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Biden-Harris Administration Announces Project Agreement for Over \$100 Million to Clean up Cuyahoga River Area of Concern

Thanks to President Biden's Investing in America Agenda, the new funding agreement between EPA and non-federal sponsors will cleanup 875,000 cubic yards of contaminated sediments.

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Today, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and its partners announced a new project agreement totaling more than \$100 million, with a significant investment from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. These much-needed funds will clean up nearly 875,000 cubic yards of contaminated sediments from the Cuyahoga River Gorge Dam.

EPA Regional Administrator and Great Lakes National Program Manager Debra Shore announced the agreement alongside Ohio EPA Director Anne Vogel and Akron Mayor Dan Horrigan at the **Gorge Metro Park in Cuyahoga Falls**. This long-awaited cleanup will greatly advance the environmental, community, and economic revitalization of local communities and will help lead to the ultimate removal of the Cuyahoga River Area of Concern from the list of 25 remaining U.S. Areas of Concern (AOCs) — highly degraded areas found across the Great Lakes basin.

“The Cuyahoga River was once a thriving ecosystem, but after decades of industrial pollution it became known as the ‘burning river,’” **said EPA Region 5 Administrator and Great Lakes National Program Manager Debra Shore**. “Thanks to funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the incredible hard work and contributions from our many partners, today’s announcement will help undo the environmental damage caused all those years ago and return the river to its thriving state.”

The partnership is between EPA and four non-federal sponsors, the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District, the City of Akron, FirstEnergy/Ohio Edison Company, and Ohio EPA. EPA’s portion of the project is funded by President Biden’s Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Additionally, Summit Metro Parks, City of Cuyahoga Falls, and Summit County will support this project through financial and technical support. These four partners will contribute approximately 35% of the total cost for the project. Final project cost estimates will be determined following the bidding and procurement process.

“Improving water quality is something I’ve prioritized throughout my years in public service, and the state is proud to support this long-awaited project with funding from the H2Ohio initiative,” **said Ohio Governor Mike DeWine**. “It’s also great to see the important role that the Great Lakes Legacy Act is playing in this project. When I sponsored the Act in Congress in 2002, we knew it would make a significant impact on water quality across the Great Lakes region. Now, more than two decades later, the Act is still making a difference, contributing to the removal of the Gorge Dam and the contaminated sediment behind it.”

“I’m glad to announce this project of more than \$100 million to clean up the Cuyahoga River Gorge Dam. Once again, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law is making a difference right here in Ohio’s 13th Congressional District. This important collaboration between the federal Environmental Protection Agency and local sponsors Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District, the City of Akron, FirstEnergy/Ohio Edison Company, and Ohio EPA will help restore the health of the Cuyahoga River, boosting job creation and economic development throughout the region,” **said Rep. Emilia Sykes**.

“The removal of the Gorge Dam will restore the natural flow of the Cuyahoga River, improve the environment, expand recreational opportunities, and improve habitat for fish and wildlife species in our communities,” **said Mayor Dan Horrigan**. “The City of Akron is proud to partner with our local, regional, and national partners on this vital project and we can’t wait to see the benefits to our local ecosystem.”

“The DeWine/Husted administration has invested significant resources to improve water quality in rivers across the state of Ohio,” **said Anne M. Vogel, director of Ohio EPA**. “Removal of the Gorge Dam will improve water quality and habitat in the great Cuyahoga River, while providing unique recreational opportunities for the community, creating whitewater rapids and expanding public access for fishing. We are thrilled to officially kick off this project today, acknowledging the years of hard work and the commitment of many partners who have brought us to this day.”

“Our role in the Gorge Dam project is a testament to the benefits of the Sewer District’s Regional Stormwater Management Program,” **said Kyle Dreyfuss-Wells, CEO of Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District**. “For this project, our work will focus on restoring the aquatic habitat in the Cuyahoga River Area of Concern. This work builds on the decades of the Sewer District’s work along the river.”

“Every step forward is a page in the ongoing story of our commitment toward a more vibrant, ecologically sound future,” **said Lisa King, executive director Summit Metro Parks**. “With the support of our partners and community, this exciting update allows us to build stronger connections to the rich legacy of Gorge Metro Park and ensures the enjoyment of its natural resources for generations to come.”

“This exciting project has been many years in the making, and our \$10 million contribution toward the safe and sustainable removal of this dam is a testament to FirstEnergy’s commitment to living its core value of stewardship,” **said Amanda Mertens Campbell, vice president of external affairs at FirstEnergy**. “The dam’s deconstruction requires extensive collaboration between governmental entities and the community, and this contribution exemplifies FirstEnergy’s dedication to creating a brighter future for our environment, customers and communities.”

This project is a critical step in the river’s restoration. Once the contaminated sediments and the dam are removed, a significant portion of the river will be returned to a free-flowing natural state for the first time in over 100 years. The Gorge Dam has been in place since 1912 and is located on the Cuyahoga River within the Cities of Cuyahoga Falls and Akron. Accumulated sediments behind the Gorge Dam are contaminated with PCBs, PAHs, heavy metals, oil, and grease. The removal of the contaminated sediments will reduce the risk of exposure to these substances to humans as well as fish and wildlife.

In February 2022, President Biden and EPA Administrator Regan [announced a \\$1 billion investment](#) from President Biden’s Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to significantly accelerate cleanup and restoration of the Great Lakes. EPA projected that the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding, combined with funds from annual Great Lakes Restoration Initiative appropriations and funding from other sources will enable the agency and its partners to bring work to completion at 22 of the 25 remaining AOCs, with Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding directly supporting 11 of these sites, including the Cuyahoga River AOC.

For more information on the Cuyahoga River AOC, [click here](#).

For more information on the GLRI, [click here](#).

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