



Dear Members:

This year the Ohio Environmental Council celebrated its emerald anniversary: a legacy of 55 years advocating for a clean, healthy Ohio. We reflected on our past, and we also built our plans for the future. For years, the OEC has navigated the dynamic—and at times, turbulent—environmental and political landscapes of Ohio.

Here's what hasn't changed: the resilience and resolve of our team and our broader movement as we fight for a healthier environment for all who call Ohio home.

The OEC's new strategic plan outlines our organizational goals and priorities for the next three years of our journey. It also unveils our new collective vision, shared across our family of organizations: a clean, healthy Ohio where our democracy empowers all communities to thrive in harmony with the environment.

And with the support of people like you, we fulfill our new mission of protecting the environment and health of all Ohio communities through legal and policy advocacy, decision-maker accountability, and civic engagement. Each of these foundational elements builds upon the OEC's transformational work so many of you have supported. We're grateful for your partnership as we continue to build power and drive action.

As we reflect on the past year, I am proud to share with you the strides we've made toward advancing climate action, securing environmental justice, and empowering Ohio's environmental movement.

- One of our priorities this year has been ensuring **improved water quality and public health** for Ohio's communities. From raising awareness of key initiatives such as the replacement of 745,000 lead service lines to safeguarding Big and Little Darby Creeks, and supporting the expansion of the H2Ohio program to improve water infrastructure we remain committed to protecting Ohioans' drinking and surface waters.
- In the realm of **renewable energy and climate action**, we made important progress on re-establishing energy efficiency programs, supporting methane mitigation efforts, and securing approval of the Oak Run Solar Project, set to be Ohio's largest solar installation.
- We also believe in the power of our members and communities to shape the future of environmental policy. From opposing gerrymandering to standing up for ranked-choice voting, we've fought for a **fair and healthy democracy.**
- As always, protecting Ohio's rich natural landscapes is at the heart of what we do. This year's **public lands advocacy** focused on stopping fracking in Ohio's National Forest while also engaging in outreach programs to educate communities about land stewardship.
- We also fostered engagement through community-centered environmental events and advocacy trainings, hosting various events throughout Ohio in Cleveland, Reynoldsburg, and the Southeast region among others. These gatherings serve as critical platforms for sharing knowledge, connecting our neighbors, and driving action toward sustainability.

Collectively, we ensure our environment and the communities we build can thrive, no matter the challenges ahead. Thank you for standing with us. We look forward to the road ahead and to creating lasting change together.

Warmly, Carol Kauffman OEC Executive Director



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can thrive, no matter

the challenges ahead.







Experts agree that no amount of lead is safe, which is why the OEC continues to advocate at every level of government for solutions that prevent lead from contaminating the drinking water of Ohioans.

This year, the OEC commissioned a critical analysis of the economic and public health benefits of replacing lead water service lines. Ohio has an estimated 745,000 lead service lines, which pose significant health risks, particularly to children and vulnerable communities. The cost-benefit analysis found that replacing these lines would result in a return of \$32 to \$45 for every dollar invested, generating an overall economic impact between \$145 billion and \$185 billion over the next 15 years. More importantly, replacing these lines would result in better physical and mental health outcomes for Ohio families.

The OEC celebrated a significant advocacy victory with the finalization of the Biden-Harris Administration's Lead and Copper Rule Improvements in October. Supported by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, this updated rule mandates that most U.S. drinking water systems replace 100% of lead service lines within the next 10 years, addressing a long-standing public health problem. We also celebrated the introduction of Ohio House Bill 534, the Lead Line Replacement Act, which supports this effort locally while emphasizing water affordability and workforce development. The OEC Action Fund and our partners at the Alliance for the Great Lakes helped draft this legislation years ago and continue to advocate for its adoption at the Statehouse.





SUPPORTED BY THE OFC LAW CENTER

ADVOCATING FOR BIG AND LITTLE DARBY CREEK PROTECTION

We are deeply involved in efforts to protect Big and Little Darby Creeks, two of the most biologically diverse waterways in the nation. In collaboration with conservation groups like the Darby Creek Association and the Center for Biological Diversity, the OEC pushed for the Ohio EPA to designate these creeks as Outstanding National Resource Waters (ONRW), which would provide the strongest possible protections under the Clean Water Act

Together, we mobilized thousands of public comments, working tirelessly to ensure the preservation of these vital ecosystems for future generations. In 2024, despite overwhelming public support for the ONRW

designation, the Ohio EPA decided not to grant this status to the creeks — a decision we will push to revisit in the future.

This past fall, the OEC and our partners hosted an event for lawmakers on the banks of Big Darby Creek to showcase the ecological importance of these waterways, which are home to rare and imperiled species. We discussed the efforts underway to protect the waterways with the hope of inspiring local government leaders to take further protective actions for the Creek.

Together, we can protect the Big and Little Darby Creeks.

REMEMBERING THE TOLEDO WATER CRISIS AND PUSHING FOR PROGRESS

Ten years ago, Toledo residents lost access to their drinking water for days due to toxins from a severe harmful algal bloom making their way into a water intake. The 2014 Toledo Water Crisis was met with bold declarations of action by elected officials and government agency leaders and has spurred significant state-level investments to address Ohio's water quality issues. Yet, to meet the moment, bold leadership is still needed.

To raise awareness about harmful algal blooms and the lasting impact of the crisis, the OEC and Junction Coalition co-hosted a community event where residents shared personal stories and called for action. Our organizations compiled these first-hand accounts



into a digital storyboard to highlight the community's resilience and our organization's ongoing work to prevent future water quality issues.

Through additional local and national media engagement, including an op-ed in Crain's Business Journal, the OEC has kept the crisis in the public eye, advocating for stronger environmental regulations and long-term investments to protect our water resources. We've used each of these opportunities to highlight critical investments while emphasizing that more aggressive action is needed to reduce nutrient pollution, which fuels harmful algal blooms in Lake Erie.

ACCELERATING WATER QUALITY IMPROVEMENTS THROUGH H2OHIO

For five years, the H2Ohio program has invested in important water quality programs that reduce phosphorus runoff, create wetlands, restore rivers, address failing septic systems, and prevent lead contamination. With the support of members like you, the OEC continues to advocate for making this comprehensive water quality improvement program more permanent and more well-funded.

Over the past year, the OEC pushed to strengthen Ohio Department of Agriculture rules and regulations to protect Ohio's water resources from nutrient pollution. The OEC continues to participate in the Ohio Agricultural Conservation Initiative which works with soil and water districts to enroll farmers in voluntary programs such as nutrient management plans, cover crops, and subsurface phosphorus application.

By working alongside our agricultural partners, we can make significant strides to reduce nutrient runoff in the Western Lake Erie Basin and improve water quality.







In order to fight climate change, we cannot shy away from bold action. With the support of members like you, the OEC advocates for bold clean energy solutions — like Ohio's largest solar energy project.

The Ohio Power Siting Board approved the Oak Run Solar Project this year. This ambitious project will generate 800 megawatts (MW) of solar power and include a 300 MW battery storage system, positioning it as a significant contributor to Ohio's clean energy future. Spread over 6,000 acres in Madison County, the project will be the largest agrivoltaic project in the country — combining solar energy production with agricultural activities like grazing sheep and cultivating crops.

The OEC played an instrumental role in advancing the project by intervening in the case and providing expert testimony highlighting the project's potential to mitigate climate change and design to reduce harmful stormwater runoff. In addition to the environmental benefits, the project is expected to create around 1,500 construction jobs and contribute \$8.2 million annually to local governments and schools.

This project is a key example of Ohio's transition towards renewable energy while ensuring the integration of sustainable agricultural practices.



The cleanest energy is the energy you never use — which is why the OEC has continually advocated to reduce Ohio's energy waste. Thanks to your support, we're making progress at the Statehouse to do just that.

This year, members of the Ohio House narrowly passed an important piece of legislation aimed at restoring energy efficiency measures that were rolled back by Ohio's controversial House Bill 6 in 2019. House Bill 79 allows utilities to offer voluntary programs to help residential and small business customers reduce their energy usage, which in turn lowers energy costs, reduces air pollution, and enhances grid reliability. If passed by both chambers, the bipartisan legislation would create energy-saving programs, supporting consumer protections and reducing the burden of high energy prices for low-income households. The OEC Action Fund supported the bill as it made its way through the Ohio House, and will continue to push for the Senate to pass this important legislation.



Cutting methane pollution is crucial to combat climate change, protect public health, and advance environmental justice. With your support, the OEC has successfully advocated for policies at the state and federal levels to reduce dangerous methane emissions from active and abandoned oil and gas operations across Ohio.

Methane is a potent greenhouse gas with 80 times the warming potential of carbon dioxide in the short term. Methane leaks not only contribute significantly to climate change but also release harmful air pollutants like benzene, which can cause serious health issues, particularly for communities near drilling sites.

Over the past year, the OEC supported new federal methane regulations enforcing stricter leak detection and repair requirements. This effort is bolstered by federal funding from the Inflation Reduction Act. As a result, the state is expected to create thousands of jobs focused on mitigating methane pollution and decommissioning abandoned oil and gas infrastructure across the state.



Solar is soaring across the state with more and more Ohioans taking advantage of renewable energy financial opportunities — especially through the Inflation Reduction Act.

The OEC has long supported net metering policies, including the passage of a new policy in Columbus this past year. Net metering allows homeowners and businesses with solar panels to receive credit for the excess energy they generate and send back to the grid,

thus reducing their electricity bills. This policy is crucial in encouraging the adoption of renewable energy by providing financial incentives for solar installations.

In addition to policy, the OEC has worked to make solar energy more accessible by supporting solar coops across the state in partnership with Solar United Neighbors. These co-ops educate residents about solar energy and help them obtain solar installations at competitive prices.



Together, we're reducing Ohio's reliance on fossil fuels and boosting renewable energy adoption in Columbus and across Ohio!





OPPOSING FRACKING IN OHIO'S ONLY NATIONAL FOREST

Thanks to members like you we've stopped fracking in Ohio's only National Forest before, and we're working to stop it once again.

In 2024, the Bureau of Land Management announced the proposed leasing of 40,000 acres of the Wayne National Forest for oil and gas development. OEC attorneys and our partners filed extensive, science-based public comments opposing the Bureau's leasing effort. In doing so, we discovered that this leasing project could emit the greenhouse gas equivalent of all carbon sequestered by the entire Wayne National Forest for the next 30 years. In other words, this leasing proposal could knock the largest public forest in Ohio out of the climate fight for an entire generation or more.

Working alongside the Center for Biological Diversity, Earthjustice, and Sierra Club, we've built a strong administrative record in preparation for potential legal action. This effort follows our 2020 federal court win which blocked similar leasing plans due to insufficient environmental review of harmful impacts.

We'll continue to keep you informed on our efforts to protect our National Forest.

FIGHTING FRACKING IN OHIO'S STATE PARKS

The OEC continues to push back against efforts to frack some of Ohio's most beloved state parks and wildlife areas. You may remember, during the 134th General Assembly lame duck session, legislators rushed House Bill 507 through at the last minute, logrolling wildly disparate subjects together into an ultimately dangerous bill for our environment.

Along with our partners, we have challenged the state's unlawful leasing approvals and the legislature's unconstitutional leasing bill in court. Members like you have submitted thousands of comments opposing fracking in Salt Fork State Park and Ohio's public lands. Additionally, our collaboration with grassroots allies helped expose a scandal in which fracking special interests submitted fake public comments designed to sway decision makers. Our work led to the adoption of stronger state identity theft regulations.

Thank you for your continuing support in this important fight.





PROTECTING OHIO'S MATURE AND OLD-GROWTH FORESTS

More than one million public comments were submitted to the U.S. Forest Service this year in support of protecting the nation's mature and old-growth forests. The benefits of mature and old-growth forests are numerous. Intact, connected, and diverse forests and wetlands are critical for biodiversity. They are the foundation of ecological resilience and are one of our greatest natural assets in the fight against climate change. They provide a foundation for economic sustainability while bolstering human health and wellbeing. And very little can rival the visual magnificence of an old-growth forest.

In 2024, the U.S. Forest Service issued a Draft Environmental Impact Statement seeking public input on their proposed forest management plan, which includes protective measures for old-growth forests. The OEC proudly contributed to this campaign, providing technical comments and driving hundreds of Ohioans to add their voice as well.

Still, there's more to do. While the proposed plan focuses on old-growth habitat and its efforts to strengthen consultation with local Native American tribes, the plan falls short of providing meaningful protection and may even lead to increased logging in old-growth areas. As an irreplaceable resource, we'll continue to push for more robust protections to ensure more forests can achieve old-growth status.





At the OEC, we know that fair electoral maps are crucial for addressing environmental injustice issues and securing a clean, healthy environment for Ohio communities. Gerrymandered districts have hindered progress on these issues by creating legislative environments where lawmakers fail to respond to Ohio voters' views on pressing issues like renewable energy and the fight against climate change.

This year, the OEC joined hundreds of partners and thousands of volunteers to end gerrymandering through our work on the Citizens Not Politicians campaign. The campaign aimed to replace Ohio's current politiciandominated redistricting commission with a 15-member independent citizens redistricting commission tasked to draw fair and impartial legislative districts. We enthusiastically supported campaign

signature collection, fundraising efforts. and voter education — especially when decision-makers approved intentionally confusing language about the amendment on Ohioans' ballots. Despite our coalition's best efforts. Issue 1 was ultimately defeated on Election Day.

Following the election. Ohio Supreme Court Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor said. "It is clear that the millions of Ohioans who voted ves want to end gerrymandering. And it is also clear that those who voted no thought that they were voting to end gerrymandering. We have built something lasting, and we will continue to hold those in power accountable. Our opponents may have won this round, but we are not defeated." We agree and will continue to keep you informed of our efforts!

OPPOSING BANS ON RANKED CHOICE VOTING

A healthy democracy requires robust and ongoing civic engagement — including casting one's ballot on (or before) Election Day. The OEC is committed to expanding voter access through modernized democracy policies, including same day voter registration, automatic voter registration, and other creative opportunities, such as ranked choice voting.

Ranked choice voting encourages more democratic elections by requiring candidates to appeal to a broader base of voters. But instead of exploring

what this process could look like for Ohio's diverse communities state lawmakers introduced Senate Bill 137. The legislation seeks to prohibit the use of ranked choice voting at all levels of government and penalize local governments that implement the voting method. Alongside other advocacy groups. the OFC Action Fund raised concerns that this bill is part of a broader effort to restrict voter choice and maintain the status quo in gerrymandered districts. where candidates can win with less than majority support.

SUPPORTED BY THE OFC LAW CENTER

FENDING OFF ATTACKS ON DIRECT DEMOCRACY AT THE STATEHOUSE AND IN COURT

This year we opposed Ohio's House Bill 1 – legislation designed to restrict the power and freedom of Ohioans to organize and participate in democratic processes. HB 1 creates significant restrictions on the First Amendment rights of organizations like the OEC, as well as foreign-born U.S. residents. The bill's language was designed to chill nonprofit and grassroots organizations supporting ballot initiatives and prevent them from working inclusively with immigrants in their communities.

The OEC Action Fund spoke out against the bad legislation as lawmakers rushed it through the Statehouse in May. Following the passage of the legislation, the OEC Law Center worked with partners by filing an amicus ("friend of the court") brief at the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals to support a lawsuit to overturn HB 1. We continue to monitor the court case and the implications of HB 1 across Ohio.

A healthy and inclusive democracy is essential for a healthy environment.

You can count on the OFC to continue to stand up and speak out to protect Ohioans' right to direct democracy.

REYNOLDSBURG CLIMATE CAMPAIGN

This year, the OEC continued to build power in the city of Reynoldsburg with our partners at the Ohio Organizing Collaborative. Historically redlined neighborhoods in this Central Ohio community disproportionately face the impacts of climate change and other environmental injustices. These same neighborhoods also have lower voter registration and voter turnout rates when compared to other parts of the city and region.

With the support of members like you, we are successfully driving civic engagement efforts through door-to-door canvassing to encourage voter turnout and promote climate action. As a result of our efforts. we're seeing sustained voter participation and strengthened community connections between residents, organizations, and elected officials. Additionally, the OEC conducted a climate action survey, and facilitated the creation of a climate action plan, with







ACROSS THE STATE



Kylie Johnson, OEC's Southwest Ohio Regional Director, was elected as Vice Chair of the City of Cincinnati's Environmental Advisory Board this year. In this important role, she provides the city environmental policy and strategy guidance and helps shape critical policies that address sustainability, climate adaptation, and environmental resilience.

LEADING COMMUNITY CIVIC **ENGAGEMENT & ADVOCACY EFFORTS**

This year we expanded civic engagement and advocacy education efforts across Southwest Ohio, including a training held in partnership with Groundwork Ohio River Valley and Green Umbrella at the Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden. Hosted for local residents engaged in the Climate Safe Neighborhoods program, we focused on civic education, storytelling best practices, and advocacy tips to effectively engage in environmental activism. Thanks to members like you, the OEC is able to foster stronger communitybased collaboration driving climate action across the state!



The OEC was thrilled to work with the City of Akron's newly formed Office of Sustainability and Climate Resiliency this past year. Shortly after the city named its first director. Akron committed to reducing carbon emissions and advancing climate resiliency projects when joining Power a Clean Future Ohio. We look forward to working with city leadership and playing a pivotal role in Akron's transition toward a more sustainable and resilient community.

SUPPORTED BY THE OFC LAW CENTER SUPPORTING ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

COMMUNITY EFFORTS IN YOUNGSTOWN

Our policy and legal advocacy have helped bolster community environmental justice efforts in Youngstown over the past two years. Alongside local community groups such as SOBE Concerned Citizens, the OEC raised concerns about the environmental and health risks associated with the SOBE Thermal Energy Solutions' proposed pyrolysis plant, including the release of harmful air and climate pollution. Last December, we secured an important victory when Youngstown City Council imposed a one-year moratorium on the project to conduct further research into the potential environmental and safety impacts. With your continued support, we'll continue to amplify the need for stricter regulations to ensure that industrial projects like this do not disproportionately harm vulnerable communities.



In early 2024, the OEC hosted its inaugural State of the Environment event at the Cleveland Public Library. The event attracted over 100 attendees and featured a panel discussion with Cleveland Mayor Justin Bibb and Cuyahoga County Executive Chris Ronavne, moderated by the OEC. The conversation focused on how regional leaders are working collaboratively to foster a cleaner, healthier, thriving region. Key topics included climate action, environmental justice, historic clean energy investments, regional tree canopy, and efforts to expand access to the Cuvahoga River and Lake Erie. Because of members like you, we're able to engage the public in important conversations like these and showcase Cleveland's leadership in addressing climate change.

HIGHLIGHTING HISTORIC FEDERAL **CLIMATE INVESTMENTS**

In April, the OEC celebrated Earth Day with a panel featuring Congresswoman Shontel Brown, Euclid Mayor Kristen Holzheimer Gail, and Growth Opps President & CEO Michael Jeans. The discussion centered on how federal policies. including programs introduced through the Inflation Reduction Act, are supporting cities and organizations in implementing climate action plans, reducing carbon emissions, and improving community health. We were thrilled to celebrate news of a \$156 million Solar for All Grant with those gathered at the event. This funding will create and expand low-income and disadvantaged solar energy programs across Ohio and the Midwest!

SOUTHFAST OHIO

SUPPORTED BY THE OEC LAW CENTER

ADVOCATING FOR ATHENS' PLASTIC BAG REGULATION

Over the past year, the OFC has actively supported the City of Athens in its efforts to implement a regulation aimed at reducing single-use plastic bags and plastic pollution and guided by thoughtfulness, scientific research, and a deep commitment to the health and well-being of our community. Despite challenges, including a lawsuit from the state of Ohio. the city remains committed to addressing the environmental harm caused by plastic waste. The OFC, in collaboration with other environmental groups such as the Surfrider Foundation and the Sierra Club, has filed legal briefs defending Athens' right to enforce its plastic bag ordinance under the principle of "Home Rule," which allows local governments to regulate in areas like environmental protection. We will continue to advocate for the ability of local governments to enact policies that address environmental challenges and improve the sustainability of our communities.

INSPIRING NEW WAYS OF THINKING ABOUT LAND STEWARDSHIP

In order to inspire new policy, you need to demonstrate its impact. This year the OEC collaborated with Rising Appalachia on the Community Ecology Apprenticeship Program, funded by the U.S. Forest Service, to do just that. The program trained 16 young adults in sustainable land management practices through a series of educational presentations and hands-on projects. Participants created trails with bridges and benches, planted thousands of trees, mapped land boundaries, and built structures like farm stands and animal sanctuaries. Additionally, the program fostered cultural appreciation through an Indigenous Mingo language project focused on preserving language and culture.

During two visioning sessions, program participants showcased their work and discussed policy recommendations for how a community can grow its economy by investing in people and our environment. We hope to grow this partnership to promote environmental stewardship, build resilient communities, and support a sustainable economy in Southeastern Ohio.



INVESTING IN EMERGING LEADERS

The OEC continues to invest in tomorrow's environmental movement through our Emerging Leaders program in Central Ohio. The program empowers hundreds of local young professionals to take action and become the next generation of environmental champions through education, advocacy, and networking. This year, our Emerging Leaders events included a career panel, an Olentangy River clean up and tree planting, a backyard birding training, and a post-election event focused on mental health and wellbeing.

like you, the OEC plans
to deepen its impact and
expand its presence across
the state over the coming
years. Together we can
continue to build meaningful
relationships, foster
connections, and advance
policies and projects at the
local level to protect the
environment and health of all
Ohio communities.

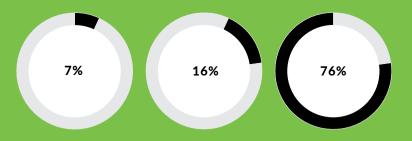




FY 2024: JULY 1, 2023 TO JUNE 30, 2024**

PROGRAMMATIC EFFICIENCY

TOTAL: \$3,508,589



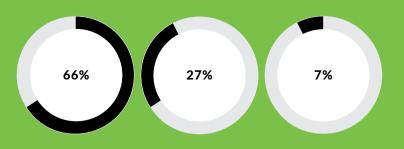
Fundraising \$252,117

Administration \$562,468

Program \$2,694,004

REVENUE BY SOURCE

TOTAL: \$3,886,231



Grants* \$2,555,490 Individual Donations \$1,050,700 Other \$280,040

^{*}The grant revenue reported includes a revenue hold-over for future fiscal years as a result of GAAP accounting guidance related to grant revenue recognition

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*An asterisk denotes a Legacy Club member who has passed away. We are especially grateful to these generous donors who have included the OFC in their wills.

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We value each and every contribution that is made in support of our collective mission to secure healthy air, land, and water for all who call Ohio home. Each contribution is important to building a broad, equitable base of support to protect our environment. This list represents only a fraction of the generous Ohioans who make our work possible. Thank you to all our donors, group members, community supporters, and volunteers. Below we've listed the grantors, organizations, and individual donors who gave \$1,000 or more between July 1, 2023 and June 30. 2024. We thank these donors—and everyone who made gifts of less than \$1,000.

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