except for a short segment near the Bonnie Park dam in Strongsville. These same monitoring efforts demonstrate that the SWCD's removal of three low head dams in 2012 have restored the lower 0.9 miles of Baldwin Creek to full attainment of its WWH designated aquatic life use.

Despite this good news, there's still work to be done, as many of the tributaries continue to be in full or partial nonattainment of their designated aquatic life use, including all or portions of Abram Creek, Baldwin Creek, Blodgett Creek, Cossett Creek, Granger Ditch and both Plum Creeks. Also, bacteria pollution continues to be a problem throughout the watershed.

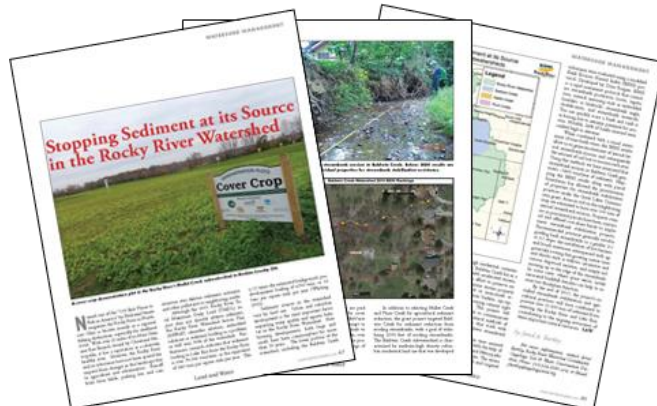


Volunteers assist with tree planting and streambank stabilization in the Rocky River watershed.

### 2015 Program Highlights:

- Program activities reduced pollutant loading to the Rocky River and its tributaries by 1700 tons of sediment, 2300 pounds of nitrogen and 875 pounds of phosphorus.
- "Watershed-friendly Stream Maintenance: A Guide for Communities" guidance document completed and initial community trainings completed. The project was funded through a grant from the Ohio Environmental Education Fund.

- Article about Great Lakes Commission-funded "Stopping Sediment at its Source in the Rocky River Watershed" published in July-August 2015 issue of *Land & Water Magazine*. Additionally, 397 acres of cover crops were installed on crop fields in the watershed through the project.



- The "Bucks for Buffers" streamside reforestation program kicked off in 2015. In partnership with the Rocky River Watershed Council, this Ohio Lake Erie Commission-funded pilot project incentivized riparian reforestation on residential properties through the use of a reverse auction, through which eligible landowners submit bids in the amount of payment they will except in exchange for allowing trees to be planted on their property. The auction process has been completed in the Abram Creek Baldwin Creek and Plum Creek subwatersheds. Tree planting will occur in Spring 2016.
- Through the "Extreme Makeover: Hinckley Stables" project, Cuyahoga SWCD and Cleveland Metroparks restored 530 feet of an ephemeral channel flowing through a former horse pasture, eliminating a severe head cut and adding 2 acres riparian forest to protect sensitive downstream cold water habitat. The project was funded through a grant from the Ohio EPA's Surface Water Improvement Fund.

### Public Involvement and Public Education Highlights:

- 1,440 streamside trees and shrubs planted by volunteers throughout the watershed at 5 planting events.
- 2 volunteer river/creek cleanups at which 89 volunteers cleaned trash from over 10 miles of Baldwin Creek and the Rocky River.
- 6 rain barrel workshops, where participants constructed 98 rain barrels to install at home.

## **Storm Water Pollution Prevention Program**

As a non-regulatory public service, the Cuyahoga SWCD Storm Water Program is focused on developing and implementing better methods to help guide planning, design, construction and maintenance of water quality Best Management Practices (BMPs) on active construction sites. As the permit that communities and contractors operate under evolves, so has the District's program which is implemented on behalf of 17 communities and the County's Department of Public Works. The Cuyahoga SWCD staff continues to build strong relationships with site operators and staff in the various communities, resulting in fewer "notices of deficiency." The SWCD's specialized technical education and assistance in the areas of erosion and sediment control, oversight, soil quality, urban agriculture and urban forestry, continue to play an important role in the county.

This year staff provided the following:

- New sites initiated in 2015-118; Total active sites visited throughout the year-326, with an average of 156 sites active in a given month.
- Review of preliminary plans, Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plans, best management practice plans, farm and soil quality management plans –179 reviewed.
- 1,870 Comprehensive Field Reviews of active construction sites were conducted throughout the year.

## **Long Term Operations & Maintenance Program**

Maintenance is necessary for the proper function of water quality and quantity treatment facilities. Once most construction projects are completed, staff continues to inspect the storm water facilities designed to address storm water runoff, such as bio-retention practices, basins, green roofs, and permeable pavement applications. This year, the program was expanded to be more helpful to the communities and to provide additional assistance to facility owners who are required to maintain storm water treatment facilities. Efforts included mapping sites and facilities, delivering inspection reports directly to individual property owners, providing on-site technical assistance and training to educate community service personnel and home owners associations about the importance of long term maintenance, as well as creating fact sheets for common maintenance items. The benefits of the program expansion have led to a greater awareness of the water quality and cost benefits of a good maintenance program.

- 430 Site Inspections
- 791 Facilities Inspected

- 42 Follow-Up Efforts including calls/emails/additional site visits
- 29 Follow-Up Site Visits in ten communities



Elizabeth Hiser verifies the depth of a retention basin.



Map of long term operations and maintenance inspections conducted by Cuyahoga SWCD in 2015.

## **Conservation Easements**

Cuyahoga SWCD holds conservation easements on 266 acres of land in 13 communities. These easements protect sensitive wetland and streamside areas. Staff conducted field inspections to ensure that the easements remain protected and in their natural state. "Keep it Natural" post cards were mailed to property owners adjacent to the easements. Field inspections also provided opportunities to meet with landowners to explain the purpose of the conservation easements and the importance of protecting the land.



## **Landowner Assistance**

Cuyahoga County residents frequently requested assistance and guidance from the SWCD. Staff assisted callers with issues related to drainage, soils, erosion, flooding, and land protection of sensitive areas. Some on-site assistance is also provided. In 2015, staff responded to 72 requests for assistance, including site-specific landowner assistance related to long term maintenance concerns in water quantity and water quality basins.



## Conservation Partners

The spirit of collaboration is extremely strong and our many partners strengthen the staff's ability to provide a stronger and more effective conservation program. Those partners include: Alliance for the Great Lakes, Army Corps of Engineers, Big Creek Connects, Cleveland Metroparks, Central Lake Erie Basin Watershed Collaborative, Chagrin River Watershed Partners, Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Port Authority, Cleveland Office of Sustainability, Cuyahoga County agencies—Board of Health, Department of Public Works, Cuyahoga County Planning Commission, Cuyahoga County Farm Bureau, County Land Bank, Cuyahoga Solid Waste District, Cuyahoga Community College East, Cuyahoga River Restoration, Cuyahoga Valley Conservancy, Cuyahoga Valley National Park, Euclid Beach Adopt-a-Beach, Euclid Creek and Rocky River Watershed Councils, Friends of Euclid Creek, Good Nature Organic Lawn Care, Holden Arboretum, Lake Erie Central Basin Work Group, National Wildlife Federation, NRCS, NEO PIPE, Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency, Northeast Ohio Storm Water Training Council, Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District, Notre Dame College, ODNR-Division of Soil & Water Resources, Ohio Environmental Council, Ohio EPA, Ohio Lake Erie Protection Fund, US EPA (GLRI), OSU Extension, The Nature Conservancy, West Creek Conservancy, Western Reserve Land Conservancy, Western Reserve RC & D and our great volunteers!



Cuyahoga SWCD and NRCS staff hosted a tour for the National Federation of Soil & Water Conservation Districts which highlighted conservation efforts in the county.

## Funders

Cuyahoga Soil and Water Conservation District's funding, as well as project grants, is almost entirely from state, county and local governments. The board and staff are appreciative of the support of Cuyahoga County, State of Ohio and the 27 communities that the SWCD assists through working agreements. Special thanks are also extended to the Friends of Euclid Creek and Rocky River Watershed Council who receive support through the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District.

## USDA

### NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE (NRCS)

The long time partnership between Cuyahoga SWCD and its federal partner, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has continued to grow. NRCS staff continued to bring federal dollars (program rate) to Cuyahoga County to assist in conservation and urban agricultural efforts, focused on Cleveland to help promote and provide fresh local produce in areas defined as "food desserts." The initiative provided incentive payments to qualified recipients for high tunnels (hoop houses) which extends the growing season. The Cleveland program has served as a model to inspire similar programs in other cities. In 2015, 27 contracts were awarded and 69 high tunnels have been installed since 2012. Since storm water runoff is a resource concern in the county, federal funds may also be used for drip irrigation, most of which is installed in the high tunnel.



High tunnels extend the growing season and notice the plants for pollinators.



Al Norwood, Urban Conservationist and Lynette Harmon, District Conservationist implement the NRCS programs in Cuyahoga County.

## Cuyahoga SWCD Staff

Cuyahoga SWCD staff had a successful year. The work program expanded, staff expertise increased and efficiencies were made for better delivery of our services. The staff's passion for the environment and commitment to Cuyahoga SWCD's mission supported ongoing conservation efforts that protected land and aquatic resources.

Janine Rybka.....District Administrator  
 Jared Bartley.....Rocky River Watershed Coordinator  
 Brent Eysenbach.....Storm Water Program Coordinator  
 Gloria Kestranek.....Administrative Assistant  
 Elizabeth Hiser.....Natural Resources Coordinator  
 Kelly Parker.....Urban Conservationist  
 Claire Posius.....Euclid Creek Watershed Coordinator  
 Carla Regener.....Storm Water Specialist  
 Amy Roskilly.....Conservation Education Specialist  
 Brian White.....Urban Conservationist  
 Lynette Harmon.....District Conservationist, NRCS  
 Al Norwood.....Urban Conservationist, NRCS



From left: Kelly Parker, Jared Bartley, Blaine Lary, Claire Posius and Amy Roskilly installing two mini rain gardens in front of the SWCD office.

## Program Interns 2015

Jon Jameyson, Blaine Lary and Dalton Macalla served as the 2015 program interns. Their assistance with research, stream and site assessments and conservation education efforts added to the Cuyahoga SWCD program implementation. We wish them all success in their future endeavors.

## Board of Supervisors

The Cuyahoga SWCD Board of Supervisors is volunteers elected to three year terms. Members share their time and talents to set policy and assist staff in program implementation. Board members supported and assisted with the 2015 community outreach efforts, including the Speaker's Bureau, outreach to local legislators, data review and developing position statements.

Ruth Skuly.....Chair  
 Howard Maier.....Vice Chair  
 Ted Esborn.....Secretary  
 Jeremiah Swetel.....Fiscal Agent/Treasurer  
 Tom Marsalis.....Lake Erie Central Basin Liaison

## In Memory

The board and staff fondly remember Tom Marsalis for his years of service to the Cuyahoga SWCD. His expertise and assistance will be greatly missed.

## Associate Supervisors

Each year the Board appoints associate supervisors. These volunteers expanded Cuyahoga SWCD's capacity and better enabled Cuyahoga SWCD board and staff to meet and exceed the 2015 goals. Their time and service was extremely important to increasing our ability to get conservation on the ground.

Kathleen Bradley  
 Patricia Carey  
 Dorothy Hazel

## 2015 ANNUAL MEETING

On beautiful September 24, the 2015 Annual Meeting was held at the Cuyahoga Valley Career Center in Brecksville. The program, held in collaboration with the Career Center and the Cuyahoga County Farm Bureau, featured seasonal produce provided by the Farm Bureau that was transformed into sublime and tasty hors d'oeuvres. Ruth Skuly was re-elected and Rachel Webb elected to serve on the Board of Supervisors for the 2016-2018 term.



Ruth Skuly and Rachel Webb, board supervisors-elect (2016-2018 term).

## 2015 Conservation Heroes

Each year at the Annual Meeting, the Cuyahoga SWCD board and staff honors individuals who voluntarily work to promote conservation. This year's conservation awards were presented to Sean Brennan as the Conservationist of the Year; Jamel Rahkeera, Village Family Farm, as the Cooperator of the Year; and the Cleveland Heights Monitoring Gang (David Smith, David Mothersbaugh, David and Bobbie Farrell and Ted Woodbridge) as the volunteers of the year. Congratulations to all!



Jan Rybka, District Administrator and Sean Brennan, *Conservationist of the Year*



Euclid Creek Monitoring Gang-Irene Smith, Donna & Dave Mothersbaugh accept the Volunteers of the Year award for the team that also included David Smith, David & Bobbi Farrell and Ted Woodbridge.



Jan Rybka and Ruth Skuly recognize Jamel Rahkeera as the *Cooperator of the Year*.

## Cash Basis Report 2015

| RECEIPTS   | DISTRICT FUND       | SPECIAL FUND        |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|
| Taxes  |                     |                     |
| Grants:  |                     |                     |
| Local Government   |                     | \$439,125.00        |
| State Government   |                     | \$407,663.00        |
| Federal Government   |                     |                     |
| Sale of Products/Materials   | \$11,272.00         |                     |
| All Other Revenue  | \$622,508.00        |                     |
| <b>TOTAL RECEIPTS</b>  | <b>\$633,780.00</b> | <b>\$846,788.00</b> |
| DISBURSEMENTS  |                     |                     |
| Salaries   |                     | \$504,909.00        |
| Supplies   | \$7,142.00          | \$2,868.00          |
| Equipment  | \$1,612.00          | \$45,471.00         |
| Contract Services/Cost Share Payments  | \$70,010.00         | \$21,843.00         |
| Office Rent  |                     | \$19,500.00         |
| Travel & Expenses  | \$2,859.00          | \$3,859.00          |
| Advertising /printing  | \$10,880.00         | \$23,283.00         |
| PERS   |                     | \$70,118.00         |
| Worker's Compensation  |                     | \$365.00            |
| Unemployment Compensation  |                     | \$0.00              |
| Hospitalization  |                     |                     |
| Medicare   |                     |                     |
| Product/Materials for Resale   | \$9,460.00          |                     |
| Other (postage, printing, county indirect fees, insurance & bonds, phone, fax, internet, dues) | \$25,154.00         | \$111,442.00        |
| <b>TOTAL DISBURSEMENTS</b>   | <b>\$127,117.00</b> | <b>\$803,658.00</b> |
| <b>Total Receipts Over/(Under)</b>   | <b>\$506,663.00</b> | <b>\$43,130.00</b>  |

Check out our website at [www.cuyahogaswcd.org](http://www.cuyahogaswcd.org)

*Cuyahoga SWCD is an equal opportunity employer and provider*