



Athens Conservancy

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to April 2019

Conservancy Represented at Land Trust Rally

Each year, the Land Trust Alliance, a national organization of which we are a member and which establishes standards and practices for land trusts, holds a national conference referred to as a rally. Five board members attended the 2018 rally, which was in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. This year it will be in Raleigh, North Carolina. We participate because we feel that it is important to network with other land trusts and to provide board education.

Featured Preserve

Skunk Run Preserve

Skunk Run Preserve is named after a stream by that name. It drains the north and west side of the Torch area in Troy Township in eastern Athens County, Ohio.



This preserve came to be largely due to the creation of the Athens-Belpre Rail-Trail. To create this new multi-use pathway, we began buying up the pieces of the former B&O Railway grade. In one spot, we were unable to buy a 500-foot stretch that was owned by the neighboring landowner, and he was quite adamant about it. We had a similar situation in Torch itself, where we are missing a 1,350-foot section. However, in Torch, it is simplicity itself to create a semi-permanent detour on Torch Road that takes the user all of two blocks out of their way. In the case of the land at Ireland Road, such a bypass would have added 2.6 miles of boring roadway to the user's journey.

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Are Cliffs Real?

by John Knouse

Almost three decades ago, my daughters were 4 and 6 years old. We were visiting Natural Bridge State Park in Kentucky, near the Red River Gorge, as a family. We stepped out to walk across Natural Bridge, which is 78 feet long and 65 feet high, dwarfing anything Ohio has to offer. Predictably, we warned the girls, Rachel and Libby, about the natural environment. "Stay away from the edge of the cliff," we told them.



"Cliffs aren't real!" announced Rachel grandly, as she made a beeline for the edge. When you're parents of young children, you have to learn to move fast, and we had her safely in our grip almost immediately.

"Cliffs aren't real?" This was a shocker. We finally figured that this was a result of watching too many Roadrunner-Wiley Coyote cartoons. We were surprised by her attitude given the fact that we had had regular family outings in natural settings. Ah, the power of television.

This forced us to realize that it's not enough just to expose kids to nature every now and then. It's important not only to get them out there, but to interpret the experience for them and hope that each trip allows them to come away with more knowledge about the outdoors and nature than before.

Not surprisingly, this is exactly what we did with our kids. We made sure that they had plenty of exposure to the outdoors – and explanations to go along with it.

Skunk Run Preserve, continued from front page

We chose another alternatives. Because this stretch of the former railway passes through a wild and scenic gorge, the valley of Skunk Run, it would be an excellent place to create a nature preserve: for its own merits, to preserve the scenic view from the bikeway, and to create space for an alternate path route.

So Skunk Run Preserve was born. An initial Clean Ohio Green Space Fund grant enabled us to purchase 27.6 acres bordering Ireland Road in 2013. Since then, two more such grants have resulted in the purchase of 12.1 acres in 2016 and another 33.8 acres in 2017, for a current total of 73.5 acres.



This preserve features sandstone bluffs, as do several of our preserves. However, unlike the others, the sandstone in this case consists of the Ewing and Waynesboro formations, which is right on the Pennsylvanian-Permian boundary, so the preserve spans two geologic periods. There are a few plant species growing there that are less than common in our area, including wintergreen (*Gaultheria procumbens*) and pitch pine, (*Pinus rigida*).

Bow-hunting for deer is allowed on this preserve, by pre-arranged free permit with the Athens Conservancy. See our website for contact details.

Another important aspect of this preserve are the streams. Not only is there a perennially-flowing spring-fed feeder stream, Bingman Spring Run, but there is a larger perennial stream, Skunk Run, which is typically around 15 to 20 feet wide.

Skunk Run drains roughly the western half of a fracking wastewater injection well site, K&H, at Torch, which is the largest such injection well system in Ohio. Because this stream was obviously wild and of good quality, and because it drains a potential hazard, the Conservancy began testing it. The initial invertebrate survey indicated a stream of very high quality, and the chemical testing done to date has revealed no problems. We have performed chemical testing on the stream now for five years, and will continue to do so.

This is our only preserve land, other than the Athens-Belpre Rail-Trail itself, in Troy Township. We hope to further expand this preserve in the future.

As always, see our website for maps of the preserve.

Clean Ohio Update

By the time you read this newsletter, we will have applied for a new Clean Ohio Green Space Conservation Program grant. This application is for 42.7 acres that adjoins the north side of the Mary Beth Zak Lohse Preserve. This property features beaver-created wetlands, bluffs, and a small historic family cemetery. Even more, the acquisition of this property will increase the watershed protection for Dow Lake and will enable a better trail system on the Lohse Preserve, if we build one.

In December, we were awarded a grant to acquire approximately 440 acres of land adjoining the eastern border of Strouds Run State Park. A survey is in progress, and we expect the closing to occur in May or June. More on this the next newsletter.

Public Land in Ohio

Ohio ranks 43rd among the 50 states in the percentage of land that's featured as public open-space land. We look around at Athens County, with the Wayne National Forest and Strouds Run State Park and other public lands, and think that it's a lot – and, indeed, about 12% of Athens County is public open space. This compares to our neighboring states of Pennsylvania: 14%; West Virginia, about 11%, and Kentucky, at 4%.

However, the vast majority of these open space lands are in southeast Ohio, in the unglaciated Allegheny Plateau, where the Athens Conservancy is located. Because most of Ohio is intensively farmed, wherever it's not paved or built over, it is desirable to preserve a disproportionate amount of land in our region to compensate for the lack in the rest of the state. Statewide, there are 3,907 square miles of land within urban boundaries in Ohio. In contrast, there are only 1,980 square miles of public green-space lands. That is approximately half the total of city lands, coming out to only about 4% of the total land area of the state.

It's vitally important that we as a society and as a state

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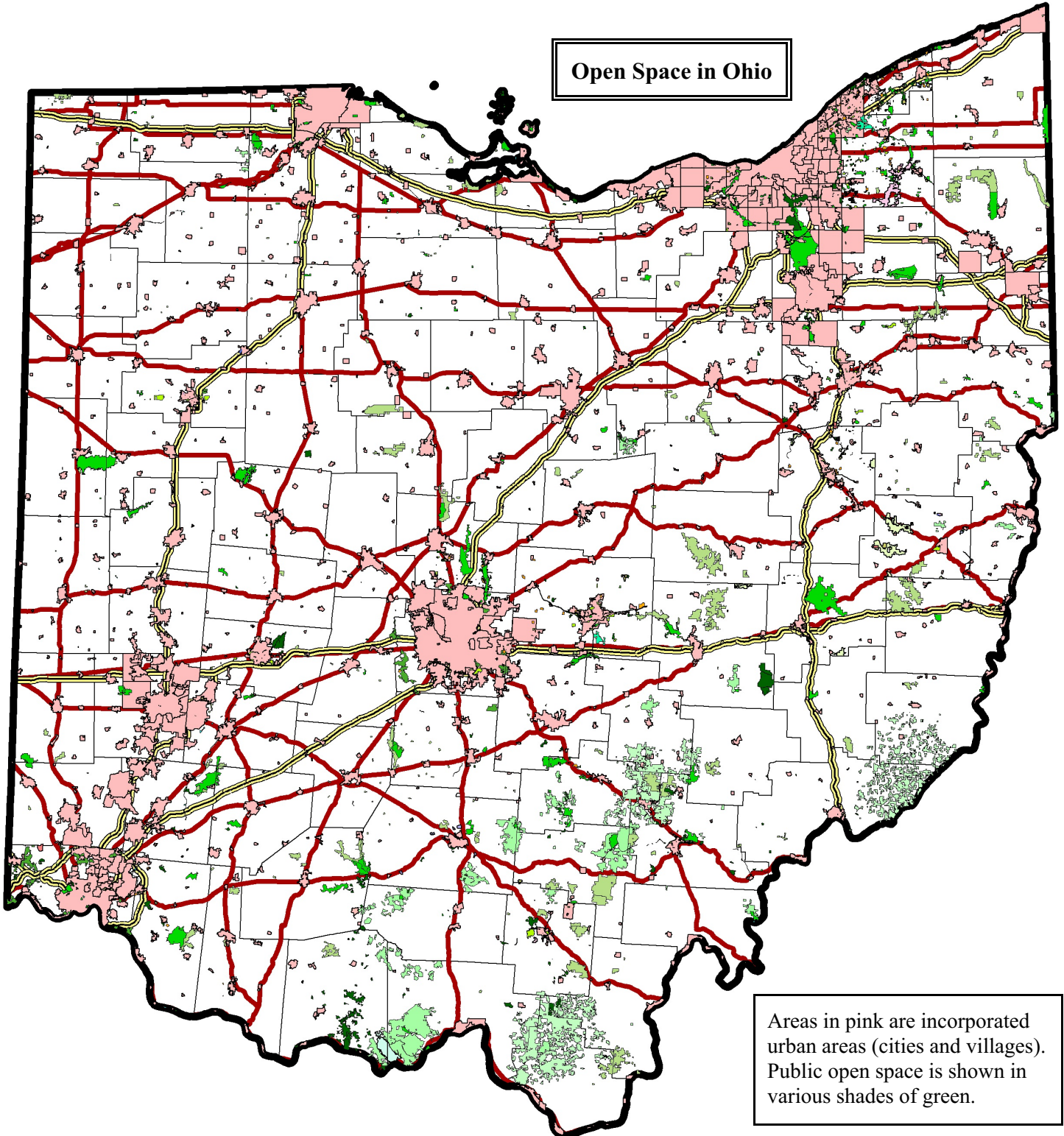
create a balance between developed lands, farmed lands, and preserved open space. There are powerful environmental reasons for doing so, but there are also economic reasons. Many Ohio residents go out-of-state for vacation experiences. But given wise planning, preservation and use of resources, we have plenty right here in Ohio to offer those vacationers. We should be able to keep many of those vacation dollars right here in our state, and maybe even gain a few more dollars from out-of-staters.

This issue also speaks to the quality of life in our area of Ohio. Many people choose to live in the Athens area at

least partially because of what we have to offer in the way of hills, trees, streams, and public open space. It's a scenic area with considerable opportunity to get out and enjoy all that natural beauty.

By extension, we want people who are not from this area to enjoy the same opportunity. We want them to find the Athens area and southeast Ohio in general to be an attractive destination, both for outdoor recreation in general and for ecotourism. We need to greatly develop the potential of both, and in the process enlarge and consolidate public open space.

Open Space in Ohio



Areas in pink are incorporated urban areas (cities and villages). Public open space is shown in various shades of green.

Athens Conservancy's Strategic Plan

by Donna Goodman

Over the past year, with the input from many of our stakeholders (including our members) who completed a survey that we emailed to them, the Athens Conservancy board has worked hard to develop a formal five-year strategic plan. Our board has always been very much united in our vision and strategy. However, as the demographic makeup and size of our board has changed over the sixteen years of our existence, and as the number of acres that we have preserved and protected continues to grow, we knew that we needed to formalize a shared vision and plan to guide us through the next five years. It has been very gratifying to conclude that our stakeholders and younger board members share the vision of our founding members, assuring us that the Athens Conservancy will continue in good and capable hands.

Here is a brief summary of a portion of the strategic plan, the Long-Term Vision and Strategic Direction that we now have adopted.

Our Long-Term Vision

The Athens Conservancy protects lands to preserve wild and scenic places, maintain healthy ecosystems, preserve water quality, and protect biodiversity, habitat, and ecological processes. Our conserved lands are valued by the community and connect people with nature for recreation, education, research, and inspiration. The community supports our work and mission as dedicated volunteers, passionate stewards, donors, allies, and partners.

Our Strategic Direction

Athens County is the place where we live (or visit), work, or raise our families. It is a place that is special to us all for many reasons, some of which are reflected in the Athens Conservancy mission to protect natural lands in Athens County and surrounding areas.

As our community and others grapple with a changing climate, contend with persistent threats to water quality, and navigate changes in the economy, our work is more important than ever.

In the Athens Conservancy, we have a positive vision for our region's future. With the help and support of dedicated volunteers, forward-thinking elected officials, local and state partners, and supporters, we are working to preserve important natural lands, waterways, iconic landscapes and views, and sustainable family farms. We strive to maintain our region's ecological integrity, preserve water quality, invest in our community's health and character, nurture environmental education and awareness, and promote local jobs and economic prosperity tied to the lands we all love.

We have a passionate, focused, and committed board who lend their time, talents, and expertise related to land and water conservation, biology, land management, ecology, land use, finance, volunteer engagement, community organizing, communications, and nonprofit management. Over the years we have been successful in securing grants from the State of Ohio and we have relied on the partnership of local units of government to protect significant lands.

We are aware of the realities of our current capacity. We have relatively limited means and face significant challenges as we work to accomplish our mission. This strategic plan reflects what we can do, incrementally, over the next five years to increase our capacity as we move toward our long-term goals and vision.

Committee Structure

We have committed to creating a more effective and comprehensive committee structure to draw in more member volunteers and to distribute the workload more effectively. We will have more about this in the next issue of this newsletter.

These include Executive, Personnel, Volunteer, Land Prioritization, Challenges, Land Stewardship, Outreach and Education, Finance, and Marketing & PR. Member interest in any of these committees is welcome except for the Executive, which is reserved for Athens Conservancy officers.

Athens Conservancy Newsletter

This is the fourth 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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www.athensconservancy.org

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