

West Creek Preservation Committee
Lake Erie Protection Fund - Small Grant
Final Report SG-78-98

I. ORIGINAL OBJECTIVES

West Creek is a tributary of the Cuyahoga River that flows through the cities of Parma, Seven Hills, Independence, and Brooklyn Heights, Ohio. The West Creek Preservation Committee formed in 1997 as a volunteer, nonprofit organization of local residents seeking to facilitate the conservation of natural, historical, and recreational resources and development of public greenspace within the West Creek watershed.

The objectives of our proposal consisted of an LEPF small grant of \$7,500 to support public education activities that would promote the concept and future development of the West Creek Preserve & Greenway. These included membership brochure publication, newsletter publications, public meetings, and exhibiting at community events.

II. ACTIVITIES MADE POSSIBLE BY LEPF GRANT

The Lake Erie Protection Fund grant was instrumental in printing a membership brochure for the organization and issues of the West Creek Preservation Committee's newsletter, *Notes from West Creek* (Copies of issues printed with LEPF funds were submitted with interim report). This included the distribution of the newsletter to members of the organization and direct mailings throughout the city of Parma. These quarterly updates of the project were a critical part of keeping the public informed and were instrumental in bringing forth new members, volunteers, and business partners. Over 500 people are now active members of the West Creek Preservation Committee.

An example of the successful outreach was demonstrated in the first annual West Creek Cleanup, which was attended by over 120 people including four city councilmen and the State Representative of the district. The cleanup generated over \$1,500 in donated equipment and services making possible the removal of over 250 bags of trash and 68 shopping carts from a one mile stretch of West Creek in Parma. Since this time we have had three other West Creek Cleanups generating over 200 participants and providing extensive community awareness.

Non-printed educational outreach was also made possible by grant funding allowing our participation in annual Earth Day celebrations at the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo and other exhibits at community events. The West Creek Preservation Committee also presented a monthly speaker series at public meetings which enjoyed good attendance as well as periodic hikes through the West Creek Valley to give a real-life look at the beauty and potential of the project. These hikes were well attended by the public as well as by elected officials in part due to the printed media described above.

In August of 1999 The West Creek Preservation Committee submitted a budget revision request allowing the use of \$3,000 toward the publishing and distribution of a new watershed-wide brochure about the West Creek Preserve and Greenway project. This amount was originally intended to support a series of facilitated meetings to gather public input on the West Creek Greenway Project. However, we were recently successful in raising \$63,000 to partner with the Cuyahoga County Planning Commission to develop a West Creek Watershed Management Plan. The planning process will include public outreach meetings, which will accomplish our original purpose of the LEPF grant with other funds. We are extremely grateful to the Lake Erie Protection Fund to allow us to revise our proposal, allowing us to redirect the LEPF public meeting funding towards continued public education activities and new brochure publication. A draft copy of this brochure is enclosed. Full printing will be complete by June and copies will be forwarded to the Lake Erie Office.

III. EXPERIENCE AND ADVICE

The successful use of funding provided by the Lake Erie Protection Fund can be attributed largely to the commitment and dedication of numerous volunteers who provided their time and professional expertise to carry out the necessary work in order to make the most use of the funding provided. Skilled individuals from the community stepped forward to provide their assistance in writing and designing publications, developing and printing maps and photographs for use in interpretive displays, and drafting conceptual plan booklets. These voluntary efforts all played a key role in maximizing the use of funding.

We have found that an active public education campaign, like that funded by the LEPF grant, is an excellent use of money and time to promote conservation initiatives. As people learned about the project, they wanted to become involved and many contacted their local officials to express support for the project. We found that once public officials heard support for the project from their constituents, they became very approachable and willing to bring it to the forefront.

Other advice would include developing a good rapport with the local media and, probably most importantly, developing a respectful and strong relationship with local elected officials. The West Creek Greenway project has enjoyed endorsements of support from the mayors and city councils of all four communities involved as well as the endorsement of the districts state representative, state senator, and U.S. congressional representative.

IV. SUCCESSES

- Prior to the formation of the West Creek Preservation Committee, the 180-acre area now designated as the West Creek Preserve in Parma, was slated for development as a golf course and associated cluster housing. Education efforts about the West Creek Preserve & Greenway, as an alternative conservation project, were extremely important in the

conservation of this area as a riparian preserve. The designation provided the first major accomplishment on the road toward realization of the project. We found that as people became familiar with the area, it was easy for them to believe in its potential and visualize the overall benefits to the community that would be made possible by the West Creek Preserve & Greenway.

- The idea of a watershed-wide greenway was supported with council resolutions, letters of mayoral support, and funding matches from the communities of Parma, Seven Hills, Brooklyn Heights and Independence. Community leaders support led to a proposal for a West Creek Watershed Management Plan a \$63,000 project which is currently being developed to make recommendations for implementation.
- The Cuyahoga Soil and Water Conservation District has committed \$92,000 toward the purchase of conservation easements to conserve riparian habitat areas and water quality on West Creek.
- In 1999 The West Creek watershed was included within the boundaries of the Ohio & Erie Canal National Heritage Corridor. This federal designation signified the importance of West Creek as a regional resource worthy of protection and linking it to the regional greenway system along the Cuyahoga River.
- In May 2000, our State Senator and State Representative were successful in securing \$112,000 from the State Capital Construction Bill to allow for initial development of visitor use facilities to allow people to use the West Creek Preserve and \$100,000 for additional land purchases of critical stream areas.

It is important to note that this LEPF small grant was the first source of funding the West Creek Preservation Committee received to carry out initial public awareness activities. None of the successes we have attained would be possible were it not for the support and belief in our organization shown by the Lake Erie Commission. Thank you!

V. ADDITIONAL FUNDING

Additional funding leveraged through activities supported by LEPF

<u>Source</u>	<u>Amount</u>
State of Ohio – Capital Construction Bill	\$212,000
Cuyahoga Soil and Water Conservation District	92,000
ODNR-Coastal Management Zone Grant	30,000
George Gund Foundation	20,500
Cleveland Foundation	10,000
Great Lakes Aquatic Habitat Fund	2,500
National Park Service	2,500
Total	\$369,000

VI. Future Plans

There is much work ahead for the eventual development of the West Creek Preserve & Greenway. As public acceptance grows, so do the challenges of implementation. However, public education on the values of conserving greenspace and making it publicly accessible will always remain a key function of the West Creek Preservation Committee.

Future plans of working toward implementation include:

- Hiring of an administrative assistant to handle the numerous logistical aspects of this project
- Developing a Watershed Management Plan with the assistance of the Cuyahoga County Planning Commission, encompassing the full scope of the project throughout all the communities involved and identifying the best possible routes and means to accomplishment. A series of public meetings throughout the four communities will be a key component of this plan.
- Providing technical advice and other assistance to the communities in the West Creek watershed to facilitate project implementation.
- Establishing a trust fund to financially assist communities with acquiring lands and easements for the West Creek Greenway.
- Developing partnerships within the business community to bring broader resources to the project.

Enclosures:

West Creek Preservation Committee membership brochure
Newspaper article (Cleveland Plain Dealer April 7, 2000)