

OHIO RIVER VALLEY WATER SANITATION COMMISSION

**Roundtable Issues Forum
Embassy Suites RiverCenter
Covington, Kentucky
Wednesday, February 13, 2013**

Commission Chairman Komoroski opened the meeting stating that this Roundtable discussion is in follow-up to the discussion held last October which centered on the value of ORSANCO and the Ohio River and the various ways in which that value can be communicated to the states and the public. Some of the questions remaining include, “How do you define the value of a clean Ohio River”; “What’s our interest in the river, and why are we here”, and “How do you feel when you read offensive headlines about the Ohio River”? In addition, the broader question includes, “What is the value of the Ohio River, the whole Ohio River corridor”?

Executive Director Tennant commented that most people don’t appreciate how bad the river was 60 – 70 years ago, which is a benchmark that speaks to how far we have come. Today, there are many, many river and riverfront uses that depend on a clean Ohio River for their success. Riverfront oriented activities occur almost year long on the Ohio due to the quality of the resource.

Jerry Schulte introduced the speakers featured for the afternoon’s discussions. These included Brewster Rhoads and Ron Riecken. A third speaker, Capt. Paul Willett, was unable to participate in the discussions; however, his written comments were conveyed to the roundtable participants.

Brewster Rhoads is the Executive Director of Green Umbrella, a Cincinnati based non-profit organization working to improve the economic vitality and quality of life in the region around Cincinnati by maximizing the collective impact of individuals and organizations dedicated to environmental sustainability. Individually, Brewster lives and recreates extensively on the Ohio River and has been a staunch and adamant supporter and promoter of and for the Ohio River. He is found on the Ohio River, in his kayak, 300+ days a year.

Brewster provided a video presentation on his perspectives on the Ohio River, commenting on issues such as how clean it is, how it is a vastly underutilized, misunderstood and underappreciated resource. The Cincinnati event known as Paddlefest is the single, largest canoe and kayak paddling event in the country, with Cincinnati now known as the paddling sports capital of the country.

He stated that, finally, the business communities of Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky are “getting it”, with respect to the value of the resource and the value a clean resource is to their businesses. Further, the Cincinnati Regional Business Committee understands the value, looking at the river as providing them with an attraction that creates strong workforce development talent. “People can live a good life around the [Ohio] river with all the regional trails, swimming and kayaking opportunities.”

Brewster closed his presentation, thanking the Commission for the opportunity and encouraging them to keep up the good work.

Next, Mr. Ron Riecken from Evansville Indiana provided a brief presentation on the value of the Ohio River. Ron is no stranger to the Commission and has served on the Commission’s Public Interest Advisory Program for many years. Ron is a marina owner and waterfront developer in the Evansville, Indiana area.

Ron spoke to the importance of the Commission to the successes he has seen as a developer, citing that no one wants to live near or look out over a polluted body of water. He complimented the Commission on implementing the programs that have been responsible for cleaning up the Ohio River and cautioned, that, looking to the future, “without ORSANCO, the river would very quickly go back to what it was before, and no one wants that”.

He encouraged the Commission to get story out about the cleanliness of the Ohio River.

In closing, Ron recounted a passage he had read, penned by one of the earliest European explorers as they headed west past the Allegheny Mountains. Upon seeing the Ohio River, they described it as a “Beautiful, magic carpet moving west”. Ron closed by saying that we must endeavor to keep it that way.

Jerry Schulte read aloud comments submitted via e-mail by Captain Paul Willett, owner of Camo Fish Guide Service, in Henderson, Kentucky:

“I would be happy to discuss this topic with you. A local news station cornered me about this subject a few years ago but they were surprised that I supported the fact about the Ohio River being cleaner that it ever has been. I told them I saw more fish species thriving than ever before and they did not air it. They tried to stump me into saying something negative toward water quality and it backfired on them. I did not have any problem wasting their time or mine sharing my observations.”

“As for the value of the Ohio River and what it is worth to me? It is my life blood and I keep a finger on its pulse 365 days a year. I’ve shared her with nearly 1,000 people over a 5 year period and fished over 800 miles of it. I spent 250 days on her in 2010 and it was the most humbling experience of my life. I fish 12 months a year in every condition, she has taken from me and I have borrowed from her. I will continue guiding as long as the government will allow me too. A lot of people take me for granted because of the knowledge I have of the fish that swim in the Ohio River. Sometimes it makes me feel cheap when other anglers lie to me to gain this knowledge for themselves. But, with everything comes a price to pay and I would do it all over again if I had to.”

Following these presentations, Chairman Komoroski opened the floor for discussion.

Heather Mayfield, Director of the Foundation for Ohio River Education (FORE) commented that the perception of the Ohio River is bad as demonstrated by their pre and post program evaluations. Pre program perceptions, ostensibly based in ignorance, found that 92% of participants considered the condition of the Ohio River as “bad”, while, post program evaluations resulted in only 16% of participant’s considering the Ohio River condition as “bad”, a 76 point increase following education.

Chairman Komoroski stated that the Commission needs a brochure that presents all the good work it has done and that doing so would help with funding request issues. Benchmarking what other organizations/groups are doing may be a good exercise, i.e., Pittsburgh’s evaluation of the Boston Inner Harbor development.

Commissioner Flannery suggested we look into the success stories on Lake Erie as they are doing a good job communicating to state agency heads the continued successes of their programs.

Commissioner Duritsa stated similar discussions are ongoing in Pittsburgh. In the last 20 years, businesses and municipalities have begun to showcase river and their riverfronts. In addition, a new walking/biking trail will soon be opened that will connect the Point in Pittsburgh to Washington, DC.

Commissioner Flannery commented on the expansion of Panama Canal and the implications that will have to the river economy. Pacific Rim cargo will go directly to the east coast but may do so by bringing cargo up the Ohio River system. Inland port development funds are being allocated to study and accommodate the increase in traffic.

Other questions and comments included:

Kayakers, barge traffic, and riverfront development. How do you measure that? How do you communicate that?

What's ORSANCO's role in defining that. Need resource commitments to do this.

What is the possibility and utility of a congressional pronouncement creating a national river designation for the Ohio? The symbolic significance. River could use the accolation. Nice to put on wall and put in papers. Use the Ohio River Sweep to get congressional members involved in river.

On communicating the value of ORSANCO to the states, Commissioner Bruny suggested approaching it from a different perspective: Imagine what it would be like if ORSANCO wasn't there? What would states have to pick up and do? Similarly, communicating the value of the river, what if river wasn't there? Not much there without river. It's like trying to put a value on such non-monetary things as love, family, health, etc. How do you put a value on it? It's easier if you consider it wasn't there.

Ben Pedigo - PIACO

ORSANCO has taken a leadership role on the river since its inception. It is its destiny to do so. Now, where do we want to go? We know the history of the river/where do we want to go into the future?

Judy Peterson - PIACO

You can quantify the value of a clean river. It makes vision for where you are going easier to create. ORSANCO has role and vested interest to lead the discussion. Should work with groups that quantify such things; helps you sell yourself, your needs to congress, chambers, justify self and actions to public, etc. Where do we want to be in another 60 years? ORSANCO has responsibility and vested interest to lead that discussion.

Ecosystem services; new industry terminology how you value the environment. How do you define ecosystem services for the Ohio River? And how can it be brokered to promote value of river?

Can an Ohio River summit be convened? Could provide input from all sectors.

Benchmark what Great Lakes did to quantify economic benefits.

Good idea to attempt to quantify the value and use of the river/basin. Must ask, "What am I going to do with info when I get it? Who will this be talking points for?" The mission/vision/goals are needed before quantifying the value, which may be to, "protect the quality of the Ohio River, the quantity of the Ohio River, the economy associated with, and reliant upon, the quality and quantity of this resource, and the preservation and enhancement of the quality of life for all who are along the Ohio River corridor.

The first paragraph of the Funding Request document speaks directly to this and should be used in any such vision/mission statement.

Chairman Komoroski stated the mission must acknowledge the economic development and value of the corridor. It should be the job of those who already benefit financially from resource to help promote the resource, and it is ORSANCO's job to show how our programs help those who benefit from the resource. Two-way street. Need to reach out to them.

But, how do we implement any of this? How do we communicate or develop the bridge between quality and quantity? To do so may provide opportunity to tap into funding from the commercial navigation industry.

Rahall Transportation Institute (RTI) should conduct a study looking at what the river is worth. It's more than just transportation corridor. RTI should do study to value whole resource, not just transportation sector. Value would be much greater than any one sector. Bring all chambers together to develop TV commercial like Michigan. Make river desirable resource to many commercial/consumer sectors.

Pilot the marketing campaign locally before going river wide.

Chairman Komoroski thanked the participants for their contributions and discussion. The session was brought to a close.

Communicating the Value of ORSANCO

A review and discussion on the ORSANCO Federal Funding Request brochure was undertaken. Overall, the Commissioners were pleased with the document. Comments were received and will be incorporated where possible. A draft of the amended brochure will be provided at the next meeting.

ORSANCO Involvement in Enforcement Activities

The issues for discussion here were, 1) should ORSANCO continue to be involved in the Cincinnati MSD Consent decree litigation, and 2) is there a need or use to retain, modify or rescind the Commission's Resolution Establishing Commission Policy Concerning Involvement in Enforcement.

Commissioner Scott Nally, Chair of the Pollution Control Standards Committee, requested direction from the Roundtable participants on these two issues which would provide the basis for a recommendation to advance to the full Commission body at their formal meeting the next day.

The basis for the Commission's involvement in the Cincinnati MSD Consent decree was discussed as was the need and value of Commission staff and Commission legal resources to continue on with the process.

Regarding involvement in the Consent Decree, the upshot from the discussion indicated that Ohio EPA was heavily involved in the Consent Decree and there was no need for Commission staff or resources to be further expended in participation.

Regarding the Resolution, historical context was provided from veteran Commissioners identifying the basis for the drafting of the Resolution.

Chairman Komoroski stated that since there isn't any formal training for ORSANCO commissioners, the background provided tremendous value to the discussion.

Commissioner Morgan commented at the time the Resolution was drafted, ORSANCO was looking for additional sources of funding, and this provided a formal basis for involvement in enforcement actions and the opportunity to share in fines and penalties.

After several comments were made supporting all sides of the issue, Commissioner Nally determined there was no consensus at this time and the issue should be discussed by the Pollution Control Standards committee further.

Commissioner Flannery offered to provide comment on the verbiage contained in the document from an attorney's perspective.

Chairman Komoroski then offered for discussion the last issue on the agenda.

Commissioner Scott Nally stated that the Pollution Control Standards Committee would recommend the proposed process for consideration of variances be moved forward for adoption. In addition, he would also seek approval for the creation of an ad hoc committee to be formed under the aegis of the Pollution Control Standards Committee to address remaining variance procedure needs, specifically, the October implementation deadline.

Commissioner Nally further commented that two letters would need to be drafted, one by ORSANCO informing the states of the status of current facilities in need of variance requests, and a letter to be sent by the states to the facilities informing them of the status of ORSANCO's variance requirements and procedures.

Commissioner Flannery asked if the ad hoc committee would evaluate the merit of the applicability of a Great Lakes based criteria to a flowing system like the Ohio?

Commissioner Nally responded that the issue would be addressed during the Commission's triennial review of the Pollution Control Standards.

Chairman Komoroski brought the discussion to a close and thanked all participants for the contributions to the Roundtable discussions.