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GCL 126

17 October 2017

Sustainability Concerns in Cleveland

Growing up in a suburb near Cleveland I have noticed and heard numerous complaints regarding sustainability issues that affect the regional scale. The overriding concern in my opinion has to be the pollution into the Cuyahoga River and Lake Erie. During the 1960s, Lake Erie became irreversibly polluted from industry and manufacturing along many cities, but the biggest contributor was Cleveland, Ohio. Due to constant dumping of chemicals, pollutants, and sewage into waterways, Lake Erie soon became brown and filled with algal, creating an unsuitable environment for many fish. The press soon declared Lake Erie as "dead" due to the algae covering beaches and killing fish because of the oxygen they required.


Above is a picture of the Cuyahoga River emptying into Lake Erie as well as a warning sign at a beach on the shore of Cleveland. In 1969, the Cuyahoga River caught fire and received a great deal of unwanted press. Times Magazine stated that the river "oozes rather than flows"

and “it bubbled like a cauldron from all the chemicals.” This moment was pivotal for environmental change for Cleveland, sparking many new initiatives in the following years.

Three years later, Congress increased regulations on dumping by enacting the Clean Water Act. Furthermore, the United States and Canada signed the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. While water pollution has gotten significantly better since the 1960s, we must still be diligent and proactive for the future. Many of the issues from our past are actually still present today. For example, the algal bloom that plagued Lake Erie in the 1960s from agricultural runoff still exists today as seen from satellite photos. The Ohio Environmental Protection Agency is at the forefront of improving the lake’s water quality on a regional scale through the Lake Erie Phosphorus Task Force.

While we are currently doing many great things to combat pollution in local rivers and Lake Erie, I believe that there is more to be done. First of all, pesticides and fertilizers from agriculture negatively affect nearby water, especially Lake Erie, which causes acid rain and many other issues. Using non-phosphorous fertilizers is a great way of combating this issue. Furthermore, stormwater runoff is a serious issue in Cleveland which could be solved with more green infrastructure and increased attention to runoff concerns during development.

Most importantly, communication between cities about environmental policies and coordinated efforts to improve water quality are crucial to really make a difference.

## Works Cited

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