Sierra Club Ohio Chapter
Clean Water Campaign: Statewide and Central Ohio

Working to educate, engage, and empower Ohioans to restore, improve, and protect our waterways
Over the past six months, the Clean Water Campaign continued to educate, engage, and empower Ohioans to protect, improve, and restore Ohio’s waterways. We have invested the Earth Month 2013 funds into our Water Sentinel and Fellowship programs, resulting in clean water victories across Ohio. Halfway through the reporting period, we are a little behind on some of our goals but, given that spring is our busiest quarter, are on track to:

- Train 100 new Water Sentinels, for a total of 300 (25 percent obtained)
- Supervise 3,000 hours of Fellowship activities (50 percent obtained)
- Coordinate 3,500 hours of service (40 percent obtained)

With the increased support of Earth Month 2013, we have expanded the campaign. One longtime staff member recently left, but we added three new regional water coordinators. We divided our northeast region into two regions: Eastern and Lake Erie. The two new staff in the Lake Erie region will focus on agriculture and stormwater runoff issues that are fueling algae blooms and destroying the lake’s ecosystem. We will impact more watersheds, support more Water Sentinels, and add additional fellowship students.

In addition to our 2013/14 work plan, we are also thrilled to be working with salons, institutes, and retail experience centers to raise awareness and support for Clean Water during Earth Month. We have been coordinating with salon development partners, contacting salons, and communicating with our members to make 2014 a success. Entering our fifth year as a statewide partner, we have built upon past successes and have the capacity to develop new, creative ways to protect and restore Ohio’s waters. We look forward to making a big splash this Earth Month, because

Clean Water is Pure Happiness.
The Ohio Water Sentinel Program kept watch over our waterways this fall. Since its inception in 2011, we have trained 225 citizen scientists and collected more than 1,200 surface water data entries on 111 sub-watersheds throughout Ohio. Sentinels filed nine W.A.R.N. (Water Alert Reporting Network) cards to flag local pollution issues over the reporting period. We also welcomed 25 Water Sentinels to our monitoring network, which represents 25 percent of our 100 Water Sentinels training goal. Last quarter, we highlighted our growing partnerships across the state. This quarter, we are highlighting the development of our mapping and analysis efforts.

When we launched the first statewide water monitoring networks in Ohio, our initial goal was limited to collecting water quality data. As our database has grown, we have begun to take the next step of mapping and analyzing the quality of Ohio’s waterways. We have vastly improved our analytic capabilities, and will start reporting our findings within several sub-watersheds this spring.

Thanks to partnerships with ProMaptive, the Cleveland Geospatial Association, and Kent State University’s (KSU) our data is more organized, easily accessible, and presented to visually showcase hotspots for water pollution. ProMaptive provided a $1,000 in-kind donation to the campaign, enabling us to produce five maps with up to 100,000 data points and more than 200 parameters. The Cleveland Geospatial Association provided technical assistance and helped develop a variety of maps for the campaign and KSU’s geography department provided ArcGIS maps of our data that we can use in reports.
The Clean Water Fellowship Program accomplishes local conservation victories, while training the environmental leaders of tomorrow. Since 2010, 29 students have spent more than 7,500 hours in the program, receiving $60,000 in educational awards. Fellows will continue to take action, raise awareness, and advocate for clean water in 2014.

We selected six students from six different campuses and awarded $7,250 for our 2014 spring cohort. Unfortunately, four students from the fall cohort will not continue with us this spring, but we did recruit one new student to the program. Over the course of the reporting period, fellows have dedicated 1,500 hours to the campaign and received $13,750 in awards. We are on track to hit our goal of 3,000 total hours and have $6,250 to distribute to summer cohort of students. Summer enrichment opportunities will include the nationally recognized Sierra Student Coalition’s Summer Grassroots Leadership Training Program (SPROG) and classes at the Sierra Club Cincinnati Paddle Sports school.

Fellowship students are taking the lead on local conservation issues. Last semester, we improved the Fellowship program by developing an online resource portal and organizing bi-weekly skill-building trainings. Fellows have applied what they have learned by hosting rain barrel workshops, organizing cleanups, monitoring pollution, and more. In addition, one of our fellows is helping to design and create co-branded marketing materials for this year’s Earth Month. The Fellowship cohort is eager for the snow to thaw and to get back by the streamside.
Stewardship is a core value of our campaign that we advance by organizing watershed action events. Watershed action events directly improve water quality through tree planting, trash pickup, and invasive species removal events while helping participants connect to their local waterways. Over the past three years, the campaign has organized more than 85 events and engaged thousands of volunteers to dedicate more than 7,500 hours to protecting, improving, and restoring Ohio’s waterways.

Due to the weather, we only coordinated three events during the last quarter. Over the reporting period, we held 17 events with 428 participants, for a total 1,360 service hours, or 40 percent of our goal. We still hope to exceed our goal of 3,500 hours, and are planning a bunch of events this spring. New Lake Erie staff will augment our capabilities, enabling the campaign to adopt new sites and host more events. As we work to add new service sites, we continue to improve our existing sites.

The transformation of our service sites has been remarkable. We have adopted areas along several rivers and creeks—Little Miami, Mill, Olentangy, Alum, Nimishillen, Little Cuyahoga, Mahoning—and, of course, along the shores of Lake Erie. At many locations, volunteers have removed most of the litter and garbage, cleared acres of invasive species, and have begun planting native riparian species.

Thanks to support from Aveda, we will continue to clean our streams in 2014 and beyond. Last year, we partnered with two individual salons to plant trees and remove debris. We look forward to getting the salons more involved with service events this spring and summer.
The Clean Water Campaign raises awareness about water pollution through events, workshops, speaking engagements, public comments, media attention, and letters-to-the-editor. Over the reporting period, we coordinated 25 events with more than 1,500 participants, delivered 1,700 public comments, and were mentioned in print news more than 75 times. Last quarter, we highlighted the campaign's impact on clean water by administratively advocating for green infrastructure investments. This quarter, we are highlighting our legal victories and concerns over the Charleston West Virginia spill.

Using legal tactics, we uphold the Clean Water Act so that our waterways will once again be swimmable, fishable, and drinkable. Over the past five years, we have successfully prompted sewer upgrades and protected wetlands from development. As a watchdog for our waterways, we often submit public records requests for data or information.

In September 2013, the Sierra Club requested information from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) pertaining to D & L Energy, an injection well company that extracts natural gas through hydraulic fracturing (fracking). The company caused ten earthquakes in Ohio, was subsequently shut down, and proceeded to dump tens of thousands of gallons of fracking waste into the Mahoning River. ODNR ignored our request and withheld the public records until we filed suit in the Ohio Supreme Court. The case was quickly dismissed as ODNR turned over the records. More than 40 print articles resulted from the filing and settlement. As a result of our persistence, citizens from across Ohio are obtaining information from public officials more easily.
In January, 300,000 of our neighbors in Charleston West Virginia lost access to clean drinking water after coal processing chemicals were spilled by Freedom Industries. The impact of the spill to the public health, the environment, the economy, and overall quality of life in the region has been staggering. While our thoughts remain with the victims of the spill, it also heightened our concern for Ohio.

The campaign was quick to take action and we identified 22 facilities in Ohio that, like Freedom Industries, have expired water discharge permits dating back as far as 2002. If the permits were renewed, we believe many of the facilities would not meet current discharge standards for sulfates and total dissolved solids. Several of these coal preparation facilities are even owned by Freedom Industries’ parent company, Rosebud Mining. Rosebud Mining is a repeat offender in Ohio and our Carroll County water sentinels are concerned that a proposed Rosebud coal mine would impact their drinking water. We are raising awareness of the risks posed by these 22 coal prep facilities and the Rosebud mine so that Ohio learns from the Charleston Spill.

We raised awareness of the expired permits through the Ohio News Network. Our story was aired on 26 radio outlets across Ohio. We will continue to investigate and administratively advocate for the renewal of permits with more stringent reporting requirements. We will be a voice for the water, telling its story, and bringing attention to the local issues that impact our quality of life and the life that surrounds us.