



## Fifteenth Annual Groundhog Hike

Yes, we have already had fourteen Groundhog Hikes in years past and we're ready for the fifteenth. As usual, it will be the first Sunday in February, which this year will be February 4. This is Super Bowl Sunday, but if you hike you'll be home in plenty of time for the Super Bowl. Now, you know you don't get out and exercise enough in the winter, right? Well, here you go, you can come and hike with pleasurable company. The starting window will be from 11 am to noon. There will be a guided hike at 11:30, and a kid-friendly hike at noon. This is a free event, and refreshments will be provided.

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## Bikeway Benches!

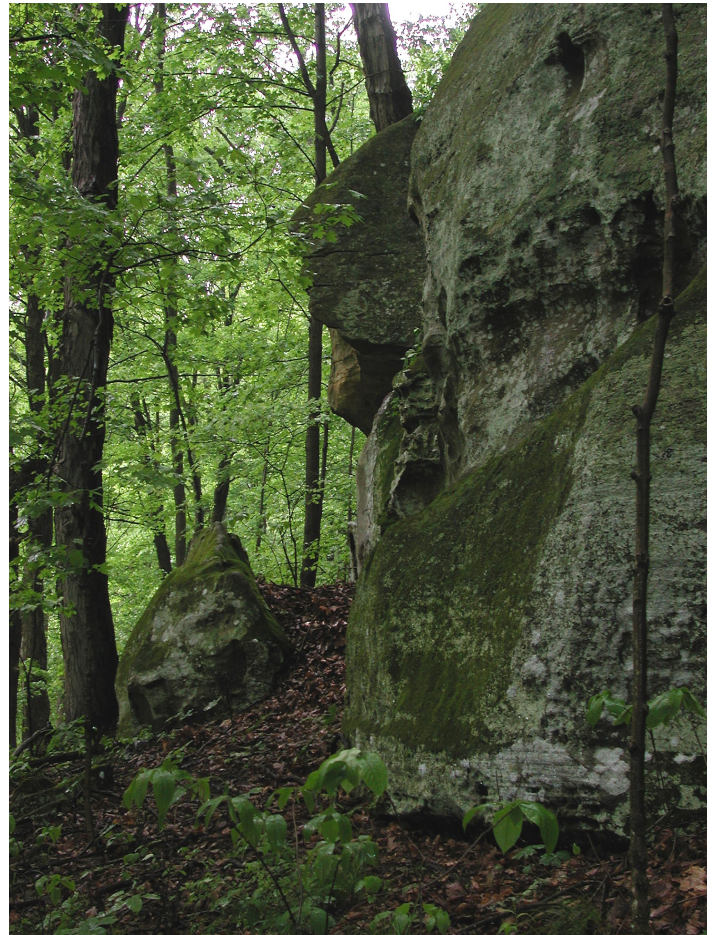


Cyclists and walkers on the Hockhocking Adena Bikeway can now enjoy two new benches facing the Bluebell Preserve, sponsored by NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness. We are grateful to Greg Polzer for initiating and implementing the project.

*Photo by Phil Cantino.*

**Did you know that every \$25 in donations can buy about 500 square feet of preserve land? And if it's used as match for a grant for acquisition, it helps preserve about 2,000 square feet of land.**

## Preserve of the Month Baker Preserve



The Baker Preserve is unusual among our preserves in being a conservation easement, not a fee-simple purchase. We acquired the easement in 2008. We had hoped to purchase the property, but were constrained to instead negotiate a complicated conservation-management-trail-public access easement. The Baker sisters, daughters of former Ohio University president John C. Baker, still hold the title to this land.

There are many beautiful bluffs and other rock features. There are areas of limestone flora as well, including twinleaf, blue ash, Shumard oak, and chinkapin oak. This preserve presents a ridge face to US-50, preserving an attractive viewshed to travelers, and the rest of the property is mostly centered around Canaanville Run, which has its headwaters in two adjacent private properties.

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A trail system, blazed with red and blue paint, provides miles of hiking trails. These trails have interesting names, each with a story, such as Mythical Tree Trail, Broken Jug Trail, Liar's Ridge Trail, and Cockatiel Ridge Trail. The longest trail is the Liar's Ridge Trail, over two miles long, and the total system features more than five miles of trails.

Horse riders are allowed to use the trails from April 15 to December 15.

There are gas wells on this property, which have existed since well before our acquisition of the easement. However, these are conventional wells, not fracking wells. There is also a Texas Eastern gas transmission pipeline bisecting the property, but other areas are as close to pristine as one may find in Athens County.

Deer hunting is allowed on the Baker Preserve, but by permission only.

To reach the Baker Preserve public access, take US-50 5.1 miles east from US-33 at Athens to Ohio State Route 690. Turn left on OH-690 and go 0.5 mile, and the entrance to the parking area will be on the left.



*Photos by John Knouse*

## New Skunk Run Preserve Addition



We have finally closed on the third property purchase for our Skunk Run Preserve in Troy Township. The purchase of 34.9 acres now brings the total acreage of the preserve to 73.5 acres. It protects a third of a mile of Skunk Run, a high-quality perennially flowing stream. We will feature this preserve in the next edition of this newsletter.

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## Bobcat Tracks Sighted



Bobcat tracks have recently been found along the Hockhocking Adena Bikeway near the Bluebell Preserve, west of The Plains. It's great to think that bobcats are finally repopulating our area!

*Photos by Joe Brehm.*

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This is the first occasional newsletter. It is available as an on-line .pdf (Adobe Acrobat/Reader) file. If you need to receive this as hard copy, please let us know.

For feedback and queries, please email:

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Check out our website if you haven't done so already:

[www.athensconservancy.org](http://www.athensconservancy.org)