



John R. Kasich, Governor  
Mary Taylor, Lt. Governor  
Craig W. Butler, Director

June 25, 2014

Notice of Issuance of a Limited Environmental Review and Final Finding of No Significant Impact to All Interested Citizens, Organizations, and Government Agencies

City of Akron – Wilbeth Wetlands  
WR390095-0101

The purpose of this notice is to advise the public that Ohio EPA has reviewed the referenced project and finds neither an Environmental Assessment (EA) nor a Supplemental Study (SS) is required to implement the project as discussed in the attached Limited Environmental Review (LER). Therefore, a Finding of No Significant Impact is being issued for this project.

The Water Pollution Control Loan Fund program requires the inclusion of environmental factors in the decision-making process for project approval. Ohio EPA has done this by incorporating a detailed analysis of the environmental effects of the proposed action in its review and approval process. Environmental information was developed as part of the facilities plan, as well as through the facilities plan review process. A subsequent review by this Agency has found that the proposed action does not require the preparation of either an EA or an SS.

Our environmental review concluded that because the proposed project is limited in scope and meets all applicable criteria, a Limited Environmental Review is warranted. Specifically, the proposed wetland restoration is a nonpoint source pollution control project consisting of non-structural practices.

The proposed project:

- has no significant environmental effect;
- does not require extensive specific impact mitigation;
- has no effect on high value environmental resources;
- has a reasonable cost;
- is not a controversial action;
- does not create a new, or relocate an existing discharge to surface or ground waters;
- will not result in substantial increases in the volume of discharge or the loading of pollutants from an existing source or from new facilities to receiving waters; and
- will not provide capacity to serve a population substantially greater than the existing population.

The LER presents additional information on the proposed project, costs, and basis for our decision. Further information can be obtained by calling or writing the contact person named at the end of the LER.

Upon issuance of this determination, loan award may proceed without being subject to further environmental review or public comment, unless information is provided which determines that environmental conditions on the proposed project have changed significantly.

Sincerely,



*for*  
Alauddin A. Alauddin, Chief  
Division of Environmental and Financial Assistance

c: Sue Farmer, OWDA  
File

## LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

### A. Project Identification

Name: City of Akron - Wilbeth Wetlands

WPCLF #: WR390095-0101

Sponsor / Owner / Implementer: The Honorable Donald Plusquellic, Mayor  
City of Akron  
166 South High Street  
Akron, OH 44308

### B. History and Existing Conditions

The City of Akron in Summit County has requested \$1,750,000 from the Ohio Water Resource Restoration Sponsor Program (WRRSP) to restore approximately 75 acres of degraded wetland and 65 acres of adjacent upland that affects wetland quality on City property.

WRRSP funds will be used to eradicate invasive plant species and plant native species, remove abandoned industrial infrastructure, and for hydraulic and water quality improvements. Other funding sources (including the Clean Ohio Fund) will acquire adjacent parcels of wetland to restore and manage the entire wetland complex as proposed for the \$2,500,000 project.

The immediate project area in south Akron is part of the Portage Lakes area, straddling the Ohio River / Lake Erie watersheds. The original lake / wetland complex, originating from the retreat of the last continental ice sheet, was modified with dams and dikes in the early 1800s to feed the Ohio and Erie Canal that passes beside the Wilbeth Wetlands area. These modified waterways still present a diverse and complex regional ecosystem.

Deep organic soils beneath much of the project area suggest it was part of a large wetland complex draining toward the west. The inundated area is below the elevation of the adjacent Ohio and Erie Canal. The proposed Wilbeth Wetlands restoration property was previously owned by the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company and, due to human activity, was dry upland. During that time industrial water wells, brine wells, and gas and oil wells were installed. Historical photographs suggest that farming and soil mining occurred as well.

The project area contains 13 wetland sites and one stream, representing forested, emergent, and shrub-scrub wetland types based on primary water source: those influenced by the Ohio-Erie Canal, areas associated with concentrated storm water inflows, and precipitation - or ground water - dominated isolated depressions. All the

wetlands contain invasive species and are in different states of ecological succession as a result of past disruption.

Wetland evaluation using the Ohio Rapid Assessment Method version 5.0 for wetlands (ORAM) yielded scores ranging between 30.5 and 47 (Category 1/2 Gray Zone, Modified Category 2, or Category 2). The presence of a heron rookery and evaluation of the project proposal goals suggest the restoration could result in ORAM scores in Category 3, the highest quality.

Surrounding lands are a mix of residential, industrial, commercial, active recreation, and vacant lands. These adjacent land uses could impact the project area and water quality by encroachment, poor land management practices, and potentially contaminated storm water and ground water. Storm sewers in the low-lying subdivision to the southeast of the project area connect to an above-ground storm water raceway half-pipe that drains onto the project area and directly into a wetland.

Parcels to the immediate east of the project area are used for construction and demolition debris, soil stockpiling, and automobile recycling. One property is under restoration orders by the United States Army, Corps of Engineers (USACE), Huntington District for the illegal filling of wetlands; part of the illegal fill also occurred on City of Akron land.

### C. Project Description

The objectives for the Wilbeth Wetlands restoration are aquatic habitat enhancement and protection of the project area (Figure 1). A specific goal is to increase plant and animal diversity and resilience. Surface water and ground water resources will be protected by the removal of open industrial water wells that are potentially conduits for surface water. Storm drainage systems that dump street runoff directly into wetlands will be re-engineered to protect water quality, and the property will also be protected from development and other direct disturbance to aquatic resources.

The restoration project involves:

- Invasive plant species eradication and wetland enhancement
- Storm water management
- Removal of former industrial infrastructure
- Existing utility infrastructure maintenance coordination

#### Invasive plant species eradication and wetland enhancement

Invasive plants will be eradicated by application of broad-spectrum, non-persisting, water-safe herbicide; three to four applications may be needed for full eradication. A "Jurisdictional Waters and Isolated Wetlands Report" identified invasive species and

their locations. Planting and overseeding with native species after eradication will revegetate these areas; the planting list is based on the wetland community being restored and on the presence of native species. Establishing these additional native communities will also help prevent the future establishment and spread of invasive species.

### Storm water management

Removing the elevated storm water raceway and replacing it with self-forming stream fill to maintain conveyance of storm water into the wetland will naturalize surface flow into the wetland. Access through a wetland for the raceway demolition and removal, and wetland fill for the self-forming stream both require the appropriate USACE Nationwide permits approval, which is pending and expected. Wetland disturbance will be minimized by combining the raceway demolition and removal with the filling to develop the storm water stream.

Storm flow evaluations suggest the self-forming stream design can connect to existing storm sewers at the edge of the project area. Two storm water forebays (shallow retention basins) will be constructed where storm sewers enter the project area to trap sediments and trash before the water enters the wetland area. Akron storm water management staff will regularly clean and maintain the forebays and dispose of accumulated trash and sediments properly.

Areas of the canal / towpath embankment where storm water overflows into the project area wetlands will be reinforced to ensure storm water does not erode the bank and deposit sediment in the wetlands.

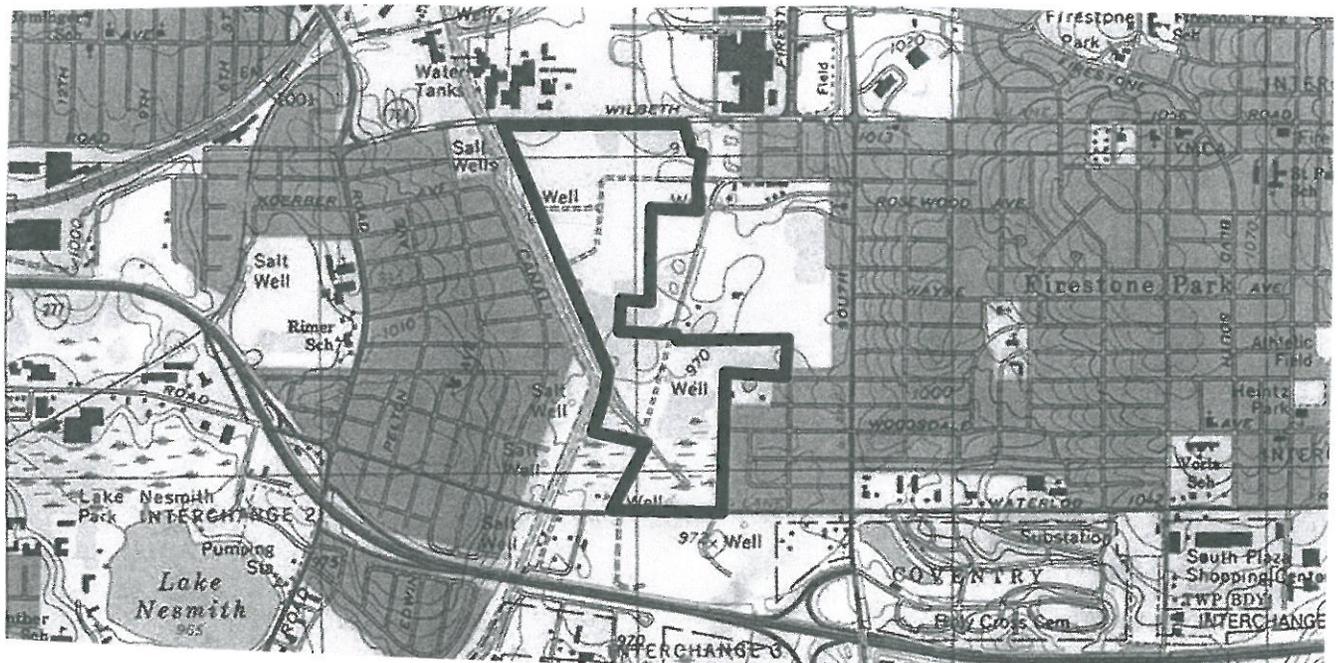


Figure 1 – General Project Location

### Removal of former industrial infrastructure

This project will remove six industrial water wells located in the project area, following applicable Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) requirements for well abandonment. Well abandonment involves removing the well head and associated pump materials from the well, filling the well with a combination of pea gravel and Portland cement, and then cutting the well casing off approximately four feet below the ground surface. One well head structure may be saved and relocated to an interpretive display describing the area's history. Temporary construction access requires authorization through a USCAE Nationwide permit that is pending approval.

Pipe connecting the water wells to the former industrial water supply operation is assumed to contain asbestos material. Asbestos-cement (AC; Transite) pipe was used extensively in the mid-1900s in potable water distribution systems. The type of asbestos contained in the transite pipe material is not a risk to human health unless the pipe material is broken or pulverized. To protect the wetlands from degradation with asbestos that could also affect the public, above-ground Transite pipe will be removed using proper procedures for asbestos-containing material and a pipe bridge over Ley Ditch will be razed and removed.

### Existing utility infrastructure maintenance coordination

Municipal sanitary sewers and storm sewers, and public utility electrical distribution infrastructure cross the project area. This project includes coordination of maintenance to reduce negative effects on aquatic habitat and water quality.

### D. Project Implementation

Akron is the project sponsor and implementer, owns the project area, and intends to also separately acquire and restore adjacent parcels to manage the wetland complex as a whole. Restoration will be by contractors experienced in this type of work selected by competitive bidding. An Environmental Covenant will be placed on the project area to ensure the restored wetland is protected in perpetuity. Akron is also the holder of the Environmental Covenant and is responsible for maintaining the property in accordance with the protections of the Environmental Covenant. Land acquired with Clean Ohio Fund assistance will also be protected with a deed restriction required by that program.

Restoration design has been completed in anticipation of \$1,750,000 of WRRSP funding being made available from Akron's scheduled June 2014 WPCLF loan of approximately \$18,485,500 for the Mud Run Pump Station Improvements and Storage Basin project. For that project, Akron qualifies for the standard interest rate (now 3.09%; interest rates are set monthly and may change for a later loan) for the June 2014 loan award. In exchange for sponsoring the water restoration project, Akron will receive an interest rate reduction of 0.08%, and interest that otherwise would be charged to the wastewater loan will be advanced to Akron to pay for the Wilbeth Wetlands restoration.

Akron will combine the WRRSP funds with a \$750,000 Clean Ohio Conservation Fund grant for this project, which will begin in late 2014 and be completed in 2016. The project involves no direct cost to Akron residents and will have a beneficial effect on the water quality, habitat, and biology of the wetland complex and Cuyahoga River watershed.

#### E. Public Notification

Akron published a project description and request for public comment on its municipal web page in April 2014 and received no comments. The City also had directly contacted the Summit County Historical Society and the Ohio and Erie Canalway Coalition. Ohio EPA is unaware of controversy about or opposition to the project.

Ohio EPA is posting this Limited Environmental Review (LER) decision and Finding of No Significant Impact on the Division of Environmental and Financial Assistance web page: <http://epa.ohio.gov/defa/EnvironmentalandFinancialAssistance.aspx> ("What's New" "WPCLF Documents for Review and Comment") and will distribute it to interested parties. Information supporting the LER is available from the project contact named below.

The following agencies reviewed this project's planning information:

- Ohio Environmental Protection Agency
- Ohio Historic Preservation Office
- Ohio Department of Natural Resources
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

None of the review agencies has opposed the project.

#### F. Conclusion

The proposed wetland restoration is a nonpoint source pollution control project consisting of non-structural practices that qualifies for a LER and meets the following additional criteria for a LER:

*It has no significant environmental effect, has no effect on high value environmental resources, and does not require extensive specific impact mitigation* – The proposed restoration involves construction and non-construction activity in the wetlands and uplands that, when complete, will enhance the quality of the wetlands. A great blue heron rookery exists on the northern portion of the open wetland, an area that will see invasive plant removal and native plant revegetation, neither of which should adversely affect that species. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recommends that construction within 300 feet of the rookery, including installation of artificial nesting structures, be avoided from March 1 until June 1.

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) recommends a habitat suitability survey for the state endangered spotted turtle. The project site is near a current record of a spotted turtle, which inhabits areas with wet meadows, pond edges, wet woods, and shallow sluggish waters of small streams and ditches, features present on the project site. If suitable habitat is found at the project site, a presence / absence survey will be conducted before proceeding with restoration activity.

These activity restrictions are included along with the standard construction best management practices used to minimize noise, dust, traffic disruption on the canal towpath trail, and storm water runoff. Construction impacts will be temporary and incorporated into the wetland restoration.

*The cost is reasonable* – Project budget review suggests that the proposed line items are reasonable for the type and scope of proposed restoration activity.

*It is not a controversial action* – Ohio EPA is unaware of opposition to or controversy about the project.

*It does not create a new, or relocate an existing, discharge to surface or ground waters; will not result in substantial increases in the volume of discharge or the loading of pollutants from an existing source or from new facilities to receiving waters; and will not provide capacity to serve a population substantially greater than the existing population* - These wastewater infrastructure criteria are inapplicable to this type of nonpoint source pollution control project.

The planning activities for the project have identified no potentially significant adverse impacts. The project is expected to have no significant short-term or long-term adverse impacts on the quality of the human environment or on sensitive resources (floodplains, wetlands, prime or unique agricultural lands, aquifer recharge zones, archaeologically or historically significant sites, or threatened or endangered species). The project will significantly restore and protect a major wetland complex in the greater Akron area.

G. For more information, please contact:

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[dan.halterman@epa.ohio.gov](mailto:dan.halterman@epa.ohio.gov)

*Ohio EPA's email addresses are changing. Please update your contact information to the new extension @epa.ohio.gov.*