



Ohio River Valley Water Sanitation Commission

Strategic Plan

2022-2026

Adopted June 16, 2022

Mission and Vision

The mission of this strategic plan is to provide the citizens of the Ohio River valley and its contributing watersheds an outstanding and well-maintained water resource. The mission will be achieved through continued implementation of the Ohio River Valley Water Sanitation Compact by encouraging collaboration among the member states and other stakeholders, and providing direct action as helpful. This mission is in recognition of the wide array of pollutants sourced or discharged in the basin that affect water uses, the value of recreation for health and tourism, and the necessity of diverse aquatic life. Supporting diverse uses of the river and tributary waters, such as water supplies, navigation, aquatic life support, contact recreation, agriculture and industry, requires extensive and increasingly complex information and research. ORSANCO is uniquely positioned to organize and share resources and information across jurisdictions. ORSANCO's history of collaborative activities and transparent conduct underlie its development of communication strategies that support education, share information, and treat citizens justly.

The vision of the Commission is to use the best available technology, such as advanced instrumentation, or methods such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS), to evaluate beneficial water uses. The Strategic Plan goals are to use an efficient and collaborative approach to aid member states in their Compact pledges to control and abate pollution in the Ohio River, and to avoid threats to river uses such as water supply. ORSANCO's information compilation, communication, and education activities and principles support diversity, equity and inclusion.

Below are four strategic plan goals for the period 2022-2026. Several actionable objectives are given for each goal that support ORSANCO's broader program work. Staggered scheduling of the implementation of the goals and objectives will enhance efficiency of staff utilization. Appointment of ad hoc committees or work groups, and the Commission's fine grants record, will further insure excellent progress, as in the past.

I. Preserving Basin Waters for Beneficial Uses: Ensuring Public Health

ORSANCO's primary goal is preserving beneficial uses by ensuring basin water quality for public and industrial water supply, and particularly public health concerns such as drinking water and contact recreation. Thus three actionable objectives are emphasized for water quality:

1) maintain source water protection for drinking water utilities through:

(a) spill monitoring and response coordination, which includes the Organic Detection System; consideration will be given to extending ORSANCO's source water protection program to Ohio River headwater tributaries provided funding for this expansion is secured;

(b) improved coordination with stakeholders, including concern for environmental fairness, will be enhanced by GIS applications, especially through advisory committees;

(c) completion of the Ohio River PFAS study and other studies that may be programmed to support this goal by ORSANCO, communicating how findings on river processes might be applied to other contaminant transport studies (such as determining best sample distributions for analysis of effects from facilities on the river, effects from tributaries, effects on water intakes, or analysis of mixing zones, as examples).

2) continue current programs for water quality and biological data acquisition, and analysis of data trends, for protecting water uses, which include:

(a) sharing data with state and federal partners to support their federal reporting requirements, such as Clean Water Act sections 303d or 305b;

(b) developing annual “State of the Ohio River” reports that analyze historic trends to help communicate how the Ohio River meets Compact uses.

3) secure an approach for triennial or other time frame assessment of Ohio River Water Quality Standards that:

(a) supports states needs for information for Clean Water Act sections 303d and 305b or other relevant sections;

(b) supports states, communities, industries or others that want to cite river-wide or watershed-wide uniform, supplemental, interim, or emerging standards;

(c) recognizes that each discharge permit issued pursuant to the Clean Water Act or other federal or state law may not contain requirements addressing one or more of ORSANCO’s Pollution Control Standards, and that the Commission, and each signatory state, have committed to implementation of discharge permit limitations that provide comparable use protection and achievement of the Compact goals as provided by these standards. The process of ORSANCO Standards review or development might be undertaken by the Pollution Control Standards Committee and be streamlined; for example, ORSANCO staff could identify standards of interest and announce these while requesting other stakeholder suggestions for review or development.

II. Preserving Basin Waters: Avoiding Impairments to Diverse Uses

Objectives for avoiding impairments to diverse beneficial uses, may be achieved through ORSANCO staff, committees, stakeholders, or director-appointed work groups, including:

1) the Commission will consider the effects of climate change, through consultation with other scientific organizations, or its own studies, to determine potential impacts on water quality conditions in the Ohio River District, and consider mitigation methods for such conditions. Examples of climate-change impacts of concern to ORSANCO might include, but are not limited to: water “quantity-induced” chemical, biological or sediment loading; flooding or landscape flushing events; drought or wildfire aggravated events; combined sewer overflows; lock or dam fluctuations; and mobilizations of river and tributary beds at water supply or industry intakes or outfalls.

2) Fundamental to the use of ORSANCO or related data for trends analyses will be the development of a database management plan to update ORSANCO’s current database management system and to facilitate data use by staff or other stakeholders; development of the plan will be informed by ongoing trends analyses. ORSANCO, through its analyses of trends in data (such as bacteria, PCBs, and other contaminants), has demonstrated the great value of its historic and continuing data collection, archiving and analysis. Spatial or temporal trends analyses will be continued or expanded to include priority contaminants as determined by staff and ORSANCO’s Technical Committee. ORSANCO or others, such as state or federal agencies or universities, will continue analyses of water data, as available, for relationships among variables to forecast impairments to river uses. For example, analyses could include a range of trends studies such as bivariate plots or more complex analyses such as multiple regression or clustering; investigations might include use of GIS or modeling.

3) ORSANCO staff, as funds allow, and working with stakeholders such as agencies or universities, will evaluate incongruities among state or federal designated impairments to uses.

III. Communicate and Educate Stakeholders: Status of Beneficial Uses

The plan for ORSANCO's communication approach to stakeholders about beneficial uses of District waters has three components to be emphasized in the coming five years:

1) the Commission will identify the location of its water quality and aquatic life beneficial use data for the Ohio River Compact District by GPS (latitude-longitude) coordinates, and enter these locations and water data into a GIS. Our objective is to be able to query monitoring locations and associated data layers to find spatial and temporal trends and display this information District wide that will lead to forecasting beneficial uses, avoidance of impairments, and greater fairness. Obtaining or identifying GPS locations is the near-term objective.

2) the Commission will work with its Foundation for Ohio River Education (FORE) to develop and implement a Five-Year Strategic Plan for Ohio River environmental education.

3) ORSANCO and FORE will develop and implement an Ohio River communication strategy through collaboration with state, federal, utility, or other public information professionals; this strategy will incorporate programs such as Ohio River Sweep, Life Below the Water Line, and other programs to help demonstrate the value of the Ohio River from water quality, aquatic life and recreation standpoints. The strategy will help communicate water quality successes and challenges to inform the public and to help support the diversity, equity, inclusion or environmental justice needs of impoverished or otherwise possibly underrepresented groups.

IV. Maintaining Organization Financial and Structural Stability

Two approaches to maintaining financial and structural stability will be emphasized:

1) financial stability will be maintained: (a) five-year historical-trends analyses of finances and their projections into five-year futures will be continued on an annual basis; (b) additional funding streams will continue to be secured through partnerships with key stakeholders; (c) ORSANCO will help implement, and manage funds disbursement for the Ohio River Basin Restoration Initiative; and (d) ORSANCO will continue to conduct its current water quality and biological assessment programs (including the National Rivers and Streams Assessment sampling during two years of each five-year cycle).

2) an annual assessment of concerns for ORSANCO's ability to complete its mission will involve participation of staff at the discretion of the Executive Director and results will be reported annually by the Executive Director to the Audit Committee at their annual meeting (February), or at the Commissioner Executive Sessions.