

# green watch

SPRING 2021



Ohio Environmental Council



# THE PROMISE OF SPRING

So much has changed over the past year. Together, we've faced the challenges posed by a global pandemic, reckoned with racial injustice, and fought unprecedented corruption at the Ohio Statehouse. We will undoubtedly continue to grapple with these issues in the months and years to come. But here at the OEC, we are moving into this new season with fresh perspectives, tremendous gratitude, and a reinvigorated sense of purpose.

And 2021 is already starting out strong.

In January, we saw the biggest day for climate action in more than a decade when President Biden signed executive orders aimed at addressing the climate crisis, fighting environmental injustice, and restoring science in decision-making. These actions will have a positive impact on the health and well-being of Ohioans and our environment.

Just a few weeks later, we celebrated the city of Lima's commitment to meaningfully reduce its carbon emissions, followed by Bexley and Warren a few weeks later. A growing number of communities across the Buckeye State have committed to carbon reduction and 100% renewable energy goals. And just last month, we learned of another win, this time in the courts in our fight to protect Wayne National Forest, Ohio's only National Forest.

If the first few months of 2021 are any indication, spring promises to be full of exciting opportunities to grow our collective impact.

In this issue of GreenWatch, we highlight some of the upcoming opportunities we have to champion policies to protect our air, land, and water. Our work to create a fair redistricting process, to build upon the success of the H2Ohio program, and take polluters to court is more important than ever.

We remain grateful for supporters like you who make our work possible. Thank you for being by our side and continuing the fight for a healthier environment for all who call Ohio home.

Stay safe, be well, and thank you for all you do.

Yours in the fight,



**HEATHER TAYLOR-MIESLE**

Executive Director



# PROTECTING OHIO'S ENVIRONMENT INCLUDES STRENGTHENING OUR DEMOCRACY



**SPENCER DIRRIG**  
OEC Political Director

It's no secret that Ohio's congressional and state legislative district maps are gerrymandered. For too long, politicians have rigged Ohio's electoral maps to preserve political power and silence the voices of our communities. Because of these maps, our legislators often fail to respond to Ohio voters' concerns on pressing issues like clean water and the fight against climate change.

Fortunately, in 2015 and 2018, Ohio voters decisively rejected partisan gerrymandering. Ohioans voted for two redistricting reform measures that will help guide the drawing of Ohio's new legislative and congressional districts.

The importance of fair maps that truly represent Ohio's communities cannot be understated. Without a fair and truly representative democracy, Ohioans will continue to face environmental injustices from big polluters. But with solid maps, we can ensure the diversity of Ohioans' voices is heard. Together, we can push for the action required to secure healthy air, land, and water for all who call Ohio home.

Building on our team effort to get all Ohioans counted in the census, the OEC will continue to work with partners to demand a transparent, inclusive, and fair redistricting process.

We will also continue to work with members like you to advance this cause. There are many opportunities to get involved in this important process. In the months to come, you can learn more about the intersection of environment and democracy, build your own community maps, and connect with your elected officials to share why fair districts matter for our future.

This is a once-in-a-decade opportunity to change course and move toward forward-thinking environmental policies in Ohio. Our work today will set the stage for accountability and advocacy far beyond 2021. When we create fair, competitive, and representative district maps, Ohioans will build the infrastructure for a decade of pragmatic environmental policy. I hope you'll join us in these critical efforts to create fair districts for Ohio in the months to come.



## ADVOCACY IN ACTION

In February, the OEC Emerging Leaders hosted a digital event focused on redistricting. In "Jeopardy" style, participants learned about Ohio's redistricting history and process.

The OEC hosted a follow-up digital event in March, where redistricting education was paired with community mapmaking. During this event, people were taught to make and share maps of their communities, which will be useful for redistricting advocates in fighting for fair districts as the new maps are drawn.



To view past events and trainings and explore opportunities to get involved in the process, please visit:

[theoec.org/campaigns/redistricting2021](https://theoec.org/campaigns/redistricting2021)

# H2OHIO EXPLAINED



**PETER BUCHER**  
OEC Managing Director of Water Policy

From our Great Lake to the mighty Ohio River—and the many lakes, ponds, and streams in between—Ohio’s plentiful water resources provide drinking water, recreation opportunities, and a strong economy for millions of people. Since OEC’s founding more than 50 years ago, supporters like you have been critical in our fight to protect and improve water quality for all Ohioans.

Two years ago, OEC and our members played an important part in the launch of H2Ohio. This program is a comprehensive and science-based effort designed to improve Ohio’s water quality from source to tap. H2Ohio specifically focuses on reducing phosphorus, creating wetlands, addressing failing septic systems, and preventing lead contamination. What do each of these programs entail? Are there examples in your backyard? Let’s dive in!



## REDUCING PHOSPHORUS

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. Nutrient runoff from farms plays a key role in the development of toxic algae in the western Lake Erie basin and water bodies across Ohio.

H2Ohio has invested substantial resources to encourage adoption of 10 of the most effective and cost-efficient practices to reduce agricultural phosphorus runoff. Starting in the Maumee watershed in Northwest Ohio, H2Ohio and the Ohio Department of Agriculture provide incentives to farmers who develop a nutrient management plan. These plans utilize soil testing data to guide farmers to best practices for their land. The Ohio Agricultural Conservation Initiative (OACI)—supported by the OEC and our academic, conservation, and agricultural partners—has also played a key role. OACI created a widely supported farmer certification program and a best management practice program to promote conservation practices. Nearly 2,000 farmers enrolled in H2Ohio and OACI programs in their first year.



## BUILDING WETLANDS

Wetland creation is another key approach to combating harmful algal blooms across the Buckeye State. Wetlands have been called “nature’s kidneys” because of their ability to filter sediments and excess nutrients. Wetlands slow the flow of water, absorb that water, and remove nutrients that water may be carrying. As a result, our wetlands stop phosphorus and nitrogen from getting into our lakes and rivers. Under the leadership of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, the H2Ohio wetland program is focused on building and restoring wetland habitat primarily in the Maumee watershed in Northwest Ohio. Additional projects have started around the state, including one near Chippewa Lake, the state’s largest glacial lake, in Northeast Ohio.



## REPLACING LEAD SERVICE LINES

H2Ohio also funds water and wastewater infrastructure improvements, including reducing the risk of lead exposure in high-risk day care centers and schools. Ohio is believed to be second-highest in the nation for lead water lines. That means there are an estimated 650,000 lead service lines carrying water to families’ homes. This legacy of lead in our drinking water delivery system is a big challenge. Health experts agree: No amount of lead is safe. Exposure to lead, even at low levels, can cause serious health effects in all age groups, but especially in our children.

Through H2Ohio, the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency awarded a total of \$1.225 million in funding to the city of Cincinnati for the removal and replacement of lead service lines and lead-containing fixtures at approximately 185 child care facilities in the city.



## ADVOCACY IN ACTION

We must take an all-of-the-above approach to secure clean, safe, and affordable water for all Ohioans. H2Ohio is a major investment in that approach.

To learn more about the H2Ohio program, check out OEC's recent interviews with the Ohio Farm Bureau, Medina County Park District, and Greater Cincinnati Water Works: [theoec.org/campaigns/h2ohio](https://theoec.org/campaigns/h2ohio)

# GROWING THE NEXT GENERATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL CHAMPIONS



**TRECIA PANSELL**  
OEC Communications Coordinator

OEC's Emerging Leaders Council will always hold a special place in my heart. Not only did I have the opportunity to meet new friends and work on meaningful projects to advance climate action during my time as a member, but I was also introduced to the broader work of the OEC. I'm now proud to be supporting that work as a new staff member.

There continues to be a growing need for diverse voices and perspectives in the environmental movement. This need is especially critical as the movement reckons with its history of excluding and marginalizing people of color. As the OEC Emerging Leaders program enters its third year, expanding access to the environmental movement remains at the forefront of our work.

The OEC Emerging Leaders program connects young professionals from diverse backgrounds and experience levels to environmental issues at home and across the globe. We empower each other to take action and become the next generation of environmental champions through education, advocacy, and networking.

The Emerging Leaders Council helps make the movement truly sustainable by preparing future leaders with hands-on learning and skill-building opportunities. The yearlong volunteer cohort experience provides space for members to exercise creativity in developing and guiding the program's content. The Emerging Leaders Council helps ensure there is a diverse, knowledgeable, skilled bench of environmental champions ready to step into leadership for years to come.

As an alumna of the program, I can confidently say that the experience equips participants with the skills and training to put leadership in action to create a better environment and a stronger community. Thank you to the OEC members who are making this program possible.

In March, the Emerging Leaders Council kicked off the 2021 program year with its third-ever cohort of 13 volunteers ready to learn and grow. We're excited to see how this year's Council will build on last year's success and continue mobilizing the next generation of environmental champions!



To learn more about the 2021 OEC's Emerging Leaders Council and to sign up for updates, please visit: [theoec.org/emerging-leaders](https://theoec.org/emerging-leaders)

## 2021 OEC EMERGING LEADERS COUNCIL

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Bailey Fullwiler

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Jake Kuss

Marie McConnell

Yolanda Owens

Lis Regula

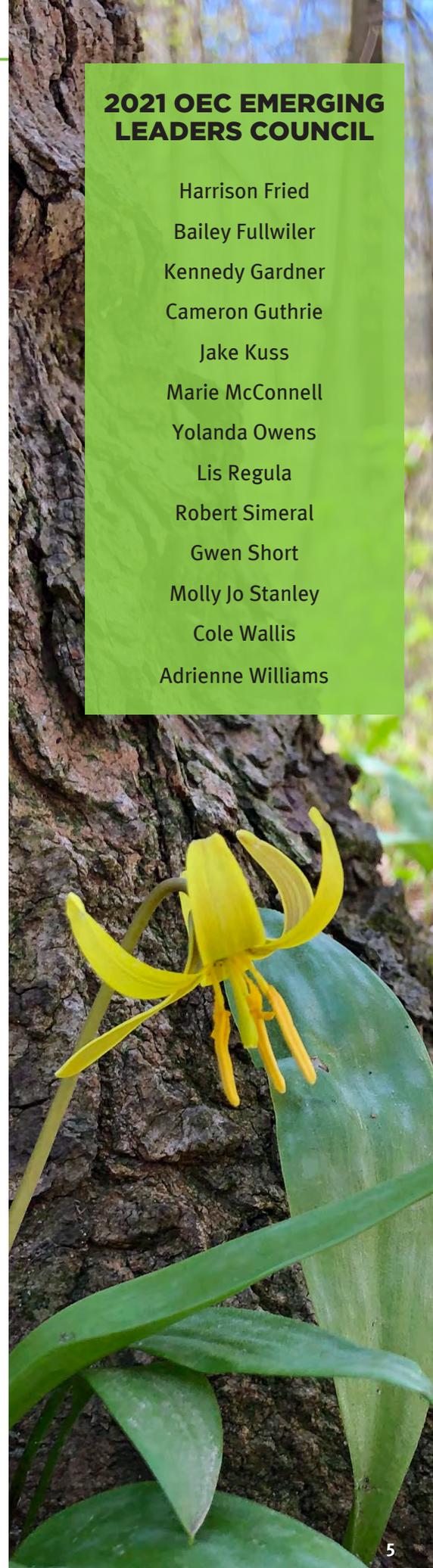
Robert Simeral

Gwen Short

Molly Jo Stanley

Cole Wallis

Adrienne Williams



# HARNESSING NATURE TO FIGHT CLIMATE CHANGE



**NATHAN JOHNSON**  
OEC Director of Public Lands

On a recent walk through the woods, the beauty of the trail was eclipsed for a moment.

Our natural world is facing severe threats from climate change. The problems are getting worse each year. Experts are calling for big changes if we want to save our natural treasures. I ask myself: "Are we up to this daunting task?"

The spring sun pours in brighter and longer now. The life around me is stirring. And with each step, and each new thought, my mood lightens a little.

The political climate is thawing. The past four years were full of federal inaction and outright hostility toward climate action. The new Biden administration has elevated climate and tackling the climate crisis as one of its chief priorities. In a flurry of executive orders issued in January, the Biden administration declared the protection of 30% of America's lands and waters by 2030 a national priority. Known as the 30x30 Campaign, this is a global effort to both stem the biodiversity crisis and fight climate change.

To avoid the worst of climate change, we must dramatically reduce fossil fuel emissions. But

that's not enough. The Paris Climate Agreement temperature goals cannot be achieved without significantly increasing carbon dioxide removal from the atmosphere by forests, wetlands, and soils. Up to a third of emissions reductions needed by 2030 could be achieved through nature-based climate solutions.

The single most effective way to harness the power of nature to store more carbon is to protect the standing forests we currently have. Though this approach is basic in concept, it only recently received a word to precisely identify and describe it. "Proforestation" is the intentional protection of existing forests so they can grow uninterrupted into their full carbon storage and sequestration potential. Importantly, many of America's forests are nowhere near their full potential. This is because most of our forests in the eastern United States are relatively new.

The old, mighty eastern forests were nearly all destroyed a few human generations ago. These marvels were cleared for agriculture, logged and shipped down river for profit, and burned to fuel industry. On my forest walks, I try to imagine what these indigenous forests would have looked like, what they would have felt like. The old forest has many things the young forest does not. Perhaps the most notable is the inspiration of awe in the human spirit.

## A WALK THROUGH THE FOREST

*With each step, and each new thought, my mood lightens a little...*



Some of the buds on the trees have already burst open, though the slow rise of carbon-rich sap blood is hidden under bark.



Underfoot, through untold fungal passages, the trees, too, sing in their own way—sharing messages and resources. These fungal networks are essential for forest health and resiliency.



The early flowers show themselves: white and yellow trout lilies. Dutchman's breeches hanging on their lines. Bloodroot. Trilliums, white and red.

Most of today's forests are recovering, but they will never reach their full carbon potential if we don't protect them. Only about 12% of all land in America (some 289 million acres) is currently protected. To reach the 30x30 goal will require conserving an additional area twice the size of Texas, or approximately 440 million acres, over the next decade. This is an immense goal, but it is achievable. For context, the federal government owns about 28% of all U.S. land. But most of this federal public land is managed for resource extraction—like timber and oil and gas development—and therefore doesn't meet the 30x30 standard.

Protecting 30% of America's land by 2030 is not just bold; it's necessary.

To be successful, we will need to provide incentives for private landowners to conserve and restore natural areas. But we will also need to rethink how we manage our public lands. If we take these big steps together, we have a shot at reversing some of the damage of climate change. And we have the opportunity to inspire more awe and wonder in the process.



To learn more about the 30x30 Campaign and take action, please visit: [theoec.org/blog](https://theoec.org/blog)



Migrant songbirds have returned, filling the morning forest air with their melodies.



Protecting 30% of America's land by 2030 is not just bold; it's necessary. And we have the opportunity to inspire more awe and wonder in the process.

# AN ALTERNATIVE PIPELINE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY: THE OHIO SUPREME COURT



**CHRIS TAVENOR**  
OEC Staff Attorney

The Rover Pipeline, a 700-mile fracked gas pipeline spanning 18 counties in Ohio, may not be making headlines at the moment, but it is at the front and center of the OEC Law Center's work.

When it was under construction in 2017, the Rover Pipeline racked up dozens of violations as it spilled millions of gallons of drilling fluid into Ohio's wetlands. As pressure to take action mounted—thanks in part to OEC members like you—the Ohio EPA filed a lawsuit against the company for all of the pollution dumped into Ohio's waterways.

Lawsuits take a long time. They can easily get trapped in the maze of procedural appeals, motions to dismiss, and discovery review. After years of legal battle, the Ohio EPA and the Ohio Attorney General's Office appealed this case to the Ohio Supreme Court in 2020. In January 2021, the Court held oral arguments regarding the case.

The heart of Rover's argument is a timing issue. After it was caught polluting, Rover argued that the Ohio EPA didn't have the authority to punish the company because the state was late in approving its permit. Essentially, Rover's argument boils down to an attempt by a polluter to create legal loopholes for itself—and for future polluters.

In response, the OEC filed two “friend-of-the-court” briefs in the case last year. We filed our briefs to make clear: This case is not merely about the Ohio EPA missing a deadline or one particular pipeline's pollution. What hangs in the balance at the Court is whether the Ohio EPA can maintain its authority to protect this state's water resources moving forward, or whether bad actors can skirt the law.

The case against Rover isn't over. The Ohio Supreme Court is still weighing the issues, and we anticipate a decision later this year. If you're interested in the specifics of this legal case, we encourage you to visit our blog, where we explore the legal arguments in detail. What's important to remember is that fights for our environment can continue for years. It might start when a polluter dumps into a wetland, and it might end when the Ohio Supreme Court makes a ruling years later.

As an environmental advocate, make sure you consider all the venues in the fight for clean air, land, and water for all who call Ohio home. The Ohio Supreme Court may seem distant from our everyday lives, but some of the most impactful environmental policy can be written from the bench.

Stay tuned: When the Ohio Supreme Court makes its decision, we'll ensure the OEC family hears the news and knows what it means for our waterways.



Read more about the OEC Law Center's work on this case: [theoec.org/blog](https://theoec.org/blog)



Photo Credit: Ohio EPA

## ADVOCACY IN ACTION

This case, *State of Ohio ex rel. Dave Yost, Ohio Attorney General v. Rover Pipeline, LLC*, demonstrates how legal cases can have a longer-lasting impact on the environment than the singular polluting incident that compelled the case in the first place. Complex legal arguments between companies and public interest attorneys occur years after the events in question, and the public tends to forget about them. If the case is too contentious, it can rise through the courts to the Ohio Supreme Court.

Once the Ohio Supreme Court makes a decision, it dictates Ohio law for years to come—at least until the legislature changes the interpreted law or new justices consider a similar question under different circumstances.

Often, Ohioans forget about the importance of judges, especially on the Supreme Court. Yet, in Ohio, we elect our judges across the board. It's important for us to elect fair judges, especially judges who believe in a holistic approach to the law, including environmental policy.

# CITIES ACROSS OHIO SEIZING OPPORTUNITIES TO GO GREEN



**MIRANDA LEPPLA**  
OEC Vice President of Energy Policy

Ohioans are seeing the impacts of climate change more and more. It's clear that it's time to act. Unfortunately, we've seen years of corruption and roadblocks to clean energy adoption.

For four years, we watched a president make the problem worse, from leaving the Paris Climate Agreement to rolling back commonsense methane regulations and more. Here in Ohio, we saw lawmakers put corrupt corporate bailouts before the renewable energy future we deserve.

The stakes are too high for more delays. It's up to us to act. Supporters like you are making that a reality. With the help of OEC's members, we've focused on making positive changes in cities across Ohio.

One way we're making progress locally on climate change is through a process called community choice aggregation. Aggregation allows communities to negotiate for the power their residents use. This process is now enabling cities across Ohio to negotiate for renewable energy to power homes and small businesses. In November, Columbus passed an aggregation ballot initiative that will provide the city with 100% renewable energy by 2023.

The OEC is providing technical support to more cities gearing up to ask voters to approve aggregation initiatives. Later this year, we're expecting aggregation initiatives to go before voters in several communities, and we're excited to help these cities move to cleaner, greener energy.

But the work doesn't stop with aggregation. In 2020, the OEC helped found Power a Clean Future Ohio (PCFO) to support cities across the state to make meaningful reductions in their carbon emissions. Already, 10 communities have committed to reducing their carbon footprint. Our goal is to help these communities reduce their carbon emissions by 30% of baseline by 2030. We're working to grow PCFO to 30 cities by the end of 2021.



Additionally, the OEC and PCFO are working to provide a variety of tailored solutions and support to help local leaders make positive changes for the environment. Just recently, we launched two exciting new programs: Equity Coaching and Technical Experts.

We know that climate change is going to impact our Black, Brown, and low-income neighbors the hardest. The Equity Coaching Program helps match cities to equity coaches to help create just and equitable solutions that center those most impacted by climate change. This will equip cities to identify tailored, equitable solutions to meet their community's needs.

The Technical Experts Program is connecting cities with outside expertise on the challenges facing their communities. Our technical experts will host "office hours" to support leaders and staff and discuss new ideas. This program is bringing together experts from around Ohio to cover topics like electric vehicle fleets, comprehensive sustainability plans, and energy efficiency benchmarking.

Smart investments now can make our cities cleaner and greener for generations to come. Communities across our state are stepping up to protect our environment in tangible ways. The OEC's members are helping make this impressive work happen, and we're looking forward to continuing to make positive changes in cities across Ohio.



To learn more about Power a Clean Future Ohio, please visit: [poweracleanfuture.org](https://poweracleanfuture.org)

# ADVANCING LOCAL POLICY TO BUILD HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES



**KARLTON LASTER**  
OEC Cleveland Metro Director

As we emerge from the pandemic and hold local elections across the state, 2021 is ripe with opportunities for communities to come together and define what comes next—including my hometown of Cleveland.

How do you ensure each member of the community has access to clean and safe water at a price they can afford? What improvements are needed to make sure residents live within a 10-minute-walk of a high-quality park? What does it look like to fully enable community-owned solar energy? And, perhaps most importantly, how do you increase shared decision-making on key issues at every step of the process with community members?

The OEC partnered with more than a dozen organizations—including local and regional nonprofits, community development corporations, and quasi-governmental institutions—to answer these questions. Together, we drew from multiple disciplines and perspectives to develop a set of comprehensive and intersectional policy recommendations.

The Cleveland Comprehensive Environmental Policy Platform details actionable objectives and locally focused policy recommendations. It addresses issues of environmental justice, water quality and access, land and green space, infrastructure and transportation, as well as energy and air quality. And the Platform provides local leaders with the information they need to champion practical and equitable environmental policies that will benefit Cleveland residents in 2021 and beyond.

Adopting and advancing strong environmental justice policies will play a major role in our collective success. We're proud to share the Cleveland Comprehensive Environmental Policy Platform with the community to shape a healthier and more sustainable future.



Sign on and pledge your support for the policy recommendations shared in the Cleveland Policy platform: [theoec.org/publications/clevelandenviropolicyplatform](https://theoec.org/publications/clevelandenviropolicyplatform)



**"The Cuyahoga Soil & Water Conservation District is united in this effort to advance policies and programs that will protect and restore our soils, which in turn will help protect our precious Lake Erie in the effort to proclaim Cleveland as an environmental leader in the new Green Belt region."**

Janine Rybka, Director,  
Cuyahoga Soil & Water  
Conservation District

**"Many environmental issues are of serious concern for Cleveland voters. Our goal is to equip decision-makers with information and opportunities to enact policies that mitigate environmental harm. The platform, coupled with community engagement efforts during the election season, will provide the wraparound approach needed to address water, land, air, and energy issues from all sides in Cleveland."**

Angelique Salizan, Ohio Policy & Outreach Manager, Alliance for the Great Lakes

**"The Cleveland Policy Platform contributes to the conversation and commitment to land, water, air, transportation, and energy issues that impact our economic bottom line, through the lens of health, diversity, inclusion, and equity."**

SeMia Bray, Co-Facilitator,  
Black Environmental Leaders

**"Clevelanders deserve to live in neighborhoods where they have safe, reliable mobility options. Transportation decisions impact individual and community health, safety, access to opportunity, and quality of life. This policy platform outlines actionable steps that leaders can take around transportation and infrastructure to ensure we are building a sustainable, diverse, and healthy Cleveland."**

Jacob VanSickle, Executive Director, Bike Cleveland

## A PENNY FOR YOUR THOUGHTS?

We want to hear from you! Our members are a critical part of this movement. Will you take a few minutes to do a short survey on the issues that matter to you? You can take our survey online at: [www.surveymonkey.com/r/OECengagementsurvey](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/OECengagementsurvey)



Thanks for your insights and for supporting the OEC!



## THANK YOU!

The OEC's donors are champions for Ohio's environment. Our donors are inspired by the OEC's mission to protect Ohio's air, land, and water. In turn, you inspire our team as we work each day to tackle tough challenges facing our state.

From everyone at the OEC, thank you for being a critical part of this important work.

To make a donation, please visit: [theoec.org/donate](http://theoec.org/donate)

*The OEC restricts contributions from individual businesses to less than 5% of our total operating budget and limits total business donations to less than 15%. The OEC requires all business donors to acknowledge that acceptance of a gift does not hinder or place limits on the OEC's ability to comment on, litigate, or participate in processes related to any permit, legislation, policy, or related decision.*

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## LOOKING FOR THE LATEST NEWS & EVENTS?

Visit our website for the latest news about our collective efforts to secure healthy air, land, water, and democracy across the Buckeye State. Also, be sure to check out our events page for the latest offerings—from wonky webinars to exciting Emerging Leaders conversations to our newest series on The Art of Change, there is something for everyone!

[www.theoec.org](http://www.theoec.org)

Be sure to follow us on social media, too:



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