

**Conservation Issues**  
**By Jim Hunt**

Gorge Dam removal on Cuyahoga River between Akron and Cuyahoga Falls is moving forward with federal blessing  
By Bob Downing, Beacon Journal staff writer



The Gorge Dam on the Cuyahoga River between Akron and Cuyahoga Falls could be coming down in 2019.

That surprising news came from Bill Zawiski of the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, who announced Tuesday that the federal government has agreed to provide 65 percent of the \$70 million cost to remove the 57-foot-high dam and deal with sediments behind it.

The project, including sediment removal, will be funded by \$45.5 million in federal Great Lakes cleanup funds, he said at a meeting of the Summit Metro Parks commissioners.

The federal EPA recently gave its blessing to proceed at a meeting of parties involved in cleaning up 43 contaminated spots on the Great Lakes. The Cuyahoga River from Akron to Cleveland is on that national priority list.

The balance of \$24.5 million will be paid by the Ohio EPA and local partners and those contributions can include in-kind services, such as land donations or engineering work, he said.

Zawiski said the long-discussed proposal to remove the dam inside the Gorge Metro Park is suddenly "a viable plan" for the first time and the plan is starting to move forward.

Removing the dam, plus another in Cuyahoga Valley National Park, would create 60 miles of a free-flowing and healthier Cuyahoga River from Lake Erie to the Lake Rockwell dam north of Kent in Portage County.

The dam removal would be a "tremendous improvement ecologically," he said.

The news that the dam might be coming down delighted Gary Whidden of Cuyahoga Falls.

"I'm really excited by that happening," he said. "It's wonderful and I love it. People have been working on taking the dam down for a long, long time. ... All of Northeast Ohio will benefit from such a project."

"That is really wonderful that the dam coming down is moving forward," said Elaine Marsh of Bath Township, a spokeswoman for the Friends of the Crooked River, a grass-roots group devoted to the Cuyahoga River.

She admitted that after years of discussion, it is strange to realize that the dam's days may be numbered.

"In the beginning, we weren't sure it would ever happen. It's almost surreal, but we are serenely happy. ... I am just delighted," she said.

Removing the dam in 2019 would also be a way for the Ohio and U.S. EPAs to mark the 50th anniversary of the 1969 Cuyahoga River fire in Cleveland that triggered the modern environmental movement and led to the passage of the federal Clean Water Act, Zawiski said.

Zawiski took Akron Mayor Dan Horrigan to the site on Tuesday morning. Additional meetings with local stakeholders are being arranged. A meeting will be held in April when federal EPA officials from Chicago come to Northeast Ohio, he said.

Zawiski said he hopes that engineering plans to deal with slightly contaminated sediments behind the dam might be completed this year.

The sediments — 830,000 cubic yards, enough to fill the old Akron Rubber Bowl from floor to top four times — must be removed before the dam can come down.

Demolishing the dam would likely cost about \$12.5 million, with an additional \$57.5 million for sediment removal, according to estimates.

State and local partners would likely have to pay for the dam removal and site restoration.

Under the preliminary plan, a hydraulic dredge would likely be used to suck up the contaminated sediments behind the dam. They would then be piped  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles downstream to near the Chuckery Area of Cascade Valley Metro Park off Cuyahoga Street in North Akron.

Sediments would be placed in giant, sock-like tubes and the water would drain off. The liquids would have to be collected and treated because of low-level contamination.

The plan calls for using 11 to 13 acres that are next to the park and owned by the city of Akron. It is a long-closed landfill.

The sediments would cover 38 football fields to a height of 10 feet.

The federal EPA spent about \$1 million to determine the sediment volume and the contamination level.

That preliminary plan was unveiled last September by Zawiski at a public meeting in Cuyahoga Falls.

It is unclear if the 429-foot-wide dam is owned by Akron-based FirstEnergy Corp. or Summit Metro Parks.

The dam was built in 1911-1912 by the Northern Ohio Traction & Light Co.

It generated electricity for its Akron trolley cars from a hydro facility near the dam. The hydro facilities were discontinued in 1958, largely because of the inadequate and unpredictable flows on the river.

Dams in Kent, Munroe Falls and two in Cuyahoga Falls have already been removed or modified in recent years to improve Cuyahoga River water quality.

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