DISTRICT 19
NATURAL RESOURCE ASSISTANCE COUNCIL
OF STARK COUNTY
February 17, 2026

Members Present
Joe Leslie, West Creek Conservancy
Mark Cozy, Canal Fulton
Dan Moeglin, Stark Parks
Brenda Griffith, Osnaburg Township
Michael Rekstis, ODNR
Bob Sanderson, District 19

Others
Sarah Buell, Stark Parks
Jeff Brown, OPWC

RPC Staff
Bob Nau, Executive Director
Dan Slicker, SCATS Technical Director
Athena Aslanes, Transportation Planner
Jennifer Bayer, Executive Assistant

1. Opening Remarks

Moeglin called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m.

2. Consideration of Minutes of September 11, 2025

Cozy moved and Griffith seconded to approve the September 11, 2025 minutes. A vote was taken and the motion carried with the adjustment of removing a duplicate name in attendance. Sanderson abstained from voting.

3. Approve Work Plan and Budget for Fiscal Year 27 (Round 21)

Slicker stated the work plan outlines what the staff is required to do over the next fiscal year. It is unchanged from last year other than the dates. The budget proposal broke down the administrative costs and totaled $15,000. Sanderson moved and Leslie seconded to approve the Work Plan and Budget. A vote was taken and the motion carried.

4. Approve Project Selection Methodology for Fiscal Year 27 (Round 21)

Slicker stated the methodology was amended last April and asked for any comments or changes. The group generally agreed that the current methodology worked well in the previous round and saw no immediate need for changes. Leslie shared that NRAC 8 recently made significant changes to its methodology, adopting an approach nearly identical to NRAC 7's, which is more nature-as-a-resource-based and highly specific. While this revised method has been working well, it would require a major effort to implement similar changes here. Therefore, the suggestion was to consider reviewing NRAC 8's approach for next year, but not to make any changes for the current cycle. Cozy moved and Sanderson seconded to approve the Project Selection Methodology for Fiscal Year 27. A vote was taken and the motion carried.

5. Approve Schedule for Fiscal Year 27 (Round 21)

Slicker reviewed the proposed schedule for the year, which closely follows last year's timeline. Applicants are required to have 90 days to complete applications and will receive three and a half months. Most dates were adjusted to align with the same days of the week as last year. The estimated budget figures were also shared.

A key discussion point was whether a quorum is necessary for the August 27 project presentations. These presentations are informational only, with no scoring or decisions made at that time. Some members felt quorum may not be critical since no official action occurs, while others noted that if multiple projects are being presented, especially in a competitive process, it would be beneficial to have broader attendance to allow for diverse perspectives and community questions.

Another issue raised was setting a clear deadline for submitting project scores. Previously, some members brought scores to the September 10 meeting, but staff indicated it would be helpful to receive them earlier to allow time for averaging and summarizing. The group agreed to set September 8 as the deadline for score submission to provide adequate preparation time before the meeting.

Leslie moved and Cozy seconded to approve the Program Schedule with the addition of September 8 as a due date for scores. A vote was taken and the motion carried.

6. Budget Amendment Request – Fry Family Park

Sarah Buell from Stark Parks presented updates and requests related to the Fry Family Park grant project. The park received a $600,000 grant (2022–2023) for trail upgrades, prairie restoration, and reforestation. Trail improvements and prairie planting were completed successfully, including ADA-focused accessibility upgrades. Reforestation exceeded expectations due to natural tree succession, reducing the need for additional planting. About $205,000 remains from funds from the original grant. Stark Parks requested approval to repurpose these funds to pave the gravel parking lot so the trail system can be fully ADA accessible from parking to destination. This would be a scope amendment (not a budget increase) and would not negatively affect reforestation goals.

Stark Parks also sought approval to allow a future mountain biking trail at Fry Family Park. Demand for mountain biking in the area is high, and current options are limited (mainly at Quail Hollow Park). No specific trail location or length has been finalized yet. The project would be developed carefully to minimize environmental impacts, potentially with help from a regional biking association.

The committee discussed both requests and moved toward approving the scope change to use remaining grant funds for ADA parking lot paving and allowing development of a mountain biking trail at the park, with no additional funding required. Griffith moved and Cozy seconded and the motion was carried. Moeglin abstained. Brown noted that the deed restrictions on the property should be updated to show that mountain biking is allowable for that purpose to be on the property.

7. Budget Amendment Request – Pike Ridge Park

The committee discussed a budget amendment request for Pike Ridge Park related to a conservation easement grant on a 300+ acre parcel. The amendment was necessary because an updated appraisal, required after the original appraisal became outdated, raised the property's value from $735,000 to $765,000 and reflected a larger surveyed acreage than previously recorded. As a result, the conservation easement value increased, creating a request for an additional $17,566 in grant funds. Members noted this situation was somewhat unusual but acceptable since carryover funds were available from a previous funding round and the easement process was still underway with the City of Canton. The discussion also touched on existing and potential equestrian use at Pike Ridge Park, with members generally agreeing horseback riding aligns with program goals. Cozy moved and Sanderson seconded. A vote was taken and the motion carried approving both the budget amendment and continued equestrian activities on the property. Moeglin abstained.

8. Other Business

Buell presented a request to allow equestrian use at WalBorn Reservoir – Bingham Park, a Clean Ohio–acquired property that had historically been farmed and is now being planned for expanded public access. As Stark Parks develops a new parking area suitable for trail access, staff reported strong community interest in horseback riding, noting that nearby sections of the reservoir owned by the City of Alliance already permit equestrian activity. Members agreed that while such uses must align with deed restrictions, park managers would retain discretion to discontinue the activity if it proved unworkable. The discussion also emphasized that approvals for activities like horseback riding or mountain biking are handled case by case, even if prior decisions help set general precedent. The group then moved toward approving equestrian use at the site. Leslie moved and Cozy seconded. A vote was taken and the motion carried to approve equestrian activities at Walborn Reservoir – Bingham Park. Moeglin abstained.

Jeff Brown provided a brief update introducing himself and his role with the Ohio Public Works Commission, explaining that he conducts compliance monitoring for Clean Ohio projects across all districts. His responsibilities include reviewing deed restrictions on both current and past funded properties, identifying violations, and working with property owners to resolve issues before any legal action is needed. Jeff emphasized that his visits to district meetings are part of an effort to build relationships, ensure compliance, and support protection of conservation properties statewide.

With no further business to discuss, the meeting adjourned at 1:41 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Jennifer Bayer, Executive Assistant