

WESTERN RESERVE RESOURCE CONSERVATION & DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

AREA PLAN 2008 – 2013



This five year Area Plan has been developed with input from planning meetings, surveys, interviews, strategic planning retreats, and public meetings.

Cover Photos:

Big Creek Valley, Lake County

Terminal Tower Cleveland, photo by William C. Rieter

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Holden Arboretum, Lake County

CLEAN Project sampling in Grand River, Lake County

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Introduction

This document known as the Area Plan of the Western Reserve Resource Conservation & Development (RC&D) Council provides a five year guide to Council activities. It has been developed from planning meetings, surveys, interviews, strategic planning retreats, and public meetings.

The Western Reserve RC&D is made up of county commissioners, Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisors, and members-at-large from 9 counties in Northeast Ohio. The counties served by this area plan are Ashtabula, Cuyahoga, Lake, Geauga, Lorain, Medina, Portage, Summit, and Trumbull.



The RC&D Council is a 501 (c)3 non-profit organization that receives much of its support through grants, dues, and donations. The RC&D Council has a unique relationship with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), U.S. Department of Agriculture. Council receives annual support from NRCS with coordinator, office space, and technical assistance support.

This plan serves as a strategic planning guide for this organization. The plan can be modified or updated throughout the 5 year time frame. The goals shown in this plan reflect the priorities determined by Council to address the needs of the region in accordance with Council's mission statement.

Congress passed the Food and Agricultural Act of 1962, which authorized Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) areas. The purpose of the act was to expand opportunities for conservation districts, local units of governments, and individuals to improve their communities in multi-county areas. This included assistance in enhancing the economic, environmental and social well being of the RC&D Areas. Currently, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, USDA administers the Federal RC&D Program. This document serves as an agreement between NRCS and the Western Reserve Resource Conservation and Development Council Inc.

Organization Overview

A. Mission

To plan, promote and implement conservation and sustainable use of natural resource in both rural and urban areas.

B. Vision

A sustainable, regional community with wild and open spaces, creeks, and lakes, clean water and air, in balance with a mixed economy that includes agriculture, forestry, commerce, industry and tourism.

C. Background and History

In October of 1989, a steering committee was formed to begin the process of forming by-laws and applying for USDA funds under the name of the Western Reserve Resource Conservation and Development Council. The intent of the committee was to establish an RC&D Council similar to others that have been previously adopted around the state of Ohio.

In 1991, officers were elected, projects adopted, and Bylaws and Articles of Incorporation written. Council members approved the purpose of the Western Reserve RC&D being to accelerate the conservation, development and utilization of natural resources to improve the general level of economic activity, and to enhance the environment and standard of living. In 1992, Council received official nonprofit status from IRS and in 1993, Council received charitable trust status from the State of Ohio.

During this time period, Council began to focus on land preservation and environmental education projects by sponsoring workshops and submitting grants. Council received its first major grant in 1994. Over \$600,000 was secured from grants from the Storer Foundation, Arthur Holden Jr., U.S. EPA, Ohio EPA, and the Division of Soil and Water Conservation for these projects with an emphasis on the Grand River Protection Project. The success of council in gaining such grant funds became the catalyst for future projects. Council operated with only part-time NRCS assistance during this time period as its official NRCS authorization was still pending.

In January of 1996, Council received major funding from the Gund Foundation to hire a coordinator for the "Countryside Program." This program became the cornerstone of the RC&D Council with its mission of promoting conservation development practices in communities throughout Northeast Ohio. In 2000, the Gund Foundation's support also helped Council created the "Center for Farmland Preservation in Northeast Ohio." Both of these programs continue to serve Northeast Ohio today. The Countryside Program is now housed with Cleveland State University and what is now called "The Farmland Center" is located in the Cuyahoga Valley National Park under an organization known as the Countryside Conservancy.

In 2001, Council's application to USDA was finally approved. Council received authorization from the USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service. A USDA Office that serves as the Western Reserve RC&D location was established in Painesville. Council receives support from that office with a full-time coordinator, office space, vehicle, and technical support.

Council's strong interest in land protection started an initiative to help facilitate conservation easements that continues today. Over 40 miles of streamside properties have been protected

with the assistance of the RC&D Council by partnering on various grants and programs. Many of these easements have been accomplished through the use of the USDA Wetland Reserve Program (WRP).

Since its establishment, Council has strived in promoting conservation education. Sponsoring workshops, annually funding the outdoor high school environmental education program know as the "Envirothon," promoting the Food, Land, and People (FLP) Program, and providing accredited courses for real estate agents on wetland issues fill an educational need that Council has identified.

In 2006, a change in county boundaries occurred as Wayne County moved to the Crossroads RC&D and Trumbull County became a member of the Western Reserve RC&D Council. Council now operated in the following counties: Ashtabula, Cuyahoga, Lake, Geauga, Lorain, Medina, Portage, Summit, and Trumbull.

Operations of the Western Reserve RC&D Council are conducted monthly through Executive Council meetings with oversight from full Council. Executive Council is made up of the President, Vice-President, Secretary, and Treasurer. Full Council meetings are held quarterly in January, April, July, and October.

D. Area Description

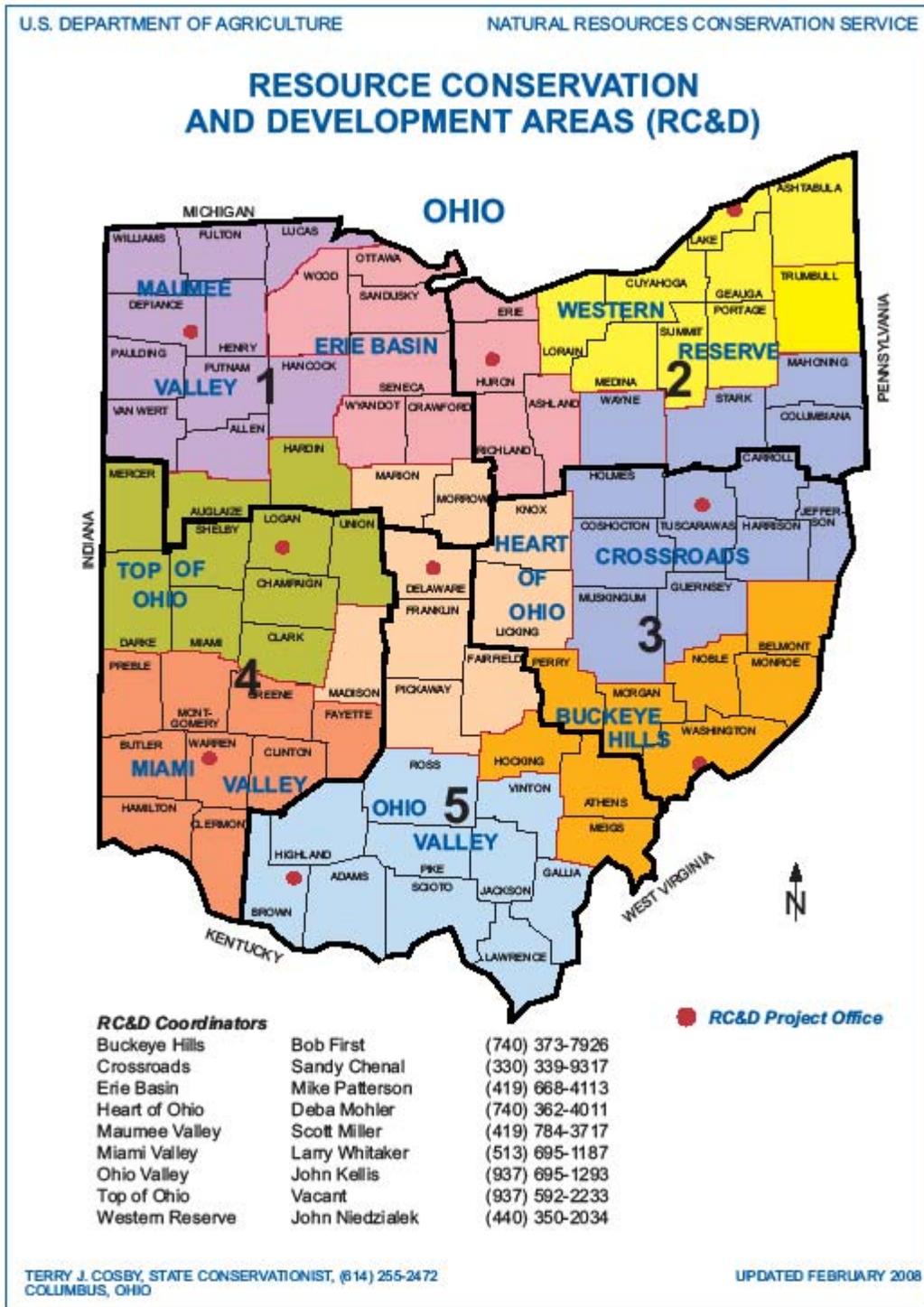
The Western Reserve RC&D lies in northeast Ohio bounded by Pennsylvania on the east (see map page 6). The 4,228.5 square mile area encompasses nine (9) counties: Ashtabula, Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, Lorain, Medina, Portage, Summit and Trumbull. The Western Reserve RC&D is named after the post Revolutionary War Connecticut land grant that established this area. Today this region of northeast Ohio includes a mix of urban and rural areas with economic and social interdependence.

The soils of the nine counties of the Western Reserve RC&D are predominately medium-textured glacial till soils that include coarse-textured sandy soils on glacial beach ridges, fine-textured clay lacustrine soils and glacial deposits of coarse-textured sandy and gravel soils. Topography of the area varies from very flat in the northwest to steeply sloping in the east and south. Four of the nine counties are located along the Lake Erie shoreline.

Agriculture is changing, yet remains the dominant land use, and includes a diversity of enterprise (i.e., grain, livestock, dairy, nursery stock, fruit, truck, and greenhouse crops). All counties in the region share common agricultural enterprises. Specialty crops such as nursery stock, fruits, and vegetables are very important to the region. The center of Ohio's maple syrup production is located within the area.

The population of the Western Reserve RC&D area is an ethnic mix of many races with large population centers in the cities of Cleveland, Akron, and Lorain. Population numbers are relatively stable for the region with several counties showing increases. The growing services and wholesale/retail trade sectors combine with a reduced manufacturing base to comprise the leading industries, and unemployment ranges from 4.4% to 6.6% according to the 2006 figures. Important resources include abundant water, productive soils, substantial wetlands, and underutilized woodlands. As a region where extensive land use changes are occurring along a large urban/rural interface, the impacts on natural resources and agriculture are enormous. The Western Reserve RC&D Council has demonstrated an ability to use innovative tools for land and wetlands protection. The Western Reserve RC&D provides a unique regional perspective for

addressing these issues, and has the potential to achieve broad-based natural resources conservation and development.



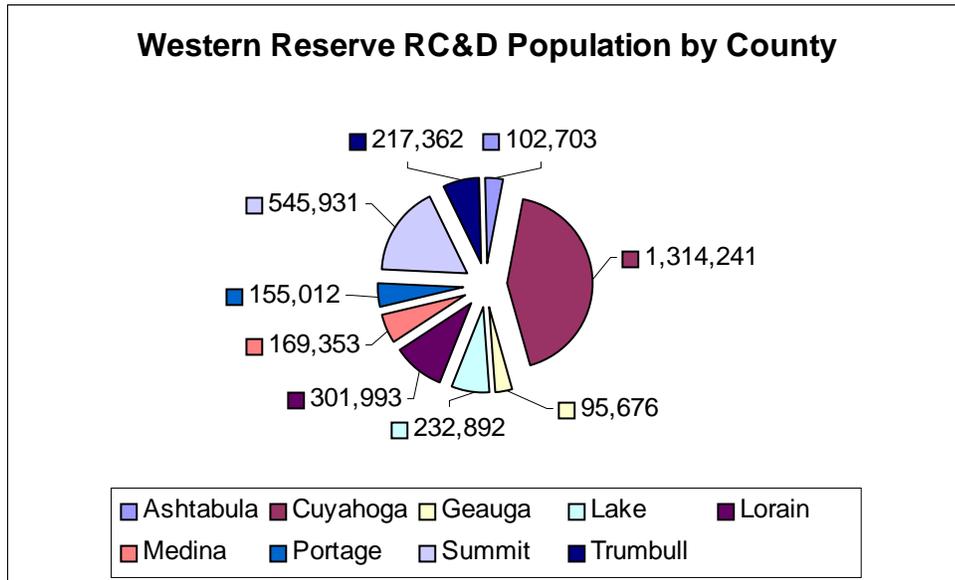
E. Demographics

Population

According to the Ohio Office of Strategic Research the Western Reserve RC&D has a population of 3,135,163 within 4,228.5 square miles. The densely populated Cleveland/Akron metropolitan area of the Council is quite a contrast from the very rural and diverse agricultural enterprises that comprise a large portion of the region.

The following chart shows a breakdown of the population and land area for each of the nine counties in the Western Reserve RC&D.

County	Ashtabula	Cuyahoga	Geauga	Lake	Lorain	Medina	Portage	Summit	Trumbull
Land Area (square miles)	702.7	458.3	404.1	228.2	492.6	421.6	492.4	412.8	615.8
Number of farms	1,260	160	950	330	960	1,170	940	370	1,000



Population by Diversity and Age

The following chart is an ethnic breakdown of the combined counties in the Western Reserve RC&D.

(a) Population by Race	(b) Number	(c) Percent
Total Population	3,170,947	
White	2,533,845	79.91%
African-American	506,015	15.96%
Native America	5,829	0.18%
Asian	41,490	1.31%
Pacific Islander	594	0.02%
Other	35,043	1.11%
Two or More Races	50,131	1.58%
Hispanic (may be of any race)	81,929	2.58%

The population breakdown by age is as follows:

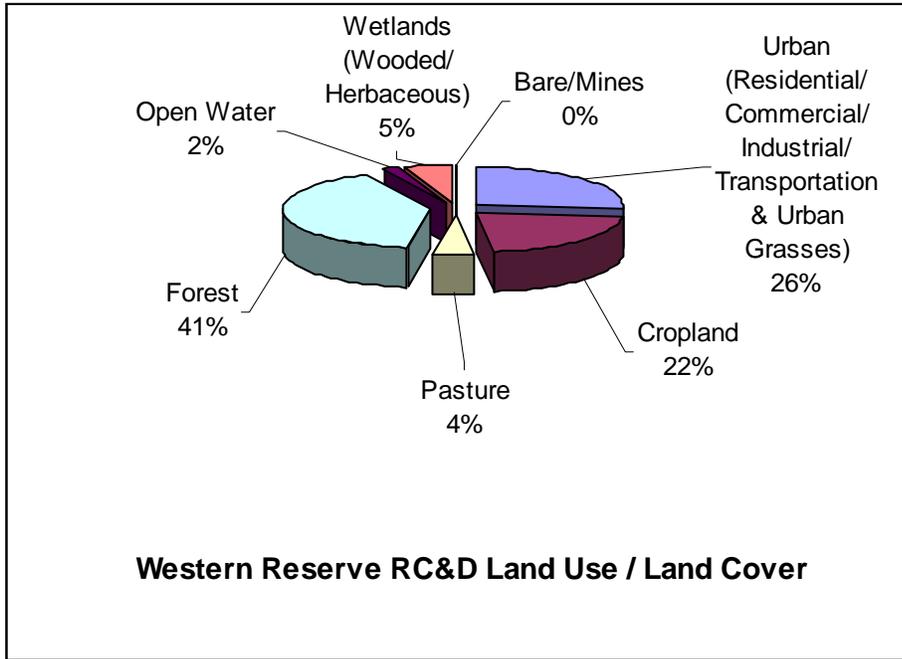
Population by Age	Number	Percent
Total Population	3,170,947	
Under 6 years	249,593	7.87%
6 to 17 years	548,138	17.29%
18 to 24 years	259,423	8.18%
25 to 44 years	928,392	29.28%
45 to 64 years	663,771	20.93%
65 years and more	455,556	14.37%

F. Natural Resources

The Western Reserve RC&D region has a vast diversity of natural resource reserves in the nine county area. The State of Ohio has designated the upper Cuyahoga, Grand, and Chagrin Rivers as State Scenic Rivers, and the Conneaut Creek and Grand as Wild and Scenic Rivers. Numerous state parks and natural resource preserves owned by the State of Ohio exist in the region. The Nature Conservancy owns 1000 acres of land in the Grand River watershed and has targeted assistance to this water shed.

State Parks, Forests, Nature Preserves & Wildlife Areas	
Facilities	55
Acreage	35,664.17

The following pie chart shows the breakdown of the land use/cover for the nine county area.



G. Agriculture

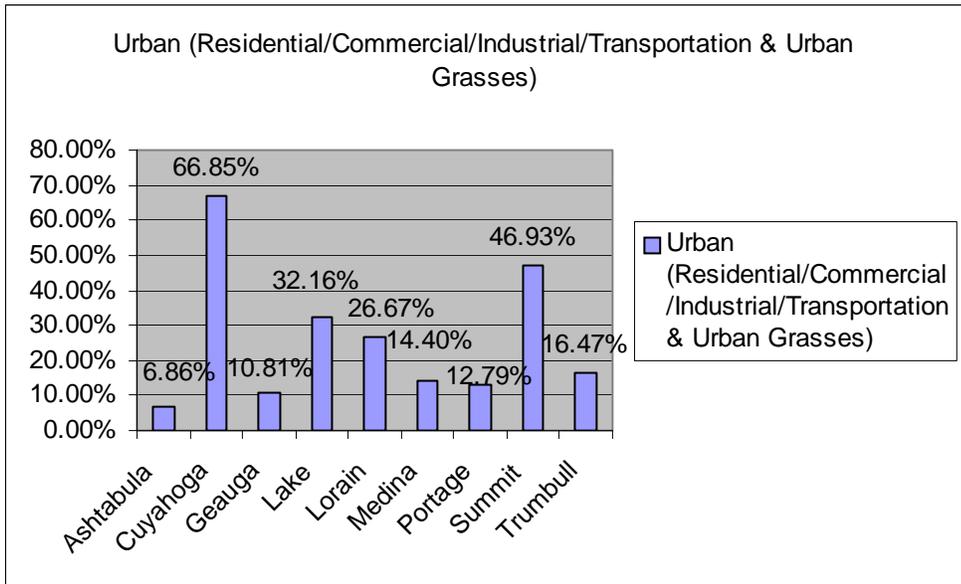
The Ohio Department of Agriculture is currently collecting data for the 2007 Census of Agriculture. This survey is conducted every five years by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to count the nation’s farms and ranches and the people who operate them. The following chart shows the breakdown of the number of acres in the Western Reserve that is designated as farms, the number of farmland, the average size and the cash returns on the property. This information was taken from the Ohio Department of Development, Office of Strategic Research County Profiles.

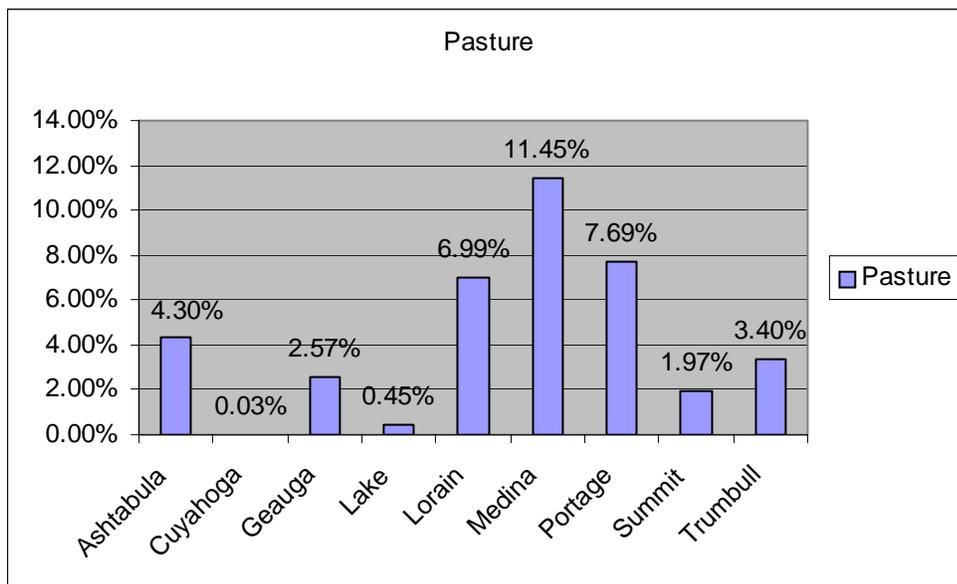
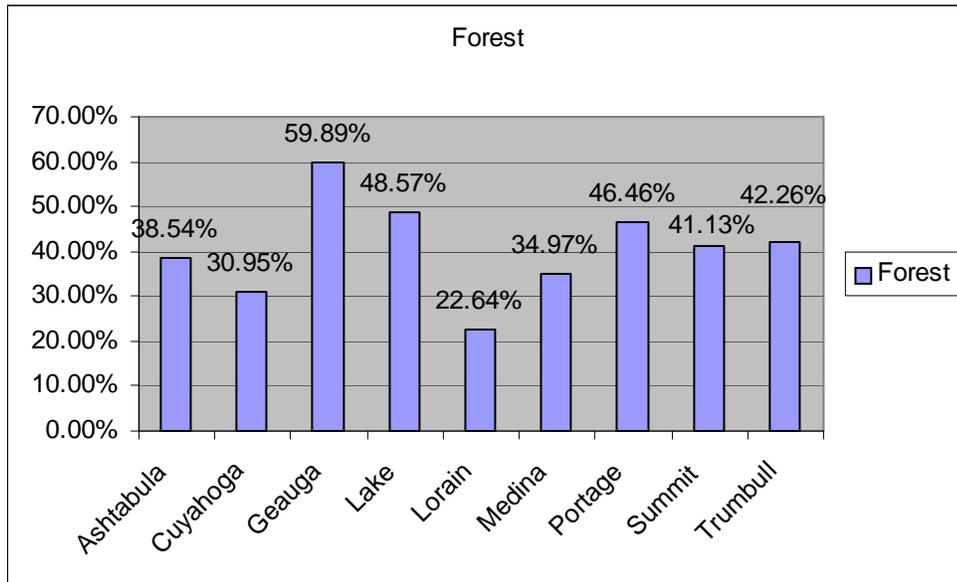
1) Agriculture	
Land in farms (acres)	760,000
Number of farms	7,140
Average size – acres	821
Total cash receipts	\$364,898,000.00
Per Farm	\$59,738.22

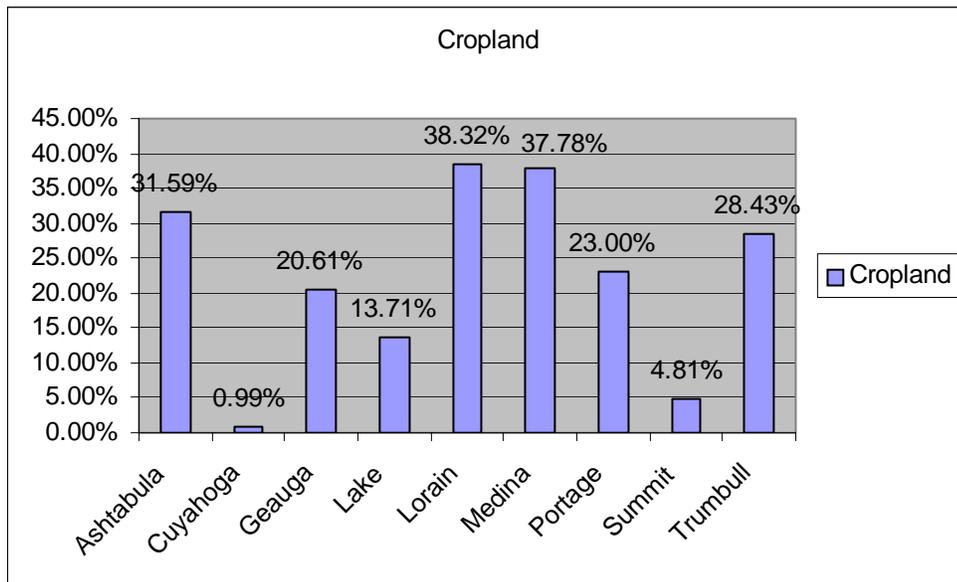
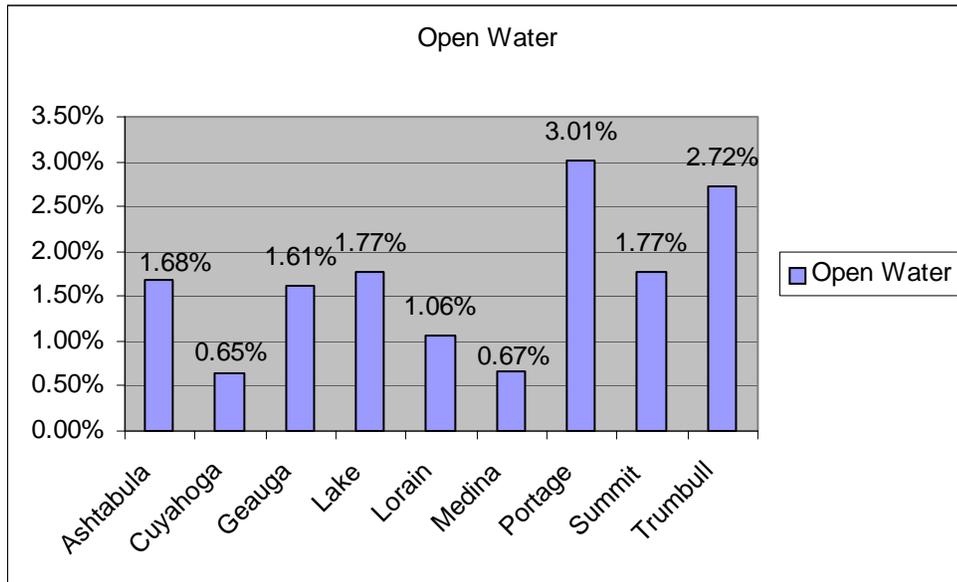
Below is a chart breaking down the number of farms, and the percentage of cropland, pasture and forest for the square miles of each county.

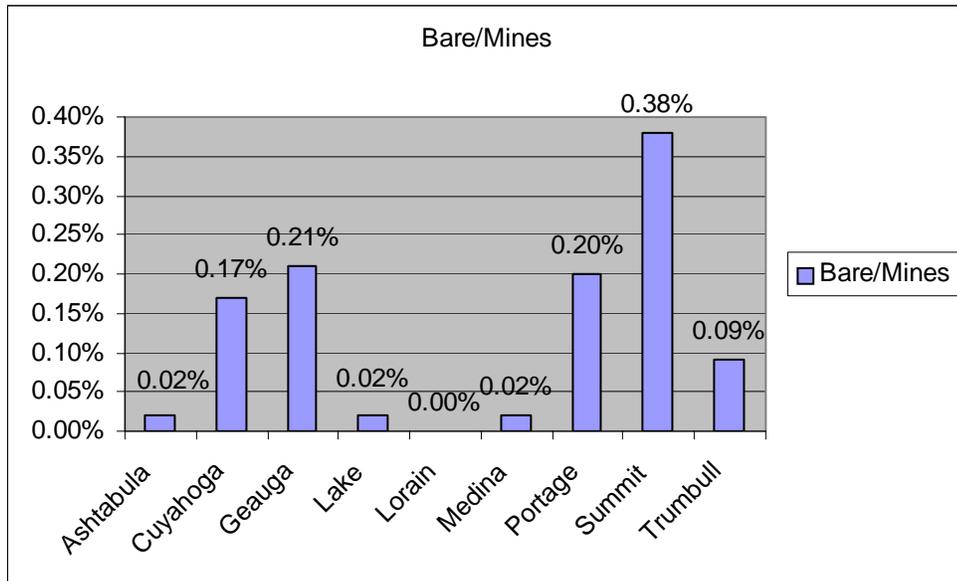
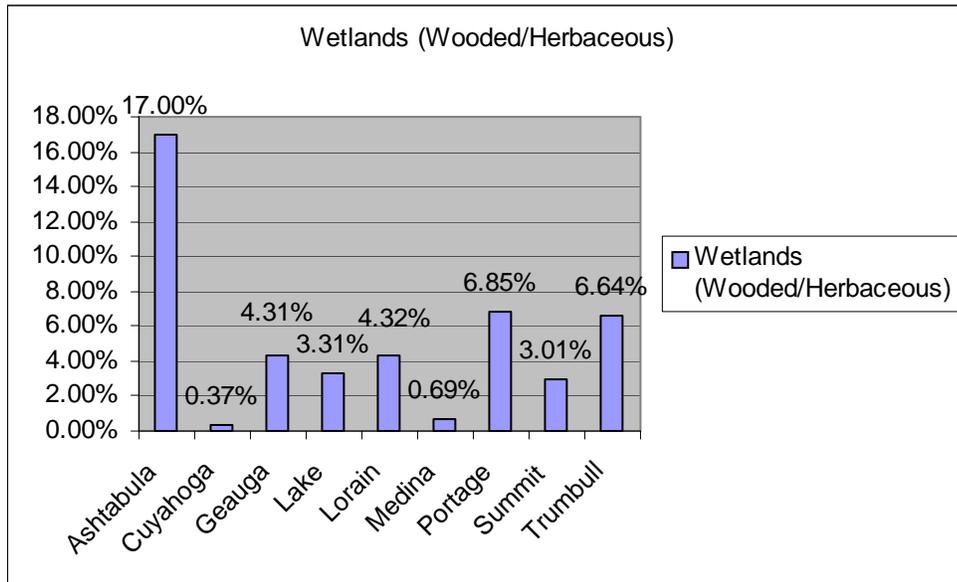
County	Ashtabula	Cuyahoga	Geauga	Lake	Lorain	Medina	Portage	Summit	Trumbull
Land Area (square miles)	702.7	458.3	404.1	228.2	492.6	421.6	492.4	412.8	615.8
Number of farms	1,260	160	950	330	960	1,170	940	370	1,000
Land use/ Land Cover	Percent								
Urban (Residential/Commercial/Industrial/Transportation & Urban Grasses)	6.86%	66.85%	10.81%	32.16%	26.67%	14.40%	12.79%	46.93%	16.47%
Cropland	31.59%	0.99%	20.61%	13.71%	38.32%	37.78%	23.00%	4.81%	28.43%
Pasture	4.30%	0.03%	2.57%	0.45%	6.99%	11.45%	7.69%	1.97%	3.40%
Forest	38.54%	30.95%	59.89%	48.57%	22.64%	34.97%	46.46%	41.13%	42.26%
Open Water	1.68%	0.65%	1.61%	1.77%	1.06%	0.67%	3.01%	1.77%	2.72%
Wetlands (Wooded/Herbaceous)	17.00%	0.37%	4.31%	3.31%	4.32%	0.69%	6.85%	3.01%	6.64%
Bare/Mines	0.02%	0.17%	0.21%	0.02%	0.00%	0.02%	0.20%	0.38%	0.09%

The following bar charts show the differences in the percentage of land use/cover for the each of the above in the nine county region.









H. Economic

The chart below shows the population increases and decrease of the in the nine counties. It also includes the per capita personal income.

County	Ashtabula	Cuyahoga	Gauga	Lake	Lorain	Medina	Portage	Summit	Trumbull
Population 1990	99,821	1,412,140	81,129	215,499	271,126	122,354	142,585	514,990	227,813
Population 2000	102,728	1,393,978	90,895	227,511	284,664	151,095	152,061	542,899	225,116
Population 2006*	102,703	1,314,241	95,676	232,892	301,993	169,353	155,012	545,931	217,362
Per Capita Personal Income	\$25,632	\$37,082	\$40,863	\$33,298	\$29,089	\$33,450	\$29,878	\$34,395	\$27,590

*NOTE: 2006 figure is estimated

Data for the tables and graphs on pages 7 to 13 are from the Ohio Department of Development, Office of Strategic Research

Resource Needs and Opportunities

A. Public Participation Process

The Area Plan has been developed using public input from various sources. A series of meetings, reports, surveys, and interviews were held. The following is a summary of the work by Council to incorporate a broad range of input in developing this plan.

The participation process started with a grant from the Gund Foundation to allow Council to hire a consultant and conduct a strategic planning process. A series of surveys, interviews and retreats were held where Council representatives and staff determined the future role of Council. A copy of this report is included as Appendix A of this plan.

An Area Planning session was also conducted at the April 2006 Council meeting where public participation was included. The session was facilitated by Council members. Council members, council staff, elected officials, Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisors and staff, and citizens representing private organizations attended this session.

In 2006, a series of interviews were conducted by Council members on the local level for each county. A Council member was responsible for bringing together commissioners and Soil and Water Conservation District members to complete the surveys. Personnel interviews were conducted by many of the council representatives. Results from the county surveys and interviews have been summarized by the chairperson of the planning committee, Carol Thaler from Cuyahoga County. These findings are included in Appendix B of this plan. Many thanks go out to Carol Thaler and her staff at the Cuyahoga County Planning Commission for assisting council in this effort.

Another regional effort entitled "Voices & Choices" was also taking place at this same time period in Northeast Ohio. This comprehensive effort engaged 21,000 people from across Northeast Ohio. A series of town meetings, regional workshops, and interviews were held to determine the challenges of the region and identify specific goals for the region. These findings are identified in a report entitled "Voices & Choices: Report on the Public's Priorities for Northeast Ohio's Future." It is available at the website www.voiceschoices.org. With such a comprehensive effort to engage the public to determine regional goals for the area, Council felt it was important to develop an Area Plan that is consistent with the results from public meetings and interviews from the Voices & Choices Plan for Northeast Ohio. The major theme identified from the Voices and Choices Report that Council felt its mission directly coincides with is "Reducing Sprawl & Increasing Regional Connectivity." This is a major challenge identified by the public in Northeast Ohio and many of the goals and objectives identified in the Area Plan address this issue.

B. Summary of Findings Corresponding to RC&D National Elements

I. Land Conservation

Addressing erosion and sedimentation using land conservation practices is a priority of the Council. Because of the urban make-up of the region, partnering with Soil and Water Conservation Districts in addressing such issues is important. The Council has agreed to play a role in working on these issues in a regional manner through many of its watershed related activities. Assisting communities with riparian setbacks and other conservation development practices that address erosion and sedimentation are such examples.

II. Water Management

Issues regarding Lake Erie and its tributaries make water management practices another key element to be addressed. Watershed groups are strong in the region. The Council will continue to partner with these groups to work on water quality issues. While agricultural issues continue to be addressed under water management, urbanization has become the largest threat to the region's water quality. In some cases, maintaining the excellent water quality of some of the region's state designated "wild and scenic" streams is important while improving some of the impaired streams is also a priority. Lake Erie issues can be complex from both a political and ecological standpoint. Partnering with neighboring RC&D's, states, and Canada is part of addressing Lake Erie concerns. Council will continue to address Lake Erie water quality concerns by concentrating its efforts on watershed management issues.

III. Community Development

Community development is addressed in various areas of the plan. The "Voices & Choices" goals are based on economic development of Northeast Ohio. Combining community development with sustainable development is a key component of the Council's mission. "Making communities sustainable" continually surfaced during the interview process. Providing economic growth to the region through sustainable practices is a priority of the Council. A key example is helping agriculture to remain viable throughout the region by adopting sustainable agricultural practices that benefit the farmers, consumers, and the neighboring landowners.

IV. Land Management

Land Management is the dominant priority element addressed through the planning process. Land protection and conservation development practices continue to be addressed by the Council. The "urban sprawl" issue in Northeast Ohio has made "Land Conservation" a high priority in the region. Facilitating projects using conservation easements to protect both farmland and riparian areas is such an example. Council is also pursuing projects related to energy crop production as a new initiative.

V. Other

Improving the capacity of the organization and making the Council more sustainable are parts of another priority element identified by Council. Part of the planning process identified roles in which Council can take actions to conduct activities undertaken to improve the organization's capacity, effectiveness and sustainability. Some activities are required by law or organizational by-laws, others are necessary to ensure the Western Reserve RC&D's future success. These items are covered under the element of **Capacity Building, Sustainability, Organization Responsibilities and Maintenance.**

An underlying theme of all the elements in this plan is the priority that Council has placed on the need for additional environmental education efforts. Providing opportunities for youth and adult regarding all the issues relating to land conservation, water management, community development, and land management will ultimately prove to be the long term solution in the region in addressing these problems. Council will continue to be a key player in the region in facilitating projects to promote environmental education in Northeast Ohio. Strategies related environmental education efforts are included in many of the goals and objectives in this plan.

Goals Objectives and Strategies

Goals Objectives and Strategies – Land Conservation - The control of erosion and sedimentation.

Goal - To provide urgently needed assistance for stormwater management in the form of both technical and educational outreach for six of the nine member counties by 2013.

Objective - Assist 6 County Departments with flood and stormwater management plan assistance including its impacts on erosion, flooding and property damage, sedimentation, aquatic health, and water quality.

Strategy

1. Increasing Education: Meet with 6 county agencies to discuss their current plans and assess their need for additional education and assistance in 2008.
2. Assist all nine SWCD's to develop customized materials to be used for County Commissioners and other local officials addressing issues of stormwater management in their respective watersheds by 2009.
3. Identify and assist those member counties without erosion and sediment control regulations by making available model regulations and hosting a technical session resulting in at least 1 additional county adopting regulations by 2010.

Objective - Create opportunities to provide education to the public about stormwater management issues in all 9 counties.

Strategy

1. Assist SWCD's in developing and distributing area wide educational materials each year to be used for educating diverse audiences about watershed issues such as drainage, flooding, erosion, sediment, and nonpoint source pollution.
2. Develop a methodology in 2008 to have county officials gain Certified Professional in Storm Water Quality (CPSWQ) accreditation.
3. Host 1 workshop in the years of 2008, 2010, 2012 for CPSWQ water quality certification purposes resulting in at least 50 new CPSWQ certified staff members in the region.

Goals Objectives and Strategies – Water Management -

the conservation, use, and quality of water, including irrigation and rural water supplies; the mitigation of floods and high water tables; the repair and improvement of reservoirs; the improvement of agricultural water management; and the improvement of water quality.

Goal - Assist Partners with the management of water resources that address both quality and quantity and support all uses in all nine counties by implementing at least 5 projects through the year 2013

Objective- Address septic and agricultural non-point pollution concerns on a regional basis by working with Health Departments, SWCD's and watershed groups in 8 of the 9 each year through 2013.

Strategy

1. Address failing septic systems and new state regulations by distributing information through a forum for County Health Departments in the year 2010.
2. Partner with NRCS to disseminate information regarding Farm Bill Programs that address non-point pollution with an emphasis on Lake Erie Watershed awareness starting in the year 2008.

Objective-Address water quality aspects of storm water management on a regional basis by partnering with at least 4 watershed groups each year starting in 2008.

Strategy.

1. Promote and provide education on stream restoration, riparian setbacks, and conservation easements by serving as a representative on the watershed coordinator review team for 4 watershed each year through 2013
2. Review at least 1 watershed action plan each year through 2008 resulting in the adoption of 5 watershed action plans through 2013.

Objective - Assist regional Land Protection groups in efforts to protect riparian areas in at least 5 watersheds through 2013.

Strategy

1. Continue to serve on Grand River Watershed committees, providing regional solutions supporting the Grand River Protection Effort (4 meetings per year).
2. Partner with groups such as the Nature Conservancy, the Western Reserve Land Conservancy, Chagrin River Partners, The Cleveland Museum of Natural History, and Grand River Partners to partner in the protection of 5 properties in Northeast Ohio per year.
3. Provide conservation easement assistance to state-wide watershed groups and other RC&D's to promote riparian area land preservation techniques for 1 area outside the region each year through 2013.

Goals Objectives and Strategies – Community Development –

the development of resource-based industries; the protection of rural industries from natural resource hazards; the development of adequate rural water and waste disposal systems; the improvement of recreation facilities; the improvement of rural housing; the provision of adequate health and education facilities; the satisfaction of essential transportation and communication needs; and the promotion of food security, economic development, and education. The goals, objectives, and strategies identified are consistent with those identified in the “**Voices & Choices Report**” for Northeast Ohio which identified as a major goal to foster economic growth & job creation while reducing sprawl and improving regional connectivity.

Goal - Foster economic growth & job creation through sustainable development practices by implementing projects each year in all 9 counties.

Objective - Promote the establishment of Greenway trails in 4 counties.

Strategy

1. Provide grant support as requested to assist Park Districts in Lake, Geauga, Cuyahoga, and Ashtabula counties for efforts to expand greenway trails each year until completion.

Objective - Provide support to all 9 counties in implementing conservation development practices on developing lands each year.

Strategy

1. Partner with the Countryside Program to promote new Legislation, including “transfer of development rights” in Ohio, by working with the program coordinator to make Legislative contacts in all 9 counties in 2008
2. Assist the Countryside Program in hosting 3 or more workshops each year in 3 or more communities to incorporate conservation development practices in local ordinances.
3. Partner with the Countryside Program to help initiate conservation development practices with SWCD offices during site plan reviews in 4 or more counties each year through 2013.

Goal - Provide support to initiatives of “The Farmland Center” to preserve farmland and expand sustainable agriculture operations in Northeast Ohio with a goal of 20 farms preserved and 20 sustainable agricultural business created/or retained by 2013.

Objective - Promote agricultural retention and business expansion through sustainable community projects that will help preserve farmland and create new agricultural businesses in all 9 counties in Northeast Ohio through 2013.

Strategy

1. Provide assistance to the “Farmlink” Program by serving on the committee to help promote the program to 5 other agencies resulting in 4 new operations or retained agribusiness operations each year through 2013
2. Provide support to the “Farmland Center” by assisting with USDA and State Farmland Protections applications by coordinating applications with SWCD’s and Land Trusts resulting in the retention of 4 farm operation businesses retained in Northeast Ohio each year through 2013.

Goal - Partner with Hispanic business groups to provide for the start-up and growth of a Hispanic based local vegetable production agribusiness starting in 2008 and continuing to expand each year.

Objective- Promote the expansion and diversification of local agribusiness operations and improve the local food economy by creating and expanding 2 Farm Markets per year through 2013.

Strategy

1. Find grant funding and partner with North Union Farmers Market, the Hispanic Organization of Ashtabula and Lake Counties (HOLA), and the Lake SWCD to identify and train 5 Hispanic growers to raise vegetables and market their crops to local farm markets in an effort to boost income and support the expansion of local far Markets in 2008. (Farmers Market Diversity Project)
2. Provide support for the continuation of the Farmers Market Diversity Project to expand into 4 or more counties by 2013 resulting in the expansion of 4 or more Farmers Markets in the area and creating agribusiness income potential for a diverse group of producers.

Goal - Create and enhance agricultural and conservation education opportunities for students and teachers from a variety of grades and diverse backgrounds throughout the school year and summer each year through 2013.

Objective - Coordinate and promote youth and teacher educational opportunities on agricultural issues with a goal to teach hundreds of youth annually about agricultural and food nutrition issues.

Strategy

1. Partner with Lake Farmpark to conduct a Food, Land, and People (FLP) teacher facilitator workshop every other year through 2013 with a goal to have 50 new facilitators functioning by 2013.
2. Assemble a committee and host meetings to facilitate the incorporation of FLP coursework into Ohio Department of Education standards with a goal establish such a requirement by 2010 resulting in thousands of youth educated in agricultural issues each year.
3. Partner with the Painesville City Schools Hispanic Migrant Education Program to conduct a Food, Land and People (FLP) Summer Field Day for grade school students (once per year) resulting in 40 Hispanic students/teachers trained on U.S. agricultural issues each year.

Objective - Support and promote conservation education through the regional and state level High School Envirothon competition supporting hundreds of youth and 20 schools in the region annually learning soils, forestry, and environmental issues that will lead to the development of future community leaders and decision makers aware of natural resource based issues.

Strategy

1. Raise funds from local businesses and individuals with a goal of \$1000 annually. These funds will be used as awards at the regional competition. Schools will use the award money to cover part of the costs associated with traveling to the state competition.
2. Assist SWCD's to organize the event by providing technical resource professionals to assist with creating quizzes and teaching at the event, if requested on an annual basis.
3. Provide materials needed on an annual basis at the competition such as vests and audio equipment as purchased by the RC&D.
4. Involve 1 or more council members as volunteers at the event to assist as needed and present the awards.

Goal - Provide for adult environmental education and employment opportunities each year through 2013 for hundreds of current and graduating higher education students and future working professionals, in an effort to strengthen and retain within the Northeast Ohio workforce professionals trained in natural resource protection issues.

Objective -To provide fiscal oversight and program guidance to the CLEAN (Collaborative Learning for Environmental Action Network) project, for the purposes of assisting undergraduate faculty at 10 higher education institutions in the development of environmental service-learning curricula involving hundreds of future college graduates and of promoting “brain gain” in the region through employment of these graduates in Northeast Ohio.

Strategies

1. Provide a contract to a coordinator for the CLEAN project to implement an Ohio Environmental Education Fund grant through 2009, and support continuation of the project by seeking additional funding to continue the project through 2011.
2. Facilitate partnerships between RC&D member organizations and the universities and colleges participating in this project by conducting workshops, developing service-learning projects, forming partnerships with environmental organizations, identifying employment opportunities, and training faculty/staff at area universities, leading to retention and employment of over 50 undergraduate students in environment-related careers by 2011.

Objective - Provide a Wetland and Soils Real Estate Course at Lakeland Community College on an annual basis with a goal to train 10 or more professional each year resulting in hundreds of homeowners receiving proper information to make wise land use decisions in purchasing homes and developing properties.

Strategy

1. Partner with the Real Estate Association to conduct an accredited course for real estate agents regarding home site soils limitations and wetland issues in an effort to help homeowners and real estate agents gain a better understanding of natural resource concerns on building sites and private lots (once per year).

Goal - Initiate a mass media environmental learning tool that will provide environmental education programming to a diverse audience of hundreds of thousands of people in the Northeast Ohio TV viewing area in 2008 and continuing each year.

Objective - Initiate and continue the Program entitled "Raising the Environmental IQ of Northeast Ohio." by partnering with area Foundations, WKYC TV, ODNR, NRCS, Stormcenter Communications, and SWCDs.

Strategy

1. Raise grant funding and develop a website through StormCenter Communication to implement the Environmental IQ Project in 2008.
2. Assist with grant writing and oversee grant expenditures for this project (on going until grants and funding are obtained and/or completion of project) starting in 2008.
3. Partner with ODNR, NRCS and SWCD's to incorporate water quality and other environmental factual data to Channel 3 weather forecaster and website to educate hundreds of thousands of individuals on program opportunities, BMPs, and conservation activities they can engage in starting in 2008 and continuing thereafter.

Goal - Partner and provide outreach efforts to various organizations in an effort to develop one or more recreational/tourism opportunities involving minority groups by 2010.

Objective- Work with the North American Indian Community to acquire funding through grant sources to develop a North American Indian Cultural Garden in the City of Cleveland in 2008/2009.

Strategy

1. Partner with North American Indian Cultural Center to apply for various grant sources (Cleveland Indians, University Circle Inc.) leading to the development of a cultural garden in the city of Cleveland that will be used for recreational, tourism, and economic development purposes in 2008/2009.
2. Assist the North American Cultural Center with planning for development of the garden.

Goals Objectives and Strategies – Land Management –

Energy conservation that includes the production of energy crops, the protection of agricultural land as appropriate from conversion to other uses, farmland protection, and the protection of fish and wildlife habitats.

Goal - Preserve land in Northeast Ohio resulting in land management, water quality, and wildlife benefits by promoting the use of agricultural and conservation easements as land protection tools in an effort to protect 45 properties by 2013.

Objective - Implement the Northeast Ohio Wetland Reserve Program by partnering with SWCDs and Land Trusts resulting 5 properties protected with conservation easements each year.

Strategy

1. Enter into contracts with 4 or more SWCDs and Land Trusts to implement the Northeast Ohio WRP Pilot Program in 2008.
2. Implement the goals of a grant from the Nature Conservancy for the Northeast Ohio WRP Pilot Program by entering into a WRP contract in a Nature Conservancy Priority Area in 2008 and to complete such easement in 2009.
3. Begin implementation and payments to SWCDs and Land Trusts for WRP easement acquisition in 2008 (including payments for sign-ups, appraisal, survey, hazardous material studies etc.) resulting in the protection of 5 properties in 2008 and continuing each year as WRP funding allows.
4. Provide for state wide WRP Program leadership by conducting 1 or more presentations each year to outside of region agencies/non profit groups in an effort to expand the use of the WRP program and establishment of conservation programs in 3 other areas of the state by 2013.

Objective - Partner with farmland protection agencies and non-profit groups to assist in the protection of 4 farms per year through 2013.

Strategy

1. Partner with the "Farmland Center" and SWCD offices to foster the state and federal farmland protection program sign-ups by assisting with new applications and promoting the funding of these programs each year resulting in 20 farms preserved through 2013.

Goal - Foster programs that result in the protection and enhancement of the biodiversity of our habitats and ecosystems by implementing 2 or more grants or agency programs each year through 2013 resulting in 200 or more acres enhanced each year.

Objective - Promote the use of USDA Farm Bill Programs that result in the enhancement of wildlife acres on private property by 2 or more projects each year.

Strategy

1. Partner with the Cleveland Museum of Natural History to implement the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) on 1 or more properties each year through 2013, resulting in the control of non-native species on 50 acres of riparian areas or wetlands each year through 2013.
2. Partner with SWCD's and Land Trusts to restore/enhance wetlands/riparian areas on 4 or more WRP properties each year through 2013.

Objective - Provide leadership to the Lake Erie Allegheny Partnership Fund, by participating as a member of the Local Advisory Committee, resulting in the protection and enhancement of the biodiversity of our habitats and ecosystems of at least 2 properties each year through 2013.

Strategy

1. Assist the Fund with the development of a grant making process and the collection of funds from sources such as the Ohio Attorney General, US Attorney for the Northern District Ohio, the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency and the Ohio Department of Natural Resources with a goal to have the process in place by 2008.
2. Assist members and partners with grant applications to the fund with the goal of having 2 properties (projects) allocated funding for protection each year through 2013.

Goal - Facilitate alternative energy development opportunities in Northeast Ohio with annual educational opportunities and implementing 1 or more alternative energy projects for the region through 2013.

Objective - Promote the use of alternative energy in Northeast Ohio, including the use of sustainable agricultural production methods and energy conservation practices by sponsoring 1 or more educational opportunities each year and implementing a related project starting in 2009.

Strategy

1. Host or sponsor 1 or more speakers /workshops to facilitate alternative energy topics for the region on an annual basis through 2013.
2. Assemble a committee to discuss and implement a regional alternative energy or energy conservation related project region in 2008.
3. Implement a project through the RC&D Council involving alternative energy production or energy conservation that emphasizes sustainable energy and sustainable agricultural and/or energy practices for the region in 2009 and continuing thereafter.

Goals Objectives and Strategies – Capacity Building, Sustainability, Organization Responsibilities and Maintenance –

Conduct activities undertaken to maintain the organization's capacity, effectiveness and sustainability. Some activities are required by law or organizational by-laws, others are necessary to ensure the WR-RC&D's future success.

Goal - Increase the ability of the Council to serve the entire diverse region while developing funding sources to allow Council to become self-sustaining with a goal to increase Council's own operating funding by 10% each year through 2013.

Objective - Carry out ongoing administrative responsibilities on an annual basis while adhering to organizational by-laws and state and federal requirements.

Strategy

1. Maintain bookkeeping system and work with CPA firm to provide financial assistance services to Council each year through 2013.
2. Follow Financial Policies by providing oversight on a monthly basis to review credit card and checking account expenditures.
3. Prepare Annual Budget to be approved at December Executive Council Meeting.
4. File all forms necessary with IRS, State of Ohio, and Lake County for tax purposes and to retain non-profit status by May of each year.
5. Conduct quarterly Full Council meetings and monthly Executive Council meetings.
6. Complete an audit annually.
7. Produce newsletter 3 times per year or as funding allows and distribute hard copies through USPS and electronic versions online.
8. Produce annual report by midyear.
9. Produce Annual Plan of Work in accordance with Area Plan.

Objective - Ensure future expansion and success of the council by developing new methods to expand council membership and funding sources with a goal to increase sustainable funding sources by 10% each year through 2013.

Strategy

1. Continue to implement the recommendations of the 2004 Strategic Planning Process and 2005 and 2006 Council planning sessions by:
 - a. Increasing the effectiveness of Council meetings by changing the meeting format and locations on a quarterly basis.
 - b. Creating additional work committee groups to involve more people in projects. This will be done using county capacity to host conference calls to get the work done with a goal of organizing each committee per major RC&D project and continuing that effort through 2013.
 - c. Including RC&D members and non-members to work on such committees to create a more diverse approach to problem solving with a goal to have at least 1 non member per project committee established as projects are approved and committees are adopted.
 - d. Reviewing By-Laws to consider adding new at-large members in an effort to diversify council membership and to expand capacity by the end of 2008.
2. Review Employee Policy Council Ethics Policy, and Outreach and Equal Opportunity Policies on an annual basis.
3. Explore and ascertain the viability and appropriateness of an endowment, membership, or annual fund drive to create a stable source of funding. Form a committee in 2008 to review/or set up this process.
4. Establish a fundraising committee in 2008 and meet annually to develop a methodology of a gift giving program to the RC&D to help make the Council more sustainable.

Objective - Provide representation to local, state, and national groups for outreach and training opportunities on an annual basis.

Strategy

1. Provide representation and input from Northeast Ohio to the National and Regional RC&D Association as travel funding allows.
 - a. Represent Council and take advantage of training opportunities at the National RC&D Forum in Washington with a goal to send at least 1 member per year.
 - b. Represent Council and take advantage of training opportunities at North Central RC&D Meeting with a goal to send 2 members each year.
2. Provide support to the Ohio Association of RC&D Councils and serve on State Association Marketing Committee by annually selecting 2 representatives and having at least 1 representative attend all Ohio Association meetings throughout the year.
3. Provide representation at State County Commissioner, Tri-State Diversity Conference, Ohio Federation of Soil and Water Districts, and State Township Trustees Conferences on an annual basis.
4. In 2010, select Council representatives to assist in hosting North Central meeting which will be held in Ohio.
5. In 2009, select representatives to attend National RC&D Meeting in Albuquerque, New Mexico and submit success stories for presentations at the National meeting.

Objective - Improve communication and outreach among our members, partners and other RC&D organizations.

Strategy

1. Update NRCS website for Western Reserve RC&D Programs quarterly.
2. Update national RC&D data base with progress semi-annually.
3. Update the mailing list annually to include minority organizations for outreach purposes.
4. Explore the development and upkeep of a new RC&D website in coordination with the existing USDA RC&D Website in late 2008; link members to projects on the website.
5. Executive Council will determine a strategy of the RC&D to reach out to county commissioners educating them about regional conservation problems, a new RC&D dues structure, and potential solutions that have been researched by the RC&D.
6. Assign members to provide RC&D representation to the Northeast Ohio "Fund for our Economic Future" Program (established from the "Voices and Choices" Program) in an effort to partner with that organization to increase outreach opportunities and facilitate sustainable economic expansion in Northeast Ohio. Assign 2 members in 2008 and continue efforts through 2013.
7. Orient new members and commissioners on an annual basis to who and what the RC&Ds are and what they do by providing a council handbook, meeting new commissioner representatives, and providing training for new SWCD Supervisors at NRCS/SWCD meeting opportunities.

Signatures

Signature Requirement	Compliance Statement
Paragraph 1	<p>"The Western Reserve RC&D Council agrees that the RC&D Program will be conducted in compliance with the nondiscrimination provisions as contained in Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as amended, the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987 (Public Law 100–259) and other nondiscrimination statutes; namely, Section 504, of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975 and in accordance with the regulations of the Secretary of Agriculture (7CFR–15, Subparts A and B) that provide that no person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, national origin, age, sex, religion, marital status, or handicap/disability be excluded from participation in, or be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial (or technical) assistance from the U.S. Department of Agriculture or any agency thereof."</p>
Paragraph 2	<p>The Western Reserve RC&D Council agrees that the signing of this document constitutes agreement to comply with Federal laws concerning restrictions on lobbying, a drug-free workplace, and responsibilities for procurement, suspension, and debarment.</p>
Paragraph 3	<p>The Western Reserve RC&D Council has had this application reviewed by the state. Comments made through the state single point of contact have been considered prior to submission of the application and that all applicable procedures have been followed. An environmental impact statement will not be prepared during the development of the area plan, but an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement will be prepared concurrently with the development of each project, when applicable, in accordance with federal procedures.</p>
Signature Block 1	<p>Western Reserve RC&D Council, Painesville, Ohio</p> <p>By: _____ Date: _____ Chairperson</p> <p>Attest: _____ Council Secretary</p>
Signature Block 2	<p>This action authorized at an official meeting of the Western Reserve RC&D Council on <i>April 10, 2008</i>.</p> <p>U.S. Department of Agriculture – Natural Resources Conservation Service</p> <p>The State Conservationist hereby acknowledges the attached Area Plan of _____ as meeting the requirements under Public Law 97–98 to receive assistance from USDA.</p> <p>Acknowledged By: _____ Date: _____ State Conservationist</p>

Partnerships

The Western Reserve RC&D Council has formed numerous partnerships in its efforts to meet the regional needs of Northeast Ohio. These partnerships play a key role in implementing Council's Area Plan. Many partners have been involved in the planning process, funding of grants, and assistance with project implementation.

Partners on the federal state, local and private sector include:

The George Gund Foundation
Countryside Conservancy
The Nord Family Foundation
Kent H. Smith Foundation
Ohio Division of Wildlife
Farm Service Agency, USDA serving 9 counties
Natural Resources Conservation Service, USDA
Soil and Water Conservation Districts serving 9 counties
Board of County Commissioners serving 8 Counties
Summit County Council
U.S. Forest Service
U.S. EPA
Ohio EPA
County Park Districts
Lake County YMCA
Boy Scouts of America
Hallmark Excavating
Aquadoc
Painesville Migrant Education Program, Painesville City Schools
Ohio Division of Soil and Water Conservation
Ohio Division of Forestry
Nature Conservancy
Western Reserve Land Conservancy
Grand River Partners Inc.
Lakeland Community College
The Illuminating Company
Dominion East Ohio
Aquadoc
Trust for Public Land
Cleveland State University
Case Western Reserve University
National Association of RC&D Councils
National Association of Counties
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
U.S. Department of Interior Cuyahoga Valley National Park
County Planning Departments serving 9 counties
USDA Rural Development
Storer Foundation
Holden Family
The Frohring Foundation

The Ohio Environmental Education Fund
Cleveland Museum of Natural History
1525 Foundation
Ohio Division of Natural Areas and Preserves
Chagrin River Watershed Partners
Friends of Arcola Creek
Ohio Farm Bureau
Holden Arboretum
Organization of Hispanic Women of Lake and Ashtabula Counties (HOLA)
Ohio State University Extension
The Ohio Department of Agriculture
The Cyrus Eaton Foundation
The Cleveland Foundation
Ohio Greenways
Alan Januzzi, Auditor
Walthall, Drake, & Wallace
North American Indian Cultural Center
University Circle Inc.
Science Education for New Civic Engagements and Responsibilities (SENCER)
Ohio Lake Erie Commission
Sears-Swetland Foundation
Ohio Association of RC&D Councils
Senator George Voinovich
Senator Sherrod Brown
Congressman Steven LaTourette
Congresswoman Stephanie Tubbs-Jones
Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur
Stormcenter Communications
WKYC TV Cleveland
Congressman Dennis Kucinich
Congressman Tim Ryan
Congressman Ralph Regula
Congresswoman Betty Sutton

Linkages to NRCS Strategic Plan

The *Strategic Plan of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)** outlines the 6 Mission Goals as:

1. High-Quality, Productive Soils
2. Clean and Abundant Water
3. Healthy Plant and Animal Communities
4. Clean Air
5. An Adequate Energy Supply
6. Working Farm and Ranch Lands

The Western Reserve Area Plan directly addresses all 6 of these Mission Goals in various aspects.

The goals and objectives in Council's Area Plan relating to *Land Conservation*-The control of erosion and sedimentation are directly linked to NRCS Mission goals (1, 2).

The *Water Management* element found in the Area Plan includes goals and objectives that are directly linked to NRCS Mission Goal (2)

The *Community Development* element in the Area Plan includes a series of goals and objectives that relate to all 6 NRCS Mission Goals. The educational component that is included in this element will foster all of these Mission Goals. An example would be Council's activities related to developing a website and partnering with a local television station to provide conservation education opportunities that address all 6 Mission Goals.

The *Land Management* element of the Area Plan relates to assisting landowners with conservation and alternative energy program and grant opportunities. These goals and objectives address NRCS Mission Goals (1, 2, 3, 5, and 6).

Three strategies to implement the Mission Goals are identified in the NRCS Strategic Plan. They are:

- Cooperative Conservation: Seeking and promoting cooperative efforts to achieve conservation goals.
- Watershed Approach: Providing information and assistance to encourage and enable locally led watershed scale conservation.
- Market-based Approach: Facilitating the growth of market-based opportunities that encourage the private sector to invest in conservation on private lands.

The Cooperative Conservation strategy is one that is closely tied to the implementation on Council's Area Plan. The use of partnerships to help meet the regional needs of the Western Reserve RC&D can be found throughout the plan and identified in the list of partnerships that Council depends upon to be successful.

The Watershed Approach was a strategy first used when Council formed and continues to be used today. In partnership with watershed groups such as Grand River Partners inc. and the Western Reserve Land Conservancy, conservation on a watershed scale is identified in the Area Plan.

The Market-based approach is likely to be a strategy that will have greater future implications. The rapidly changing agricultural market will experience many opportunities and challenges in the future. The use of sustainable agricultural practices, promoting the expansion and diversification of local agribusiness, and facilitating alternative energy opportunities involve the

Market-based approach. Private sector funding from Foundations has been a strategy used by Council for many years and has been a key component of many of its successful projects.

In summary, the Mission Goals and Strategies as identified in the NRCS Strategic Plan correlate with many of the goals, objectives, and strategies in the Council Area Plan. The partnership of the Western Reserve RC&D Council with NRCS enables a locally led process (development of the Area Plan) to compliment national goals that NRCS has adopted.

** Productive Lands Healthy Environment Natural Resources Conservation Service, United States Department of Agriculture Strategic Plan 2005-2010*

Strategic Planning Report

Council Survey Report