

green watch

SUMMER 2023



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Ohio Environmental Council

A LETTER FROM CAROL KAUFFMAN THE OEC'S NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Dear Members and Supporters:

My name is Carol Kauffman and I'm delighted to introduce myself as the Ohio Environmental Council's new Executive Director.

As a Buckeye, born and raised, I'm thrilled at the opportunity to lead this incredible organization and work with a world-class team of staff and partners in pursuit of clean air, safe water, vibrant public lands, and a strong democracy for all who call Ohio home.

I spent many weekends as a child exploring Ohio's state parks with my family. My father, a plant scientist, would stop us on the trail to explain the importance of the tiniest spring wildflowers at our feet and the towering trees overhead. These walks in the woods taught me to value and appreciate our natural environment and not to take it for granted.

But I recognize that there are many Ohioans who do not have the same access to nature. And many more who question the health of the environment around them, from the air they breathe to the water they drink. We must all work together to ensure the gains we make are shared by all Ohioans.

I'm proud to work alongside my new OEC colleagues, our community partners, and tremendous supporters like you to do just

that. And I'm excited to draw on my past work experiences to grow our collective impact.

I bring nearly two decades of nonprofit experience to this role — in Ohio and far beyond. I've also spent the past several years working on environmental sustainability issues and leading philanthropic efforts for Ohio-based businesses. From working with Cambodian communities to secure access to safe drinking water to leading a national network of environmental organizations, I understand the importance of working with diverse constituents and building strong relationships to make progress.

I look forward to partnering with you to make progress for our environment — to protect our precious natural resources like the Wayne National Forest and Darby Creek, to transition our state away from fossil fuels to clean and renewable energy, and to advance environmental justice and democracy in communities across Ohio.

Thank you for your continued support of the OEC.

Warmly,
Carol Kauffman
Executive Director



COMMUNITY CARE IN THE FACE OF CRISIS



MARISA TWIGG

Creative & Communications Director

When disaster strikes, it really does take a village to protect one another. In the aftermath of Norfolk Southern's hazardous train derailment in East Palestine on February 3, 2023, Ohioans took this to heart.

It is the OEC's core belief that every Ohioan deserves to breathe clean air, drink clean water, and play without worry in their communities. Accidents like the Norfolk Southern train derailment and toxic chemical spill jeopardize Ohioans' ability to live safe and healthy lives and perpetuate historical environmental injustices in our state.

But in times of high stress and fear, Ohioans know one thing to be true: we're in this together.

It's likely we all know someone who lives in a town or neighborhood like East Palestine. Ohioans often talk about how small our state truly feels — everyone seems to know almost everyone. These community connections that stretch from Lake Erie to the Ohio River and every village in between keep Ohioans moving forward together when we're knocked off our feet. Especially when the knocking is done by a multibillion dollar company that pollutes our towns and disrupts our livelihoods.



The OEC honored River Valley Organizing, a local nonprofit advocating for East Palestine residents, with our "Community Champion" award at the 2023 Green Gala.
Credit: Marisa Twigg



During a March 2023 visit to Capitol Hill, the OEC joined with River Valley Organizing to advocate for increased support and resources for East Palestine following the train derailment. We also attended the Environment and Public Works Senate Committee shown here. Credit: Marisa Twigg

Together, Ohioans called for agencies to hold Norfolk Southern accountable and make them pay. Together, Ohioans advocated for two-person rail crews and requirements for train inspection detectors — making Ohio the first and only state with these critical requirements. Together, Ohioans raised awareness about the need for stronger emergency response to environmental disasters. And together, Ohioans shared what they could do to make sure the East Palestine community had what they needed to keep their families safe, their businesses afloat, and their communities together.

Amidst the trials and tribulations, we're proud to see the people of Ohio continue to work together to fight for accountability and resources to protect each other.

This is what fighting the climate crisis looks like: communities across villages, across counties, across the state coming together to lift each other up while holding polluters accountable for the disastrous messes they make.

With considerable gratitude for the continued support of thoughtful, concerned OEC members like you, we've been able to help coordinate legal support for East Palestine residents, deliver jugs of water, convene policymakers and experts, lobby lawmakers at the Ohio Statehouse and on Capitol Hill, and so much more. As we navigate the long-term phase of this environmental disaster, we will continue to work in solidarity with our partners, on-the-ground advocates, and residents fighting for transparency, accountability, and justice.



SCAN FOR MORE: Find ways to support the East Palestine community by scanning the QR code or by visiting theoec.org/ohio-train-derailment

THE 2023 GREEN CINCINNATI PLAN: PAVING THE WAY FOR EQUITABLE CLIMATE ACTION



KYLIE JOHNSON
Southwest Ohio Regional Director

These days, it's no secret that cities are stepping up as local sustainability leaders.

One city paving the way toward climate action is Cincinnati. The City earned an international reputation as a climate leader with the adoption of its Green Cincinnati Plan in 2008. It was **one of the first municipal climate action plans of its kind in the country** and has catalyzed a 36.6% reduction in the City's carbon emissions from buildings, transportation, and waste since its adoption.



Participants share ideas at a Green Cincinnati Plan Community Activation Subcommittee Breakout Session. Credit: Kylie Johnson

Every five years, the City has worked with the community to update the plan and I'm proud to have played a part in this most recent update. In 2022, I was appointed by Mayor Aftab Pureval to represent the OEC on the 2023 Green Cincinnati Plan Steering Committee and serve as Chair of the Community Activation Subcommittee. It's the first time the OEC has had a voice at the table to steer the community engagement process in Cincinnati.

Advocacy, education, and outreach were foundations for the Community Activation Subcommittee to engage as many Cincinnati residents as possible. Community members, nonprofit leaders, businesses, faith communities, educational institutions, and advocacy groups worked together to empower Cincinnati residents



Mayor Aftab Pureval (right) and Councilmember Meeka Owens (second from right) speak at a Green Cincinnati Plan Press Conference. Credit: Kylie Johnson

to take climate action. Our Subcommittee prioritized and refined over 200 recommendations submitted by the community! All in all, over 1,600 residents participated in over 40 public meetings to share their voices, including 150 residents from frontline communities most impacted by climate change.

These recommendations, alongside those from other committees, were ultimately shared with the Green Cincinnati Plan Steering Committee, chaired by Councilmember Meeka Owens. Together, we synthesized more than 3,000 resident recommendations into 40 high-impact emissions reduction strategies across eight focus areas of the Plan — **with the ultimate goal of achieving an aggressive 50% carbon emissions reduction by 2030 and carbon neutrality by 2050.**

Intentionally centering racial equity throughout the engagement process and final written plan was imperative to the Plan's success. In doing so, the 2023 Green Cincinnati Plan sets an example for the world on **how to prioritize environmental justice in city-level climate action plans** by embedding equity, inclusion, and community voice throughout.

The 2023 Green Cincinnati Plan's unanimous adoption by Cincinnati City Council in April marks a defining moment in the City to center equity in climate action goals. I look forward to continuing this work on behalf of the OEC, and I am excited to see what Cincinnati can accomplish with our collective power.

GOING LOCAL WITH THE REYNOLDSBURG CLIMATE CAMPAIGN



FRANKLIN DAVIS
Climate and Democracy Organizer

In my community of Reynoldsburg, redlined neighborhoods disproportionately face the impacts of climate change and other environmental injustices. These same communities also have **lower voter registration and voter turnout rates** when compared to other parts of the city and Central Ohio.

So how do we effectively organize around climate and environmental justice to close the gaps in civic engagement, while addressing the concerns of Reynoldsburg residents?

Enter the Reynoldsburg Climate Campaign, a project driven by the needs of Reynoldsburg residents most impacted by climate change. Launched by the OEC and Ohio Organizing Collaborative in August 2022, this campaign is laying the groundwork to drive **civic engagement and climate action** through door-to-door and digital “Get Out the Vote” campaigns.

"WE'RE GRATEFUL TO THOSE WHO OPENED THEIR DOORS TO WELCOME US. NOT ONLY DID WE HAVE GREAT CONVERSATIONS, BUT WE ALSO USED THE OPPORTUNITY TO TALK ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF MAKING OUR VOICES HEARD AT THE BALLOT BOX."

— FRANKLIN DAVIS

For the 2022 November election, our canvassers knocked on 17,000 doors in the City of Reynoldsburg, including residents in Wards 1, 2, and 4. We successfully reached more than 1,200 Reynoldsburg residents at their homes. Most answered a few questions for us and we had in-depth conversation with nearly 400 residents about the environment and their community.

We're grateful to those who opened their doors to welcome us. Not only did we have great conversations, but we also used the opportunity to talk about the importance of making our voices heard at the ballot box. Though we saw



Two canvassers representing the Reynoldsburg Climate Campaign pass out flyers while door knocking in Fall 2022. Credit: Franklin Davis

voter turnout dropoff in the November 2022 election statewide, we know that the areas in which we talked to voters — especially Reynoldsburg Wards 1 and 2 — saw less of a dropoff.

We're using what we learned in 2022 to guide our work this year. In addition to our community listening, community garden, and get out the vote efforts, we're gearing up to **develop a Climate Action Plan for Reynoldsburg with city officials and community members**. This will provide a tangible plan to not only reduce the city's carbon emissions, but also ensure our neighborhoods are more resilient to climate change impacts. We're also crafting a **partnership with Reynoldsburg City Schools** to work with students on climate change education at the macro and local levels. Students would then develop service projects and information campaigns for their community.

We owe a big thanks to the OEC's incredible members like you for supporting our on-the-ground work to advance climate action and strengthen our democracy. We'd love to have you join our efforts in Reynoldsburg, too!

Check us out at www.ReynoldsburgClimate.org.



The OEC Democracy Team is determined to meet Reynoldsburg community members where they're at — starting in the garden! Credit: Marisa Twigg

FOLLOW THE CREEK:

THE BIG AND LITTLE DARBY CREEKS

are some of the most important streams in not just Ohio or the Midwest, but the entire nation. Without stronger protections, we will lose the outstanding ecological integrity, breathtaking beauty, and numerous recreational opportunities of these waterways. But how did the Creeks' health begin to decline in the first place, and what's been done to prevent future degradation?

Follow below to learn more about the history behind protecting the Big and Little Darby Creeks.

BEFORE 1492 |

Pre-European Contact

The Big Darby Creek Watershed was home to a number of Native American tribes, including Miami, Shawnee, Delaware, and Wyandot. Tribes used the Creek for hunting, fishing, and transportation.

1700s |

Post-European Contact

European settlers began to arrive in the Big Darby Creek Watershed, clearing much of the forested land around the Creeks for agriculture and other development.

1800s |

Industrial Revolution Disrupts Darby

Settlers used the Creeks for transportation and industry. Increased development from grain mills that diverted water out of the Darby disrupted the aquatic ecosystem. In the decades after the Treaty of Wyandot in 1843, settlers forcibly removed every remaining Native American tribe in Ohio, including those within the watershed. A reconstructed Native American mound, called the Voss Site, remains at the Battelle Darby Creek Metro Park.

1984 |

Big Darby Designated State Scenic River

After years of advocacy by the OEC and partners, part of Big Darby Creek was designated a State Scenic River by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR). The designation creates a 1,000-foot buffer on each side of the stream and gives the state regulatory authority over state activities — but not private — that could threaten its water quality.

1994 |

Big & Little Darby Designated as National Scenic Rivers

Due to their excellent quality of aquatic habitat, remarkable scenic value, and incredible biodiversity, the Big and Little Darby Creeks were designated National Scenic Rivers, managed in partnership with the National Park Service. Little Darby Creek was also named a State Scenic River by ODNR at the time.

1970s |

Advocates Stop Columbus from Damming the Darby

Development pressure from a growing Central Ohio region is common in the Darby's history. In 1968, the City of Columbus purchased property along Big Darby Creek to build a dam for a City water supply reservoir. But intense opposition from advocates — including the Ohio Environmental Council — led the city to scrap the entire project in the early 1970s.

THE HISTORY OF PRESERVING THE BIG AND LITTLE DARBY CREEKS



MARISA TWIGG

Creative & Communications Director

2006 | *The Big Darby Accord is Established*

Again, Central Ohio faced significant development growth that threatened Big and Little Darby Creeks. This prompted leaders in 10 jurisdictions in Franklin County, including the City of Columbus, to join together to protect the Watershed, forming The Big Darby Accord. They developed a collaborative plan, finalized in 2006, to preserve habitat along Big Darby Creek, protect it from pollutant run-off, and maintain the Creek's natural flow.

WHILE OUR WORK IS FAR FROM OVER,

your support of the OEC's efforts has made a significant difference in Big and Little Darby Creeks' health over the last 50 years. The Creeks are now cleaner and healthier than they've been in decades, but threats from poorly planned development jeopardize this progress. We will use every advocacy tool we can to protect the Creeks for future generations.

Join our campaign to preserve this outstanding watershed at theoec.org/big-little-darby-creek.

2007 | *Big Darby Headwaters Restoration Launches*

The Nature Conservancy launched an effort to restore the headwaters of Big Darby Creek in 2007. One year later, the Conservancy opened Big Darby Creek Headwaters Nature Preserve to the public.

2023 | *Advocates Call on OEPA to Increase Darby Protections*

Thousands of advocates across the U.S. — and hundreds of members like you — called on Ohio EPA to enact the strongest protections in the Clean Water Act for Big and Little Darby Creeks. We believe the Creeks should be "Outstanding National Resource Waters" because of their exceptional recreational and ecological significance.

2016 | *Mass Mussel Die-Offs in the Darby*

Home to more than 100 fish species and 44 freshwater mussel species at the time, 50-miles of Big Darby Creek had a sudden die-off of mussels in 2016. Throughout the 2010s, the City of Columbus and villages of West Jefferson and Plain City continued building more housing and industry along the Creeks in areas not protected by the Big Darby Accord.

2022 | *OEC & Partners Appeal OEPA Permit for Wastewater Discharge in Big Darby Creek*

The OEC, Center for Biological Diversity, and Darby Creek Association appealed an Ohio EPA permit for Plain City Wastewater Treatment Plant's discharge increase into Big Darby. As of publishing, the OEC and partners are awaiting a decision on our permit appeal.

2019 | *Big Darby Named 9th Most Endangered River in the United States*

American Rivers announced Big Darby Creek as the nation's 9th most endangered river due to the rapid onslaught of under-planned development.

Thank you to OEC member David Ike for sharing this Big Darby Creek photograph with us in support of our preservation efforts!

FIGHTING FOR OHIO'S NATIONAL FOREST: CELEBRATING A VICTORY & HONORING OUR WORK AHEAD



NATHAN JOHNSON
Director of Public Lands

Ohio has only one national forest, and it's worth fighting for. Thanks to your support, the OEC continues to use our legal expertise to protect the Wayne National Forest in Southeast Ohio.

In 2018, we learned the "Sunny Oaks" timber project sought to clearcut thousands of acres of the Wayne. Over the next three years, we submitted public comments in defense of the forest with your help. A month after the U.S. Forest Service opened the project for bidding in August 2021, **the OEC filed our lawsuit, *Ohio Environmental Council v. United States Forest Service***, in federal district court.

In early March 2023, I argued in U.S. District Court that the U.S. Forest Service cannot fulfill the Sunny Oaks timber project **because it did not use sound science** when proposing to clearcut thousands of acres of the Wayne National Forest. From underground fungal networks to awe-inspiring white oaks, the arguments in our case emphasize the importance of holistic forest management.

In a partial win for Ohio's only national forest, the Court ruled in our favor. This is a tremendous and hard-fought victory. But, it's not quite time to rest or celebrate.

On March 30, 2023, the Court granted our motion for summary judgment. Specifically, the Court said the project's environmental review was flawed — its impacts were highly uncertain. That's a fatal deficiency under the National Environmental Policy Act.

However, the Court didn't halt the project. Therefore, our work in court isn't over. The OEC is arguing that the Court should void the U.S. Forest Service's environmental review and clearcut approval since it found the project unlawful. In doing so, **the agency and the public would have the best opportunity to objectively evaluate the environmental impacts at stake.**



Nathan Johnson stands outside the courthouse after delivering oral arguments. Credit: Anna Siriano



In addition to clearcutting, U.S. Forest Service authorized other timbering tactics that risk the Wayne National Forest's ecosystems. It also authorized between 2,000 to 4,000 acres of prescribed burning per year, annual bulldozing of 23 miles of fire line in the project area, and an unspecified amount of herbicide applications. Clearly, leaving the Sunny Oaks Project in place risks more environmental harm than voiding it.

Though litigation continues, the Court's ruling is an important and hard-fought legal victory — for the protection of the environment, for the OEC, and for our thousands of members and supporters.

As always, we'll keep you updated on this case and our ongoing fight to protect Ohio's forests.

FIGHTING FOSSIL FUEL LIES: OHIO ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL'S CLEAN ENERGY ADVOCACY



NOLAN RUTSCHILLING

Managing Director of Energy Policy

Across Ohio, major employers, communities, and individuals are embracing climate and clean energy investments as a result of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act. But not everyone is on board, and the OEC is using all of our advocacy power to change that.

Despite clean energy's growth, the fossil fuel industry keeps doubling down on dirty, expensive fuels. The oil and gas industry will do all it can to stop Ohioans from reducing dependence on fossil fuels. That includes lying to the people of Ohio.

This past winter, dark money group The Empowerment Alliance pushed lawmakers to add last minute language to **House Bill 507**, legislation originally focused on poultry regulations and food safety. The added language wrongly defined natural gas as "green energy," among other harmful provisions (including fracking Ohio's beloved state parks).

"BUT, OHIO HAS ENTERED A NEW PHASE IN OUR ENERGY TRANSITION: CLEAN ENERGY IS COST COMPETITIVE, POPULAR, AND IN HIGH DEMAND."

We stirred up statewide press coverage to draw attention to these sneaky industry efforts. And while we were ultimately successful in **preserving our renewable energy portfolio standards**, HB 507 unfortunately passed and was signed by the Governor on January 6, 2023.

The passage of HB 507 comes after a decades-long fossil fuel industry effort to misrepresent natural gas as a climate solution — rather than its reality as a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions.

Let's be clear: natural gas is a fossil fuel.

Natural gas — also known as methane — is a fossil fuel. It produces carbon dioxide when burned or released during transport. When leaked, **methane is 80 times more potent** as a greenhouse gas in its first 20 years in the atmosphere compared to carbon dioxide. At least 25% of today's global warming is driven by methane from human actions. It is not green energy.

Campaigns to rebrand natural gas as "green" are one way the industry hopes to secure fossil fuels' place in the market.

But, Ohio has entered a new phase in our energy transition: clean energy is cost competitive, popular, and in high demand.

The OEC, with the help of our members and partners, is educating leaders at the local, state, and federal levels to ensure the clean energy transition is not stunted by misinformation or fossil fuel bailouts.

You can write, call, and engage local leaders in person to tell them: **Ohio must embrace our rapidly approaching clean energy future**. And you can help by purchasing clean energy for your home and encouraging your workplace and local government to do the same.



SCAN FOR MORE: Read our latest energy blog written by OEC's Clean Energy Attorney Karin Nordstrom! Scan the QR code with your mobile device, or visit bit.ly/get-renewable-now

MEET EMILY KELLY, WATER FELLOW AT THE OHIO ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL



CASSIE JOHNSON
Communications Associate

Emily Kelly is halfway through her Water Fellowship at the OEC. Raised in Ohio, her work is a great example of what opportunities await Ohioans if we invest in our state and in our people.

Where did your environmental interest start?

“When I was studying biology at Bowling Green State University, I had a chance to study the harmful algal blooms to see what was causing them. What we found was that rising temperatures exacerbate this issue that is plaguing Lake Erie. This came at the time when a lot of people didn’t really have a grasp of climate change or really believe in it. It wasn’t really being taught in younger generations’ schools. Through my minor in environmental science I was inspired to share the message and learn more. I joined an environmental advocacy organization, The Lake Erie Foundation, and then pursued my masters in environmental science.”

How has your work at the OEC impacted Ohio water policy?

“The OEC works with many partners on water policy at the local, state, and federal level. For example I had the chance to elevate coalition water policy priorities, like replacing lead service lines to legislators and their staff in D.C. I also conducted a water advocacy day at the Statehouse and spoke to several city council members on water issues. We saw some progress on these issues in the federal Bipartisan Infrastructure Law – the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act—that has been distributed by Ohio’s State Revolving Funds program. I lead our advocacy for this investment in water infrastructure to be implemented through equitable means.”

When did you realize your ability to make a difference in Ohio?

“I was really taken aback that [lawmakers] are just regular people that have issues that they care about. Some have experienced injustices that they want to address. Many have passions that are similar to mine and they were able to make it to a place where they can make a difference. That gave me inspiration that I could make it to the top myself.”

In your view, why is Ohio important in the national environmental picture?

“A lot of the issues we face in Ohio, other states around us face as well. We have the opportunity to lead in addressing these issues by listening to our advocates. I think Ohio’s H2Ohio program, which is one of the best state initiatives on water quality, is a great step towards being a leader. It makes me hopeful that if we continue to invest in our environment that we can be a real leader in our region.”



Emily Kelly traveled to Athens County in May 2023 to present on the OEC’s work to the Appalachian Watershed Council. Credit: Molly Jo Stanley



In October 2022, Emily Kelly and several members of our team joined U.S. EPA Administrator Michael Regan and our partners in Cleveland to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Clean Water Act.



HELP SUSTAIN OUR MISSION: JOIN THE GREEN GIVING CLUB

Ohio isn't an easy place to win protections for our energy, water, land, and democracy. But our team's successes this year showcase the collective strength of our environmental policy advocacy. Our shared accomplishments highlight how when we work together, we can achieve bold climate action that holds energy utilities accountable, keeps our forests safe, cleans our waterways, and increases voter turnout.

Our team is taking the OEC's advocacy to the next level – and we need your support.

Becoming a monthly donor is a simple, reliable way to invest in Ohio's environment – now and into the future. Your tax-deductible donation to the Ohio Environmental Council helps ensure our team can build upon our shared success and elevate our efforts to protect our environment for all who call Ohio home.

Green Giving Club benefits include:

- Easy monthly processing
- Special Green Giving Club member updates and event invitations
- End-of-year donation summary to assist you in tax preparation
- A dedicated OEC staff person to answer your questions

Scan here to join our Green Giving Club, or visit theoec.org/give-monthly.



GREEN GALA 2023 THANKS TO OUR SPONSORS!

Special thanks to the following sponsors who made our 2023 event a success! For a full list of sponsors and a recap of the evening, please visit: theoec.org/greengala2023/

CHAMPIONS



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JOIN THE OEC IN AUGUST:

VOTE NO ON ISSUE 1!

Our ability to defend a healthy environment is directly impacted by Issue 1. This will make it harder for Ohio voters to fight for clean air, land, water, and democracy through future ballot initiatives. Getting rid of ballot initiatives means more power for extreme out-of-touch politicians, lobbyists and special interests, and less power for voters to decide the issues that matter most.

IMPORTANT ELECTION REMINDERS:

Register to vote or update your registration by Monday, July 10.

MAKE YOUR PLAN TO VOTE: You can:

- (1)** Vote at home by mail: Request your absentee ballot no later than August 1,
- (2)** Vote early in-person: Visit your local county Board of Elections July 11 through August 6, or
- (3)** Vote in-person on Election Day: Tuesday, August 8

For more information, visit our website at:

theoec.org/vote-no-on-issue-1

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