

# NORTHEAST OHIO REGIONAL SEWER DISTRICT | PROJECT CLEAN LAKE



## WHAT IS PROJECT CLEAN LAKE?

- ▶ *A program to enable NEORS D to meet Clean Water Act standards and address water quality issues caused by raw sewage that overflows into the environment during rain events.*

In 1972, the Clean Water Act was created to address water quality issues, like raw sewage discharges.

Although NEORS D has reduced raw sewage discharges significantly over the years and holds permits for discharge points, the EPA considers us in violation of the Clean Water Act because not all discharges have been controlled to required levels.

NEORS D and the federal government will enter into a Consent Decree to address this issue.

## WHAT'S A CONSENT DECREE?

- ▶ *It's a document that spells out what NEORS D will do to reduce raw sewage discharges and when it will complete the work.*

It is a legally binding document entered into by NEORS D, the Department of Justice, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, and the Ohio Attorney General's Office. The document details NEORS D's **Project Clean Lake**.

Project Clean Lake is a \$3 billion, 25-year program that will reduce the total volume of raw sewage discharges from 4.5 billion gallons to 494 million gallons annually. Over 98% of wet weather flows in our combined sewer system will be receiving treatment in 25 years.



## WHAT'S IN THE PLAN?

At the heart of the proposed Consent Decree is the construction of large-scale storage tunnels and treatment plant enhancements.

- ▶ *"Gray" infrastructure—tunnels*

NEORS D will construct seven tunnels, ranging from two to five miles in length, up to 300 feet underground and up to 24 feet in diameter—large enough to park a semi-truck.

The tunnels are similar to the nearly complete Mill Creek Tunnel, a structure with the capacity to store 75 million gallons of combined sewage for treatment at the NEORS D Southerly Wastewater Treatment Plant.

In 2011, NEORS D will begin construction on its second large-scale project, the Euclid Creek Tunnel System.

The five other remaining tunnel projects are: the Dugway Tunnel, Shoreline Tunnel, Southerly Tunnel, Big Creek Tunnel and the Westerly Tunnel.

- ▶ *Treatment plant enhancements*

At the Easterly and Southerly plants, the maximum amount of wastewater that can receive secondary treatment will increase. Additionally, at the Westerly plant, the maximum amount of treatment that can take place at the District's Combined Sewer Overflow Treatment Facility (located adjacent to Westerly) will increase.

Also, the District has been given an opportunity to demonstrate the effectiveness of lower-energy treatment options through pilot demonstration projects. If successful, NEORS D can avoid implementation of costly, energy-intensive treatment technologies.

- ▶ *"Green" infrastructure—SCMs*

Project Clean Lake includes a minimum of \$42 million in green infrastructure projects. This includes stormwater control measures (or SCMs) to store, infiltrate, and evapotranspire stormwater before it even makes its way to the combined sewer system.

Additionally, NEORS D will work with the City of Cleveland to assess the use of vacant lots for green infrastructure projects and leverage economic development opportunities in redevelopment corridors.

*continued* ⇨

This could reduce the long-term cost of the program while enhancing neighborhoods, providing economic development opportunities, and rebuilding our community.

## WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE COMMUNITY? FOR CUSTOMERS?

▶ *It means a cleaner Lake Erie. But, with a \$3 billion price tag, it also means that rates will increase.*

As our main source of revenue, our customers will fund Project Clean Lake. Rate increases will be significant.

Currently, NEORS D is working on a rate study, which will define the rate increases for 2012 through 2016. It is anticipated that rate increases for the first three years will be in the double digits.

However, NEORS D is seeking additional funding and developing rate saving programs to help eligible customers defray the cost.

### ▶ *Economic impact*

A 2010 economic impact study by Cleveland State University (CSU) determined the economic benefit of sewer construction projects on the community.

Based on the information provided by CSU for the District's five-year CIP (2012-16), Project Clean Lake will generate 31,000 jobs in the seven Northeast Ohio counties and will generate \$3 billion in labor income. Plus, it will generate \$443 million in tax revenue.

## WILL NEORS D PAY ANY PENALTIES?

▶ *Yes, but most of our penalty dollars will stay in Northeast Ohio.*

In lieu of a portion of a civil penalty for past discharges, NEORS D will use traditional penalty funds to invest in other environmentally-beneficial programs. The investment will directly benefit projects in Northeast Ohio.



## WHAT'S HAPPENED SO FAR WITH THIS PLAN?

▶ *NEORS D has worked cooperatively and positively with federal and state governments on CSO issues.*

Since 2004, District has negotiated with state and federal environmental regulators to obtain approval of the plan to reduce raw sewage discharges, the last of which was submitted to the state in 2002:

- Easterly District and Southerly District CSO facilities plans were submitted in 2002.
- Westerly District CSO facilities plan was submitted in 1999.
- The Mill Creek facilities plan was submitted in 1996
- Easterly and Southerly Wastewater Treatment Center plant bypass evaluations were submitted in 2008.
- In July 2010, NEORS D and state and federal environmental regulators agreed on the basic elements of an acceptable proposal. Specific issues included the length of time allotted to complete construction projects, the cost of the program and affordability.

Like NEORS D, over 770 other cities around the country—including Akron, Cincinnati, Columbus and Toledo—have negotiated (or continue to negotiate) a long-term plan to address sewer discharges.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

▶ *Federal court*

Project Clean Lake will become final once all parties' signatures are included on the proposed consent decree and it is lodged in federal court.

A 30-day public comment period will then begin. At the end of that period, after it is approved by the federal court, the consent decree will be legally binding. This is anticipated to occur in November 2010.

▶ *Communicating to the public*

The Communications & Community Relations department is tasked with communicating to the public Project Clean Lake and its direct financial repercussions—higher sewer rates for NEORS D customers.

*For more information, contact:*

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