



Western Reserve Land Conservancy

land • people • community

LANDLINE

wrlandconservancy.org

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LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT AND CEO

In 1987, a group of concerned citizens formed the Chagrin River Land Conservancy (CRLC). Nearly 20 years later, through a merger of CRLC and seven other local land trusts, Western Reserve Land Conservancy - Ohio's largest and most influential land trust - was born. Since then, we have had a significant impact in conserving natural lands, working family farms and urban greenspaces. At the time of the merger, the eight land trusts had collectively protected 205 properties totaling 8,850 acres; at the close of 2021, we now have protected 67,637 acres at 846 properties in 28 counties of Ohio.

It is a stunning achievement, a testament to the hard work of our board and staff and to our commitment to partnership. But sometimes the numbers just don't tell the whole story.

For example, a quarter-acre parcel in Vermilion is our smallest conserved property but an important part of one of our biggest and most ambitious projects to date: Revitalizing Vermilion's Main Street Beach with a new comfort station, permanently protected green space, and improved access to the town's biggest tourist destination.

In Bloomfield, we took one of our largest properties - a 1,500 acre landscape - and hired local contractors to restore water flow and recreate the natural wetlands that were drained more than 100 years ago.

Less than an acre of land in Cleveland's Mt. Pleasant neighborhood has become a symbol of an entire community's healing a decade after a horrific tragedy.

The Garden of Eleven Angels memorializes the lives of 11 women brutally murdered at the site by a convicted serial killer.

The numbers don't lie. After nearly 16 years, our work restoring and preserving the natural landscapes, family farms, and urban greenspaces continues, stronger than ever. Over the years we have learned that all of our work to restore land can also restore people and their communities. Permanently protected landscapes provide the people of our region with an environment that nurtures them physically, mentally, and spiritually. Thank you for helping us transform Northeast Ohio to better serve the people who love this region and call it home.

Sincerely,
Rich Cochran
President and CEO

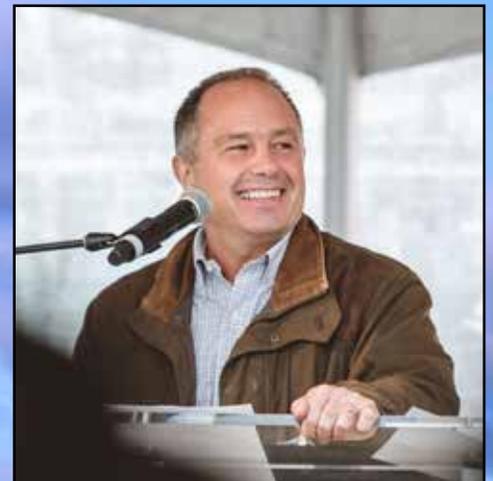


Photo credit: Scott Esterly

LANDOWNER SPOTLIGHT *by Jared Saylor*

Gordon Oney (second from left), his son Bryan, and granddaughters Sarah and Hannah



In 1974, among the rolling green pastures of Huron County, Gordon and Kathy Oney purchased their first farm, a modest 230-acre parcel they both saw as an investment for their future. It cost \$500 per acre, but its value to them and their family was priceless. As the years went on, the Oneys purchased additional surrounding parcels, leasing out the lands to other farmers in the area. When Kathy passed away in 2018, Gordon vowed to continue their commitment to preserving and protecting Ohio's lands.

Born in Greenwich, Ohio in 1940, Gordon comes from a farming family but worked at a local printing shop for most of his life. Together they raised a family and kept a modest old-style concrete block house built over 100 years ago just 10 minutes from where Gordon grew up.

In June of 2021, Western Reserve Land Conservancy recognized Gordon and Kathy's commitment to land conservation by awarding them the Grimm Family Conservation Medal, the highest honor the Land Conservancy bestows upon conservation easement landowners. Gordon has been a lifelong ambassador for conservation, playing an instrumental role in the creation of the Firelands Land Conservancy where he served as a member of the board of trustees. He also assisted in the 2006 merger of land trusts that created Western Reserve Land Conservancy and served on that board as a trustee.

"I've said it I don't know how many times, but I am proud to be a part of this," Oney said. "These farms will be a part of my family for many years to come. It's a real privilege to be a part of this effort to protect these lands and have a long-term impact."



Kate Pilacky (Associate Field Director for the Land Conservancy), Bryan and Gordon Oney, and Andy McDowell (Vice President, Western Field Operations for the Land Conservancy)

Scan with your smartphone camera to watch a video!



TAKING STEPS TO RENEW CLEVELAND'S VACANT LAND

by Karen Koch

Early on a gray, cold November morning in 2021, 10 of us gathered at Britt Oval in the City of Cleveland, enjoying fresh bagels and coffee while receiving final instructions from Isaac Robb, Western Reserve Land Conservancy's Vice President of Planning, Research, and Urban Projects. We were minutes away from starting a land parcel inventory in the nearby neighborhoods of Mount Pleasant, Buckeye-Shaker, and Buckeye-Woodhill, the first step towards revitalizing and repurposing abandoned and vacant lots in Cleveland.

Organized into groups of three people per vehicle, we spent the rest of the morning and early afternoon driving through a dozen pre-mapped survey areas to organize and expedite the day's surveying.

As we drove street by street, we identified vacant lots with accumulated debris and trash, a major problem for many of these neighborhoods. We recorded an inventory of discarded items, most of which was illegally dumped into the lots: mattresses and furniture, cardboard, construction debris, tires, yard waste, abandoned vehicles, and more. We also identified distressed structures such as homes, garages, and other buildings in extreme disrepair that could pose a threat to neighborhood safety and be candidates for demolition. Using Regrid, an app designed to provide land parcels and spatial data at scale, we identified each specific land parcel with debris, photographed each lot in question, and entered data regarding the specific kinds of debris found. Assembling this data provides concrete information to government leaders and property owners to support neighborhood-wide cleanup initiatives.

Last June, the Land Conservancy completed a

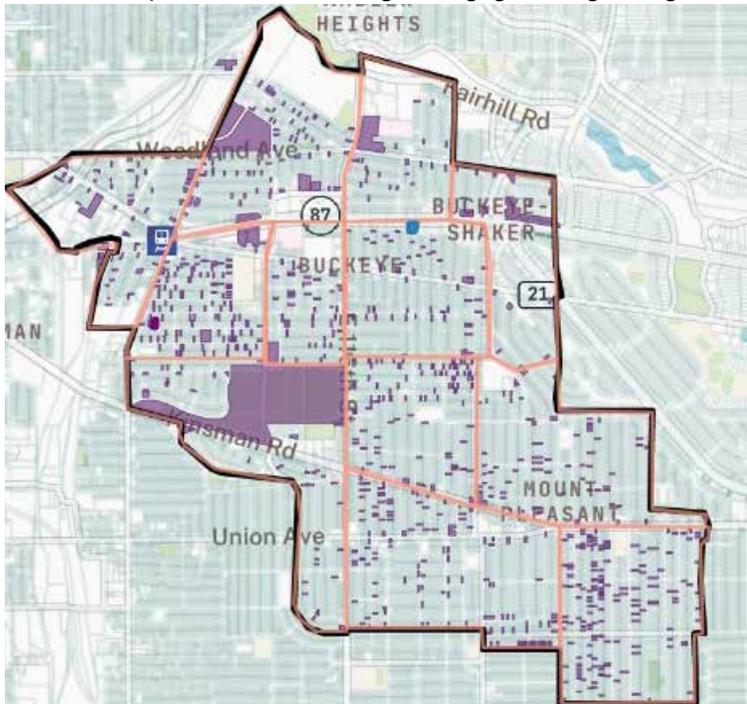
similar assessment in these same neighborhoods. This second survey was the follow-up, an evaluation of progress gained or lost, with both surveys made possible thanks to grant funding from the Cuyahoga County Solid Waste District. A related grant received this spring from the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency is also funding cleanup of debris found on vacant lots, as well as education and outreach around dumping prevention for residents living in these areas.

"We send the city a list of publicly-owned lots where debris is found," said Kelly McCarthy, Urban Projects Manager at Western Reserve Land Conservancy. "If there are lots the city misses, or they can't get to it, we partner with Court Community Service, a nonprofit that arranges community service work for adult criminal offenders, to provide additional clean up. For privately-owned lots, we send outreach to the property owner with info and resources to help them with clean up."

Data collected from the property inventories will be analyzed, providing important information about land use in Mount Pleasant, Buckeye-Shaker, and Buckeye-Woodhill. Based on this report, the Land Conservancy will make recommendations to city and local leaders on preventing structural distress and improving use of vacant land.

"We're working toward positive long-term results for our neighbors on the east side of Cleveland," Robb said. "Knowing what is happening at these sites gives us important information for how to best deal with some of these challenges. None of this would be possible without good data, strong community partners, and a passion to see some of Cleveland's distressed neighborhoods made better."

Using the Regrid app allows survey volunteers to record lots (shown in purple) where debris is present, and vacant buildings showing significant signs of neglect



Empty lots containing litter, tires, and other debris are captured in photos during surveys so that future action can be taken to clean it up



PROGRESS ON OUR PRESERVES *by Chris Szell*

At the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, Western Reserve Land Conservancy launched its #GetOutsideOhio campaign and prioritized opening and maintaining Signature Parks and Preserves to provide safe, natural, and publicly accessible landscapes in both urban and rural settings. In the last year, we have explored non-traditional conservation work including large scale restoration efforts, the re-vitalization of an old grist mill, and construction of amenities for a new park to open in 2022.



Sugar Island Preserve

Last November, the Land Conservancy completed a 7-month wetland restoration effort at its 1,477-acre Sugar Island Preserve in Trumbull and Ashtabula Counties. The effort restored 210 acres of wetland habitat through funding provided by the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Water Resource Restoration Sponsor Program, the Ohio Public Works Commission Clean Ohio program, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Restoration Act. [Read more about Sugar Island Preserve on page 11.](#)



Kister Mill

The restoration of an old grist mill in Wayne County is nearly complete. All exterior work on the mill is finished, as construction to replace the roof, siding, windows, doors, and entry way began in December 2020. A new stairwell leading up to the water wheel viewing platform was recently installed and electrical has been updated including new light fixtures. We plan to install siding to close in the old garage, which is now an accessible restroom facility, and install a new septic system. In 2022, we will complete site grading, parking, walkway installation, and the apple cider porch. We anticipate that renovation of the original wooden water wheel will begin this year using hand tools and machinery found inside the mill itself.

Blue Heron Preserve, in Memory of Janet Franklin Foster

We are well on our way to completing this keystone park in Burton Township. Inspections for septic systems and the newly constructed shelter and office are complete. All structures are built, including the Observation Deck (pictured). The remaining work to be done on site includes general site grading, installing additional catch basins to capture water, trail and road work, and installing a new driveway apron, gate, and welcome entry. As we begin the new year, we look forward to reopening the park to the public hopefully this summer and to begin improving trails throughout the park. This former sand and gravel mining pit has been transformed into a beautiful public park with great hiking trails, unspoiled wetlands, and tremendous fishing.



Farmington Forested Wetland Expansion

Acquisition and restoration of the 181-acre property was accomplished through funding provided by the Ohio EPA Water Resource Restoration Sponsor Program. The Land Conservancy will complete acquisition by March and has already begun developing plans for a \$203,000 wetland restoration project that will re-establish 13 acres of wetlands and enhance an additional 56 acres of wetland and 1,030 linear feet of stream. The Land Conservancy will also remove invasive species and plant new trees later this spring.



The goal of Western Reserve Land Conservancy's fundraising campaign to Conserve, Connect, & Sustain is \$45 million. We're getting close, but we need your help!

Every dollar you donate up to \$1 million this year will be matched by Larry and Karen Bettcher. Your gift to protect wildlife habitats, clean our air and water, preserve Ohio's special places, and ensure healthy landscapes for future generations will go **TWICE AS FAR if you donate today!**

Contact Stella Dilik at sdilik@wrlandconservancy.org or 440.528.4153

OUT &



Renee Boronka, Manager of Conservation Education for the Land Conservancy

CONNECTING KIDS TO NATURE

Cleveland kids will soon have better access to outdoor recreation and learning opportunities thanks to funding from Cities Connecting Children to Nature (CCCN), a joint initiative of the National League of Cities and the Children & Nature Network that supports local communities in their efforts to increase equitable access to nature. Connecting children to nature improves their health and well-being and enhances academic achievement. The funding will complement Western Reserve Land Conservancy's ongoing efforts to create outdoor curriculum that gets kids outside and engaged.

Launched in 2016, CCCN will now add Cleveland to more than 40 other cities nationwide focusing on developing policies, programs, and infrastructure to connect children to nature more equitably.

"Nature play promotes a child's intellectual, emotional, social, and physical development. And by being outside and surrounded by nature, children experience a dynamic environment that stimulates all their senses," said Renee Boronka, Manager of Conservation Education and Outreach at the Land Conservancy. "We'll be collaborating with city officials, community nonprofits, and many other partners to create a variety of green play areas throughout Cleveland."

In her role, Boronka is expanding upon current programs, as well as creating new nature-based learning opportunities for people of all ages. Prior to joining the Land Conservancy, she spent 25 years with the Cleveland Museum of Natural History directing their Natural Areas Program. She enjoys weaving nature education into all aspects of programming that ranges from field trips and workshops/symposia, to special events, webinars and outdoor experiences,



Kids attending our Monarch Tagging event took home butterfly tags and a new love for pollinators. This boy spent his birthday with his mom and the Land Conservancy tagging butterflies in Frohring Meadows in Chagrin Falls

believing that a deep understanding of our natural world leads to a lifelong commitment to protect it, reinvigorating Western Reserve Land Conservancy's education and outreach programming.

As a grant recipient, the Land Conservancy will bring together local, municipal, and regional organizations sharing a similar vision to collaborate on equitable nature connections. Working together, the partners' mission will be to leverage funding, advance policies, and share knowledge to bring nature's benefits to more children, particularly children of color and those from low-income communities. While time outdoors benefits all children, access to nature has the greatest positive impact on marginalized youth and those living in poverty.

The effort will prioritize communities where children lack access to parks and greenspace, and will engage organizations that represent communities underrepresented in the outdoors.

The 26-month grant period includes technical assistance from CCCN national experts, as well as grant funding, to support the region in engaging municipal leaders to implement nature connection strategies.

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of access to safe, outdoor green spaces within walking distance of residents' homes. Nature has become more critical than ever. The Land Conservancy - which launched #GetOutsideOhio at the beginning of Covid lockdowns, an outreach campaign designed to promote publicly accessible Signature Parks and Preserves - continues to see astounding attendance at its properties across the region.

ABOUT *by Karen Koch*



Larry Bettcher, 2021 Art of Caring Award recipient



Vermilion Main Street Beach



Rich Cochran (President and CEO for the Land Conservancy), Stella Dilik (Chief Development Officer for the Land Conservancy), Bill Mulligan (Trustee, Campaign Co-Chair) and Kathy Leavenworth (Trustee) at Stewards Event

STEWARDS EVENT

Longtime Western Reserve Land Conservancy supporter and trustee Larry Bettcher received the 2021 Art of Caring Award from the Land Conservancy during the annual Stewards Event, held this year at the historic Shelter Hill Farm in early November.

Friends, family, and donors of the Land Conservancy gathered to honor Larry while enjoying drinks and catered refreshments inside a spacious 100-year old barn located on the Hunting Valley property owned by hosts Peter and Alexa Drago.

Larry, a Vermilion resident, has been instrumental in supporting the conservation and restoration of the Vermilion lake front, as well as other conservation projects in the region, and has donated transformational gifts to the Land Conservancy, including a substantial estate commitment.

"Larry has transformed Vermilion through his leadership, his charity, and through inspiring others to give. Since we started working with Larry and his colleagues in Vermilion, we have helped to conserve and improve the lakeshore and river frontage. For that legacy, plus the many, many other projects he has helped us with in the Firelands area, it's extraordinary" said Western Reserve Land Conservancy President and CEO, Rich Cochran.

Rich presented Larry with a White Oak Pin, recognizing him as a member of the White Oak Legacy Society. Larry and his wife, Karen, also received a commissioned framed painting of their home in Vermilion, created by artist and friend of the Land Conservancy, Chuck Delpapa.

The White Oak Legacy Society is a special group of Land Conservancy supporters who have made a lasting commitment to land conservation and restoration through a variety of estate planning tools.

Larry has supported the Land Conservancy since 2007, and joined the Board of Trustees in 2012, where he currently serves on the Executive, Finance, Campaign Cabinet, and Transaction Review Committees. He retired as chairman and CEO from Bettcher Industries, Inc., originally a family owned business started in 1944 by his father, Louis Bettcher. Larry spent 56 years with the company, overseeing its growth and expansion in food processing, industrial manufacturing, and medical instrumentation.

"Larry is a strategic leader and cherished donor to the Land Conservancy. He sets the pace for philanthropy by making extraordinary gifts, inspiring others to do the same. His heart of gold and wise guidance have made a permanent, lasting, and positive impact on Northeast Ohio" said Stella Dilik, Chief Development Officer for the Land Conservancy.

Additionally, Larry has served in various capacities with Lake Ridge Academy, United Way, the Inland Seas Maritime Museum, the Boy Scouts of America Firelands Council, and other nonprofit organizations.

ROC IN CLE *by Karen Koch*



Fire dancers from The Amazing Giants performed in the tent between acts



Train takes the stage and blows the crowd away at the Bolton Estate



Julie, Kylie, Scott, and Jordyn Mawaka

When it comes to raising money for trees, Western Reserve Land Conservancy supporters can have a fun time under any circumstance, including a deluge of rain and flooding.

Case in point: On October 23, about 500 people gathered in Mentor for ROC in CLE, presented by the Kaulig Companies and sponsored by the Mawaka Charitable Foundation, a new annual fundraiser benefitting Western Reserve Land Conservancy's Reforest Our City program. Charlie and Julie Bolton opened up their private estate to attendees who came to celebrate trees and enjoy a concert by Grammy award winning artist, Train.

But what should have been a pleasant fall evening quickly turned into a soggy mess. It rained for more than 12 straight hours, turning the property into a massive pop-up lake. As bands of cold rain passed through, donors huddled together in the Bolton home and outside under a large tent on an adjacent open field. Truckloads of dry straw applied to the saturated ground under the tent early in the evening helped alleviate wet conditions to some extent, allowing guests to mingle and enjoy delicious food from some of Cleveland's favorite food trucks including Driftwood, Wild Spork, Barrio, Thyme Traveler, and Fired Up Pizza.

After opening act Brother Trouble warmed up the crowd, at exactly 8pm Train and the lead singer Patrick Monahan took to the stage under the tent, and started performing some of their greatest hits through the years. Songs included "Drops of Jupiter," "Calling All Angels," "Hey Soul Sister," "Play That Song," and "Meet Virginia," as well as cover songs by Led Zeppelin, the Rolling Stones, Tom Petty, and others. Guests listened, danced, and sang along, and the rain finally let up.

"It was a memorable evening, a reminder that Mother Nature always has her way" said Matt Zone, Senior Vice President and Director of Thriving Communities at Western Reserve Land Conservancy. "Despite the adversity, the cold, the rain, and the flooded fields, everyone jumped into work mode and we pulled it off. I am so proud to be a part of this team."

Proceeds from ROC in CLE are designated to support the Land Conservancy's Reforest Our City program. Restoring Cleveland's tree canopy is critical to building thriving, vibrant communities. Rebuilding Cleveland's dwindling urban forest is the result of visionary leadership led by philanthropic, conservation, and corporate leaders. Once known as the "Forest City," Cleveland's future success depends on restoring a healthy tree canopy.

One path towards achieving this goal is partnering with Cleveland businesses. So two days prior to the concert with Train, leaders from each of Cleveland's professional sports franchises gathered on Public Square for a corporate breakfast and plenary discussion to demonstrate their commitment to trees.



Rich Cochran, Dee Haslam, Paul Dolan, Matt Kaulig, Len Komoroski, and Tim Clepper

Following the breakfast, the Cleveland Browns Managing and Principal Partner Dee Haslam, Kaulig Companies President Tim Clepper, Cleveland Cavaliers CEO Len Komoroski, Kaulig Companies Chairman Matt Kaulig, and Cleveland Guardians owner Paul Dolan participated in a panel discussion led by Land Conservancy President and CEO Rich Cochran, sharing why they have pledged financial support to reforest Cleveland.

“This is a perfect partnership for us; putting trees in school yards will improve school attendance. I am incredibly excited about making a difference in education, and at the same time improving the environment,” Haslam said.

Clepper agreed, saying, “I truly believe if we can take the environment and make it better, the outcome of that is peoples’ lives will be better.”

Ohio Governor Mike DeWine shared a message with the audience where he voiced his support and thanks for the leadership and reforestation efforts underway. “Some of us may not see the benefit of the work we’re doing now, but future generations will. Nothing exemplifies this more than the planting of trees,” he said.

A beautiful sunrise at Cleveland Public Square for the ROC in CLE Corporate Breakfast



Madison Shaheen and other Western Reserve Land Conservancy staff distributed hundreds of tree saplings to guests at the ROC in CLE Corporate Breakfast

To restore Cleveland’s tree canopy, community leaders are working to raise more than \$100 million during the next 10 years to plant trees in parks, school yards, residential yards, along sidewalks, and near cooperating businesses. The result will be a greener, cleaner, cooler city in which residents can live, work, and play.

During his opening remarks, Cochran cited several studies on how trees benefit public health and the environment, and how a lack of trees can have significant, and lasting effects. He referenced a 2013 study that found a 10 percent increase in human mortality due to heart and lung disease that occurred in a neighborhood where Emerald Ash Borers decimated an entire tree canopy. A study in Seattle from 2014 found that wealth, poverty, psychological and other human health measures, and property values improved if trees were present, and worsened in areas with no trees. In Belgium scientists studied 600 children and their exposure to green spaces and nature; they found that for every 3 percent increase in daily exposure to tree canopy the children enjoyed a 2.6 percent increase in IQ scores.

Cochran said that improving environmental quality by planting trees is one way to improve human equality. “All we ever want as human beings is a fair playing field,” he said. “We can come together as a community and make a huge difference for the children and adults who live in the city of Cleveland today.”



SUGAR ISLAND

MIRACLE IN BLOOMFIELD

“A miracle.” That’s how Western Reserve Land Conservancy’s Senior Vice President Alex Czayka describes newly restored wetlands near Bloomfield, Ohio. It is a conservation success story years in the making, involving multiple funding sources, many partners, different land parcels, some risk, incredible effort, the right people, and – more often than not – a lot of luck.

Located in Bloomfield and Orwell Townships, in an area once called “Bloomfield Swamp” by locals stretching back to the mid-19th century, the reborn wetlands have been renamed Sugar Island Preserve, the newest property to join the Land Conservancy’s Signature Parks and Preserves program. It includes 1,477 acres of protected land, of which over 300 acres are newly created and restored wetlands. Stretching across the Ashtabula-Trumbull County line and bordered by Penniman and Fenton Roads on the west and east, this property contains the largest wetland area currently owned

by the Land Conservancy.

“Preserving and restoring this large tract of land was an unbelievable challenge,” Czayka said.

A tour across this large expanse of land reveals shallow wetlands, mature forests, marshes, scrub-shrub swamps, and wet meadows running south-north within this ancient glacial floodplain. Large quantities of invasive plants have been removed within the last two years on the property by crews from the Nature Conservancy and EnviroScience Inc., creating opportunity for planted native species to outcompete the non-native intruders.

Northern harriers and sand hill cranes, both protected species in Ohio, fly over fields, while trumpeter swans and various species of ducks alight in the water to rest and forage. The preservation and restoration of this site has created habitat for over 18 state-listed species. The location and size of this unique wetland area creates a multitude of opportunities especially for migrating waterbirds.

The Land Conservancy learned about the property becoming available more than 10 years ago. “It was

generally known that it was for sale. But acquiring this property was going to require a unique buyer,” Czayka said.

“One of the primary goals of purchasing the property was that we’d be able to conserve a huge swath of high-quality land nearly adjacent to the 9,000-acre Mosquito Creek Wildlife Area, an opportunity that is not very common in Ohio. The amount of existing wetlands and areas that had potential to be restored made this a very important property for water quality. We’ve been aware of downstream sedimentation and nutrient issues in Lake Roaming Rock, and of course Lake Erie. While we can’t measure the impact today, it is easy to believe the preservation and restoration of this site will sequester nutrients and sediment that otherwise would be flushed downstream into Lake Roaming Rock, the Grand River, and ultimately Lake Erie.”

A LONG HISTORY, REVERSED

For more than 200 years, since the time of the earliest European settlers, the practice was to drain, fill, or



PRESERVE *by Karen Koch*

destroy wetlands. Early settlers hated swampland, believing that the deadly “marsh fever” (which we now know as malaria) was caused by bad air emanating from the “deep swamps and troublesome marshes.” More than 90 percent of Ohio’s wetlands have been destroyed, primarily for agriculture, road construction, or commercial and residential development. Historically, about a fifth of Ohio was covered in wetlands; now, it is closer to 2 percent.

Since then, scientists have learned much about the importance of wetlands to an ecosystem, often referred to as the ‘kidneys of the earth’ because of the filtration they provide to remove pollution in water flowing through them. They also provide food and habitat for a diverse array of plants and animals, creating among the most biologically productive ecosystems in nature.

Bloomfield Swamp was drained following the construction of the seven-mile-long Snyder Ditch in 1913 following the purchase of the property by a group of Cleveland-based investors. Over three miles of the ditch bisect the Bloomfield Swamp property. Draining the

swamp revealed rich, healthy muck soil utilized by agricultural producers from the 1920s to the 1970s to raise vegetables, including dry and green onions, head and leaf lettuce, carrots, celery, cabbage, spinach, parsnips, cauliflower, and turnips. The most notable producer, Ruetenik Gardens, at one time produced all the dried onions for the east coast.

Retired teacher Tim Rodgers, 75, recalls Ruetenik Gardens in its heyday. As a young child, Rodgers lived and worked there with his parents; his father was the farm gatekeeper and maintained Snyder Ditch, among other duties. By the age of 14, Rodgers was a member of the ‘kid gang,’ a group of local kids who worked long hours six days a week, thinning lettuce, trimming celery, and topping turnips for only 50 cents an hour. At age 16, he drove a small rototilling tractor to fit the nutrient rich soil; later his responsibilities switched to spraying vegetables with pesticides to protect the harvest from harmful insects.

“It was dirty and it smelled. It was dangerous,” Rodgers said. “I did not like the job, but I loved the swamp. I still do to this day. When the gate

closed, I had the swamp to myself. I grew up independent, and learned a lot in those years.”

Vegetable farm operations ended in 1975 when the muck soil had deteriorated due to wind and water erosion, fire, and natural decomposition. Subsequent land owners processed and sold the remaining muck as top soil, and bluegrass sod was raised on the farm into the 1980s.

In the spring of 1992, a Canadian company inquired about placing a construction debris landfill on the site. The Trumbull County Health Department convened an informational meeting at a church hall in Orwell about the proposal.

Local residents were not pleased with the idea of the property becoming a dumping ground for Canadian construction debris. They were concerned that debris coming from Canada, with its more relaxed environmental codes at the time, would contain toxins that could jeopardize an important underground aquifer found beneath the site that provided local communities with drinking water. Residents

came together to oppose the proposal, keeping it from moving forward. "I never heard another mention of the landfill after that meeting," recollected Nathan Paskey, who attended that meeting on behalf of the Ashtabula Soil and Water Conservation District.

Subsequent land owners used much of the property, at the time known as Grand Valley Hunting Ranch, for sporting clays and hunting, but this use ended in 2008. By 2011, Western Reserve Land Conservancy entered into a purchase contract to secure the property.

A NEW VISION FOR GRAND VALLEY RANCH

In 2012, the Land Conservancy took ownership of the 1,100-acre Grand Valley Hunting Ranch property by securing a \$3.3 million bank loan to buy time for fundraising efforts to pay off the property. In 2013, Czayka, who grew up just 20 minutes north of the site near Jefferson and frequented the property when it operated as

Grand Valley Hunting Ranch, joined Western Reserve Land Conservancy as its Associate Eastern Field Director. He and Brett Rodstrom, Vice President of Eastern Field Operations at the Land Conservancy who grew up fishing along the Grand River and had additional local knowledge and relationships, worked together to pursue various federal, state, and local grants along with private donations to raise the funding needed to pay off the loan and permanently preserve the property.



Aftermath of a prescribed burn completed in 2020 to suppress invasive species and remove dead invasive plant biomass



Marty Boote shows the Land Conservancy Communications staff updates to the property in December of 2021

The credibility and local knowledge that Czayka and Rodstrom brought to the project added value in the planning process and during negotiations with Bloomfield and Orwell Township Trustees as they were discussing the future of the property.

Between 2015 and 2016 the Land Conservancy continued to plan for the property while also pursuing acquisition of an additional adjoining 370 acres to the south known as the Cahlik property. This property was operated as Cahlik Shooting Preserve, an upland bird hunting outfit

owned and managed by Karie Cahlik and her late husband, Greg. After Greg's tragic and untimely passing, Karie knew there was only one thing to do with the property. She knew her husband, an avid outdoorsman and advocate for conservation, would want their property and hunting grounds to be conserved rather than developed for housing. "Greg was opposed to condos or homes being built there. I agreed, and honored his wishes. This was absolutely the perfect, and right thing to do," Cahlik said.

The funding and perpetual conservation of the Grand Valley Hunting Ranch and Cahlik properties occurred simultaneously. Using different funding applications and sources that were timed perfectly to maximize leverage between state, federal, and local funding sources, these grant funds allowed the Land Conservancy to repay the bank loan, and by the end of 2016, over 1,400 acres of land was permanently protected.

THE LAND CONSERVANCY WASN'T DONE

While the acquisition and permanent protection of the property was the number one priority for the Land Conservancy,

one of the primary reasons for acquisition of the site was the incredible opportunity to restore large amounts of wetland that had degraded from previous uses. "The extremely flat landscape containing historical agricultural uses, mixed with small remnants of existing high quality habitat, made this the ideal site to restore large-scale wetlands," said Chris Szell, the Land Conservancy's Director of Conservation Projects and project manager for this project.

Marty Boote of Environmental

Consulting & Technology, Inc., hired by the Land Conservancy to manage the restoration, began the restoration project design in 2017 after three years of preliminary involvement. "What an amazing opportunity. This is by far the largest restoration project I've done for wetlands specifically. It's not often that sites of this size, with various resources on it, come along," said Marty.

Before beginning his work, Marty surveyed the wetlands and saw invasive species, numerous six-foot tall mounds of dirt scattered across the property, and a barely visible track for vehicles. "It really was a disaster. Where do we even begin?" he recalled.

After several years of planning and preparation, wetland restoration at Sugar Island Preserve began in the spring of 2021 when a construction team began to implement the restoration plan. This included redistributing approximately 1.8 million tons of dirt back into the landscape. Invasive species were removed, native seed mixes were planted, and a leveled gravel access road running parallel to Snyder Ditch was created.

A system of two large water control gates, five fixed water control weirs, and ancillary ditch plugs were also installed across the property. Together, these structures allow water to flow into and across the historical floodplain, which had been disconnected since 1913 due to the

creation of Snyder Ditch. Now, instead of water, sediment, and nutrients flowing downstream via Snyder Ditch, they flow ever so slowly across nearly three miles of restored wetlands.

This allows sediment and nutrients to drop out of the water column before water exits the site to downstream Lake Roaming Rock, the Grand River and eventually, Lake Erie. During flooding events, the water control gates allow water from the wetlands to be transferred into Snyder Ditch in a stable manner. The gates also permit staff to create more diverse habitat by adjusting water levels at certain times in select areas, allowing desired vegetation to grow.

"If Western Reserve Land Conservancy hadn't acquired this property it probably never would have happened," Boote said. "I think it's an eye opener. It raises the bar, challenging everybody to look at land acquisition and protection a bit differently, not just purchasing land to protect it in perpetuity but also to look at restoring the land to what it was once before."

Today, the Sugar Island restoration is 95 percent complete. Remaining steps include planting 10,000 native trees in the spring of 2022, and ongoing monitoring and maintenance of invasive species.

The property is currently used for events and tours to engage

people in conservation, restoration, and outdoor recreation. Portions of the property are also utilized by the Land Conservancy's Sporting Circle program, which focuses on providing exceptional experiences and expanded opportunities to its members and constituents interested in hunting and angling. A recent Sporting Circle event included a veteran's-only bird hunt. The event provided an opportunity for servicemen and women to enjoy a unique hunting experience, learn about land conservation and restoration, and enjoy a meal together.

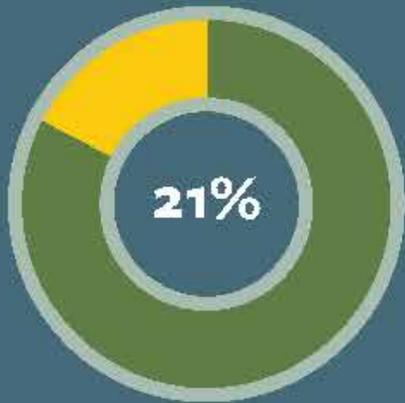
In addition, the Land Conservancy and Youngstown State University (YSU) have engaged in a partnership that provides access to YSU students to utilize Sugar Island Preserve for research. YSU has also worked with the Land Conservancy to restore a building on site that is now a field station and Western Reserve Land Conservancy regional office.

"The Land Conservancy has multiple facets. It is preserving land, doing restoration work on land, and helping people gain access to land," said Sporting Circle member Paul Doman. "We have a resource that will benefit wildlife, the environment, Lake Erie, and people in general. There are not much bigger accomplishments in such a short time to be found nationally. I think it's great, a real miracle."

Milk Snake, New England Aster, Juvenile Bald Eagle (all pictured at Sugar Island Preserve)



Agriculture is the #1 Industry in Ohio



FOOD AND AGRIBUSINESSES
CONTRIBUTE \$124 BILLION TO
OHIO'S ECONOMY EACH YEAR



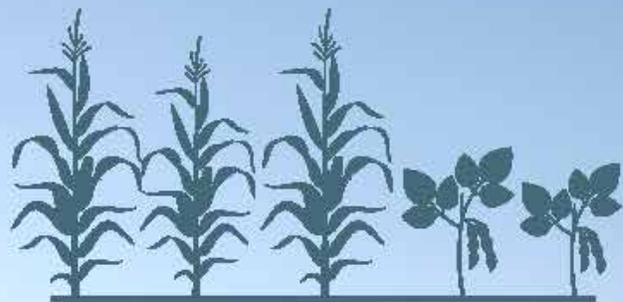
1 IN 8 JOBS IN OHIO
ARE RELATED
TO AGRICULTURE



OHIO BOASTS
14 MILLION ACRES
OF FARMLAND



OHIO'S FARMS ARE, ON AVERAGE,
SMALL FAMILY-OWNED FARMS
THE AVERAGE FARM IS ONLY 184 ACRES



CORN AND SOYBEANS ARE
OHIO'S TOP CROPS





34,007 Acres of Farmland and 277 Farms Conserved by Western Reserve Land Conservancy

The Value of Ohio Farmland



CORN

34K ACRES = 6.46M BUSHELS
1 BUSHEL = \$4.50

\$29.1M



SOYBEANS

34K ACRES = 1.8M BUSHELS
1 BUSHEL = \$11.60

\$21.3M



DAIRY

34K ACRES = 40.3M GALLONS MILK
1 GALLON = \$3.68

\$148.4M



TOMATOES

34 ACRES = 24.1M BUSHELS
1 BUSHEL (53LB) = \$30

\$721.7M

Conserving our land is a legacy we can leave for future generations. We can save this because it's the good earth, what God has given to us to steward and care for. This farm has been in our family for 125 years. By conserving the land we can go in peace knowing it's in good hands. I hope more people would consider conserving their farmlands."

- Corrine Rickabaugh, 2020 Grimm Conservation Medal Award winner; co-owner, Rickabaugh Farm; Conservation Easement Landowner (2019)



15 YEARS OF CONSERVING NORTHEAST OHIO'S LANDS

by Jared Saylor

In 2006, James Blunt's hit, "You're Beautiful" topped the pop charts, Nintendo debuted the Wii, Italy won soccer's World Cup, and Western Reserve Land Conservancy was born. In that time, the Land Conservancy has worked with hundreds of public and private landowners to conserve natural lands, working family farms and urban greenspaces. Founded as the Chagrin River Land Conservancy in 1987, the merger 16 years ago of eight local land trusts created Ohio's largest land trust and continues to be the largest merger of land trusts in the country.

At the time of the merger, the eight land trusts had collectively protected 205 properties totaling 8,850 acres; as of December 2021, we have permanently protected 849 properties and 67,732 acres, an area nearly 40 times larger than Cleveland Hopkins Airport. We have also:

- Increased our coverage area from 14 counties in 2006 to 28 counties in 2020
- Helped create and expand nearly 200 public parks and preserves
- Conserved 33,573 acres of working farmland at 270 family-owned farms
- Planted 5,545 trees and given away 7,654 trees
- Increased staff from three employees to 42
- Helped create 50 land banks in Ohio

"Western Reserve Land Conservancy has grown from a small shop of three dedicated employees to a robust conservation organization with dozens of employees across Northeast Ohio," said Rich Cochran, president and CEO. "Although we are proud of what we've accomplished, our greatest achievement is the partnerships we've built to reach and exceed our conservation goals. We cannot do this work alone, and when we work together with government agencies, private landowners, community

organizations, corporations, and nonprofit partners, we know that we can achieve great things."

The Land Conservancy has been an important player in community relations and development. In 2011, as Ohio cities were being ravaged by the foreclosure crisis and tens of thousands of homes were abandoned and left vacant, Western Reserve Land Conservancy, under the leadership of former Cuyahoga County Treasurer Jim Rokakis, formed the Thriving Communities program. This groundbreaking effort led to more than \$450 million raised in funding for demolition of vacant and abandoned housing and the formation of county land banks across Ohio, powerful public tools to fight against blight and secure vacant properties so they can be put to better use. On December 1, 2020, the Land Conservancy welcomed former Cleveland City Councilman Matt Zone to serve as the new director of Thriving Communities as Jim entered into a well-deserved retirement at the end of that year.

In 2019 the Land Conservancy, noted to be one of the top in the nation, became a nationally accredited land trust through the Land Trust Accreditation Commission, demonstrating that we operate with sound finances, ethical conduct, responsible governance, and lasting stewardship - ensuring that properties remain protected forever. This multi-year application process involved hundreds of hours of work and thousands of pages of documentation. Accreditation assures landowners that Western Reserve Land Conservancy is a well-run and effective organization.

"Over the last 15 years, Western Reserve Land Conservancy has provided the people of our region with essential natural assets through land conservation and restoration," Rich said. "And it feels like we've only just begun."

NATURE NOTES

by Sarah Kitson and Renee Boronka



Chimney Swifts (*Chaetura pelagica*) are five to six inches long with a wingspan of a little more than a foot, and weigh on average 23 grams, or about as much as 20 paperclips. They typically live three to five years and spend most of their lives in the air, flying an average speed of 60 miles per hour. They feed, bathe, drink, collect nesting material, and even sleep while in flight. They eat flying insects like mosquitoes, midges, flies, mayflies, and small bees. They are so well-adapted to a life of flight that they have a ridge of feathers above their eyes that acts like a windshield to prevent damage from insect collisions! They cannot sit on a perch like most birds, and instead use their long claws to hang on rough vertical surfaces.

In our region, nest construction typically begins during the last half of May and continues through mid-June. Both parents help build the nest by collecting small twigs and gluing them together with saliva. Up to seven eggs are laid and once again, both parents work as a team to help incubate eggs and feed their young. A nesting pair will often have two to three helper birds to assist them with nesting chores and feeding. They do not nest in colonies so you will only see a single nest per chimney. During the nonbreeding season, large numbers of Chimney Swifts will roost for the night in a single chimney. The temperature in a crowded roost can be up to 70 degrees warmer than the outside temperature.

You may be wondering what Chimney Swifts did before humans were building chimneys. They originally nested primarily in hollow trees, but also in caves and on cliff faces. As we removed dead trees from our landscape, they switched nesting locations almost entirely to masonry chimneys. Now, the common practice of removing old structures and capping chimneys creates a severe shortage of nesting sites. This is one of the primary reasons that Chimney Swift populations have declined more than 50 percent since the 1970s.

To help the Chimney Swift population bounce back, we can allow these birds to use existing structures like chimneys, silos, wells, cisterns, and outhouses, or we can build predator resistant Chimney Swift towers like the one installed on Western Reserve Land Conservancy's Oberlin Preserve (pictured). If you are interested in taking on a project, purchase and read "*Chimney Swift Towers: New Habitat for America's Mysterious Birds*" by Paul and Georgean Kyle to learn how to build a Chimney Swift tower for your property.



Pictured: Chimney Swift tower at Oberlin Preserve in Oberlin, OH

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

All species play an integral role in maintaining biodiversity. Remove one piece of the puzzle, and the entire ecosystem is off balance. Chimney Swifts also play an important role in eating insects and keeping their population balanced.



GARDEN OF ELEVEN ANGELS BRINGS HEALING AND CLOSURE

by Jared Saylor

Healing and closure have come for the residents of Imperial Avenue and the families of 11 women murdered on the block by a convicted serial killer. Hundreds of local community activists, residents, elected officials, business owners, and family members of the women were on hand to witness the grand opening of the Garden of Eleven Angels in

early November.

Western Reserve Land Conservancy; Burten, Bell, Carr Development, Inc.; LAND Studio; and a host of other local organizations led the years-long effort to acquire and demolish the site of the killer's home and other adjacent properties to create a space comprising eight parcels in total. Construction on the site began in July.

have some closure and healing for this community. And to have that healing centered on a beautiful green space and memorial that will be here for generations is a tremendous success."

The home where the bodies were discovered was demolished in 2011. In 2016, at the request of project partners, Western Reserve Land Conservancy stepped in to help establish the memorial by facilitating site acquisition of the two vacant parcels adjacent to that on which the killer's house once stood, in close partnership with the families of the victims and the local community.

"The Garden of Eleven Angels is a very special project for all of us at the Land Conservancy," said Matt Zone, Senior Vice President at Western Reserve Land Conservancy. "We are all proud to have played a role in this. Partnering with the families, the contractors, the residents, and the community made this project stronger. Now that it is finally



"This beautiful garden will be a living memorial to the Eleven Angels whose lives were so brutally taken," said Joy Johnson, Executive Director at Burten, Bell, Carr Development, Inc. "It's been years in the making, we now



Photo Credit: Lauren Pacini

complete, we hope the Imperial Avenue residents and the families of the Eleven Angels will be able to enjoy this garden for many years to come.”

The Garden of Eleven Angels is also intended to uplift the surrounding neighborhoods of Mount Pleasant and Buckeye- Shaker. Both of these neighborhoods, much like many others in the city of Cleveland, have experienced significant population loss, disinvestment, and blight resulting from the foreclosure crisis and Great Recession of 2008, which disproportionately impacted these communities due to discriminatory practices including redlining and predatory lending. The transformation of these eight vacant parcels into a memorial garden will help bring closure and healing, restoring the site to a beautiful and ecologically thriving natural area that will provide the surrounding community with a space to gather, recreate, reflect,



and enjoy nature.

“The Land Conservancy made a conscious effort to reach out and contract with Black-owned businesses for this project and I believe that has made a huge impact,” said Ariane Kirkpatrick, Owner and CEO of the AKA Team, a minority-owned diversified construction company based in Cleveland. “For every Clevelander, the tragedies on Imperial Avenue are ingrained upon our minds. To be able to help build the memorial to the Angels whose lives were taken is an honor. We are made stronger when we stand and work together.”

Vacancy, economic depression, and violence are the

Photo Credit: Louie Moore



legacies of this recent history, which are still felt acutely in these neighborhoods today. The transformation of eight vacant residential parcels where blighted and abandoned homes once stood into a vibrant urban green space will not only improve the aesthetic quality of the block, but will also provide nearby residents with direct access to a public natural area.

“We believe the Garden of Eleven Angels will be a transformative project for the Mount Pleasant and Buckeye-Shaker neighborhoods,” said Keshia Johnson Chambers, Project Manager at OHM Advancing Communities, a Cleveland-based architectural and engineering firm. “By partnering with Western Reserve Land Conservancy, Burton, Bell, Carr Development, Inc., LAND Studio, the families of the Eleven Angels, and many others, we were able to bring our unique and vital perspectives into this project. I truly believe that the diversity of our lived experiences was what made the Garden such a huge success.”

“The Garden of Eleven Angels will serve as a call for our community to do better, to protect and care for one another, and to oppose the systems of oppression and injustice that often allow these kinds of horrific acts to go unnoticed, and to happen in the first place,” Zone said.



Photo Credit: Kendrick Chittock

SPORTING CIRCLE

SELECT LAND CONSERVANCY OWNED PROPERTIES OPEN TO PUBLIC HUNTING ACCESS

by Karen Koch

Thanks to a new Ohio program and the hard work of Land Conservancy staff, sportsmen and women can now hunt on land owned and managed by Western Reserve Land Conservancy, including at one of its Signature Parks and Preserves, Ashcroft Woods.

The Ohio Landowner/Hunter Access Partnership (OLHAP) program is funded in part by the 2018 federal Farm Bill and administered statewide by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources. It allows landowners such as the Land Conservancy to permit public hunting on privately held lands. The Land Conservancy is given preference to participate since the organization is enrolled in the state's Wetlands Reserve Program.

"This program is another tool to engage the public and allow for hunting access on approximately 2,400 acres of Land Conservancy property," said Dale Dunford, Property Manager for the Land Conservancy. "We are the single largest landowner currently involved in this program. At this time 53 properties are now enrolled in the OLHAP program, and of these, 13 are owned by the Land Conservancy."

Covering 979 acres, Ashcroft Woods in Ashtabula County is currently the largest property within the OLHAP program. It is now open to 20 hunters per day. "We are excited to provide public hunting opportunities on conserved properties like Ashcroft Woods," said the Land Conservancy's Senior Vice President for Conservation Transactions Alex Czayka. "We want to permanently protect high-quality lands like Ashcroft Woods so

people throughout the region can enjoy them now and for future generations. Hunters and anglers truly understand the value of protecting land, and we are proud to partner with the Department of Natural Resources to make our preserves available for everyone to experience and enjoy."

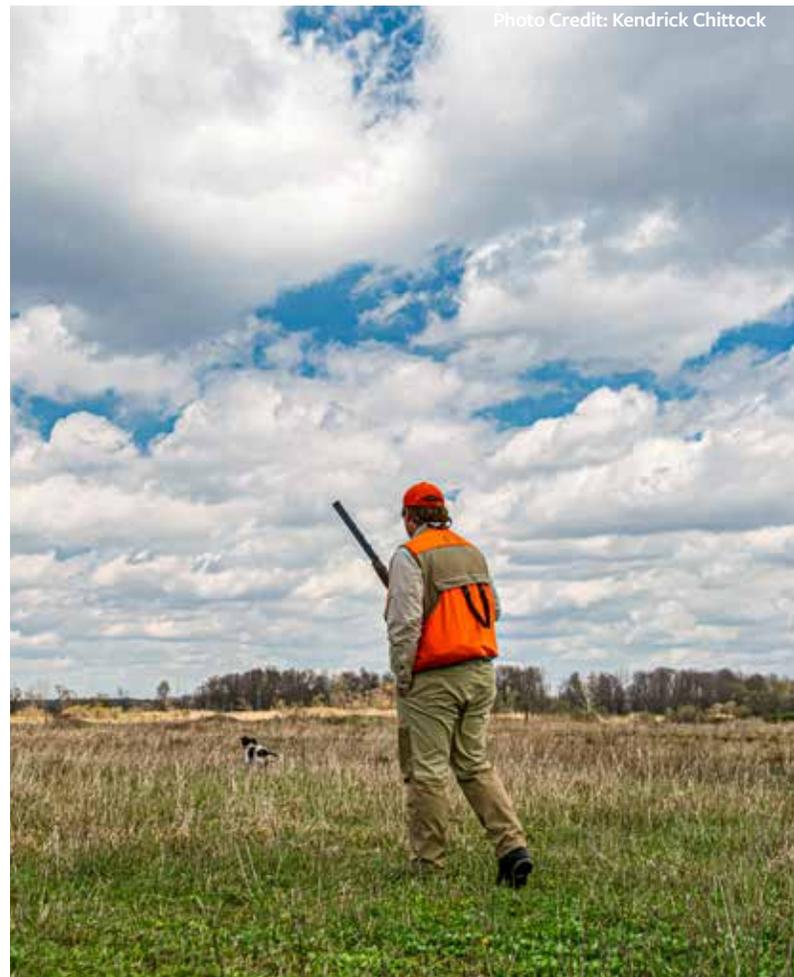


Photo Credit: Kendrick Chittock

Other Land Conservancy properties enrolled in the OLHAP program include:

Name of Property	# of Acres	County	# of Hunters Permitted, per day
Combs Road Property	37	Trumbull	One
North Park Property	74	Trumbull	One
Gass Road Property	214	Richland	Three
South Denmark Road Property	13	Ashtabula	One
Lodge Road Property	88	Columbiana	One
Leslie Road Property	6	Columbiana	One
Niss Waterfall Preserve	287	Richland	Six
North Kingsville Property	200	Ashtabula	Four
Vrooman Road Property	332	Lake	Seven
Perry Coastal III Property	39	Lake	One
County Line Road Property	29	Ashtabula	One
State Route 170 Property	59	Columbiana	One

All hunters must obtain a daily permit the day prior to their desired day of hunting to access Ashcroft Woods and all other OLHAP enrolled properties.

Anyone wishing to access an OLHAP-enrolled property must have a valid Ohio hunting license and a free daily OLHAP permit. Anyone accompanying an OLHAP permit holder must also have an OLHAP permit issued in their name, even if they are not hunting.

OLHAP daily permits can be obtained at the Ohio Department of Natural Resources' website at OhioDNR.gov.

Available dates for OLHAP permits are between September 25, 2021 - June 1, 2022 and September 1, 2022 - June 1, 2023, with the possibility of a program extension.

scan for more info



Photo Credit: Jack Rogan



Western Reserve
Land Conservancy

land • people • community

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