

KRISTEN ATHA
Director



June 26, 2026

Paul Johnston, PE
Project Engineer
The Mannik & Smith Group, Inc.
1160 Dublin Road, Suite 100
Columbus, OH 45215

RE: Stormwater Drainage Manual (SWDM) Type III Variance Request – Cleveland Cliffs Nitrogen Plant, 1800 Watkins Road

Mr. Johnston:

This letter is in response to the subject variance request to the SWDM Sections 1.3.2 *Permanent Protection of the Stream Corridor* and 1.3.3 *Prohibited Uses in the Stream Corridor Protection Zone*. More specifically, SWDM Section 1.3.2 provides for permanent protection of the Stream Corridor Protection Zone (SCPZ), and Section 1.3.3 lists specific activities and facilities prohibited within the SCPZ, which include buildings/structures, removal of native trees, filling, excavation, and other changes in topography within the SCPZ. A variance is requested to allow construction of the following infrastructure improvements at the Cleveland Cliffs plant: 15,000 sf concrete equipment pad, 30 ft. wide access drive, and associated stormwater management facility – a detention basin.

The variance application was submitted to the City on May 4, 2026. As part of the Variance review process, the subject Variance request was posted on the City website on May 18, 2026 to solicit public comments. No public comments were received in response to the posting. The Variance Review Committee has met and reviewed the subject Variance application on June 24, 2026.

The submitted variance application was found by the Variance Review Committee to be in compliance with the SWDM Stream Protection Type III Variance application requirements.

Three alternatives were considered within the application for the requested Section 1.3 variance – Full Compliance (No Impact), Minimal Impact and the Preferred Alternative.

- Full Compliance Alternative – This alternative would relocate the proposed improvements to the southern portion of the site, avoiding SCPZ impacts. This alternative was found to require additional permitting from the ACOE/OEPA due to increased impact to the on-site wetlands which are not part of the SCPZ. Significant additional grading, stormwater conveyance and electrical infrastructure work would also be required resulting in a major financial and functional impact to the project, thus making it unfeasible.



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- Minimal Impact Alternative – This alternative would shift the proposed improvements to the northeast of the site, allowing for a more efficient layout while minimizing the extent of the required stormwater management infrastructure. While this alternative results in increased project costs vs. the Preferred Alternative, the project owner has decided to pursue this alternative and moved forward with environmental permitting and plan preparation based on this alternative.
- Preferred Alternative – This alternative would provide the required functional improvements in the most economically advantageous way, but would result in more impact to on-site wetlands and the SCPZ vs. the Minimal Impact Alternative. Due to the significantly expanded environmental permitting efforts associated with this alternative impacting > 0.5 acres of the on-site wetlands and extended timeframe for such permitting process, the project owner decided not to pursue this alternative.

As mitigation for the proposed permanent impact to 0.42 acres of the SCPZ, the project proposes to dedicate an additional area of 1.174 acres to the proposed SCPZ/conservation easement, which will cover the remaining SCPZ in addition to this area. The total conservation easement area is proposed to be 2.514 acres. Of the 0.42 acres of the proposed SCPZ impact, 0.07 acres are known to contain trees of dbh of 3 inches or larger. 91 new trees will be planted to mitigate the impact of the trees proposed to be removed.

Upon reviewing and discussing the application submitted by the applicant, the Variance Review Committee agreed with the applicant that the Minimal Impact Alternative with the proposed SCPZ impact mitigation plan represents the applicant's good faith effort to comply with the SWDM stream protection requirements to the maximum practical extent. The Committee further agreed with the applicant's argument that the Full Compliance Alternative would result in functional limitations and increased financial impact making this alternative unfeasible.

In light of the above, the subject Variance Request (Type III SWDM Section 1.3), the Minimal Impact Alternative is conditionally approved contingent upon the following stipulations:

- Storm CC-Plan and Stormwater Management Report must be submitted and approved by the City of Columbus. The plans shall include an SCPZ impact mitigation plan as conceptually described above and in the variance application dated May 4, 2026, which must be approved and deemed acceptable by the City.
- The proposed mitigation areas and the remaining SCPZ must be covered by a conservation easement granted to the City.

No approval contained herein relieves or absolves the applicant of any provisions of applicable state or federal laws. Please contact PR/SRM Section Manager Greg Fedner, P.E. at 614-645-8072 with any questions.



KRISTEN ATHA
Director



Sincerely,

Signed by:
Robert Priestas by Paul W. Wilson
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Robert S. Priestas, P.E., Administrator
Division of Water Reclamation

pc: Variance Review Committee
File

