



FALL/WINTER 2022

OUR OHIO NATURE

Going with the Flow

COLLABORATION FOSTERS WATERSHED-SCALE CONSERVATION

Protecting Ohio's watersheds sounds straightforward. But political boundaries that cut through streams and divide wetlands sometimes make it challenging to protect and restore these systems—and the ecosystem services they provide, including clean air and water—at a landscape scale.

Ohio's waters do not conform to the lines drawn on a map, but instead flow across vast landscapes that span township, county, state and national boundaries. Just as our streams and wetlands cross these boundaries, so too must our efforts to protect and restore them.

Recognizing these challenges, The Nature Conservancy in Ohio began laying the

groundwork in 2015 for a holistic approach to address our mounting water quality issues. Years of mobilizing support from a broad constituency that included agriculture, healthcare, government, environmental groups and other partners paid off when the DeWine administration launched the H2Ohio program in 2019.

“The H2Ohio program provides cross-cutting funding for addressing pollution like nutrient runoff that contributes to harmful algal blooms,” says Alexis Sakas, natural infrastructure director for TNC in Ohio. “It supports stream and wetland projects that are deeply collaborative in nature. Working under the leadership of the Ohio Department of Natural

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The Nature Conservancy meets all of the Standards for Charity Accountability established by the BBB Wise Giving Alliance. The BBB Wise Giving Alliance is a national charity watchdog affiliated with the Better Business Bureau.

Director's Message



One of the reasons that many of us have worked for The Nature Conservancy for decades is that we share the values of the organization. Among these values are a commitment to the communities where we work, and a commitment to ensure diversity in our staff, partners and perspectives, which we know is imperative to helping us reach our conservation goals. This issue of *Our Ohio Nature* speaks to facets of these values, in particular collaboration, working across boundaries and engaging in partnerships with people, businesses and governments to advance tangible and lasting conservation results.

While The Nature Conservancy is known for collaboration, we also know that there is more that we can and should be doing to better serve the communities where we work. Looking forward, we are considering how to protect and restore lands and waters at an increasing pace and scale while better serving the needs of communities that depend upon them. This is not only the right thing to do, but the only way to build the support needed to deliver on our vision of a world where people act to conserve nature for its own sake and its ability to fulfill and enrich their lives. It takes a community to save an ecosystem.

We are all connected by the lands and waters that sustain us. As we work to steward these habitats with partners, celebrate the volunteers who are helping to further our mission, and work with local or state governments, we strive to maintain authentic collaboration. The complexity of ecosystems demands no less. And while it is more difficult than working alone, this type of collaboration is core to our values. Working in this way is essential to success at scale, has a greater impact than working alone, and brings even deeper meaning to our work.

Thank you for being a part of our community.

**"Alone we can do so little;
together we can do so much."**

—HELEN KELLER

Going with the Flow

CONTINUED FROM COVER

Resources, we're leveraging H2Ohio funds to restore streams and wetlands in ways that support and enhance funding from other water quality programs, like the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and the Sustain Our Great Lakes Program.”

But innovative funding models aren't the only collaborative feature of our water quality protection work. From the design of a conservation project to on-the-ground implementation and long-term stewardship, working alongside partners across townships, counties and agencies has strengthened our ability to approach restoration in ways that support the ecological functions of the systems we are working to protect.

For Northeast Ohio Restoration Manager Ann Gilmore, this community approach to conservation is critical to improving wetland and floodplain habitat in Cuyahoga Valley National Park (CVNP). Just north of the Village of Peninsula, sandwiched between the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad and the Cuyahoga River, sit 30 acres of degraded wetland and floodplain habitat that TNC is working in partnership with CVNP to restore. Through funding from the H2Ohio program, the project will enhance and restore up to 14 acres of existing wetland habitat and reforest 30 acres of Cuyahoga River floodplain.

Downriver, TNC is helping to revive another portion of the Cuyahoga River watershed on a 170-acre parcel of former agricultural land jointly owned by Sagamore Hills Township and the National Park Service. Through H2Ohio funding and a Sustain Our Great Lakes grant, TNC is working alongside staff from CVNP and the Conservancy for CVNP to remove woody invasive species and reforest important habitat that protects headwater streams and wetlands. Upon completion, more than 100 acres of wetlands, riparian buffer, forest and upland meadow will be restored, and 725 linear feet of headwater tributaries will be enhanced.

Farther west, TNC is leveraging partnerships in similarly collaborative ways to restore the dynamic Sandusky Bay ecosystem. TNC is developing a portfolio of nature-based shoreline projects that will help filter nutrients and support wildlife. Restoration work will begin with the management of invasive common reed (*Phragmites australis*) on 44 acres at the Pickerel Creek Wildlife Area. These H2Ohio-funded projects will create critical habitat for species like northern pike (*Esox lucius*)—which rely on shallow, vegetated waters for reproduction—and the state-threatened Blanding's turtle (*Emydoidea blandingii*).



Despite its early success, the future of H2Ohio is unclear. TNC is working alongside partner agencies through public advocacy and direct coordination to secure long-term funding solutions for water quality in Ohio by, for example, creating a bond for the H2Ohio Program.

This fall, TNC also completed work on a project to enable improved management of 137 acres of coastal wetland habitat at Maumee Bay State Park. This project restored 4,400 feet of dike using an impervious aquablock material so that ODNR can control water levels to help flood out common reed and improve the health of the coastal wetland habitat for a diversity of species.

These projects represent just a small glimpse into how TNC is working collaboratively and across boundaries to help ensure clean waters for Ohioans. Our mitigation program also restores and protects wetlands and streams to offset unavoidable impacts from development. And our agriculture team engages farmers and crop advisors to implement sustainable agricultural practices that help safeguard water quality and soil health. Collectively, these projects and programs are helping to secure a better future for people and nature in Ohio and beyond.

➔ **TO LEARN MORE** about how we're working to secure clean water in Ohio, visit [nature.org/ohiocleanwater](https://www.nature.org/ohiocleanwater).

Conservation Highlights

PROTECTING OHIO'S BIODIVERSE AND CLIMATE-RESILIENT LANDS
BENEFITS PEOPLE AND NATURE

Edge of Appalachia Preserve Grows

The Nature Conservancy is celebrating several important additions to the Richard and Lucile Durrell Edge of Appalachia (EOA) Preserve this year. These additions protect critical wildlife habitat and aquatic systems while helping to create a climate-resilient landscape in southern Ohio.



Ladd Tract TNC was thrilled to acquire the 128-acre Ladd Tract in 2022. The tract will help link the 20,000-acre EOA Preserve with the 65,000-acre Shawnee State Forest in a project known as the Sunshine Corridor. The property boasts an impressive diversity of native trees, including beech, sugar maple, tuliptree, and various species of oaks and hickories along with acid-loving species like sourwood, pitch pine and mountain laurel. The newly acquired property provides habitat for wildlife like rare black bear and bobcat and more diminutive species like cerulean and worm-eating warblers and spotted salamanders.



Mackenzie Run While TNC works to protect high-quality natural areas, other projects require work to return degraded areas back into a natural state. Such is the case with Mackenzie Run. Portions of the property were once home to a bar, dirt racetrack and campground. TNC worked alongside many partners and volunteers to remove abandoned buildings and restore the 37-acre area to natural habitat while providing public access through the enhancement of a boat and canoe launch. The purchase of the Mackenzie Run property also allowed TNC to conserve the last unprotected piece of the Mackenzie Run watershed, a rare cold-water creek habitat that supports an array of wildlife.



Jenkins Tract Funded by the Ohio EPA's Water Resource Restoration Sponsor Program, which targets the protection and restoration of high-quality streams and wetlands in the state, the Jenkins Tract adds 94 acres of aquatic habitats to the EOA Preserve, including stream-fed tributaries that feed Scioto Brush Creek. This addition protects deciduous forest, red cedar thickets and rare dry limestone prairie that blossoms to life with rare plant species like crested coralroot orchid (*Hexalectris spicata*), scaly blazing star (*Liatrix squarrosa*) and the green-star sedge (*Carex viridistellata*).

➔ **LEARN MORE** about recent additions to our Ohio preserves at nature.org/ohiolandprotection.



In May 2022, TNC celebrated the opening of Sandhill Crane Wetlands, the newest addition to the Kitty Todd Nature Preserve in northwest Ohio. The project, which restored 280 acres of marginal agricultural land back to native wet prairie habitat in the Oak Openings Region, today provides habitat for plants and wildlife, including state-threatened sandhill cranes. Visitors can enjoy a short walk to a viewing area that provides an expansive view of the wetland.



Back from the Brink

SAVING ENDANGERED WILDFLOWERS

From the modest spring ephemerals that peek through melting snow and last year's leaves on the forest floor, to the showy blooms that light up our prairies each summer, incredible displays of wildflowers paint our preserves with color each year. Wildflowers are a treat for people and wildlife alike, providing inspiration for nature enthusiasts and critical food sources for pollinators. But some of our wildflowers need a helping hand.

For Grand River Conservation Coordinator Derrick Cooper, protecting our rare and endangered plants is critical to supporting biodiversity.

Of the eight species of trillium that naturally occur in Ohio, painted trillium (*Trillium undulatum*) is the rarest and perhaps most beautiful. So named for the splash of pink at the flower's center, painted trillium is state-endangered. But the acidic soils of the hemlock forests at TNC's Morgan Swamp Preserve in Ashtabula County provide ideal habitat for the spring-blooming flower. The preserve boasts the largest population of the rare flower in the state and TNC staff are working to ensure that the plant continues to thrive.

"Since constructing a large deer exclusion fence around populations of painted trillium around six years ago, we are seeing an increasing trend in the number of flowering individuals we count each year," notes Cooper, "proving TNC's efforts to protect the endangered species are paying off."

But painted trillium isn't the only wildflower that staff are working to protect at Morgan Swamp. For 80 years, the

heart-leaved twayblade (*Neottia cordata*) was locally extinct in Ohio until its rediscovery in the hemlock forests at the preserve in 2013. Today, the preserve is the only known area where this rare plant can be found in the state.

Like painted trillium, heart-leaved twayblade is reliant on the eastern hemlock to maintain the habitat needed for its survival. This past spring, TNC conservation staff counted 1,600 individual plants with over 600 in flower. Staff plan to continue monitoring and protecting the endangered wildflower from the encroachment of invasive species and deer browse.

Throughout Ohio, TNC staff, partners and volunteers are working to protect the state's rare and endangered plants and animals.



EXPLORE OTHER SPECIES we're working to protect at nature.org/ohioendangered.



Faces of Conservation

TNC WELCOMES THREE NEW OHIO TRUSTEES



BARBARA PETEE is the Senior Advisor, Federal Advocacy for ProMedica, a nonprofit health care organization where she works with federal lawmakers to ensure that ProMedica is involved in helping to shape and provide input on key policy and legislative issues that affect the health care delivery model and the critical issues that affect the organization and the communities it serves. She has held numerous roles in her 36-year tenure with ProMedica, including Chief Communications and Public Affairs Officer. Petee also serves as the President of The Root Cause Coalition, a national nonprofit organization that works to address the social determinants of health. She serves on many local, regional and national boards and committees, including the Alliance to End Hunger based in Washington D.C. A graduate of Michigan State University, Petee has been married to her husband, Tim, for 32 years and they have two grown children.



CLARENCE SIMMONS has used his 25 years of experience and passion for real estate development and construction, affordable housing and community revitalization to make an impact in the greater Columbus, Ohio area. Currently, he serves as president and CEO of SIMCO, a minority-led real estate development and construction company that he started to address the affordable housing crisis in central Ohio and revitalize the Linden Community. Previously, Simmons served in banking roles at JPMorgan Chase and in nonprofit roles as director of real estate for the Affordable Housing Trust for the City of Columbus and Franklin County. He has worked with a diversity of development partners and served on many nonprofit boards and organizations. Simmons received a Bachelor of Arts degree from The Ohio State University and a Certificate of Executive Education from Dartmouth University and currently lives in New Albany, Ohio with his wife, Lachelle Simmons, Esq., and two children.



ALEX WESAW is the Director of the American Indian Relations Division of the Ohio History Connection. He is a citizen of the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians (federally recognized in Michigan and Indiana) and is the elected Tribal Council Treasurer for the Tribe's government, Treasurer for the Tribe's four casinos (Four Winds Casino Resorts), and the Chairman of the Pokagon Development Authority, an economic development arm of the Band. In his role at the Ohio History Connection, Wesaw is leading the organization's decolonization efforts and is the liaison between the History Connection and the more than 45 federally recognized tribes with connections to the lands we now call Ohio. He is working to implement the organization's American Indian Relations Policy across the statewide organization and its 58 sites (over half being American Indian sites). Wesaw holds a Ph.D. in City & Regional Planning, a master's degree in public administration, and a bachelor's degree in communication.



Community Conservation

CONSERVATION IS A GROUP PROJECT

Conserving natural areas is a team effort. Our work would not be possible without the many volunteers who help us protect and enhance Ohio's natural areas for the benefit of both people and the many species that rely on these areas for survival.



Adopt a Natural Area

The Adopt a Natural Area (AANA) program was created to strengthen opportunities for local organizations and corporations to help TNC steward our preserves over time, which helps build a lasting relationship with the land. Through regular volunteer events, participants help remove and manage invasive species, plant trees and collect seeds that will be used to plant new generations of native plants at our preserves.

The AANA program has already provided big benefits to our Big Darby Headwaters Nature Preserve in central Ohio and the Oak Openings Region in northwest Ohio. At our Big Darby Headwaters Nature Preserve, more than 75 volunteers from Honda, NetJets and Scotts Miracle GRO have contributed nearly 250 hours in trail clean-up, invasive species removal, tree planting, seed collection and pollinator habitat stewardship since 2020. Volunteer efforts in the Oak Openings Region are no less impressive, with volunteers from Cub Scout Pack 27 in Ottawa Hills, the Village of Ottawa Hills and General Motors contributing hundreds of collective hours in invasive species removal, native plant landscaping and seed collection to support this globally rare ecosystem. Previous AANA volunteers in northwest Ohio include the Wildwood Academy, Toledo Zoo ZooTeens and residents near Oak Openings Preserve Metropark at Oak Openings Preserve's Reed Road Dunes.

Volunteer Spotlight

When serendipity meets stewardship, incredible things happen. In May 2022, students from West Union High School science and agricultural classes visited our Richard and Lucile Durrell Edge of Appalachia Preserve to help remove trash and re-seed three acres around the newly restored Mackenzie Run boat ramp area, where several buildings had been recently removed. While there, preserve staff received a phone call from a local resident who had caught an endangered Allegheny woodrat in the attic of his house earlier that day. Preserve staff were quick to respond, collecting the mammal and demonstrating for the students how woodrats are processed, documented and marked for future identification as part of our larger woodrat research project in partnership with Cincinnati Museum Center. The woodrat was later released in suitable habitat just a few hundred yards away from where the students were volunteering.

 **INTERESTED IN GETTING INVOLVED?** Visit [nature.org/volunteer](https://www.nature.org/volunteer) to learn more about volunteer opportunities near you.

"The Adopt a Natural Area program allows local partners to support our work in tangible, long-lasting and meaningful ways. Through tree planting, removal of invasive species and stewardship of pollinator habitat, these partnerships help amplify TNC's conservation work in ways that benefit both people and nature."

—ANGIE BURKE, Community and Conservation Specialist

FALL/WINTER 2022

OUR OHIO NATURE

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Leave a legacy for generations to come.

What better legacy is there to leave than your commitment to protecting the Earth for generations to come? Whether you are taking those first steps toward planning your estate or are in the process of updating your estate plan, The Nature Conservancy is here to help. Don't let another day pass by. Contact Alan Monroe in Ohio at:

 (614) 967-8877

 alan.monroe@tnc.org

 nature.org/legacy

The Nature Conservancy 

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IN THIS ISSUE

From safeguarding water quality to protecting biodiverse and climate-resilient lands, conservation is a group project. Explore this issue of Our Ohio Nature to discover how The Nature Conservancy is leveraging partnerships to amplify our work for the benefit of people and nature.