

green watch

FALL 2019

THE NEXT FIFTY YEARS OF THE OEC:

Climate Action

Going Local

Lifting Up
Environmental
Justice



Ohio Environmental Council



REFLECTION, ACTION, VISION

2019 has been a year of reflection, of action, and of vision.

Together, we have thoughtfully reflected on the Ohio Environmental Council's past 50 years and on our collective, collaborative progress to secure a healthy environment for all Ohioans. Through our toughest fights and biggest wins, countless environmental champions have supported this work along the way and we celebrate them.

In the face of clean energy repeals, harmful algal blooms, threats to Ohio's unique landscapes, and attacks on the basic principles of our democracy, we have acted boldly. Members like you drove our work in the Statehouse and around the state to develop pragmatic, science-based solutions to our most urgent environmental challenges. We've pressed our lawmakers, engaged local elected officials, and amplified the voices of thousands of advocates to ensure all Ohioans have a clean, healthy environment.

This year, the OEC adopted an updated strategic plan that focuses squarely on the biggest environmental challenge of our times: climate change. If we fail to make climate action the center of our work, then we will fail to make the progress we need on Ohio's most pressing environmental concerns. You'll find strategic plan highlights throughout the document.

This work takes all of us. We must all come together to take on the biggest challenge our movement has ever faced.

The past five decades of environmental progress would not have been possible without so many of you. Without your support today, this work cannot continue. Our members have always shown us that we are stronger, smarter, and more effective when we work together. Now, more than ever, we need you in the fight.

Even in the face of our rapidly changing climate and world, the amazing work we've accomplished together over the last 50 years gives me hope. Imagine the environment we can create for each other, 50 years from today, if we stand together — like we have before.

I am hopeful because I am confident we can find climate solutions that are good for people, good for our environment, and good for our economy. This hope is possible because I know supporters like you are standing side-by-side with us in this fight.

Thank you for giving me hope for our future, every single day.

Yours in the fight,



HEATHER TAYLOR-MIESELE
Executive Director

FROM CLIMATE STRIKE TO CLIMATE ACTION

AUTHOR



SARAH SPENCE

OEC Director of Climate Programs

“There is no Planet B.” “Seas are rising and so are we!”
“Systems Change! Not Climate Change!”

As I joined the hundreds of students gathered at the Ohio Statehouse during the recent climate strike, I was filled with pride and hope as these young people lifted their voices to demand strong climate action.

Their purpose in gathering was a stark reminder of our collective failure to come together to fully address climate change and its impacts on our communities.

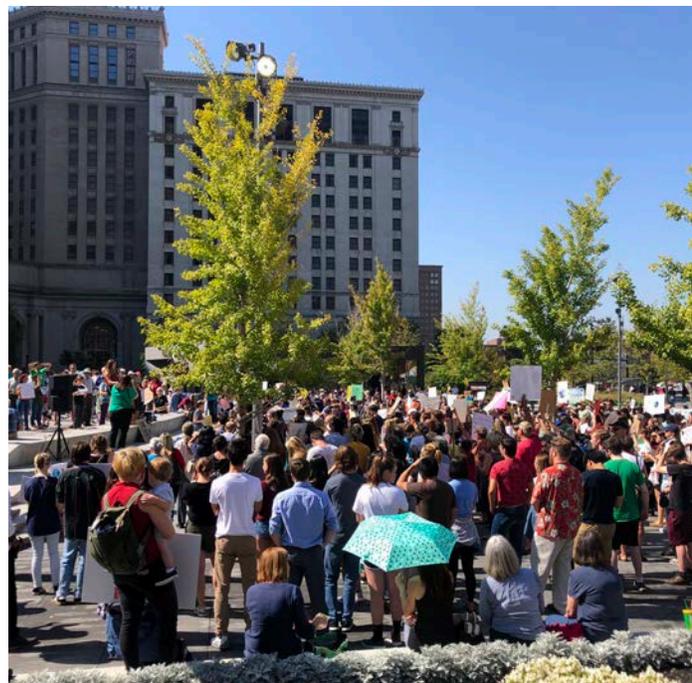
We all share the responsibility to listen, uplift, and amplify the next generation’s calls for action now. We have let our partisan politics get in the way for too long. There is no time to waste.

With each passing moment, climate change threatens the future of Ohioans, especially the health of our children. The threat is only expected to get worse, according to a new report by the Ohio Environmental Council and Policy Matters Ohio. Heatwaves worsen air quality, exacerbating symptoms of asthma, one of the most common chronic childhood illnesses. Heavy rains and flooding can pollute public water supplies with bacteria to which are more likely to infect children. Warmer temperatures allow pests to thrive, exposing children to insect-borne diseases like West Nile Virus. These negative health impacts can permanently affect kids’ growing bodies. And placing roadblocks to renewable energy development robs them of future careers here in the Buckeye State.

The next generation has every reason to demand bold climate action. We have every reason to come together and respond. The OEC is working proactively to support Ohio’s youth in their desire to do more to combat climate change themselves. Our very own staff have come together to create an Emerging Leaders program where they are actively working to educate, activate, and engage the next generation of environmental leaders.



OEC staff members attended Youth Climate Strikes around the state including the Statehouse in Columbus (top), at the Village Bakery in Athens (middle), and on Public Square in Cleveland (bottom).



CHECK OUT OUR LATEST REPORT ONLINE AT:
[HTTP://BIT.LY/OHIOKIDS_CLIMATECHANGE](http://bit.ly/ohiokids_climatechange)

50 YEARS FROM TODAY: CLEAN WATER



Rowers paddle through a harmful algal bloom on the Maumee River.

AUTHOR



PETE BUCHER

OEC Water Resources Director

Imagine your favorite swimming or kayaking getaway closed because it was full of toxic, green slime... What would you do if your family dog was sickened just from a walk along the beach? Where would you get your water if your tap water was no longer safe to drink?

This is certainly not the future I imagine for Ohioans. But for many across the state, these threats aren't a scary possibility — this is their current reality.

Each summer, we monitor reports of harmful algal blooms endangering waterways across the state in which we fish, boat, swim, and source our drinking water. This year has been one of the worst on record.

Heavy rains, a result of climate change, have increased agricultural runoff which in turn contributes to the spread of harmful algal blooms. In fact, since 1994, severe rain events have increased in Ohio, with 2019 being one of our wettest years on record. All this heavy rain contributes to the runoff that degrades our water quality, stresses our infrastructure, and poses a public health risk. We have seen increased outbreaks of harmful algae all over Ohio from Lake Erie to the Ohio River, including many smaller tributaries and waterbodies.

To achieve a future free of harmful algal blooms, we must take an all-of-the-above approach today. We must rely on the very best science. We must continue

to develop innovative new incentives and programs to reduce the pollution in our waterways. Most of all, we must continue to build trust between environmental, agricultural, academic, and regulatory leaders so we can find solutions that are a win for our people, our environment, and our economy.

That's why the OEC is leading the innovative effort to ensure there is a collaborative approach among these groups to build the next 50 years of water quality progress. Together, we have created the Ohio Agricultural Conservation Initiative to improve Ohio's water quality through measurement, education, and certification of Ohio's farmers. This first-of-its kind partnership will help to achieve meaningful improvement of water quality in Ohio, assure the future viability of Ohio agriculture, and build widespread participation of farmers.

This work is as hard as it is important. Fortunately, much of it is already underway. Together, we can create a future where no Ohioan has to worry about access to clean, safe water.

STRATEGIC PLAN HIGHLIGHTS

Protecting Ohioans' drinking water from source to tap is critical, especially in the face of climate change.

The OEC Water Program's 2019-2022 goals aim to:

- Ensure all Ohio families have **clean and safe drinking water**
- Secure more stable and reliable **funding for restoring Ohio's lakes, rivers, and streams**
- Work with our partners to **reduce algae-causing pollution** coming from farm field runoff

50 YEARS FROM TODAY: RENEWABLE ENERGY

AUTHOR



MIRANDA LEPLLA

OEC Vice President of Energy Policy

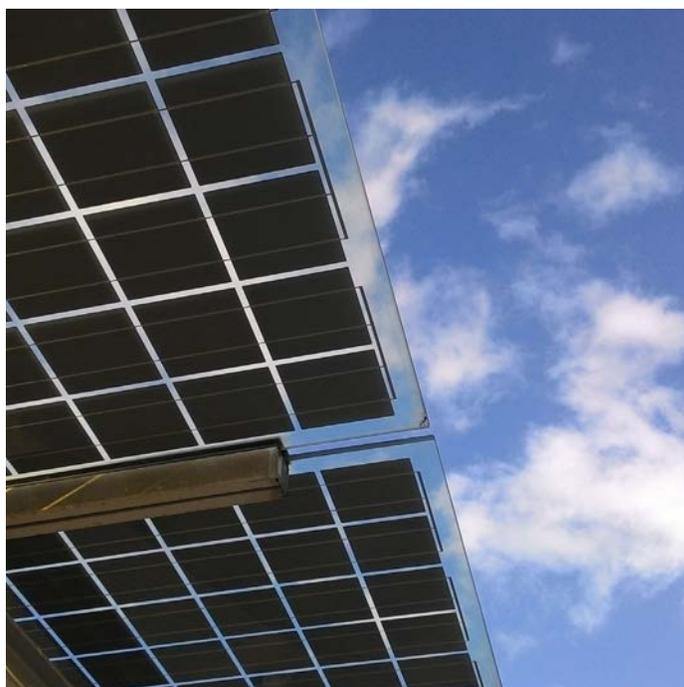
Within a few short years of the Ohio Environmental Council’s founding in 1969, scientists began to recognize that burning fossil fuels was warming our climate. Fifty years later, the threats of a changing climate are no longer far-off possibilities. It is clear that the effects are already impacting Ohioans.

Fifty years from today, I wonder, what will Ohioans say about how we acted to stop a climate crisis?

Right now, the Buckeye State is the sixth largest carbon polluter in the country. If Ohio fails to reduce its fossil fuel emissions, it is almost impossible for the United States to curb climate change and save our planet. Without reductions, we will continue to experience hotter temperatures and more frequent heatwaves, heavier rains, declining air quality, increased flooding, and irreparable changes to our environment. These impacts will cause even more harm to the health and well-being of our most vulnerable neighbors and historically excluded communities.

The first step in healing the harms of the past and building a brighter tomorrow is to establish alternatives today. Ohioans are ready to step up and act on climate change. Communities across the Buckeye State are already investing in clean, renewable energy sources and improving energy efficiency standards today. Across Ohio, individuals and local leaders are leading the charge in their homes, schools, businesses, and neighborhoods. For example, Cincinnati Mayor John Cranley has announced the city’s intent to go 100% renewable by 2035 and is working to build a 100 megawatt solar project — making it the largest municipal solar array in the country. Many other cities around Ohio have also made major commitments and are looking at ways to reduce their carbon footprint.

If Ohioans want to maintain a diverse and strong economy, we cannot wait to act on climate change. So many of the industries that make our state strong – agriculture, manufacturing, recreation, and tourism, to name a few – depend on safe water, clean air,



arable soil, vibrant parks and trails, as well as a stable, healthy environment in which to compete and grow.

That’s why we’re holding elected officials at all levels accountable to doing what’s best for our environment and for Ohioans. When we look back in 50 years, we can’t afford to regret not taking the bold action needed to preserve Ohio for generations to come. Our communities are ready. Our businesses are ready. Our people are ready. It’s time we move on from the fossil fuels of the past to the cleaner, greener future we all deserve.

STRATEGIC PLAN HIGHLIGHTS

In order to address climate change, we must **cut carbon pollution in our electric system** by creating more opportunities for **investments in renewables and efficiency** by utilities and local governments.

The OEC Energy Program’s 2019-2022 goals aim to:

- Increase **energy democracy for all Ohioans** by securing better rules and regulations that allow Ohioans to take more control over how they get their electricity
- **Reduce methane pollution coming from oil and gas operations** by advocating for strong state standards and organizing affected citizens
- Encourage electric utilities to **incentivize adoption of electric vehicles**

THINK GLOBALLY, ACT LOCALLY



Max Schaefer recently worked with partners to host a tree planting on the lawn of the library in his hometown (left) and at a nature preserve in Lorain County (right).



MAX SCHAEFER
OEC Northeast Ohio Regional Director

Think globally, act locally. It’s a commonly used phrase, but I was reminded recently of the power of doing just that.

As conversations about our changing climate erupted in public squares, on social media, and throughout the chambers of councils and legislatures, I joined volunteers on a sunny September morning to act on climate. How? We planted native trees on the lawn of the library, in my hometown of Lorain.

Small as it may seem, our efforts will one day have big impacts on the community and the world. These trees won’t just absorb carbon dioxide and reduce our library’s energy usage (both of which reduce pollution in the atmosphere contributing to climate change). They will also serve as an example of community climate action in which almost anyone can participate.



Ohio has big potential to advance major environmental protections at the local level. In fact, many of Ohio’s climate action victories over the past several years have occurred at the city or county level, where pragmatism and practical solutions have eclipsed partisan politics.

For the past three years, the Ohio Environmental Council (OEC) has tested and invested in this local, on-the-ground strategy. I know firsthand as OEC’s first regional staff member. I have worked across Northeast Ohio to raise awareness about the environmental issues impacting my neighbors and to advocate for effective solutions. I have cultivated relationships with community leaders, hosted skill building workshops for local activists, and organized on-the-ground rapid response efforts to environmental issues. And it’s working.

Our neighbors are calling upon local leaders to deliver big on protecting the environment and the health of their communities. Across the state, we’re seeing real results — from investments in local renewable energy solutions, to regional cooperation around water affordability issues, to policies protecting and improving tree canopy coverage.

Connecting directly with Ohioans in our communities is more important than ever. I can’t wait to meet more environmental champions like you. Just as those trees are growing deep roots in my community, so too is our movement. Let’s dig in!

FOCUSING ON ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

AUTHOR



KARLTON LASTER
OEC Cleveland Metro Director

While climate change and pollution hurt us all, some — like communities of color and lower-income communities — suffer disproportionately.

The statistics are staggering: communities of color and lower-income communities are more likely to live near industrial facilities, whose toxic emissions shorten and negatively impact quality of life for neighbors. In addition, these communities are often on the front lines of climate change impacts, living in places where heat waves are on the rise, the risk of flooding increases, and there are higher incidences of various climate-related diseases.

As a 29 year-old black man and lifelong Clevelander, I see this every day. Not all Ohioans have the same access to clean air, land, water, and fair representation from their elected officials.

Authenticity, integrity, and consistency is critical to success, both in my advocacy in the black community and in the environmental community. The fact is that black and minority communities are disproportionately underrepresented in environmentalism, while also being disproportionately impacted by environmental inequities. This is unacceptable.

It is imperative not only that I do my part to lift up other black and minority colleagues working in this sector, but also that all environmental organizations do more work to go beyond simply talking about environmental policies and inequities. Organizations must connect with our communities and make environmentalism real by walking the walk and talking the talk.

As OEC's first Cleveland Metro Director, I am committed to walking the walk. I plan to work with the Cleveland community to ensure we have clean and affordable drinking water, access to public green spaces, and ensuring our community's concerns here in Cleveland are being elevated to the Ohio Statehouse and beyond. I am committed to engaging with my community to create a stronger, more inclusive environmental movement to make sure that all Ohioans can tackle the impacts of climate change and thrive here — today and for decades to come.

STRATEGIC PLAN HIGHLIGHTS

Our strategic plan lays out a vision for us to continue putting down deep roots in communities across Ohio:

- **The OEC has built and deepened our regional engagement over the past three years. We will double down on these investments** by building and training local activist networks, supporting and cultivating relationships with existing local environmental champions and community leaders, and by passing policies at the local level that reduce carbon and make people's lives better.
- **We are also committed to helping bring about a more "leaderfull" movement.** Leaderfull means amplifying the voices of people directly experiencing our most pressing challenges to find the best solutions. We will build coalitions with both like-minded allies and new friends. Our movement must provide the tools for success and work collaboratively, rather than commanding the path that must be followed. Genuine relationships that spur action require deliberate thought and cultivation. They require trust, grace, and mutual opportunity to thrive when groups of diverse interests are working respectfully with a shared goal.
- **We will focus our efforts to ensure all voices have a seat at the table.** Our environment will not be protected unless the unique passions and perspectives of many diverse individuals and organizations are authentically working together.
- **We are proud to put justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion at the forefront of our efforts.** Together, we are committed to building partnerships with underserved communities and under-resourced organizations across the state to find new ways of exchanging knowledge, sharing power, and tackling climate change. We are committed to evaluating each part of our work with a justice lens. We are committed to creating a stronger, more inclusive environmental movement to make sure that all Ohioans can thrive here.

LEARN MORE ABOUT OEC'S NEW CLEVELAND METRO DIRECTOR, KARLTON LASTER BY CHECKING OUT OUR BLOG! KEEP YOUR EYES ON OUR SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS FOR UPDATES FROM ALL OF OUR REGIONAL STAFF.



50 YEARS FROM TODAY: VIBRANT PUBLIC LANDS

AUTHOR



NATHAN JOHNSON

OEC Director of Public Lands

Towering trees. Meandering creeks. Hiking through the backcountry trails of the Wayne National Forest, I often find myself in awe. Not only in awe of the raw beauty of our natural world, but also the untold generations of growth, decay, and resiliency that made the forest what it is today.

And as I think about the past, I also find myself looking toward the future. Fifty years ago, Ohio's natural places weren't all so beautiful or protected. That's why we know that 50 years from now, our forests can be even grander and more impressive than they are today. But, only if we protect them.

I hope my children, their children, and their children's children will have the opportunity to walk through Ohio's wild, natural places. That they get the chance to experience similar feelings of wonder.

The OEC and supporters like you are critical in protecting these awe-inspiring landscapes. Protecting the outdoors is also critical for another very important reason — our fight against climate change.

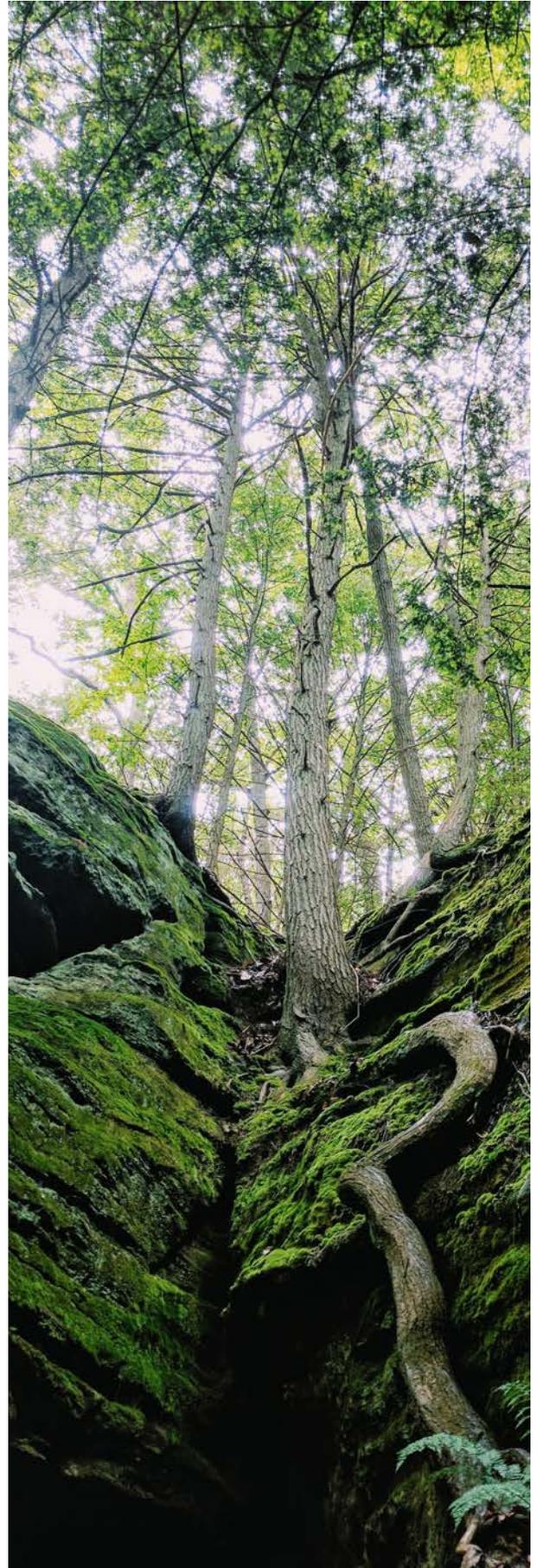
Emerging science shows that preserving mature forests is essential to protecting Ohio's ecosystems from the impacts of a changing climate. Perhaps most importantly, our forests — especially our public forests — are our best natural weapons in the fight against climate change. If we protect them, our public forests can help pull carbon pollution from our air, serve as home to many rare and unique species, and continue to be havens for the human spirit.

STRATEGIC PLAN HIGHLIGHTS

Forests and public lands play a key role in combatting climate change and protecting our environment. They're an important part of our strategic plan.

The OEC Land Program's 2019-2022 goals aim to:

- Persuade Ohio's leaders to **preserve public forests for carbon sequestration**
- **Defend our public lands** from mining, pipeline construction, and clearcutting
- **Expand public access to the outdoors** in communities across the state



50 YEARS FROM TODAY: A STRONGER DEMOCRACY



"As Ohioans cast our ballots 50 years from now, I hope that my neighbors — of all races, ages, backgrounds, and political persuasions — feel invested and empowered to vote alongside me in record-setting numbers for candidates that represent the values of communities and will act boldly on environmental and climate issues."

- Chris Tavenor

The health of our environment is deeply linked to the health of our democracy. Acting on the big challenges we face over the next 50 years requires a healthy democracy today, tomorrow, and for decades to come.

Without a functioning and fair democracy, Ohioans will continue to face environmental injustices, and the environmental protections we need will remain out of reach due to partisan gridlock.

That is why I am working alongside my colleagues at the OEC to strengthen our democracy and help make sure my community is accurately counted in the 2020 census. Representation matters at all levels of government. The counts from the upcoming census will be used to redraw Ohio's legislative districts, determine our future political representation, and allocate vital funds. It may not seem incredibly bold to fill out my census form and ensure friends, families, and neighbors have done the same. However, this small action will help in the fight against partisan gerrymandering and in the funding of critical programs directly impacting the health of our environment and our community.

Protecting and improving our democracy extends well beyond the collection of census data next year. We must continue to be bold in monitoring Ohio's redrawing of legislative districts, calling for expanded voter access through policies like automatic voter registration, and demanding stronger accountability from our elected officials.

Our team and supporters like you are critical in upholding Ohioans' right to a fair and democratic system today and tomorrow. Our environment depends on it.

STRATEGIC PLAN HIGHLIGHTS

Acting on the big environmental challenges we face over the next 50 years requires a healthy democracy today, tomorrow, and for decades to come.

The OEC Democracy Program's 2019-2022 goals aim to:

- **Protect and expand voting rights** to ensure every voice in Ohio is heard
- Make sure that the **upcoming census counts represent all Ohioans fairly**
- **Monitor and participate when redistricting** takes place in 2021



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Our Green Giving Club Members support the OEC's mission through automatic monthly or quarterly donations. These donations provide ongoing, reliable support for the OEC ensuring we're ready to fight for Ohio's air, land, water, and democracy. Plus, we're happy to provide you easy monthly processing, an end-of-year donation summary to assist you in tax preparation, and dedicated OEC staff members to answer your questions.

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OUT & ABOUT

From the Statehouse to city halls across the Buckeye State, here are a few highlights from meetings and events hosted by the OEC recently:



In June, the OEC celebrated the 50th anniversary of the last time the Cuyahoga River caught fire alongside nearly 300 partner organizations as part of Cuyahoga50. Together, we celebrated our environmental progress and learned from the past in tackling today's clean water challenges.



In September, we hosted our second annual Ohio Public Interest Environmental Law Conference for more than 150 attorneys, environmental advocates, and students. The conference focused on environmental justice and equity and featured issue experts including Yolanda Hamilton, Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for the Conservancy for Cuyahoga Valley National Park (above).



We joined our national partners at the League of Conservation Voters (LCV) for a lobby day in Washington D.C. this summer. We talked to our lawmakers about the issues we care about most: clean air, land, and water for all Ohioans!



In August, we hosted a Growing Local Solar Workshop in Northeast Ohio with our partners from Green Energy Ohio and Sustainable Cleveland 2019. The workshop explored how state and local policies and programs can attract new solar projects and green jobs.



Our Emerging Leaders Council participated in the Scioto Sweep in September, cleaning up litter along the banks of Columbus's Scioto River.



In August, nearly 60 community members participated in discussions on climate change, sustainable development, and protecting our environment for generations to come as part of our Big Table conversation hosted in partnership with the Columbus Foundation!

Be sure to check out OEC's website (www.theOEC.org) and our OEC Action Fund website (www.theoecactionfund.org) for our latest policy updates and event listings.



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