



Athens Conservancy

Annual Review
September, 2018
Newsletter Number 3

Annual Meeting

Please join us for our annual potluck-meeting in early December. You should receive a postcard later this fall after the meeting is scheduled. The meeting date and speaker will also be posted on our website.

Clean Ohio Grants

This year has been marked by our best success ever with Clean Ohio grants. These are grants under the Clean Ohio Conservation Fund, a statewide funding issue first passed in 2001. This last April, the Conservancy was awarded four grants totaling over \$1.1 million! Three of the grants are for land acquisition, and the other for invasive species control in the Blair Preserve.

Mary Beth Zak Lohse Nature Preserve

We are delighted to dedicate a new preserve in memory of a dear friend of many Athens Conservancy members, whom we lost in 2011. Mary Beth helped found the



Appalachian Ohio Group of the Sierra Club and served as the Conservation Chair for the Ohio chapter of the club. She was a leader in Southeast Ohio conservation efforts and a participant in Athens Conservancy activities. Clean Ohio support enabled the Conservancy to buy this beautiful 240-acre property from the Gillette family, descendants of one of the earliest settlers in the Strouds Run area. Located on both sides of Strouds Run Rd. between the Athens city limits and Dow Lake, its establishment as a preserve will

Our Work – Why Give?

After reading about the big grants we received this year, you may wonder why the Conservancy needs your donations. But we do! These grants mostly focus on land purchases, but we have no grant support for basic operations or the management of most of our preserves (the grant for invasive plant removal in the Blair Preserve is a rare exception). Furthermore, Clean Ohio grants require a local match. Sometimes the match can be covered by a donation of property value if the seller offers us a bargain price, but in other cases a cash match is needed. We hope that you will join or renew your membership so that we can continue our leadership role in local conservation efforts.

Also remember that you can donate your change when you shop at the Pharmacy or at the Village Bakery!

help protect the water quality in the lake. Previously the largest private holding in the Dow Lake watershed, it also includes two-thirds of a mile of the principal stream feeding the lake. As well as bordering Strouds Run State Park and the Blair Preserve, the Lohse Preserve adjoins and helps buffer Hawk Woods, with its towering oaks and tulip trees, an exceptional stand of old-growth forest owned by the City of Athens and dedicated as a state nature preserve. The city purchased Hawk Woods in 2003 in partnership with the Athens Conservancy, which played a key role in fund-raising.

Bluebell Preserve Expansion

In 2006, AEP donated to the Athens Conservancy two separate parcels totaling 65 acres along the Hockhocking Adena Bikeway between The Plains and Nelsonville. We named this land the Bluebell Preserve because of its spectacular display of Virginia bluebells, trilliums and other spring wildflowers, enjoyed by many bikeway users.



The land between the two parcels was retained by AEP. Recently, however, AEP has been selling much of its rural land in

southeast Ohio, so Conservancy board members contacted a company representative, who was very supportive. With a Clean Ohio grant, we are purchasing about 165 acres, expanding the Bluebell Preserve to 230 acres. As well as connecting the two formerly separate tracts of the Bluebell Preserve, this new acquisition protects a lovely stand of forest with a healthy understory of native plants and very few invasive exotics. It also completes the protection of a 2.5-mile stretch of forest along one side of the bikeway (between mile markers 11.5 and 14.0), including the Poston Preserve and Wayne National Forest land as well as the Bluebell Preserve.

Marietta Run Preserve

With another of this year's Clean Ohio grants, we plan to acquire a 35-acre wooded tract along Marietta Run Road in Bern Township in the northeast part of Athens County. It is entirely wooded and protects the riparian forest on nearly a half-mile of the

Marietta Run flood plain. Maintaining forest along this sizeable stream should reduce erosion during floods and siltation downstream in Federal Creek and the Hocking River. The heavily forested valley of Marietta Run is one of the wildest places in Athens County. There are currently only a few scattered homes



along the five winding miles of Marietta Run Road. It provides excellent wildlife habitat. Bears and bobcats have been seen in the area, though not yet in this preserve. When this land first became available, the owner needed to sell it quickly. We are grateful to an Athens-area couple who stepped in and acted as conservation buyers, purchasing the land and holding it until we could secure a grant to buy it from them.

Stewardship Work in Blair Preserve

Last year our Clean Ohio grant application for invasive-plant control in the Blair Preserve was turned down, but we were encouraged to resubmit, and this year they funded the project. Controlling non-native invasive plants is a major challenge in this preserve—more so than on any of the Conservancy's other lands, because of its land-use history. There are dense infestations of privet and winged burning-bush, intermixed with multiflora rose and Asian bittersweet vine. Last year, thanks to the generosity of our donors, we were able to fund over 500 hours of work by two paid seasonal staff members, which was supplemented by an afternoon's work by about 40 volunteers on National

Public Lands Day. This year, with a Clean Ohio grant, we have hired more workers and will be able to employ them through next spring. If you hike the Trace Trail or visit the public campsite along Tunnel Rock Trail, you can easily see the areas where they have been working. The



immediate result is not a pretty sight because the invasive shrubs are so dense in places that little in the way of greenery is left after they are dug out. However, the next year things look quite different, with the native plants colonizing the bare ground, and by the second year, it starts to look like a forest understory in our region should. Some annual "mopping up" of residual seedlings and root sprouts of the invasive species is still required for several years, but this is far easier work than the initial clearing.

Athens-Belpre Rail-Trail

Construction is nearing completion on the five-mile section of multi-use trail along Frost Road in eastern Athens County, including a bridge replacement. The cost of the boundary survey required to transfer the property to the county was higher than expected, and the Conservancy helped avert a

funding crisis by sharing half the survey cost with the county. Further east in Washington County, the Conservancy is working with the Belpre Multi-Use Trail



Committee to secure local funding to purchase 0.5 miles of trail right-of-way from a private owner and is also helping to implement a federal grant to purchase 1.5 miles of right-of-way from CSX. If those two purchases are successful, the public trail right of way will be secured from the Athens County line to the community of Little Hocking.