



Athens Conservancy

Occasional Newsletter Number Two

For February 2018 to June 2018

Conservancy to Hire Part-Time Development Specialist

The Athens Conservancy to date has been an all-volunteer organization except in the last two years when part-time workers were hired for removing non-native plants. But the Conservancy now administers 844 acres of preserves and future recreational trail land, as well as monitoring 598 acres of conservation easements, and this year's grants will add 442 acres to the list of preserves.

The Conservancy's task obviously is a difficult one with an all-volunteer workforce. The board has decided, after considerable thought, to hire a part-time development specialist. If this person is successful, we may consider hiring additional staff.

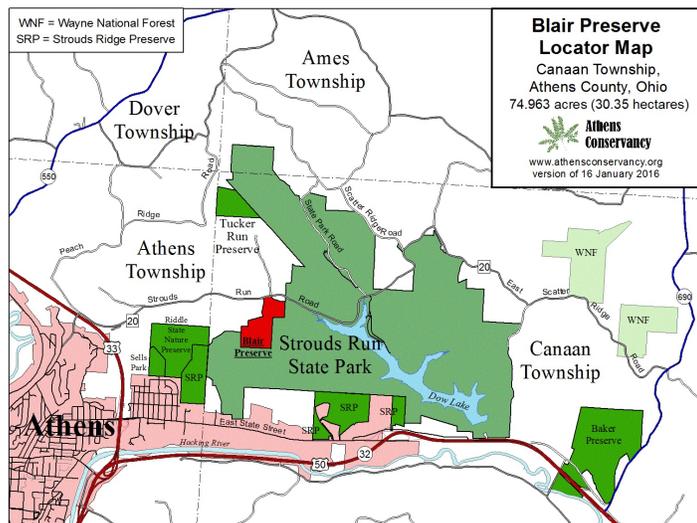
Athens Conservancy Awarded Over a Million Dollars in 2018 Grants

The Athens Conservancy was recently awarded Clean Ohio grants totaling \$1,104,171 to purchase three tracts of land and to fund the control of invasive species on an existing nature preserve.

One grant will allow the Conservancy to buy a 240-acre property between Athens and Strouds Run State Park. Located on both sides of Strouds Run Road, the acquisition of this tract for conservation land will help protect the water quality in Dow Lake. It is the largest private holding in the Dow Lake watershed and includes two-thirds of a mile of Strouds Run, the principal stream feeding the lake. The Athens Conservancy is committed to protecting as much of the Dow Lake watershed as possible. The

Featured Preserve Blair Preserve

The Blair Preserve comprises 75 acres of mostly steep forested land sandwiched into the border of Strouds Run State Park and fronting on Strouds Run Road.



Rock Formation on Gillette Tract

property is also adjacent to Hawk Woods, an exceptional stand of old-growth forest in the City-owned Riddle State Nature Preserve. The new acquisition will buffer Hawk Woods from disturbance that could occur if the land were

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available for development. It will be dedicated as the Mary Beth Zak Lohse Nature Preserve, in memory of a widely appreciated leader in southeast Ohio conservation efforts, who passed away in 2011. She helped found the Appalachian Ohio Group of the Sierra Club and served as the Conservation Chair for the Ohio chapter of the Sierra Club.



Structure on AEP Tract

With another grant, the Conservancy will purchase land from American Electric Power in York and Dover Townships, expanding the Conservancy's Bluebell Preserve from its current 65 acres (donated by AEP in 2006) to 230 acres. When combined with other land owned by the Conservancy and Wayne National Forest, this purchase will complete the protection of a 2.5-mile scenic corridor along the west side of Hockhocking Adena Bikeway in the Hamley Run - Glen Ebon Rd. area. Much of the forest in the tract to be acquired is in excellent condition, with a rich and diverse understory of native forest herbs and few invasive plants. The Bluebell Preserve is already popular with the public because of its spectacular spring wildflower displays that are easily viewed from the bikeway.

A third grant will allow the Conservancy to buy a 35-acre wooded tract along Marietta Run Road in Bern Township. The forest is estimated to be 60-90 years old and provides excellent wildlife habitat. The property includes nearly a half-mile of Marietta Run. Maintaining

the forest along this stream will reduce erosion during floods and siltation downstream in Federal Creek and the Hocking River.

The fourth grant will permit the Conservancy to hire seasonal staff to control non-native invasive plants in the Blair Preserve, adjacent to Strouds Run State Park. Invasive species are a problem in many natural areas, and the Blair Preserve has particularly bad infestations of privet, burning bush, multiflora rose, and Asian bittersweet, which are damaging the forest. Controlling these species in the preserve will reduce their ability to invade nearby parts of the park. The Blair Preserve is heavily used for recreation. The Trace Trail crossing the preserve, connecting City of Athens conservation land with the state park, is used by many hikers, runners, bicyclists, and nature enthusiasts.

Athens Nature Center Group

Athens Conservancy board members with an interest in nature education formed a new organization in summer 2016. The Athens Nature Center initiative promotes a sustainable connection between people and nature through nature education, conservation, citizen science, and ecotourism.

With the help of the Athens County Foundation, ANCI founding board members Stefan Gleissberg and Char Rae organized a round table meeting with potential partner organizations to explore how a nature center can be positioned in the community.

The board meets monthly. If you are interested, please visit groups.io/g/athensnaturecenter to be added to our email list.

Athens Area Outdoor Recreation Guide

Athens Outdoor Guide

The Athens Outdoor Guide was published as a free print publication several years ago, and the supply quickly ran out. However, the guide has also been online since then. It offers a page on every known public open-space area in southeast Ohio in Athens, Washington, Morgan, Perry, Hocking, Vinton, Meigs, Gallia, Lawrence, and Jackson Counties. Most pages have a map, and most have photographs. The pages also feature detailed driving directions to reach the place. GPS coordinates will be added soon. To find the guide, go to the Athens Conservancy website and click on the Resources tab. User feedback is very welcome. Contact the newsletter editor at knousejohn@gmail.com.

Blair Preserve, continued from page one

The preserve was purchased in two sections, both with Clean Ohio Green Space Fund grants. The first, with 55 acres, was the result of a grant in 2004. The second, with 20 acres, was granted in 2006.



Bluff and Tunnel Rock on the Blair Preserve

Blair Preserve features interesting rock formations – cliffs, outcrops, outlying boulders, and a fissure cave. A backpacking campsite, the only one in Athens County, is located close to the cliff line and features a large boulder as well as tenting sites, information board, picnic table, fire ring and grill, and firewood shelter. This campsite, called the chestnut grove camp, has proven to be very popular. A comment book is kept there for campers to record information and thought. The previous American chestnuts planted there did not survive, but more will be planted there in late spring.



Chestnut Grove Camp

The Trace Trail passes through the preserve, from Strouds Run State Park on the east to the state park and city preserve land on the west. This trail bears its name due to its following, off and on, the route of the original

stage road in the area, which connected Marietta with Chillicothe, the original state capital.

A branch trail, the Tunnel Rock Trail, provides access to the campsite. The Tunnel Rock Trail is named after the fissure cave.

The preserve is named after Brian Blair, who purchased one of the two properties to hold it until the Conservancy could buy it. Brian is one of the founding members of the Appalachia Ohio Alliance, based in Logan, Ohio.

The Conservancy has been funding part-time workers to remove non-native invasive plants from the preserve. The worst of these on this preserve are Asian bittersweet, privet, and burning bush. A grant has just been awarded from the Clean Ohio Fund to continue this work.

Bow hunting for deer is allowed on the Blair Preserve, because there is an overpopulation of white-tail deer in this area, and they wreak havoc with desirable native plants, while passing up the non-native invasive plants.

Clean Ohio Conservation Fund

The Clean Ohio Conservation Fund was established by statewide referendum in 2000, and reaffirmed in 2008.

The fund has four components:

- **Green Space Conservation:** This component provides grant funds for acquiring open-space lands as nature preserves or conservation easements. It is administered by the Ohio Public Works Commission. The 18 OPWC districts each have an NRAC - Natural Resources Advisory Committee - that reviews and approves applications. The Athens Conservancy has heavily relied on this program.
- **Farmland Preservation:** This program provides funds for agricultural easements, to provide permanent protection for farmlands that are threatened by development. The importance of this fund is that development of urban areas often takes our best farmland out of useful production, and this fund is a way to prevent that. It is administered by the Ohio Department of Agriculture.
- **Recreational Trails:** Grant funds are provided for the creation of trails. It is co-administered by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, statewide, along with the federal Recreational Trails Program. This is in general the most highly competitive of these funds.
- **Brownfield Revitalization:** This component provided grant funds for reclamation of brownfields (contaminated sites due to industry or other causes) through 2013, and continues to provide resources for brownfield restoration. Its administrating agency is the Ohio Development Services.

For more information: development.ohio.gov/cleanohio

The Larger Picture

The Athens Conservancy belongs to three larger organizations/programs that help it in its mission.



COLT, the Coalition of Ohio Land Trusts, is an organization that brings together organizations like ours across this state for purposes of education and coordination. It holds an annual meeting with informational sessions. It's been around for almost a decade. The website is at www.ohiolandtrusts.org.



We are also a member of a national organization, the Land Trust Alliance. This organization has an annual multi-day conference with many educational sessions and field trips. Last year, it was in Denver; the year before, Minneapolis; and this year, it will be in Pittsburgh.

The LTA sets national standards for organizational accreditation for land trusts. This status is difficult to achieve, with many requirements, and especially difficult for all-volunteer organizations. However, the Athens Conservancy has taken many of the required steps towards this accreditation.

This organization created the insurance program that is listed next in this article, and offers a variety of other resources for land trusts. Part of this has been the creation of a network of attorneys concerned with – and skilled in – land trust issues.

The LTA has been in existence since 1982. The LTA website is www.landtrustalliance.org.



Lastly, the Conservancy is a member of a nationwide insurance program for land trusts, TerraFirma. This insurance program is only a few years old, and was established to help organizations defend against violations and to prosecute violators. It was instigated because commercial interests in some places were going all-out to void conservation easements that had been executed on land that the local organization had under conservation easement.

There are two categories under this insurance, conservation easements and fee-simple lands (fee simple = outright ownership). A land trust can elect one or the other or both, but all lands within the chosen category or categories must be included in the insurance binder. More information on this insurance can be found at terrafirma.org.

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This is the second occasional newsletter. It is available as an on-line .pdf (Adobe Acrobat/Reader) file at

http://www.athensconservancy.org/?page_id=1111

If you need to receive this as hard copy, please let us know.

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