**Ottawa River Coalition Meeting Minutes**

**January 21, 2021 Virtual Meeting 8:00 am**

*In attendance:*

Beth Seibert, Allen County Commissioners Travis Fillhart, Allen County EMA

Joe Gearing, Allen County Engineer’s Office Brian Nartker, Allen County Health Dept.

Steve Kayatin, Allen County Sanitary Eng. Dept. Casey Heilman, Allen SWCD

Teresa Adams, Allen SWCD Kim Riddell-Furry, Alloway

Awilda Ortiz, Alloway Anne Decker, Anne Decker Marketing

Patrick Beam, Beam Designs LLC Jim Morrisey, City of Lima Public Works Dept. Mike Elwood, Hardin SWCD Tyler Black, JAMPD

Shane Coleman, LACRPC Adam Haunhorst, LACRPC

Brian Riedmaier, National Lime and Stone Cory Gonya, Nutrien

Russ Decker, Nutrien Brett Allerding Curfman, ODOT Dist. 1

Nate Tessler, ODOT Dist. 1 Clint Schroeder, OSU Extension Allen County

Boden Fisher, OSU Extension Allen County Kevin Cox, Perry Township Trustees

Leslie Riley, Tri-Moraine Audubon Society Haley Belisle, Ottawa River Coalition

Chairman Cory Gonya called the meeting to order at 8:02 am.

Cory welcomed the group to the Virtual Annual Meeting. Usernames were called to determine who was in attendance.

No additions to the agenda were requested.

Cory introduced the meeting minutes from November 19, 2020. There were no requests for additions or corrections to the minutes. *Motion by Jim Morrisey to approve the minutes of the Nov. 19, 2020 meeting. Motion seconded by Kevin Cox and carried.*

**Treasurer’s Report**

2020 Financial Report – Executive Director Haley Belisle presented the 2020 Financial Report, outlining income, expenses, and account balances for 2020. *Motion by Steve Kayatin to approve the 2020 Financial Report. Motion seconded by Kevin Cox and carried.*

**Nominating Committee Report**

Nominating Committee Report – Chairman Cory Gonya presented the following slate of officers, each to serve a one-year term, beginning this evening:

* + Chairman – Joe Gearing, representing the Allen County Engineer’s Office
  + Vice Chairman – Tyler Black, representing the Johnny Appleseed Metropolitan Park District
  + Treasurer – Sophia Fisher, representing the City of Lima Department of Community Development

The Chairman asked for nominations from the floor. *Motion by Kevin Cox to close nominations and elect the slate as presented. Motion seconded by Steve Kayatin and carried. Nominations closed. Slate of officers was elected as presented.*

**Award Presentations**

Outstanding Watershed Partner – Nate Tessler

This past year, Nate Tessler contributed significantly toward our goal to remove the Allentown Lowhead Dam. Nate has served as a District Environmental Coordinator for ODOT District One Office for the last seven years and has become a close partner and member of the Ottawa River Coalition. Nate took on an invaluable role during the removal of the lowhead dam and led a coordinated effort to find and relocate stranded mussels along the streambed. He spent many months advising the Coalition on this process and his involvement helped us achieve our goal. During the two days of removal, Nate arrived at the site with enthusiasm and a sincerity to not only protect the natural wildlife but to also educate and engage with volunteers. He was there to answer our many, many questions and his participation was pivotal toward this step for long-term improvements in water quality for the Ottawa River. We are proud to name Nate Tessler as our 2021 Outstanding Watershed Partner!

Watershed Impact Award – Beth Seibert

It is with great admiration and respect that we honor Beth Seibert for her 27 years dedicated towards the success of the Ottawa River Coalition and the wise use and management of the Ottawa River Watershed. Her commitment and dedication to her roles as Ottawa River Coalition Coordinator and Allen Soil and Water Conservation District Stormwater & Watershed Programs Coordinator are simply unparalleled. Her many years of leadership and support for this Coalition and our watershed have been evident in her active participation in community events too numerous to count. For nearly three decades, she has engaged with the public to help them make a connection to our river and help them understand that we all must work together to protect our watershed. Her relentless work has contributed to the improvement of water quality in the Ottawa River and has laid a lasting foundation for future progress in the health of this river system. Congratulations to Beth as we recognize her with the Watershed Impact Award!

**Special Announcement**

Previous Chairmen, Russ Decker and Kevin Cox gave a special announcement where they announced the establishment of the Beth Seibert Environmental Scholarship. This scholarship will be offered to undergraduate students with a major in environmental science and/or other related majors. Past chairmen will serve on the Scholarship Committee and will be working with the Lima Community Foundation. This scholarship is being dedicated to Beth Seibert for her many years of service for Ottawa River Coalition and her countless hours working “behind the scenes.”

**School to River Program Update**

Allen SWCD Stormwater Program Manager, Casey Heilman thanked the Coalition for their contributions to the School to River Program. Casey uses the School to River funds to enable classes and groups to experience the stream by providing things such as bus transportation and porta potties. This has been a hard year to get classrooms/groups into the stream due to COVID-19 restrictions. Last October, Allen SWCD and ORC partnered to host the Allen Lima Leadership (ALL) 2020 class at the former site of the Allentown Lowhead Dam. The ALL class collected macroinvertebrates from the river and learned about water quality.

**Lowhead Dam Project Report**

Cory Gonya gave an update on the Allentown Lowhead Dam Removal Project and Haley Belisle showed a collection of photos and videos from the dam removal. The Allentown lowhead dam was installed in 1933 in support of a stream flow gauging station that was operated by the U.S.

Geological Survey agency until 1984. The dam had not served a purpose since that time. The dam was 88 feet long, 4 feet tall and 2.5 feet thick. Ottawa River Coalition initiated the process to remove the dam following the 2010 Ohio EPA Biological and Water Quality study and the 2013 Ohio EPA Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) report. The TMDL report recommended the removal of the dam because the dam is a barrier to fish passage and water quality. That study determined that downstream of the dam the river is in full attainment of the state’s aquatic life water quality status. Upstream of the dam the river is only in partial attainment. The dam is not the only cause of the upstream impairment, but it is significant enough of a barrier that OEPA strongly believes that removing the dam will result in water quality improvement. Public meetings were held in 2018 and neighboring property owners had no objection to the removal of the dam. Permitting and approval of the dam removal were secured at the state and federal levels from the US Army Corps of Engineers, Ohio EPA, Ohio Dept. of Natural Resources and Ohio USGS. A Hydraulic and Hydrology study was performed to evaluate the effects of removing the dam. The study showed the upstream and downstream flow elevations and flow velocities will be minimally impacted or unchanged. The streambed area above the dam, extending for approximately one-third of a mile upstream, may narrow over time due to the elimination of the impounded area or dam pool. Degen Excavating Company began removal on August 27, 2020 and completed removal on August 28. One unique consideration of the removal involved the relocation of freshwater mussels that could have become stranded along the nearshore dewatered areas. Nate Tessler, a certified Mussel Surveyor, coordinated the efforts of his team and volunteers from Ottawa River Coalition to relocate 85 mussels representing 10 different species.

**Coordinator’s Report**

Haley Belisle gave the Coordinator’s report. “What an interesting first year this has been! Of the many things I prepared for when I transitioned into this role of director, COVID was definitely not one of them. This pandemic has seen many dramatic changes to so many aspects of life. It was greatly unfortunate that we were unable to hold our March regular meeting and Good Friday Fish Fry event last year. One of the aspects I loved about the Coalition Meetings I had previously attended as a guest was the feeling of togetherness. I could immediately tell that this was a close-knit community with members that truly enjoyed being around each other and learning from each other. I was concerned about losing that togetherness after we had to cancel in-person meetings, but there was no need because I have been so impressed at how virtual meetings have been able to *keep* us connected. I love joining our meetings and often hear everyone’s conversations and how we catch up with one another. I think it is this “togetherness” that keeps us in sight of our mission. This past August we succeeded in our goal to remove the Allentown Lowhead Dam after several years of preparation and planning. We had so many members, coming from different backgrounds and careers, to help us in this endeavor in whatever way they could. This was a significant step towards improving the water quality in this section of stream and we are already finding great macroinvertebrate species inhabiting the streambed where the lowhead dam used to be located. We also had members come together and generously provide nearly $1,000 in special donations to help fund the Coalition after we were unable to hold our annual fundraiser. We are blessed to have such dedicated members and we truly appreciate their benevolence. This year we look forward to the 2021 Good Friday Fish Fry **Drive-thru** at the Allen County Fairgrounds. This will take place on Good Friday, April 2nd from 11 AM to 6:30 PM. There will be some changes to the Fish Fry this year, but, it will still feature that delicious fish dinner from Lock Sixteen. We will be selling pre-sale tickets and will provide each meal with an informational brochure that educates the public on the Coalition and our mission. I want to thank those that have already reached out to volunteer their time to help with this fundraiser. Once again it is that “togetherness” that really allows us to achieve our goals. I want to thank our many members and partners for really accepting me into this organization during my first year and generously providing your time and guidance. I know we haven’t known each other very long, but I already hold this organization very near and dear to my heart and I look forward to what we can accomplish together.”

**Special Presentation**

The Ohio State University Extension Office gave a presentation regarding Water Quality Research and Activities. Clint Schroeder and Boden Fisher spoke about the OSU extension office team and ongoing research in this watershed. Clint is the Ag and Natural Resources Educator for Allen County Extension. Boden is the Water Quality Extension Associate for Putnam, Hardin, and Hancock counties. Brigitte Moneymaker is the Water Quality Extension Associate for Allen, Auglaize, and Mercer counties. OSU Extension Agriculture and Natural Resources empowers Ohio’s agriculture and natural resources communities, provides outreach and education based on unbiased research, and cultivates relationships to strengthen the economic viability and quality of life for Ohioans. One of OSU Extension’s recent projects addresses updates to Tri-State fertilizer recommendations. This six-year update process helped show that nutrient removal rates are decreasing, sulfur deficiencies are increasing, Nitrogen recommendations are based on economics rather than crop removal rate, and that soil type differences impact Potassium. The Water Quality Associates have been working on providing local education on water quality and outreach for Best Management Practices. BMP’s for water quality includes research-based recommendations, demonstrations, and technology amplification. One local project underway is the Delphos Drinking Water Intake. The project targets the Little Auglaize River as the City of Delphos’ drinking water source has both nitrate and cyanotoxin impairments. A nutrient analyzer has been installed at the drinking water intake and provides daily readings of nitrate & DRP every two hours. They hope this project will provide baseline water quality data to measure BMP effectiveness, assist City of Delphos with drinking water impacts, and utilize remote sensing models to identify priority areas and better inform future BMP implementation.

**New Business**

Member and Partner Reports

* Johnny Appleseed Metropolitan Park District – Tyler Black reported that the district recently wrapped up their management of Oak Wilt at Hermon Woodlands. They removed 6.5 acres of infected red oak trees and have started work to re-open the trails. JAMPD has been hosting virtual hikes and will soon be able to offer in-person hikes in some locations. JAMPD has been working with The Nature Conservancy on a wetland project near Motter Metro Park.
* City of Lima Public Works Dept. – Jim Morrisey provided updates for a couple of Lima drainage projects that are underway. The City has received contracts for the various 2021 drainage improvements that will focus on 5-6 areas of the community.
* Perry Township – Kevin Cox reported of the loss of a faithful public servant to our community. Daryl Styer passed away on January 7th. He was an active firefighter and EMS worker, beginning with Harrod and then transferring to Perry Township, where he had served as Fire Chief multiple times. Through the years, he had trained many firefighter and paramedics and worked 30 years with Lima Allen County Paramedics. Daryl has many firefighter awards, was firefighter of the year, and had been honored for saving a life. Perry Township will be honoring him at their next meeting.
* Alloway – Kim Riddell-Furry provided an update on Alloway’s projects. Alloway recently met with Ohio EPA’s Director of Surface Water. There are plans for OEPA to release all information/data that is being used for the fast-tracked Maumee TMDL study.
* Allen Soil and Water Conservation District – Haley Belisle and Casey Heilman announced that ASWCD has plans with local classrooms to conduct environmental education events as COVID-19 guidelines are lifted. ASWCD will be hiring two summer interns and are accepting resumes through March 1st.
* Beam Designs LLC – Patrick Beam reported of recent ongoing projects. The Clean Ohio Fund has continued to be a key asset in these projects. Beam Designs has recently finished an innovative stairway project at Camp Myeerah Nature Center. They have entered a final phase in designing the Stream Restoration Project for the Auglaize River in Fort Jennings. Beam Designs have been working with property owners regarding restoration in Sugar Creek.
* Tri-Moraine Audubon Society – Leslie Riley reported that they have recently passed new bylaws and a new strategic plan that focuses on conservation activities, active service, and expands Tri-Moraine’s image.
* ODOT District 1 – Brett Allerding Curfman reported that ODOT District 1 is currently putting together their annual stormwater report. There were no issues in our District this year.
* Allen County Engineer’s Office – Joe Gearing reported that ACE has secured $1.5 million in funds to construct three wetland basins. ACE is looking for additional locations for these wetlands/two-stage ditches. Volunteers would be compensated for the use of their property.
* Allen County Health Dept. – Brian Nartker recently took over for Bill Kelly as the Environmental Health Director. They are participating in water pollution control funds through OEPA to assist homeowners with failing septic systems to repair or replace systems or connect to sanitary systems.

*Motion by Jim Morrisey to adjourn the Annual meeting. Motion seconded by Casey Heilman and carried.* Meeting adjourned at 9:30 am. The next meeting of the Ottawa River Coalition is Thursday, March 25, 2021 at 8:00 AM.

Minutes transcribed by Haley Belisle, Executive Director.