

Water Transformational Project - Background and New ASK

Background:

Nutrient pollution (phosphorus and nitrogen) is recognized as the major cause of the overgrowth of cyanobacteria/harmful algae in Lake Erie, which resulted in the water crisis and shutdown in August of 2014. That pollution does not start only in Toledo - it starts from upstream in the watershed, primarily from agricultural sources (both crop and animal).

Working together with conservancies (like The Nature Conservancy, The Black Swamp Conservancy and others) along with other Rotary Clubs, the Rotary Club of Toledo (RCOT) can provide support and seed money for target projects which will restore wetlands ("nature's kidneys") to clean the water that flows past Toledo and down other tributaries and into Lake Erie.

Depending on the location of the projects, this cleaner water may provide the source water for our drinking water system; it may be the water that our food and sport fish swim in; or it may be the water we swim in or whose aerosol we breathe when we recreate in the rivers and on Lake Erie.

Based on past projects, RCOT has created a model, that inspires enthusiasm, creates permanent and visible evidence of the Rotary's commitment to the environment, cleans our water, and can be transformational in our watershed.

Purpose of the Water Transformational Project was established by the Toledo Rotary Foundation and the Board - to contribute to Clean Water in our Lake Erie watershed including any tributaries leading into the Lake.

Over the years our Toledo Rotary clean water efforts have included:

- Two very successful Lake Erie Water Conferences in 2015 and 2016.
- A trip to Blanchard Watershed demonstration farms (2017 and 2018), and a trip to Gibraltar Island Ohio Sea Grant and hatchery tour.
- Collaborating with the Black Swamp Conservancy to plant 1,000 trees at Forrest Woods Preserve (Cecil, OH) in 2018.
- Participating as a Member of the Public Advisory Council of the Toledo Waterways Initiative.
- Supporting the filming of documentary "The Erie Situation".
- Arranging speakers (including Scudder Mackey of ODNR) at the 2022 District Conference.

2019-2021 Water Transformational Project: Funds of \$2,000/year were authorized for advocacy activity. Due to Covid restrictions advocacy was done through a combination of fewer in-person meetings and many Zoom meetings.

Project Committee members logged over 450 hours, meeting with legislators, academic researchers, state members of Ohio Dept of Ag, ODNR, Ohio Lake Erie Commission, TMACOG, environmental and management process consultants, and others. This kept committee members at the forefront of improvements to nutrient control, all the while advocating for the priority Rotary places on clean, available water and emphasizing the Rotary support for collaborative problem solving.

2022 Water Transformational Project: The RCOT, together with the Maumee Rotary Club (Justin Glover) and 10 other Rotary Clubs located on the Maumee River in District 6600, became the naming sponsor for a 61-acre wetlands reconstruction project directly on the Maumee River

near Napoleon. This project was managed and developed by the Black Swamp Conservancy and has come to be known as the Rotary Riverside Nature Preserve. The RCOT was the catalyst, for this project. The project was approved, with a budget of \$10,000.00, as part of the Transformational Projects plan by the Toledo Club Foundation and Board. Because of this “seed money”, an additional \$50,000 was contributed by the other sponsoring clubs. It met our objectives of contributing to clean water in Lake Erie, and also generated excitement in our membership and our District. A Grand Opening celebration was held in Sept '22 bringing over 200 people to celebrate and publicize this Rotary project - including local politicians and the press.

New ASK: \$60,000.00 total (estimated \$20,000.00 per year for three years) to be used as "seed money" and spent on 3, or more, additional wetlands reconstruction projects over the next 3 years. This “seed money” approach is generating a lot of excitement and interest within District 6600 and in the region as well. Projects may include:

- Toledo Canopy Project – support growth of tree canopy coverage together with the City of Toledo. Residential trees have been shown to improve water quality, reduce runoff, mitigate heat islands, reduce air pollution, increase property value, improve community pride, reduce crime, sequester lead, and improve youth test score.
- St Marys project - a parcel of land near Grand Lake has been offered by the City of St Marys through contact with Kraig Noble, member of the St Marys Club. The City is willing to dedicate the land if development funding can be identified. Meetings are underway with The Nature Conservancy and Black Swamp Conservancy. Potential for support is being explored with H2Ohio and/or other Foundation funding.
- Sandusky Bay project - the Huron Club has reached out for help developing a project under this model. Currently searching for a parcel in the eastern Sandusky Bay.
- Mike Noble, District Chair for Environmental Sustainability, Justin Glover, Adam Cassi, and Rob Krain have met with members of District 6400 (western Ontario and south of Detroit) and District 6380 (Ann Arbor). Those Districts are exploring projects based on this model: 1) must have a demonstrated clean water benefit and a local champion, 2) finished project must include signage (enduring notice of Rotary sponsorship), 3) grand opening celebration to publicize Rotary commitment to clean water/environment. And: Possibility of finding a site which would be central to these 3 Districts and finding additional funding from Rotary International. Mike is introducing this project model to the broader membership of the Environmental Sustainability Rotary Action Group.

The Water Transformational Project has not been dormant during COVID, we have been laying the ground work to take this project to the next level. This additional funding will have the following outcomes:

- Improving Water Quality in Lake Erie, the Maumee River, and other tributaries.
- Increasing collaboration between the RCOT and other clubs, as well as Rotary International, growing “seed money,” into truly transformational size projects.
- Further advancing the public image of the RCOT as an organization dedicated to environmental sustainability.
- Being a catalyst for change, inspiring other organization, businesses, and individuals to care for the environment.
- Giving the RCOT a “seat at the table,” for other, larger water and environmental projects, such as with the Great Lakes Authority.