



Featured Preserve

Bluebell Preserve

The Hockhocking Adena Bikeway has long provided access to spectacular displays of wildflowers, and some of the best displays were on the inland side of the bikeway on land owned by AEP (American Electric Power) west of The Plains. The Athens Conservancy asked of AEP in 2005 if they would be willing to donate the area with the best wildflowers, and with the tremendous help of Dean Berry, one of their employees, they said yes. In 2006, AEP donated the original 65 acres of the Bluebell Preserve in two sections to the Conservancy. Since then, passersby have been regaled with those displays of wildflowers.



AEP corporate culture has since changed, and they are now gradually selling off all lands not directly needed for power transmission. When they sold off a large area on Luhrig Road, we were able to purchase the Brookville Preserve, but the rest went into private hands.

Our original Bluebell Preserve was part of the Poston lands. Part of the Poston lands have already become an industrial park, but most of it is still open and undeveloped. It has been a popular hunting venue for years. But it will be eventually sold as well.

In order to further protect the scenic values of the bikeway, and to consolidate our preserve, we negotiated a deal with AEP to purchase an additional 165 acres at fair market price. We then applied for a Clean Ohio Conservation Fund Green Space grant, which was awarded and we proceeded to purchase it, closing last fall.

See the map of the new preserve on the next page. As always, more maps are on the website.

The Year in Review

This year, the Conservancy completed the acquisition of the 440-acre Canaan Preserve, which links Strouds Run State Park to OH-690 through our Baker Preserve. We have also closed on a 42.7-acre tract that will add to the Mary Beth Zak Lohse Preserve on Strouds Run Road. The new addition is at the northwest corner of the preserve.



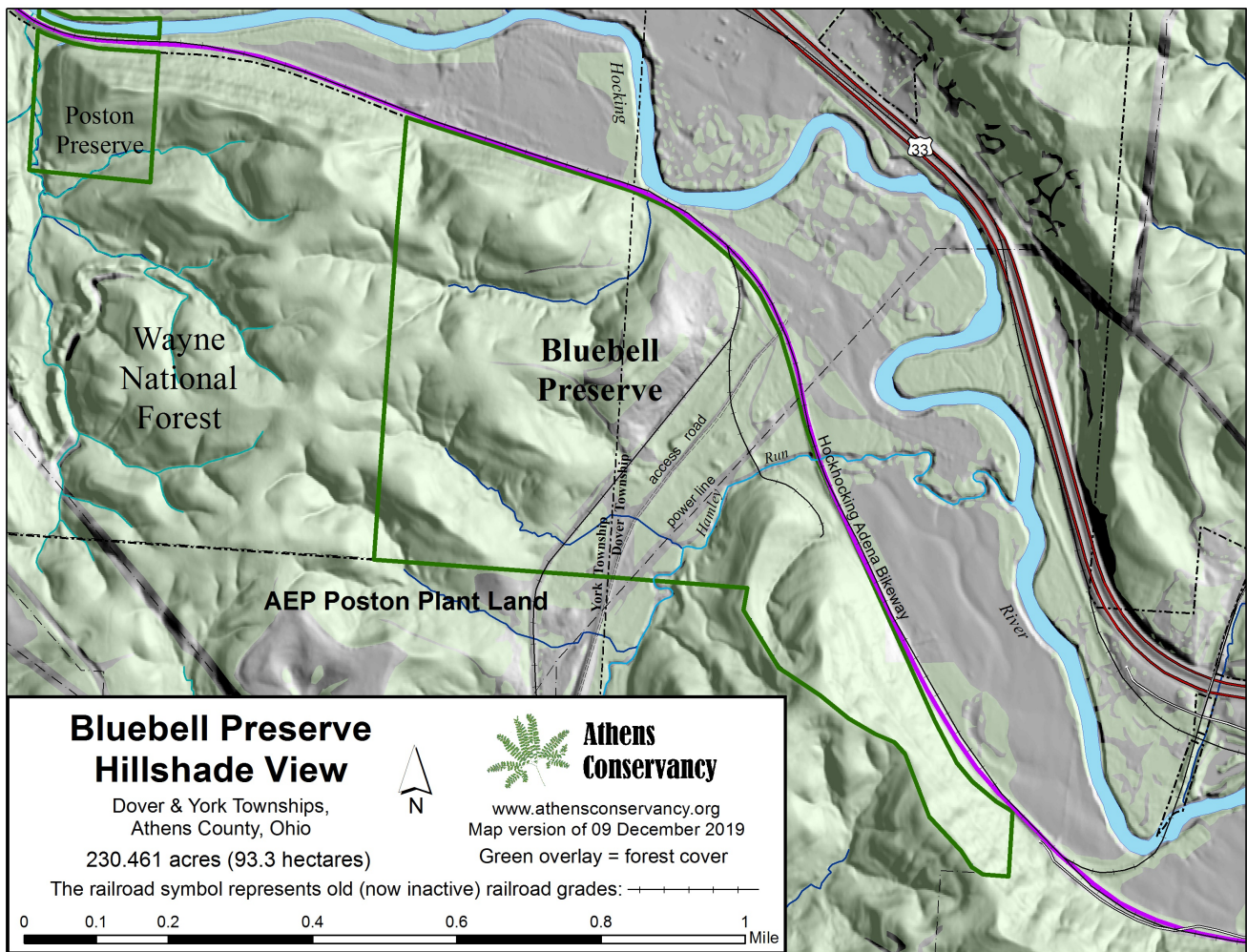
Rock formation on the Canaan Preserve

We have created a parking lot for the Mary Beth preserve with the help of the contractor who repaired Strouds Run Road, and we enabled trail access from the parking area via a new foot bridge. We will be developing trails there and are considering other amenities.

We have completed and adopted our strategic plan, available through our website in printable pdf form. This will guide us through the coming years. We have also created a Moonville Rail-Trail Connection Plan, also similarly available through our website. Go to the "Resources" tab and look for "Newsletters and Other Publications."

We have completed the funding and purchase of a half-mile extension of the Athens-Belpre Rail-Trail, extending it from the Athens-Washington County line to Collins Road in Belpre Township, Washington County. This connects the existing rail-trail, which had ended at the Athens-Washington County line, with Collins Road. If traveling east on US-50 from Torch, Collins Road is the first road to the right after entering Washington County. We have seen the opening of more of the ABRT for general public use, bringing the total available mileage to 8.6 miles with three parking areas.

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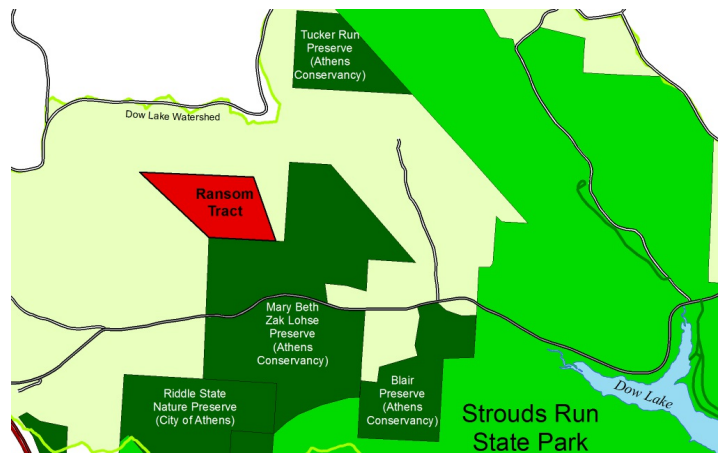


Two grants from Ora E. Anderson Fund Support Conservancy Trail Projects

We are delighted to report that the Athens Conservancy received two grants totaling \$7,955 this fall from the Ora E. Anderson Conservation Fund for Appalachian Ohio. The bulk of the funding will be used to purchase a critical half-mile section of former B&O rail corridor for the Athens-Belpre Rail-Trail project. This grant completes the funding for that purchase, which is also funded in part by grants from Ohio Health, Camden-Clark Medical Center, Quidel Corp., and over \$6000 in private donations (much of it through GoFundMe). The rail-trail section is in Washington County and connects a section owned by Athens County (originally purchased by the Conservancy with Clean Ohio funding) with a CSX-owned section to the east. (The AC is collaborating with ODOT and the Belpre Multi-Use Trail Committee to acquire the latter.) The second Anderson Fund grant will help pay for the construction of trails in the new Canaan Preserve to connect the trail systems of the Baker Preserve and Strouds Run State Park. This work will be done in partnership with the Buckeye Trail Association. There is currently no trail access to this beautiful new preserve, a situation that this Anderson Fund grant will help remedy in the coming months.

New Addition to Mary Beth Preserve

On 12 November, we completed the acquisition of a 42.69-acre addition to the Mary Beth Zak Lohse Preserve. This addition, purchased from the Ransom family, which mainly used it for outdoor recreation, centers around a small stream valley, includes active beaver wetland, and is located on the north property line of the existing preserve. This property was purchased with a Clean Ohio Conservation Fund Green Space grant. If we proceed with a proposal to build bicycle trails north of the road in the preserve, it will be a key factor in enabling those trails.



Year in Review, continued from page 1

Late last year, we added 165 acres to our Bluebell Preserve, making it 230 acres. A full 2.5-mile stretch of the Hockhocking Adena Bikeway is now fully protected on the land side by Wayne National Forest and our preserves, and is protected on the river side by Le-Ax Water lands.

We have made huge progress in removing non-native invasive plants from our Blair Preserve. This project has been underway for several years. We will be continuing to do this work indefinitely, although we're sharing our lead worker, Bill Rucker, with Friends of Strouds Run State Park, which is also funding invasives removal.

We've had other work days at our preserves. The photo to the right is from a trail-clearing day we had at Baker Preserve for Public Lands Day after a storm blew down many trees. Thanks to the Sierra Student Coalition and others! We regularly have work days at Baker and have recently had one at the Mary Beth Preserve. Also, thanks to O Ryan Gassaway of Woodsong Tree Care for removing dead trees at the springhouse on the Mary Beth Preserve.

Two new conservation easements, totaling 267 additional acres, were created this year. One of the two easements connects two existing easements, protecting approximately 576 acres of contiguous land. We have greatly improved our process and our instruments for creating conservation easements, and support them as a valuable tool. We generally favor them for lands that are going to stay private, however, and favor fee-simple acquisition for lands that are going to be public.

We have better structured our hunting permit system, with Joe Brehm finding lead hunters for the preserves in which hunting is allowed. Only deer may be hunted, and only bow hunting is allowed in most preserves. A permit is required. We permit deer hunting because, uncontrolled, deer will devastate populations of desirable native plants.



One of the reasons (in addition to poaching) that ginseng is becoming so rare is deer predation.

Three of our board members – Brian Blair, Chris Fahl, and John Knouse – attended the national Land Trust Alliance Conference in Raleigh, North Carolina, in October.

We had our usual booth at the Pawpaw Festival. We continue to provide resources through our website, including the Athens Outdoor Guide, invasive plant control, access to publications, outlinks, preserve information, GIS mapping resources, and other subjects of interest.

An Excerpt from *Vanished Species* by David Day

By 1896 there were only 250,000 Passenger Pigeons left. They came together in one last great nesting flock in April of that year outside Bowling Green, Ohio [sic-should be Kentucky], in the forest on Green River near Mammoth Cave. The telegraph lines notified the hunters and the railways brought them in from all parts. The result was devastating – 200,000 carcasses were taken, another 40,000 were mutilated and wasted. 100,000 newborn chicks not yet at the squab state and thus not worth taking were destroyed or abandoned to predators in their nests. Perhaps 5,000 birds escaped.

The entire kill of this hunt was to be shipped in boxcars to markets in the east, but there was a derailment on the line on the day of the shipping. The dead birds packed in the boxcars soon began to putrefy under a hot sun. The diligent hunters' efforts were wasted: the rotting carcasses of all 200,000 birds were dumped into a deep ravine a few miles from the railway loading depot.



Arc of Appalachia Director to Speak

Thursday, December 12, Nancy Stranahan, director of Arc of Appalachia and the Highlands Sanctuary, will be speaking at the Southeast Ohio History Center at the intersection of Congress and State Streets in Athens. The presentation will begin at 5:30 pm. She will be speaking on “**The Invisible Forest:**”

“Our home biome, the world’s temperate broadleaf forest, is one of the most disturbed biomes on the earth, and certainly the most invisible. Although a great need exists for citizen advocacy and awareness of a biome that covers a third of our nation, most of us probably know more about deserts and rainforests than our home biome. With academic researchers focusing on greater and greater fields of narrow specialization, often at the molecular level, this presentation’s cross-disciplinary presentation focuses on the world significance of on America’s Eastern Forest in a “big picture” holistic kind of way, filling a greatly needed educational niche. The Arc of Appalachia’s primary educational mission is to inspire citizens in Ohio to identify with the living forest as their first and foremost home in the world, have a stake in the Forest’s health and future, and feel the connectedness across the Forest’s vast geographic territory spanning three continents – thereby connecting our backyard forest with the entire world.”



The Athens Conservancy is deeply honored to receive the 2019 Group Hometown Hero Award. The American Red Cross of Southeastern Ohio’s Athens office organizes the annual Hometown Hero Program and solicits nominations in a variety of “Hero” categories. Our nominator, Char Rae, wrote “The Athens Conservancy Board of Directors’ knowledge, skill, and dedication create a legacy for our county, preserving nature and green space for current and future residents, including native species of wildlife and plants.” Thank you!

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.

When two people agree on the same exact identification of a species, then it becomes “research grade.” There are many posts by other people that need additional identification, so it’s helpful for you as a user to browse these and add to them.

There are also links on each of our preserve pages on the website so that you can go directly to that iNaturalist project from the website.

Athens Conservancy Newsletter

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

<http://www.athensconservancy.org/Documents/Newsletters/AC-newsletter6.pdf>

If you need to receive this as hard copy via the mail, 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