

2025 YEAR IN REVIEW

The Fresh Water Institute aims to catalyze our region's culture of freshwater stewardship to establish Cuyahoga County as a global freshwater leader. We're dedicated to convening and collaborating with our region's water leaders to increase educational programming, grow our sustainable water economy, expand access to our waterfronts, and advocate for our freshwater resources.



40 FOUNDING MEMBERS

Fresh Water Institute Founding Members have committed to working collaboratively to advance our freshwater culture. We're grateful to partner with many more organizations across the region!



215 COUNTIES ACROSS 8 GREAT LAKES STATES

In partnership with the National Association of Counties, Cuyahoga County launched the Great Lakes Regional Forum connecting county leaders from 215 counties across all 8 Great Lakes states. As Chair of the Forum, County Executive Ronayne is working with leaders at all levels of government to improve freshwater quality and access, sustain critical infrastructure, and bolster economic and destination development throughout the Great Lakes.



10,000+ INDIVIDUALS ENGAGED

From community events to deep dive conversations, the Fresh Water Institute engaged more than 10,000 individuals in educational programming this year. We appreciated the opportunity to partner with many organizations on these efforts, and we're excited to make a splash with water-related events in 2026!





28 HIGH SCHOOL FELLOWS IMMERSED IN GREAT LAKES EDUCATION

The Fresh Water Institute Fellowship Program is a paid, interdisciplinary, out-of-school learning experience designed to empower Cuyahoga County high school students with the knowledge and skills to support healthy and thriving waterways. Cuyahoga County partnered with Teaching Cleveland and Syatt to develop and implement the Fellowship Program. Our inaugural cohort of 28 students from 17 different area high schools completed the first year of the program in summer 2025 and demonstrated an increase in their understanding of the Great Lakes and an interest in working in water. While our initial cohort gears up for their capstone experience, a new cohort of high school students will onboard in January 2026.



"This knowledge and understanding of other people, combined with the sense of ownership that this program has made me feel about our Great Lakes, really makes me feel that my voice matters and I can speak up in whatever field I go into."
2025 Fresh Water Institute Fellow

3 INTERNS DIVE DEEP INTO WORK AND TRAINING EXPERIENCES

The Fresh Water Institute leverages partnerships across sectors to grow our region's water economy, with a specific focus on job training and internships. We have partnered with the Student Conservation Association to create young adult internship opportunities and connect them with program partners. In 2025, 3 young adults participated in internships with the Fresh Water Institute, Great Lakes Science Center, and Nature Center at Shaker Lakes. In addition to a 12-week, paid internship experience, interns took advantage of training opportunities to earn certificates and build real-world skills. We're looking forward to growing this program in 2026 with additional partners!

"This summer has been instrumental in affirming that my passion for the environment is well-suited for a career that blends science with community engagement. It has taught me that the most impactful environmental work happens at the intersection of ecological knowledge and human connection, and I feel more prepared than ever to contribute to the field." - 2025 Fresh Water Institute Intern



1,425 FOURTH GRADE STUDENTS IN THE POOL

Water safety is foundational to building our freshwater culture. That's why Cuyahoga County contracted with AquaMissions to expand their Water Safety Instruction Program in partnership with Cleveland State University starting in early 2025. To date, the program has reached 1,425 Cleveland Metropolitan and Warrensville Heights School District students – providing swim gear, transportation, and introductory water experiences during the school day at no cost to schools or families.



For more information visit: cuyahogacounty.gov/freshwater



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