



ON *the* LAND

Cuyahoga Soil & Water Conservation District | *Leading Conservation in the Urban Landscape*

Summer 2026

Our Land. Our Water. Our Future.

Cuyahoga Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) has been part of our community for 77 years. Some of you have been with us for decades, while others are just getting to know who we are. With so much growth and change, both in conservation and within our District, it felt like the right moment to reintroduce ourselves.

In this issue, we're taking a look back at how it all began, how conservation has evolved over the years, and the role our District plays in supporting a healthier, more resilient Cuyahoga County. Visit our website for more info www.cuyahogawcd.org.

How it all began

Soil & Water Conservation Districts were born out of one of the most challenging environmental crises in U.S. history: the Dust Bowl of the 1930s. A mix of severe drought and unsustainable farming practices stripped away millions of tons of topsoil, creating destructive dust storms that swept across the heartland.

One of the strongest voices for change was Hugh Hammond Bennett, known as the father of soil conservation. Bennett understood a simple truth: once soil is lost, it can take thousands of years to

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Cuyahoga Soil & Water Conservation District

Mission

To foster a healthy and resilient urban environment through soil and water conservation practices, community engagement, and environmental stewardship.

We are your local leader in urban conservation!

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rebuild. His advocacy helped shift national policy toward long-term conservation.

In response, Congress passed Public Law 74-46 on April 27, 1935, declaring that the loss of soil and moisture was “a menace to the national welfare.” This landmark decision created the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) within the USDA, with Bennett as its first chief. In 1994, SCS became the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), a name that better reflects its broader mission.

Federal leaders quickly realized that conservation couldn't succeed without local involvement. In 1937, states were authorized to form local soil conservation districts. The first was Brown Creek District in North Carolina. Others soon followed, and in 1949, Cuyahoga County established the Cuyahoga Soil & Water Conservation District.

Today, Cuyahoga SWCD has a team of 18 dedicated staff members serving communities across the county. Together with residents, businesses, landowners, and local leaders, we work toward a shared vision: a thriving, resilient urban landscape where healthy soil and clean water are protected, valued, and accessible to everyone.

With increasing impervious surfaces across Cuyahoga County, Cuyahoga SWCD's work centers on reducing stormwater pollution and helping communities stay in compliance with the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit through Ohio EPA. Our efforts span public education, community involvement, watershed protection, construction site inspections, and long-term operations and maintenance of stormwater control measures.

Cuyahoga SWCD has four service areas

- Education & Outreach
- Watershed Management
- Stormwater Management
- Healthy Soils & Natural Resources

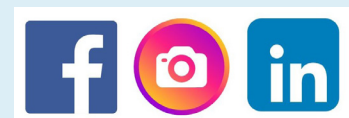
We are governed by a board of five supervisors, each elected to a three-year term. Supervisors are elected public officials.

There are 88 soil & water conservation districts in the state of Ohio and fall under the Ohio Department of Agriculture, Division of Soil and Water Conservation.

We are not a county agency, however we utilize county services, such as payroll, benefits, and retirement.

Visit our website and follow us on social media!

www.cuyahogaswcd.org



Education & Outreach

Education is the cornerstone of our work. Cuyahoga SWCD provides programming and resources that support conservation education and environmental stewardship.

Growing Connections that Lead to Action

Our programs are designed to build awareness of local natural resources and give residents the tools to take the next step in their conservation journey. We're planting seeds of knowledge, and sometimes actual seeds, across the county, inviting everyone to be part of this work.

We reduce barriers wherever we can.

- Instead of simply talking about the value of native plants, we offer native plant kits and seed sales delivered right to your doorstep.
- We offer a limited number of free soil test kits every year so you can get the answer you need to make informed decisions about your garden and lawn.
- Our education team supports teachers by offering free state-aligned standard workshops, offering graduate credits, and hands-on experiences they can bring back to their classroom.
- We offer in-classroom visits or teachers can borrow conservation models, such as Enviroscope, to teach about stormwater pollution.
- We inspire students to take action and even consider future careers in the environmental field through the Envirothon competition, shadowing, internships, and our Conservation Career Day and Symposium.
- Each year, we offer high school students free sponsorships to attend Camp Canopy.
- Communities rely on us not only to help them stay in compliance with the NPDES permit, but also to encourage meaningful behavior change around stormwater pollution.



Cuyahoga SWCD has engaged with over 10,000 youth and residents in the past decade.

We have sold over 7,300 rain barrels since 2008.

Each native plant kit we sell has 50 plants in it. With 1,012 sold to date, that is 50,600 native plants in the ground!

Our native seed packets cover 250 square feet. Since 2016 we have sold 1,816 packets. That's 454,000 square feet of habitat!

Cuyahoga SWCD is here for the small steps, the connections, and the guidance that lead to bigger actions, and we celebrate every step along the way.

Watershed Management

Cuyahoga SWCD works to raise awareness of our watersheds among residents, businesses, and local leaders, while implementing impactful restoration projects.

We ALL live in a watershed!

A watershed is the land area that channels rainfall and snowmelt to creeks, streams, and rivers and eventually to outflow points such as reservoirs, bays, and the ocean.

The state of Ohio has two primary watersheds - Lake Erie and the Ohio River. Cuyahoga County has roughly 20 different watersheds within its boundaries. Cuyahoga SWCD works specifically in the Rocky River, Euclid Creek and Cuyahoga River Area of Concern, however we support all waterways that flow in and around our County, and Lake Erie!

In our urban environment, the health of our floodplains, rivers, and Lake Erie is primarily dictated by our ability and willingness to keep stormwater runoff in balance with the landscape's ability to absorb and filter it. Our watershed team has a Nonpoint Source Implementation Strategy (NPSIS) to guide the work in their watersheds. The NPSIS is a living strategic planning document that summarizes causes and sources of impairment, established critical areas, identifies quantifiable objectives to address causes and sources of impairment, and describes projects designed to meet those objectives.

Cuyahoga SWCD's watershed team puts the NPSIS into action by helping residents understand how everyday stewardship strengthens local waterways, whether it's planting live stakes to stabilize streambanks or adopting simple at-home practices. The team also secures grant funding to restore NPSIS-identified impairments, including dam removals and floodplain reconnection.

To date, our watershed projects have restored more than 25,000 linear feet of stream (over 5 miles!), improving habitat, resilience, and water quality across the county.



- The **Rocky River Watershed** encompasses 294 square miles, stretches from Medina to Lake Erie, and includes parts of Cuyahoga, Medina, Lorain and Summit Counties, including all or part of 32 municipalities and townships.
- The **Euclid Creek Watershed** encompasses 24 square miles in northeastern Cuyahoga County and a portion of Lake County. It covers portions of 11 communities, 10 of which are in Cuyahoga County.
- The lower 46.5 miles of the Cuyahoga River, including all the tributaries that drain to that section of river, and the adjacent Lake Erie shoreline and its direct tributaries, comprise the **Cuyahoga River Area of Concern**.

Stormwater Management

Cuyahoga SWCD's Stormwater team helps communities minimize pollution from rain and snow runoff in our built environment.

We want to see only rain down the drain!

Cuyahoga SWCD's stormwater staff is out and about every day inspecting construction sites to make sure they have the proper erosion and sediment controls. During active construction, a site is at its most vulnerable: soil is exposed, trucks move in and out, and materials are continually delivered, mixed, poured, and put into place. Left unchecked, runoff from these sites can go down a storm drain and make its way untreated to our creeks, rivers, and Lake Erie. With proper erosion and sediment controls in place, much of that is avoided. When a site is developed there must be stormwater control measures (SCM's) that help control water that would have drained on the site before development, preventing pollution from entering our waterways.

As part of the NPDES permit, any construction site that disturbs one acre or more, whether individual or contiguous, must have a stormwater pollution prevention plan in place. Our team reviews these plans and works directly with builders to ensure each site meets required standards before construction begins.

Once work is underway, our staff conducts monthly inspections and documents any deficiencies, such as ineffective silt fencing or missing concrete washouts. We collaborate with construction managers and site crews to correct issues quickly to ensure projects stay compliant and moves forward smoothly.

Once a project is complete, it enters Long-Term Operation and Maintenance (LTOM). During this phase, each site is inspected every 1-3 years to ensure its SCM's continue to function properly, draining and filtering stormwater as designed.



What are some of the Stormwater Control Measures used in Northeast Ohio?

- **Bioretention Area** - depressed area that allows shallow ponding of stormwater runoff and treats it before it drains.
- **Permeable Pavement** - material that provides structure and stability yet allows water to pass through the pavement and infiltrate to the soil below.
- **Riparian/wetland setback** - a designated strip of land along the edge of a stream, river, lake or wetland that is set aside to protect the watercourse and its surrounding habitat.
- **Rain Garden** - a shallow, landscaped depression that contains native plants and captures stormwater runoff from roofs and driveways.

Healthy Soils & Natural Resources

Healthy communities start with healthy soils and natural resources. Cuyahoga SWCD offers programs and resources to support protection and restoration of Cuyahoga County's soils and other valuable natural resources.

Soil is the building block of life!

We walk on it, plant in it, dig it up, and build on it, yet many people rarely give soil a second thought. For us, it's in our name, and it's on our minds every day. Soil shapes everything around us, from the health of our gardens to the stability of our neighborhoods. When we care for it, we're really caring for our entire community.

Our staff spends every day helping people see that connection, offering practical tools and guidance that make conservation feel accessible rather than overwhelming. We're out in classrooms, at community events, and on-site with landowners, turning curiosity into action and small steps into long-term stewardship. The more we understand what's happening beneath our feet, the more empowered we are to protect the places we call home.

More trees, please!

Cuyahoga County launched the Healthy Urban Tree Canopy (HUTC) Program in 2019 to combat declining tree canopy. Led by a partnership of county agencies and Cuyahoga SWCD, the program invested \$1 million annually through 2024 to help municipalities, CDCs, and nonprofits protect and expand local tree cover.

In 2025, Cuyahoga SWCD became the program's lead administrator, shifting from grants to directly contracting tree services for communities. For 2026, the county has allocated \$225,000 to continue this work. Since its start, the HUTC Program has planted over 13,000 trees, maintained 6,000 more, and developed 38 urban forestry plans.



Investing in Cuyahoga County

Cuyahoga SWCD established the Conservation Action Grant & Scholarship Fund in 2021 with an initial goal to provide 75 grants and/or scholarships by our 75th Anniversary in 2024. The program offers small grants and scholarships for conservation education and projects aimed at improving soil and water resources in Cuyahoga County and is available to residents, organizations and schools.

We have since surpassed our original goal, providing over 100 grants and scholarships totaling more than \$70,000 for projects such as pollinator gardens, tree planting, seed libraries and more. Our 2026 grant round will open for applications later this summer, with awards made in September.

Cuyahoga SWCD Team and Board Supervisors

TEAM MEMBERS

Kristin Hall Fitzgerald

Executive Director

Fred Anger, CESSWI

Urban Technician

Jared Bartley, CFM

Deputy Director | Watersheds & Education

Tim Becker, MEd

Education Program Manager

Sarah Brunot

Urban Technician

Kate Chapel

Watershed Coordinator | Euclid Creek

Lauren Conard, CESSWI

Stormwater Program Coordinator

Brent Eysenbach, CPESC, CESSWI

Deputy Director | Stormwater

Teresa Haendiges

Fiscal Administrative Specialist

Jakob Hamlescher, CESSWI

Urban Technician

Meg Hennessey

Watershed Program Manager

Kylie Karagiozis

Urban Technician

Nichole Lopez

Watershed Coordinator | Cuyahoga River AOC

Kelly Parker, CPESC, CESSWI

Stormwater Program Manager

Carla Regener, CPESC, CESSWI

Deputy Director | Natural Resource Programs

Amy Roskilly

Communications Director

Ana Spiridigliozzi

Urban Technician

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Welcome to our new interns!



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Libby Ranker

*Stormwater
Program
Intern*

Cuyahoga SWCD interns bring fresh energy and real support to our work, and these internships give them hands-on experience that helps launch their careers. They grow their skills and confidence, and we get to watch the next generation of environmental leaders take shape. Visit www.cuyahogawcd.org/careers

Love the newsletter but hate the paper?

Contact Amy Roskilly, aroskilly@cuyahogawcd.org.

We can put you on our broadcast email list that includes an electronic version of our newsletter and other pertinent conservation news!



3311 Perkins Ave., Suite 100
Cleveland, OH 44114

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www.cuyahogaswcd.org

Sunday, October 4, 2026
Clark Field Park | Cleveland

