GREAT LAKES AND ST. LAWRENCE CITIES INITIATIVE
2026 U.S. Water Leaders Summit – Cleveland, OH

Thursday, November 12 | 8:30 AM – 4:15 PM EST
Huntington Convention Center | 1 St. Clair Ave NE

PROGRAM

*All sessions and activities will take place in **Rooms 205 A and B** on the second floor of the convention center.*

EMCEES

***Mayor Sam Cunningham** – City of Waukegan, Illinois*
***Mayor Ken Johnson** – City of Muskegon, Michigan*

8:30am	**Networking Breakfast** *Presented by **Merchant McIntyre Associates***
9:30am	**Welcome Session** *Presented by: **Fred and Barbara Erb Family Foundation** and **ONE, Inc.*** **Room 205 A** **Speakers:** • **Jon Altenberg**, President and CEO, Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative • **Dr. Paul Edward Montgomery Ramirez**, Committee of 500 Years of Dignity and Resistance • **Executive Chris Ronayne**, Cuyahoga County, OH • **Sonia Joshi**, Great Lakes Program Officer, Fred and Barbara Erb Family Foundation • **Mike Harris**, Executive Director, ONE Canada
10:15am	Plenary #1 – ***The Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Story: Advancing the Fresh Coast Economic Corridor through Local Leadership*** *Presented by **Geosyntec Consultants*** **Room 205 A** **Sponsor Remarks:** • **Chris Robb**, Senior Vice President of Operations, North America West Region, Geosyntec Consultants

	Speakers: • **Executive Chris Ronayne**, Cuyahoga County, OH • **Jennifer Scheel**, Executive Attraction Officer, City of Cleveland, OH **Moderator:** • **Kierra Cotton**, Marketing and Communications Manager, Port of Cleveland *Cleveland's Site Readiness for Good Jobs Fund, a more than $80 million initiative, is preparing high-potential industrial and commercial sites for employers that prioritize sustainability, advanced manufacturing, and equitable job creation. At the same time, Cuyahoga County is leveraging a significant regional Climate Pollution Reduction Grant award to accelerate greenhouse-gas reductions, expand clean energy adoption, and support climate-resilient economic development. Together, both governments are transforming public access and economic opportunity along the Cuyahoga River and Lake Erie. This session will empower cites with actionable strategies for deploying area-wide planning frameworks and innovative funding strategies to drive long-term job creation and waterfront revitalization throughout the Fresh Coast Economic Corridor.*
11:00am	**Networking Break** *Presented by **Reyes Coca-Cola Bottling***
11:15am	Breakout #1 – ***Towards a More Prosperous Regional Economy: Promoting Economic Integration and Resilience Amid U.S.-Canada Trade Uncertainty*** *Presented by **Stantec*** **Room 205 B** **Sponsor Remarks:** • **David Goldwater**, Senior Vice President, Public Policy, Stantec **Speakers:** • **Mayor Ken Johnson**, City of Muskegon, MI • **Mayor Mat Siscoe**, City of St. Catharines, ON • **Grantly Franklin**, Consul and Program Manager, Political-Economic Section, Consulate General of Canada in Detroit • **Larry Fletcher**, Director of Strategic Alignment, Greater Sandusky Partnership/Shores & Islands Ohio

Moderator:

- **Steph Nick**, Special Projects Coordinator – Economic Development, Department of Planning & Development, Chautauqua County, NY

The U.S.-Canada trade relationship has been experiencing significant headwinds in recent years, with the ongoing trade war causing devastating economic impacts across our region. Recently, the United States opted not to extend the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement and threatened additional tariffs on Canadian goods, exacerbating trade uncertainty amid mounting job losses and cost increases. This session will assess the economic impact of the trade war in both Canada and the United States, explore the status of ongoing bilateral negotiations, and identify opportunities for cross-border coalitions to promote continued economic integration and resilience.

Breakout #2 – ***Make No Little Plans: Setting the Vision and Securing the Funding to Advance Coastal Resilience and Water Access Projects***
Presented by ***OPTERRA***
Room 205 A

Sponsor Remarks:

- **John Paul Jewell**, Eastern Regional Director, OPTERRA

Speakers:

- **Kelly Coffman**, Principal Planner, Cleveland Metroparks
- **Linda Sternheimer**, Senior Vice President of Urban Planning & Engagement, Port of Cleveland
- **SeMia Bray**, Executive Director, Black Environmental Leaders
- **Randy Lane**, Freight & Maritime Manager, Ohio Department of Transportation
- **Steve Holland**, Coastal Programs Administrator, Office of Coastal Management, Ohio Department of Natural Resources
- **Calley Mersmann**, Director, City Planning, City of Cleveland, OH

The Cleveland Harbor Eastern Embayment Resilience Strategy, or CHEERS, is a large-scale plan that will secure additional parkland and habitat along Cleveland's Lake Erie shoreline. A partnership between Cleveland Metroparks, Port of Cleveland, Black Environmental Leaders, City of Cleveland, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, and the Ohio Department of Transportation, CHEERS illustrates the importance of

	investing in coastal resilience measures in urban areas to provide the greatest impact for the surrounding community. This session will provide updates to the project pending construction and highlight the community benefits paired with beneficial use of dredge material, habitat creation, infrastructure protection, and shoreline stabilization via multiple funding sources.
12:15pm	**Networking Lunch** *Presented by **McCaulley&Company*** **Room 205 A**
12:50pm	**Lunch Address** **Sponsor Remarks:** • **Justin McCaulley**, President, McCaulley&Company
1:00pm	Plenary #2 – ***Innovation and Partnerships in Northeast Ohio: Building Clean Water Infrastructure for the Future*** *Presented by **Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District*** **Room 205 A** **Speakers:** • **Mayor Matthew J. Castelli**, City of Middleburg Heights, OH • **John Gonzalez**, Senior Manager of Communications, Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District • **Kim Colich, PE**, Stormwater Program Manager, Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District **Moderator:** • **Nichole Oocumma, PhD**, Chief Administrative Officer, Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District *Climate change, aging infrastructure, and rising costs are reshaping the challenges facing Northeast Ohio. Join us for a community-centered fireside chat exploring how meaningful local collaboration and engagement are advancing stormwater and wastewater infrastructure in the region. Discover how science-driven innovation and strong partnerships are turning today's challenges into opportunities for cleaner water, healthier communities, and a more resilient future.*
1:45pm	**Coffee Break** *Presented by **Black & Veatch***

2:00pm	Breakout #3 – ***The Coming Container Revolution: Expanding Maritime Commerce on the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Seaway*** *Presented by the* ***Ohio Marine Trades Association*** **Room 205 B** **Sponsor Remarks:** • **Michelle Burke**, President, Ohio Marine Trades Association **Speakers:** • **Jeff Epstein**, President and CEO, Port of Cleveland • **Capt. Paul C. LaMarre III**, Port Director, Port of Monroe / President, American Great Lakes Ports Association • **Brian Oszakiewski**, Executive Director, American Great Lakes Ports Association **Moderator:** • **Jon Altenberg**, President and CEO, Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative *The Cities Initiative's Economic Transformation Action Plan calls for increasing maritime commerce on the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Seaway by 30 percent over the next decade. Expanding the network of U.S. ports with container capacity will be central to this effort. The Port of Cleveland has been a pioneer in containerization since 2014 — and new container terminals are coming online throughout the region. This session will provide a tour d'horizon of the past, present, and future of containerization on the Great Lakes and examine related opportunities for port- and municipally-driven economic growth.*
Room 205 A	Breakout #4 – ***The Local Impact of Great Lakes Restoration Investments: Restoring Our Great Lakes, Revitalizing Cities*** *Presented by the* ***Great Lakes Commission*** **Speakers:** • **Josh Miller**, Director of Programs, Great Lakes Commission • **Jill Estrada**, Project Manager, Great Lakes Commission • **Kathyrn Golden**, Deputy Director Engineering Department, City of Lorain, OH • **Tim Bruno,** Great Lakes Program Coordinator, Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection

	Moderator: • **T. Kevin O'Donnell**, U.S. Programs Director, Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative *For local elected officials, environmental restoration can be a powerful economic engine. The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) has proven to be a catalyst for community revitalization in many cities across the basin. A 2018 Great Lakes Commission-led study found that every dollar of federal spending on GLRI projects between 2010 and 2016 will produce $3.35 in additional economic activity in the Great Lakes region through 2036. During this session, the Great Lakes Commission will detail how the GLRI continues to address the most pressing environmental Great Lakes issues and how an updated GLRI Economic Impact Study is re-examining local impacts to economic activity, including tourism, redevelopment, employment, public access, and community wellbeing. The session will also feature municipal and state leaders who will share their experience with the impacts of GLRI investments and will wrap up with a discussion among attendees about ways to leverage these investments for community benefit.*
3:00pm	**Coffee Break** *Presented by **Google***
3:15pm	Plenary #3 – ***Local Growth, Regional Impact: Leveraging the Blue Economy to Improve Water Quality*** *Presented by **AquaAction*** **Room 205 A** **Sponsor Remarks:** • **Delaney Keating**, Director of Programs and Operations, United States, AquaAction **Speakers:** • **Bryan Stubbs**, President and CEO, Cleveland Water Alliance • **Alaina Harkness**, Chief Executive Officer, Current / CEO and Principal Investigator, Great Lakes RENEW • **Delaney Keating**, Director of Programs and Operations, United States, AquaAction **Moderator:** • **Emily Bacha**, Director, Cuyahoga County Fresh Water Institute

	Fresh water is one of our region's greatest economic assets, creating opportunities for business attraction, job growth, and innovation. Yet many communities continue to grapple with the legacy of past industrial pollution threatening water quality and community health. As we work to build the Fresh Coast Economic Corridor, we have a responsibility to attract companies that are doing more than just minimizing impact. This session will assess opportunities to leverage the growing blue economy to improve water quality and solve some of the region's most pressing freshwater challenges.
4:00pm	**Closing Remarks** *Presented by* ***Stantec*** *and* ***Community Infrastructure Partners*** **Room 205 A** **Speakers:** • **David Goldwater**, Senior Vice President, Public Policy, Stantec • **Shawn Kerachsky**, President and CEO, Community Infrastructure Partners • **Travis Wheeler**, U.S. Managing Director, Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative