Corps given 15 month deadline for GRR

When President Bush signed the 2004 Energy and Water Appropriations Bill on December 1st he set in motion a course of action that will greatly accelerate the process intended to provide long-term flood damage reduction in the Mill Creek valley.

Congress has given the Secretary of the Army until March 1, 2005 (15 months) to complete the Mill Creek general reevaluation report (GRR) - a flood control study originally authorized in 1998 that appeared to have no end or spending limit in sight earlier this fall. The bill further specifies that completion of the GRR is to be performed at 100 percent federal cost rather than the 25 to 50 percent local cost share recently proposed by the Corps - a stipulation that would have ended the study.

The Corps is now also required to complete a report that provides basin-wide plans for Mill Creek flood damage reduction. Need for this language became apparent this past summer when the Corps revealed preliminary studies supporting flood control options that would protect only limited numbers of structures within the flood plain leaving the remaining structures in our local communities unprotected during flood events. These recently added options also all but eliminated the likelihood that the locally-preferred deep tunnel solution to flooding would be implemented.

Flood damage reduction in the Mill Creek valley was initially authorized in the Flood Control Act of 1970. Initial flood control public works projects began in 1981 but were suspended in 1991 when complications were encountered. In 1998, the Corps was authorized to begin a General Reevaluation Report for the Mill Creek to evaluate flood damage reduction alternatives. This report was to be completed originally in 2000 but continued to grow in length and expense with no hard completion date.

Inclusion of directive language for completion of the Mill Creek GRR study in the 2004 Energy and Water Appropriations Bill would not have been possible without a last minute, concerted effort by local stakeholders, such as the Mill Creek Watershed Council, and our elected officials in Washington. In these days of increasing divisiveness in our communities it is reassuring to know that we can rally together when the need arises. (See page 5 for related story.)

Late-breaking news
Flood Warning System a go!

Word reached the Mill Creek Watershed Council at press time that the long anticipated Creek flood early warning system has been approved by the Army Corps of Engineers headquarters office in Washington D.C. Check the Mill Creek Watershed Council website for details as they become available.
State-funded but locally managed projects are bringing bioengineering and ecological restoration to two Mill Creek tributaries this fall.

In Springdale, the Clean Ohio Fund is making it possible to improve a Beaver Run segment and tributary flowing through the city's Chamberlain Park. In Colerain Township, the fund is naturally enhancing three streamside sites being converted from flood-prone homesteads to natural greenspaces.

The Mill Creek Watershed Council pledged support to both projects, improving the chances of success for grant applications prepared by the Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments (OKI).

Mark Policinski, the new executive director of OKI, sees signs of hope in the stream restoration work, saying, "OKI welcomes these opportunities to work with member local governments, the private sector and the State of Ohio to improve the region's water resources, one site at a time." 

Under the guidance of Dr. Craig Straub, a restoration ecologist with the JF New company, the two projects are designed to implement bioengineering techniques that work with nature rather than against it. Structural solutions often degrade over time, but bioengineering practices usually grow stronger with time as plants take root and natural processes restore equilibrium.

Though they are miles apart in separate Mill Creek sub-watersheds, the projects have common elements:

- stabilizing the streambank to prevent erosion and sedimentation
- planting native shrubs and trees to improve the stream corridor and provide wildlife habitat
- eradicating invasive, non-native plant species to improve biodiversity and habitat.

The Beaver Run project is receiving nearly $209,000 from the Clean Ohio Fund. The City of Springdale is contributing an additional $111,100 in local match or services in kind for a total project value of $320,100.

The West Fork Mill Creek project is proceeding on $43,800 state funding and $37,000 worth of match or services from Colerain Township for a total project value of $80,800.

Most of the Beaver Run work has been contracted to Sunesis Construction Co., which previously built man-made riffles along East Fork Mill Creek. In Colerain Township, the installation work has been shared by township employees, JF New, Hamilton County Soil and Water Conservation District, OKI and an eclectic gang of volunteers.

The end product of both projects should be less erosion, more trees and shrubs, less junk and litter, more wildlife, less unfiltered runoff, and cleaner water.

More information is available by calling:

Craig Straub (JF New) - 513.942.3446
Frank Birkenhauer (Colerain Twp) - 513.385.7500
Beth Stiles (Springdale) - 513.346.5700
Bruce Koehler (OKI) - 513.621.6300

Article provided by Bruce Koehler at OKI
A strategic regional policy plan for the OKI region

About five years ago, the OKI Board of Trustees established a Commission on Land Use and started a process to draft a Strategic Regional Policy Plan for the entire eight county tri-state region. It was determined that the Strategic Regional Policy Plan would be a long-range guide for physical, economic, and social development of the region.

After taking time to decide how to undertake such a tall order, and establishing an ambitious scope of work, the Land Use Commission spent several months gathering and analyzing an extensive amount of data. It has also identified issues that affect the relationship between transportation and land use planning, established a vision for the region future, identified goals and objectives to address critical challenges or fundamental policy concerns, and will prepare policy statements in 2004.

The mission of the Land Use Commission is to bring about better coordination between land use planning and long range transportation planning, or more specifically, to encourage land use patterns that promote multi-modal travel and the efficient use of land, natural resources, and public facilities and services.

OKI’s decision to form this Commission grew out of federal mandates for transportation planning, and from an estimated $3.5 billion shortfall between identified needs and funds available for the region’s transportation system over the next 30 years.

The OKI Land Use Commission outlined a process that will present the big picture of where the region is today, where the region wants to be at some future date and how to get there -- a strategic approach. The Commission laid out a methodical set of steps: creating a vision for stewardship; identifying strategic regional issues; outlining the trends and conditions affecting the region; establishing the goals and objectives; and finally determining reasonable and effective policy statements.

The strategic regional issues strongly emphasize the need for the protection and conservation of ground water and surface water resources on a regional basis. The value of preserving diverse natural systems, which include air, water, wildlife, plant life and land are also recognized. The need for coordination among natural systems planning, land use planning, public facilities planning, and watershed planning are key pieces of the proposed goals and objectives.

At this time, the Land Use Commission is preparing to finalize and accept draft goals and objectives for the strategic regional plan. After policy statements are attached to the goals and objectives, acceptance of a final set of goals, objectives and policies is expected in late 2004.

For more information, contact Janet Keller at OKI by calling (513) 621-6300, or by email at jkeller@oki.org.

In search of:

Your unusual, beautiful or intriguing photographs of the Mill Creek and its immediate surroundings.

Submit your mounted photographs (limit three per entrant) for display & judging at the January 29, 2004 Mill Creek Watershed Council meeting to:

MCWC Photo Contest
One North Commerce Park Drive, Suite 222
Cincinnati, OH 45215

For more information call Nancy Ellwood at 513.563.8800.

Submission deadline: January 15, 2004
The Mill Creek Watershed Council held its second bi-annual Capture the Creek Art Exhibition and Sale, featuring artist Jacob Pfeiffer and original artworks by 36 other local artists, and music by “The Townsmen” on Saturday, October 4th at Cincinnati Museum Center.

This unique fundraising event was a collaborative effort between the Mill Creek Watershed Council and local artists to raise awareness about the Mill Creek. The lucky 135 people who purchased tickets were treated to a festive evening of fine dining, dancing, and exquisite art. Profits from the sale of twenty seven artworks will be used to fund Council activities in 2004.

The event planners want to thank the following people who participated on the various planning committees: Nancy Ellwood, Charleen Vondermeulen, John Vondermeulen, Susan Rorschke, Anne Lyon, Mark Rogge, Rosemary Schmidt, Dave Buesking, Greg Jaspers, Doug Smith, and Peter Thornbury.

It would be impossible to hold an event of this caliber without sponsors and in-kind support. We want to extend our special thanks to partners and event sponsors: Burgess and Niple, Cincinnati Art Club, City of Norwood, Eclectic Gardens, Enjoy the Arts, City of Forest Park, Gaeanet Design, Greenacres, Queen City Artists, Middletown Arts Center, Mill Creek Watershed Council, OKI Regional Council of Governments, PosterSolutions, and the Western Economic Council.

We would also like to thank Peter Thornbury of Cincinnati Conservatory of Music for designing lighting for the art gallery and Jerry Harden of the Riverwatch Group for providing credit card processing services.

Planning for the next Capture the Creek Art Exhibition and Sale in 2005 will begin in June 2004. If you are interested in being a sponsor or participating on one of the event planning committees, please contact Ms. Nancy Ellwood at nellwood@millcreekwatershed.org or call her at 563-8800.

THANKS TO CAPTURE THE CREEK 2003 ARTISTS:
(in alphabetical order)

Section 3

Construction is progressing well on the Mill Creek Section 3 Punch List and Maintenance contract with placement of the articulated concrete block "road" on the right bank and plantings on both banks. The work should be done by March, 2004 to be followed by a one-year plant establishment and maintenance period.

The contract was awarded to Sunesis Construction in February, 2003 in the amount of $2.15 million. The work to the creek bed and banks near Salway Park - Section 3 - was identified in the 1998 Operations and Maintenance (O&M) Agreement between the Corps and Millcreek Valley Conservancy District.

After the restoration, the completed Section 3 channel would be turned over to the local sponsor for operations and maintenance. Section 3 was initially constructed by the Corps from 1982-1984. The new work is for stabilizing the channel slopes using riprap at the toe of the slope and bioengineering features for the rest of the slope. The work also includes construction of a maintenance access road near the toe of the slope along the right bank. This project will revegetate and stabilize approximately 2,500 feet of streambank along both banks near the Salway Park area.

Future construction activities include completing the plantings on the flood plain bench on the right side; completion of the articulated concrete block access road; installation of ponds and riffles in the stream to improve water quality and fish habitat; replacing the fence; and completing the seeding and tree planting. This work is weather permitting. The Corps will work with other agencies to restore the Butterfly Garden.

General Reevaluation Report (GRR)

An Issue Resolution Conference (IRC) is scheduled for Dec. 16, 2003 in Cincinnati to discuss the GRR. Headquarters representatives from Washington D.C. will attend the meeting. The purposes of the IRC include:

- summarizing the results of the screening level evaluation of a wide array of alternatives,
- discussing various Corps policy issues regarding the outcome of the screening analyses including which plans will be carried forward for detailed analyses,
- discussing the implications of the directions contained in the FY04 Congressional Conference Report,
- receiving the views and input of the Sponsor, other stakeholders, and state and Federal resource agencies, and
- clarifying the study team's goals and guidance to complete the study.

For more info on Mill Creek go to http://www.lrl.usace.army.mil/Mill%20Creek/.

Article submitted by the US Army Corps of Engineers Louisville District Office.

Work on Section 3 continues where layers of filter fabric are installed on the banks. USACE Photo
Mill Creek Watershed Council

To:

For more information, contact:

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Newsletter also available in color at:
www.millcreekwatershed.org

2004 Meetings:

Mill Creek Watershed Council meetings will take place on a quarterly basis in 2004. We have also changed to meet at 10:00 am on the last Thursday of the first month in each quarter. Next year's schedule:

Thursday, January 29, 2004, Colerain Township (4200 Springdale Road)
Thursday, April 29, 2004, City of Sharonville (10900 Reading Road)
Thursday, July 29, 2004, City of Springdale (11700 Springfield Pike)
Thursday, October 28, 2004, City of Wyoming (800 Oak Avenue)

Annual elections and discussion of the 2004 work plan and budget will take place at the January meeting. All Council meetings are open to the public.

Council Mission:
To promote the improvement of the Mill Creek watershed to create integrated environmental, aesthetic, recreational, and economic benefits for present and future generations.