

green watch

FALL 2026



Ohio Environmental Council

CAROL'S LETTER

The Fight Isn't Static—Neither Are We

Dear Members and Supporters,

There's something about fall that makes you want to take stock. The air turns crisp; the pace of the year starts to shift, and it feels like the right moment to look back at what we've built together—and look ahead at what's still in front of us. That's what this edition of GreenWatch is: a chance to catch our breath and assess the fight for a clean, healthy Ohio for all.

And it's a real fight, still. We're up against restrictions on voting rights and hard questions about how we handle statewide land restoration efforts. But just like the seasons, nothing here stays static—these challenges come paired with real momentum, and some wins are worth celebrating.

Take Southwest Ohio, for one. Our team there is growing, and with it, our impact across the region. You'll find the full story in the Regional Update section.

That kind of growth matters every year, but this fall carries a little extra weight. Ohioans head to the polls this November for an election that will shape who leads from the governor's office for years to come. We've spent months building a gubernatorial platform and governing agenda around the issues that matter most: dedicated funding for water quality programs like H2Ohio, and energy policies that make our grid more efficient, reliable, and sustainable.

So, here's where you come in. What is your role in this election? Vote. Talk to your

friends and family, make a plan together, and get yourselves to the polls this November. It's one of the simplest, most powerful things you can do for Ohio's future.

We've also got some wins to share while we're at it. Governor DeWine's veto of House Bill 173 preserved rights secured for Ohio energy ratepayers by the Ohio Supreme Court—read the full story by scanning the QR code below. We're pushing for that same accountability in the fast-growing data center industry, and you'll find an update on that fight in this edition, too. And closer to home, you'll read about Agriculture and Water Manager Emily Arthur's advocacy training work, which is helping communities across Ohio turn their stories into real influence with lawmakers.

None of this—the growth, the wins, the fights still ahead—happens without you. Some organizations have had to pull back this year as funding gets tighter and less certain. We haven't, and that's because of our members. As we head into this next season, thank you for staying with us.

Warmly,
Carol Kauffman
CEO



RESTRICTIONS LOCKED IN: WHAT ISSUE 3 WOULD MEAN FOR OHIO VOTERS



Spencer Dirrig
Vice President of Government Affairs

Clean water, healthy air, and protected public lands depend on real representation for Ohioans most exposed to pollution and environmental injustice. That's why the Ohio Environmental Council pays attention to how Ohioans vote, not just what's on the ballot. When eligible voters are left out, we can't achieve the representative government that environmental justice requires.

This November, Ohioans will decide on what will likely be "State Issue 3"¹, a proposed amendment to the Ohio Constitution that would permanently lock in the requirement to provide photo identification to vote.

Ohio has required photo ID at the polls since April 2023.² Issue 3 does not change that. It takes the law we already have and writes it directly into the Ohio Constitution, where later changes become far more difficult. That permanence is the point, and the problem.

Issue 3 locks in a closed, fixed list of acceptable IDs:³ an Ohio driver's license or state ID, a U.S. passport, or a military or veterans ID. A student ID does not count. Neither would any better method a future legislature might want to add, from an expanded list of photo identification methods to more accurate biometric verification. Once it's in the Constitution, the only way to change that list is another statewide vote.

Additionally, current law guarantees any Ohioan a free state ID card—a safeguard against turning an ID into an effective poll tax. Issue 3 locks in the requirement to present the ID, but omits the free-ID guarantee. As a result, a future legislature could choose to scrap the no-cost ID guarantee, putting a price tag on your ballot.

We know who pays the price for voter suppression. In 2024, 7,053 provisional ballots were set aside in Ohio because a voter could not provide the

required ID.⁴ In-person impersonation, the fraud photo ID is meant to stop, is vanishingly rare: researchers found 31 credible cases out of more than a billion ballots cast nationwide over 14 years.⁵

The OEC Action Fund opposed Issue 3 in committee this June, testifying against the closed ID list, the missing free-ID guarantee, and the rush to write a statute into the Constitution with minimal public input.

One thing to be clear on: nothing about how you vote this November is changing. However, if Issue 3 passes, it will take immediate effect. It would put this inflexible policy into our Constitution—a document meant to protect the rights of Ohioans from government overreach, not add new hurdles to exercise those rights.

State Issue 3 is coming to your ballot this November. Learn the facts before November 3, and make sure your voice is heard.

Citations

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ENERGY JUSTICE AFTER HB 15: THE WORK AHEAD FOR OHIO



Jesse Velazquez
Southwest Ohio Regional Director

During my time as Climate Justice Manager on OEC's Energy Team, I have seen how energy policy is never just about electrons, infrastructure, or legislation. It is about people: families deciding which bills to pay first, neighborhoods facing frequent outages, communities asked to host energy infrastructure, and Ohioans too often left out of the clean energy transition.

When Governor DeWine signed House Bill 15, Ohio took an important step toward a more affordable, reliable, and accountable energy future. For years, Ohioans have paid the price for an energy system shaped by utility influence, outdated infrastructure, and decisions that put profits before people. HB 15 began to change that by repealing the OVEC coal bailout, increasing grid transparency, strengthening rate case accountability, and opening opportunities for cleaner, more resilient energy.

But HB 15 was not the finish line. It was a reminder of why energy justice must remain at the center of OEC's work.

Energy justice asks a simple but urgent question: who benefits from our energy system, and who bears the burden when it fails? For too many Ohioans, that burden shows up as unaffordable bills, unreliable service, unhealthy air, and limited access to clean energy tools that could lower costs and improve quality of life.

That question will continue to guide OEC's work at the Statehouse. We will keep fighting for policies that expand access to clean, affordable energy, including HB 303's community energy pilot; HB 427's voluntary demand response opportunities for residential and small commercial customers; and plug-in solar policies that could help renters and apartment residents participate in small-scale clean energy.

Energy justice also shapes our advocacy before the Ohio Power Siting Board and the Public Utilities



Read our FirstEnergy Grid Disparity Report: theoec.org/news-and-information/grid-disparity-analyses-in-firstenergy-service-territory/

Commission of Ohio. As utilities seek rate hikes and propose grid investments, OEC will continue to push for protections that ensure customers are not simply asked to pay more but receive better service, cleaner energy, and a more resilient grid.

Our Grid Disparity Report makes clear why this work matters. In FirstEnergy's service territory, disadvantaged communities were more likely to be served by older, lower-capacity infrastructure, while traditional reliability metrics failed to capture those disparities. The grid is not failing everyone equally, and the solutions cannot be one-size-fits-all.

This same commitment will shape my new role as OEC's Southwest Ohio Regional Director. Across Cincinnati, Dayton, and the communities in between, energy justice is not abstract. It is about whether families can afford safe homes, neighborhoods have reliable power during extreme weather, local governments can invest in resilience, and communities have a voice in shaping their future.

HB 15 opened the door. Now we have to keep pushing it wider—toward affordability, reliability, clean air, local power, and justice for all Ohioans.

NON-NATIVE SPECIES MANAGEMENT: IS THERE ANOTHER WAY?



Molly Jo Stanley
Southeast Ohio Regional Director

Across Ohio, good people are leading important efforts to restore ecological beauty and diversity, which have been imperiled by over two centuries of heavy industrial extraction—including deforestation, dredging wetlands, plowing under prairies, and the introduction of non-native invasive species (NNIS). We celebrate the recovery—while acknowledging the vast difference from pre-colonial conditions of 95% forested (we’re currently at about 30%) and that, since 2018, the percentage of Ohio’s forests and wetlands has once again been in decline. Further complicating the matter, many of these ecosystems are heavily impacted by the presence of non-native species, some of which behave invasively (think Amur Honeysuckle, Autumn Olive, or Callery Pear). With a significant lack of funding dedicated to land management, especially on public lands, we’ve inherited a complex problem with no easy answer.

Currently, it is largely accepted that the most practical approach to addressing the issue of NNIS is herbicide application. The OEC recognizes the ecological threats posed by NNIS, and the circumstances necessitating herbicide use. But we look at the challenges facing ecosystems and communities, and how they came to be, and wonder: what are the implications of widespread herbicide application, who is benefiting, and how might we create practices and policies that better protect and serve ecosystems and all who depend on their health and resilience?

Recently, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of Monsanto⁶ (Bayer), citing the EPA’s declaration that glyphosate, Roundup’s key ingredient, is safe, but the study that justified its safety was deemed compromised by the EPA’s own Inspector General.⁷ This decision came on the heels of a February executive order boosting domestic production of glyphosate.⁸

While habitat loss, ecosystem fragmentation,

endangered species, and extinction are at an all-time high, the use of herbicides in our Public Lands is, too.⁹ In Ohio, the Wayne National Forest’s 2025 Non-Native Invasive Plant Control Project authorized application of herbicides across the Forest, even as its own report acknowledges herbicides may move through water runoff. Approximately 84% of soils within the Project area fall within the highest runoff-potential category.

Restoring Ohio’s ecosystems is a ripe opportunity. Imagine workforce development programs that train Ohioans to tend healthy landscapes; to harvest and process food, medicine, fiber, and fuelwood; to create trails, bridges, and pavilions; to build furniture and affordable housing. Imagine enacting policies and practices where the wealthiest corporations are investing in the communities they impact.¹⁰

The OEC works to protect and secure safe spaces for the full recovery of Ohio’s natural world, in which humans reclaim our role as thoughtfully engaged participants. We commend the efforts of Land stewards across the state, and envision these efforts supported by policies and practices that create livelihoods for Ohioans while increasing abundant, resilient ecosystems.

Recommended Further Reading

Love Them to Death: Turning Invasive Plants into Local Economic Opportunities, Edited by Wendy L. Applequist

Beyond the War on Invasive Species: A Permaculture Approach to Ecosystem Restoration, By Tao Orion

Scapegoat: What the Invasive Species Story Gets Wrong, By Clare Follmann

See citations on page 10.

CLEB BUILDS LOCAL POWER THROUGH POLICY TRAINING AND HANDS-ON LAWMAKER ENGAGEMENT



Emily Arthur
Agriculture and Water Manager

This spring, the Central Lake Erie Basin Collaborative (CLEB) participated in a four-part policy and storytelling training series to help local organizations feel more confident navigating the world of water policy, funding, and communication. Led by Emily Arthur of the Ohio Environmental Council, the series was designed to take participants from “I’m not sure where to start” to “I know exactly how to engage.”

The first session, Money, Money, Money, broke down the maze of federal, state, and local funding sources from H2Ohio to stormwater utilities and federal restoration programs. Participants learned how budget cycles work, when to talk to legislators, and how to match real projects to the right funding lanes.

Next came Advocacy 101, which cleared up the confusion around what different types of organizations can and can’t do. The session walked through the difference between advocacy and lobbying, the legal boundaries for nonprofits, and how watershed groups can confidently participate in state and federal policy processes without crossing any lines.

The final two combined sessions, Effective Communication & Taking Action, focused on storytelling and relationship-building. Participants practiced translating technical work into compelling narratives and explored strategies for preparing for meetings, building trust with policymakers, and identifying the right moments to engage.

All of these trainings set the stage for CLEB’s June 26 Lawmaker Field Day at the Gerber Stream and Wetland Restoration Project in Lorain County. Co-hosted with the Lorain County Stormwater District, OEC, Chagrin River Watershed Partners, and Old Woman Creek NERR, the event brought federal, state, and local leaders out to the water’s



We want to hear from YOU!



See the recording of the Policy and Storytelling Training Series.



We want to hear from you! Share your story with water to help us advocate for better protection and funding to keep our bodies of water safe for all.

edge to see restoration work firsthand. Attendees toured the site, tried stream quality monitoring, and spent time in conversation about current water issues and priorities.

The impact of pairing training with real-world practice was clear. CLEB members walked away with stronger relationships with lawmakers, more confidence in talking about funding and policy, and a shared sense of how local restoration work connects to statewide and federal decisions, especially at a time when rollbacks and shifting rules make local voices even more important. The field day helped turn skills into action, stories into influence, and individual organizations into a more coordinated force for protecting water across the Central Lake Erie Basin.

Now it is time to hear from you, readers! We are collecting your stories about water. Is it a place where you recreate or connect with nature? Do you depend upon it as your water source or does it support your local ecosystem? We want to share your stories with lawmakers to advocate for better protection and funding to keep our bodies of water safe for all.

SOUTHWEST OHIO: BUILDING MOMENTUM FOR EQUITABLE CLIMATE ACTION



Kylie Johnson
Managing Director of Field Advocacy

Southwest Ohio is entering an exciting new phase of climate leadership as we expand our regional capacity and deepen our commitment to community-driven advocacy. Communities across Cincinnati, Dayton, and the surrounding region are accelerating climate action, and this growing momentum makes it the perfect time for us to increase our regional staff capacity. This moment offers an opportunity to celebrate progress, welcome new team members, and look ahead to the work that will shape the region's environmental future.

Cincinnati's climate work continues to advance through the Green Cincinnati Plan. City officials recently shared that Cincinnati has achieved a 39.6 percent reduction in carbon emissions since 2006, keeping the city on track to meet its goal of a 50 percent reduction by 2030 and full carbon neutrality by 2050. Work will begin next year on the 2028 update. This year also marked Cincinnati's first ever Climate Week, where organizers across the region hosted 67 events with more than 1,000 attendees, demonstrating strong and growing public engagement.

This progress is also reflected in the City of Cincinnati's Environmental Advisory Board. Last year, the board submitted recommendations on climate resiliency budget considerations, stormwater management, energy aggregation, and the codification of environmental justice in city decision-making. These efforts demonstrate how local leadership is advancing equity-centered climate policy across the region.

With this surge in regional climate action, Jesse Velazquez is stepping in as our new Southwest Ohio Regional Director. Over the past two years, Jesse has been a driving force behind our climate justice work, advancing solutions that center equity



Jesse Velazquez, OEC's new Southwest Ohio Regional Director, with Kylie Johnson, OEC's Managing Director of Field Advocacy.

and strengthening relationships throughout the region. His deep roots in Southwest Ohio and his commitment to authentic partnership make him an ideal leader for this next chapter.

We are also excited to add staff capacity in Dayton with Jasmine Walker as OEC's new Drinking Water Manager. Jasmine brings extensive experience in water policy and advocacy and has already hit the ground running to advance critical work on lead service line replacement and water affordability. Jesse and Jasmine have both participated in the City of Dayton's stakeholder engagement process for its ten-year climate action plan, contributing regional expertise and helping ensure community priorities are reflected in the plan's development.

With Jesse's leadership, Jasmine's expertise, and the continued collaboration of partners across Cincinnati, Dayton, and the surrounding communities, OEC is poised to accelerate climate action in Southwest Ohio. Together, we are building a more just, resilient, and sustainable region through shared purpose and collective power.

FAIR COURTS MATTER: WHY OHIO'S JUDICIARY SHAPES OUR ENVIRONMENTAL FUTURE



Chris Tavenor
General Counsel

What does it mean to have a “fair” court?

In Ohio, it means having judges who apply the law impartially, follow the facts, and ensure that every person who comes before their bench has a dignified day in court.

In the environmental context, fair courts are especially important because the issues at stake are often technically complex and consequential beyond an individual's particular circumstances. Decisions about clean water, public lands, energy infrastructure, and utility rates can have ripple effects across the state, even if the case stemmed from one person's litigation.

Whether a court is reviewing a permit issued by a state agency, challenging a new law, or hearing an appeal involving a major industrial project, Ohioans deserve independent, thoughtful judges committed to the rule of law, rather than politics or special interests. Too often, environmental protections depend more on how laws are interpreted and applied by courts, not just how they're written by legislators. A fair judicial system ensures that communities, businesses, government agencies, and advocates all operate under the same rules. For organizations like the OEC, fair courts help ensure that environmental disputes are decided on evidence, science, and law—not on who has the most resources or political influence.

That's why the Ohio Environmental Council proudly partners with the Ohio Fair Courts Alliance, which educates Ohioans about the important role courts play in our daily lives—and why we must maintain a judiciary that is fair, impartial, and accountable to the people of our state. This summer, the OEC and the Ohio Fair Courts Alliance launched a three-part educational webinar series titled Fair Courts & the Environment. The series explores the many ways courts influence environmental protection in Ohio. In June and July, we discussed the different types of environmental litigation, judicial philosophy, and their relationship to principles of fairness and impartiality.



And most recently, in August, we explored how decisions by agencies such as the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio are directly reviewed by the Ohio Supreme Court, whose justices are elected by voters statewide. We're continuing these important conversations in a more specific context at our 2026 Ohio Public Interest Environmental Law Conference, occurring on September 25 at the Ohio State University Moritz College of Law.

As communities confront new challenges regarding data centers involving energy demand, water use, and local decision-making, courts will inevitably play a central role in resolving disputes and interpreting the law. We hope you will join us as we continue exploring the legal and policy issues essential to pursuing environmental progress in Ohio.



See the recordings from our Summer Series: Fair Courts & the Environment

How to Pursue Environmental Protection through the Courts, June 24

Judges, Judicial Philosophy & the Environment, July 22

Understanding the Intersection of State Agencies, the Courts & Your Utility Bills, August 19

DATA CENTER ACCOUNTABILITY: ACTION FUND ADVANCES KEY LEGISLATION



Melanie Houston
Vice President of Programs

Data centers have become one of the defining natural resource issues facing Ohioans. Communities across the state are asking who will pay for the electricity, water, and grid upgrades these facilities require—and whether Ohio families will continue footing the bill. Ohioans near proposed data centers are also worried about air pollution, noise pollution, and their local waterways. We have been working to make sure we see statewide safeguards to protect Ohioans from this influx.

This past spring, our team spent months developing a Data Center briefing for lawmakers on both sides of the aisle. Alongside our partner, Alliance for the Great Lakes, we co-hosted a virtual briefing on May 18. The session was attended by 37 lawmakers and staff, including many members of the General Assembly's joint data center committee. Later that week, our VP of Government Affairs, Spencer Dirrig, presented on a data center panel at the statehouse, hosted by Policy Matters Ohio and attended by many state lawmakers.

Also in May, the Ohio Senate stood up a joint data center committee to hear from experts and stakeholders about the opportunities and impacts associated with data centers. This data center



*Data center being built in Central Ohio.
Photo by Jack Babcock.*

committee culminated in a large data center bill (HB 646) that creates some of the first protections for Ohioans and accountability for data centers.

Our team jumped into action: diligently reviewing this bill, providing testimony, and offering expertise to lawmakers to ensure they make decisions in the best interests of the environment and Ohioans. Some of our key recommendations included urging the legislature to create a large load tariff for data centers that is uniform across Ohio's four electric distribution utilities; to require monthly disclosure of water use and PFAS testing for any water discharges; and to prohibit public officials from signing non-disclosure agreements with data center developers.

While the legislation wasn't finalized before lawmakers went home for summer recess, we found overwhelming support to act in our conversations. Every single lawmaker had a story about these facilities in their home districts. We are hopeful that data center legislation will be a priority in the lame duck session, and we'll keep advocating for Ohioans to get the protections they deserve.



Spencer Dirrig giving a presentation about data center development in Central Ohio.

INVEST IN OHIO'S FUTURE. BECOME AN IMPACT PARTNER



Alaina McCleery
Managing Director of Individual Giving

At the Ohio Environmental Council, our greatest strength has always been our people. The boldest victories for our climate, health, democracy, and environmental justice are made possible by dedicated supporters, advocates, and partners who believe in a better future and who step forward to help make it a reality.

If the work you see here inspires you and you want to help ensure it continues for years to come, becoming an Impact Partner is an incredibly meaningful way to get involved. Annual gifts of \$1,000 or more provide the stable, flexible support that gives organizations like ours the strength to respond to emerging challenges, seize critical opportunities, and take independent action where it is needed most.



As an Impact Partner, you'll gain an insider's perspective on the progress your investment makes possible and the victories you help achieve. You'll see firsthand how we are working together to protect Ohio's climate, air, land, water, and communities. You'll also join a dedicated community of environmental champions who share your commitment to creating a healthier, more sustainable future for all.

To start a conversation, please get in touch with me with any questions, ideas, or specific information tailored to your giving interests.

Alaina McCleery
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Citations from Page 5

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Lobbying activities at the Ohio General Assembly and other legislative bodies described in this publication were conducted by the OEC Action Fund.



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Communications Manager, in Columbus, Ohio.

See Our Event Schedule!

Quarterly Events:

Law Webinar
OEC In Your Area
Emerging Leaders
Members' Action Briefing

Annual Events:

Public Interest Law Conference, *September 25*
Annual Meeting, *December 17*
Green Gala, *May 14*
State of the Environment, *TBA*



See all our current events at:
theoec.org/events

