



Featured Preserve

Mary Beth Zak Lohse Preserve

One of the first properties the Conservancy tried to acquire was a 240-acre tract owned by the Gillette heirs. It was the largest remaining privately-owned property within the Dow Lake watershed and featured almost half a mile of road frontage. It took over 15 years of contacts and negotiations, but we finally reached a deal and now it is a nature preserve, named to honor Mary Beth Zak Lohse, a local naturalist and environmentalist who was well-loved by many of us, and a driving force behind local environmental activism. Her widower, John Lohse, was instrumental in helping us finance and secure this purchase.



Bluffs on the Zak Lohse Preserve

The deal was closed in September, 2018. This property had been the farm of Orin Gillett, one of the sons of Samuel and Charlotte Gillett, one of the early pioneer settler families in the area. At one time, the various members of the family, together, owned over a thousand contiguous acres of land. The Blair Preserve is entirely on the old family land, and over two hundred acres of the state park is as well. The descendants of Orin, who changed their name to Gillette, were the sixth generation of the family to own the land.

A note on the name: People like to abbreviate longer

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Bloodstream Darters

by Joe Brehm

The forest where I first fell in love with creeks, crickets, and tracking deer is now a developed subdivision on the fringes of Appalachian Ohio. There are houses where my brothers and I roamed through the woods with my dad, and the forest is cleared. No other children will make the kind of memories we made there;



Vista on the Baker Preserve

no more bonds will be forever forged with trees and wind and water. The animals who lived there have long since moved away, or died for lack of habitat. This kind of development is one of the biggest threats to the natural world.

When you look out over the misty rolling hills surrounding Athens, Ohio in the fall, you see a symphony of color. Blazing fiery red maples, rain-jacket yellow hickories, burgundy sumac, still-green oaks; even from afar the diversity is apparent. When you wander

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Athens Conservancy Annual Meeting

The Athens Conservancy annual meeting will be Tuesday, the tenth of December, 2019, at ODNR, 360 East State Street in Athens, Ohio. Our featured speaker will be Kelly Capuzzi, an aquatic biologist and an Ohio Certified Volunteer Naturalist. Her presentation will be "From Burning River to Healthy Rivers: How Ohio Streams Have Changed For the Better." She will describe the abundant and amazing life that can be found in healthy southeastern Ohio streams. This is a potluck event, with supper first, starting at 5:30 pm. Please come and share. It's free, and all are welcome! Table service provided.

Bloodstream Darters, Continued

down into the crevices of these multi-colored hills, the variety of life forms is staggering. To see it all, you must travel no faster than a white-lipped land snail, though instead of a slime trail you may leave drops of slobber here and there due to the consistent jaw-dropping fascinations of nature.

These nuggets you see may include the following: indigo milk cap (a blue mushroom!), bright red ginseng berries, hickory nuts opened by a flying squirrel, bobcat tracks leading to a squirrel's demise, buck scrapes, a marbled orb weaver spider in the middle of a perfectly spun web, or cedar waxwings feeding each other dogwood berries.

Should you happen to wander into a room housing the Athens Conservancy (AC) monthly board meetings, you will find people gathered around a long table under fluorescent lights. A devoted secretary, Phil Cantino, will be taking notes at the quick pace of a mink bounding along a creek bank. Donna Goodman, AC President, will be seated at the head of the table, leading the board through careful discussion of some 30 individual items on the agenda in 2 hours or less. Founding member John Knouse may be passing around one of the thousands of maps he has created of potential preserves; he knows the region like an albatross knows the open ocean.

The work is interesting but giving it the label of "fun" would be a stretch. The board knows, however, the positive impacts of preserving land, which can only be accomplished through attention to myriad details.

Land preservation, whether we are talking about public or private land, is no glamorous task. Deeds must be checked, titles signed, deals negotiated, surveys completed. Grants must be written to cover the cost of purchasing land. Trails must be built, and maintained. The Athens Conservancy is run by a volunteer board of directors that has been responsible for preserving 2,584 acres (about 4 square miles, approximately the size of Strouds Run State Park) in Southeast Ohio since its inception in 2002. Much of this preserved land borders on that park and helps protect the Dow Lake watershed.

Land trusts like AC are so critical because state and federal agencies are, for all intents and purposes, out of the land acquisition game. Aside from recent gifts like Jesse Owens State Park, it is now up to non-profit organizations like the AC, Buckeye Trail Association, and Appalachia Ohio Alliance to preserve more land in Southeast Ohio. These protected lands give us important places to bask in nature's beauty, hike, bike, ride horses, watch birds, walk our dogs, fish, and hunt. Protected lands are also where our kids learn to flip rocks in creeks in search of crawdads and salamanders, where they get introduced to deer tracks, and catch insects. Often we only have one chance to purchase a property and protect it from being developed or logged.

There is no better place to reflect on the importance of land preservation than preserved land, itself. As I do so in mid-summer, a dizzying vision descends upon me

like the buckeye leaves already turning red and drifting to the ground. There is an absurd amount of life in this Appalachian forest. I can feel the sycamores and other trees humming. Darters and sunfish swim through my creek-veins excitedly. Chipmunks scurry across my log-legs. As John Trudell said and wrote, "we are shapes of the earth." You have to be in nature to sense the truth of that statement. In my circle of vision alone, hundreds of trees are making their own food via millions of leaves while thousands of caterpillars eat those leaves and some are devoured by the dozens of foraging songbirds. A groundhog burrows up the hollow under a big sandstone boulder where turkeys bathe in the eroded sand. Spider webs hang nearly everywhere, all but invisible. I try to imagine all of the life that has ever existed in this spot, but it's too much to fathom. I am thankful that some group of people decided it was important enough to preserve, and worked hard to make it happen.



Skunk Run, a perennial stream in our preserve

Though we humans have given ourselves—and often earned—a bad reputation for environmental stewardship, we have the power to positively impact the landscape. We protect forests and help them recover from past abuses by replanting native species. We hunt deer, which allows the herbaceous layer to thrive. We can grow native medicinal herbs like ginseng and goldenseal, thus preserving these species while also making them into important medicine. This, I believe, cuts to the core of what it means to be truly human: to take what we need from the land in ways that are beneficial to other species. In this way, being a part of the Athens Conservancy helps me to exercise my humanity.

In a state where only 4% of the land mass is owned by the public, land trusts also have a critical role in making life better for wildlife. By focusing land preservation around existing public lands like Strouds Run State Park, for example, AC has created larger potential home ranges for bobcats. Land trusts also have the potential to connect open spaces, creating corridors

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Bloodstream Darters, ontinued from previous page

that help wildlife migrate safely from one protected space to another. Creating connectivity is critical--species impacted by climate change may have no way to migrate northward in search of cooler temperatures without it. Projects like the Moonville and Athens-Belpre Rail-Trails help provide these corridors while creating recreation opportunities for residents of and visitors to our corner of the state.

You can join the Athens Conservancy by making

a donation of any amount at

www.athensconservancy.org

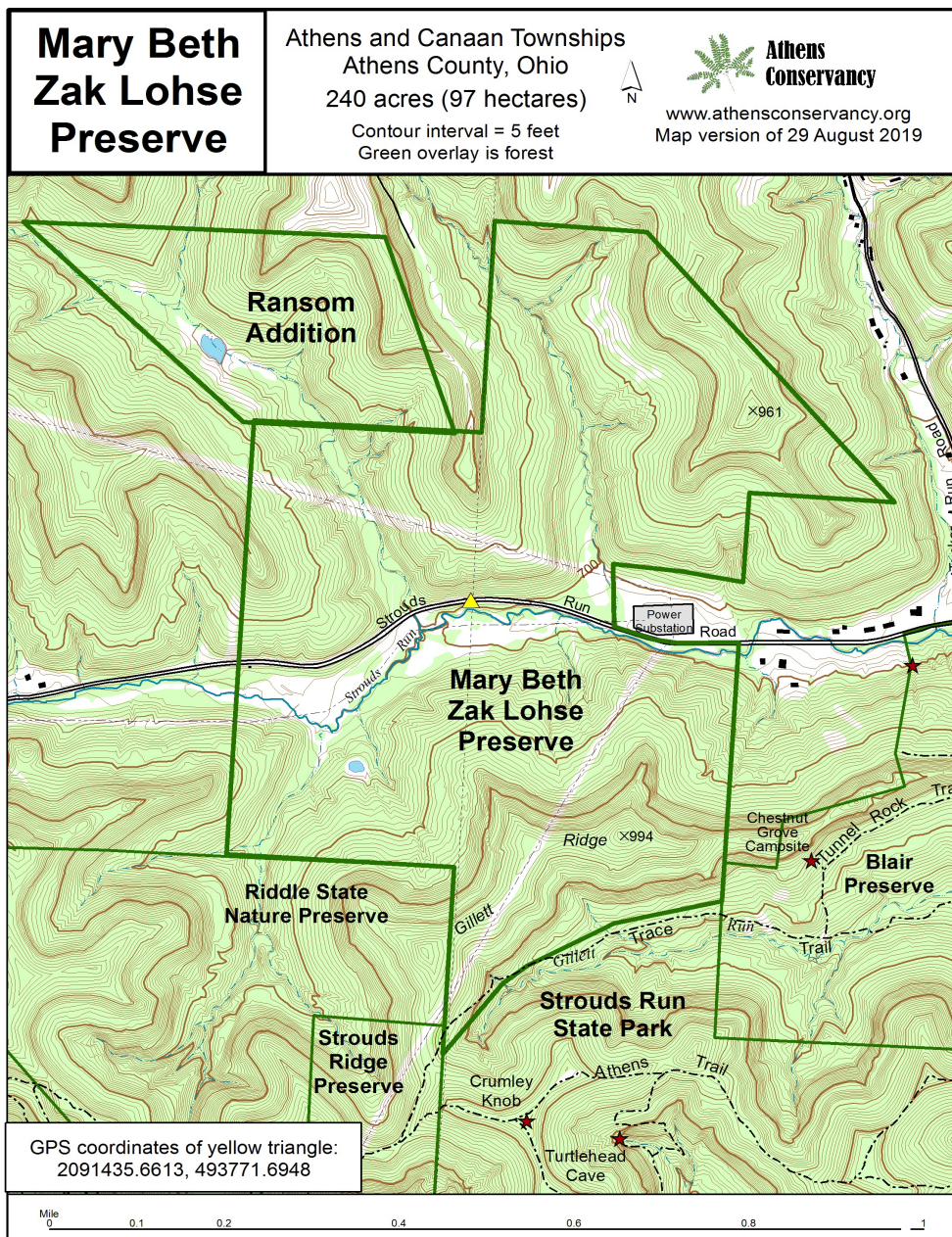
and you can keep up on AC projects by following us on Instagram and Facebook. We are also in need of volunteers to build and maintain trails, remove invasive species, and help document the biodiversity on our preserves. The conservancy needs donors, grant writers, communication experts, biologists, and those willing to help pitch in to strengthen the organization and ensure that Southeast Ohio communities will have places to explore the natural world for many, many generations.

Mary Beth Zak Lohse Preserve, contd. from front page

place names; we ask that, rather than using the name “Lohse Preserve” that, instead, it be termed the “Mary Beth Preserve” to emphasize that it honors Mary Beth.

The map also shows a tract of land of almost 43 acres, the Ransom addition, which is in the process of being

acquired with a Clean Ohio grant. We expect closing in September or October 2019. With the addition of this land, the preserve will be expanded to about 293 acres, and possibly more – there’s some question about the southern property line, and resolving it may add a few acres to the preserve.



As can be seen from the map, the preserve borders the Riddle State Nature Preserve (owned by the City of Athens, with state dedication), the COAD Tract of the Strouds Ridge Preserve (City of Athens), Strouds Run State Park, and the Blair Preserve (Athens Conservancy).

There are many bluffs and a few very large old trees on the property, including one of the largest black gums (*Nyssa sylvatica*) in the county. It has been subject to selective logging on a periodic basis, but most of it has a good forest canopy. There were once beavers living on the property along Strouds Run, and we are hoping that they return. There may still be beavers living on the Ransom Tract.

There is an old springhouse on the property that we’re assessing. If it’s sound enough, we may restore it to some extent. This springhouse was once actively used not only for water but for storage of dairy and other products that needed to be kept cool. It is quite old. The spring drains from the Ames limestone.

We plan to create a parking area along Strouds Run Road, and probably an adjacent picnic area. We’re planning to soon create a short loop trail on the ridgetop south of Strouds Run Road, and are considering a bike trail north of the road. The existing Trace Trail already is partly on the preserve (it was created with permission from the Gillette heirs).

New Preserve Name

We've been seeking name nominations for our new 440-acre nature preserve, located on the east side of Strouds Run State Park, and which connects the state park with the Baker Preserve. This property was purchased from the Couladis family. The chosen name, after considering a number of alternatives, is the Canaan Preserve. This preserve will be featured in the next regular issue of this newsletter (after the annual report issue, which will be next).

Pawpaw Festival

Come see us at the pawpaw festival! Once again, we'll be raffling off a bicycle for the Athens-Belpre Rail Trail, and the booth will feature that project as well as the Athens Conservancy.

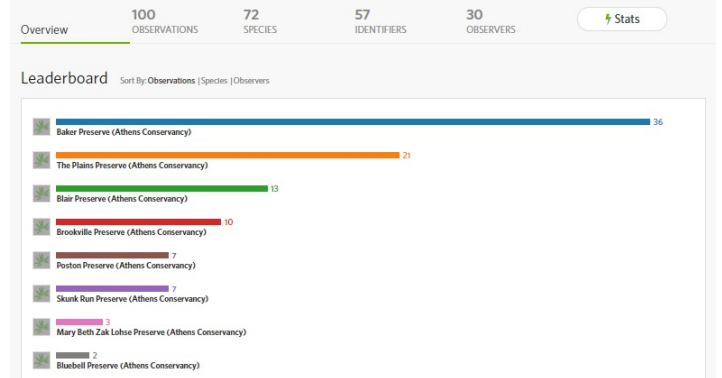
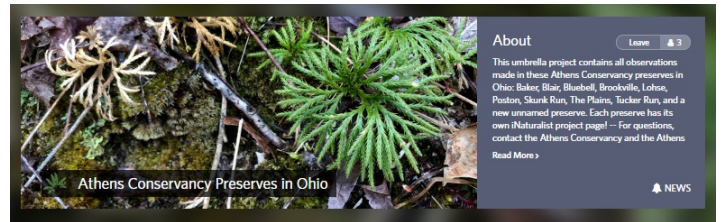


There will be several new brochures displayed, including one about the Moonville Rail-Trail Connection Project, one about wills and bequests, and one listing the Athens Conservancy preserve.

We'll have an extra chair or two so you can sit and shoot the breeze. We look forward to seeing you there!

Our iNaturalist Project

There is an online resource, iNaturalist, that was created to compile sightings of biota – plants, animals,



fungi – to identify their places and ranges. It is a public-driven resource entirely, offering free memberships. You can sign up and upload your photographs, and attempt to identify them. Other people will also suggest identifications. It takes two identical IDs for the name to be accepted as “research grade.”

The Athens Conservancy has established a project within the site for sightings of living things on our nature preserves. The URL of this project is:

<https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/athens-conservancy-preserves-in-ohio>

We urge you to become a free member of and contributor to iNaturalist! Usually, when you use your smart phone or some of the newer cameras, the GPS location is automatically recorded, and this will upload with your photograph. If not, then you need to be able to point very specifically (on a map utility provided) the location of the observation.

The site may also suggest an identification using a computer algorithm. You can accept that ID or type in your own. You may also browse other people's observations.

Athens Conservancy Newsletter

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

<http://www.athensconservancy.org/Documents/Newsletters/AC-newsletter5.pdf>

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

For feedback and queries, please email: info@athensconservancy.org

Check out our website if you haven't done so already: www.athensconservancy.org