



2023 Year in Review

Appalachia Ohio Alliance



Exploring Scioto River Ecology
with ODNR's Scenic Rivers
AOA's Scioto River Flyway Corridor
Pickaway County

AOA Celebrates Another Conservation Milestone

A Decade of River Conservation in Central Ohio - Protecting Riparian Corridors, Water Quality and Native Habitats



It seems like only yesterday when AOA conserved our first properties on the Scioto River. Although AOA is now 21 years old, our initial proposals to conserve important habitat in the Scioto River Flyway Corridor came in 2013 in a flurry of requests for the Bartley Preserve, Marsha Gunder Schneider Preserve and Snake Den Mound sites on the Scioto and the Steward Preserve on the Big Darby. We have come a long way during the last decade. Fortunately, AOA has made a lot of progress conserving natural riparian corridors and important native habitats along waterways in the Central Ohio region.

Continued on next page...

21 Years of Conservation Achievement in Central Ohio

More than
15,750

Acres Conserved

176

Properties Conserved

Conserved Properties in

21

Ohio Counties

107 Fee Owned

66 Conservation Easements

3 Transferred/Facilitated

River Conservation in Central Ohio

Continued from Cover

As of 2023, we have conserved 3,660 acres in the Scioto River Flyway Corridor, another 1,450 along the Big Darby, 225 along Alum Creek, and 1,420 along the Hocking River – over 6,750 largely riparian acres in 11 Central Ohio counties on the MORPC membership map. With more on the way. This equates to nearly 43% of the 15,750 acres we currently steward.

Initially centered on the Hocking Hills region, AOA branched out, expanding our geographic mission focus following strategic planning sessions that identified Central Ohio river corridors and particularly the Scioto River watershed and flyway corridor as critical conservation needs. This is in addition to the Hocking Hills, which remains an essential conservation priority. We also shifted our core conservation emphasis to water quality and protection of riparian corridors, aspiring to the creation of connected habitat corridors along key rivers and stream tributaries in Central Ohio, particularly the Scioto River, Darby Creek and the Hocking River.

AOA did not create our strategic conservation vision in a vacuum. We consulted with leaders of many compatible and comparable conservation organizations prior to taking this important step.

These included Russ Terry of Ducks Unlimited, Steve Gray with

ODNR, Bob Gable with ODNR Scenic Rivers, John O'Meara of Columbus Metro Parks, and Josh Knights with The Nature Conservancy, among many others. We

shaped our strategic approach to addressing conservation needs in the Central Ohio region with our many colleagues, and then proceeded to collaborate with them to maximize conservation impacts.

Although much has been accomplished, I think we would all agree that much more needs to be done to achieve the desired long-term conservation goals. Protection of our natural riparian corridors is certainly more vital today. The dynamics of the Central

Ohio region in the face of rapid population growth, expanding development of greenfields, and rapidly escalating land prices, further necessitates riparian protection at a faster rate and scale before our habitats and river corridors are degraded or eliminated. Retention of the Big Darby's ecological health and diversity, the crown jewel of Midwest rivers, is surely a worthy goal we can all agree on.

AOA has highlighted the importance of healthy, natural riparian corridors, and the water quality and

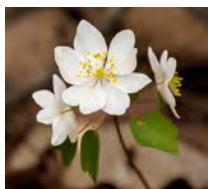
aquatic life value and benefits they provide to the community on many occasions, including in previous Year in Reviews that are available on AOA's website. As a critical north-south corridor in the Midwest, the Scioto River has provided an important migratory pathway and travel corridor for Ohio's flora and fauna for millennia. Many of our native species rely on having suitable habitat in this corridor for their survival. It is hard (and expensive) to reestablish natural riparian habitats once they are gone.

It was distressing to paddle the Scioto River this summer and see the extensive amount of newly cleared habitat for residential development right along the river. We were accompanied by a family of bald eagles, which depend on the natural riparian forests and habitats being cleared. We will not have wild species without wild places for them to live and thrive.

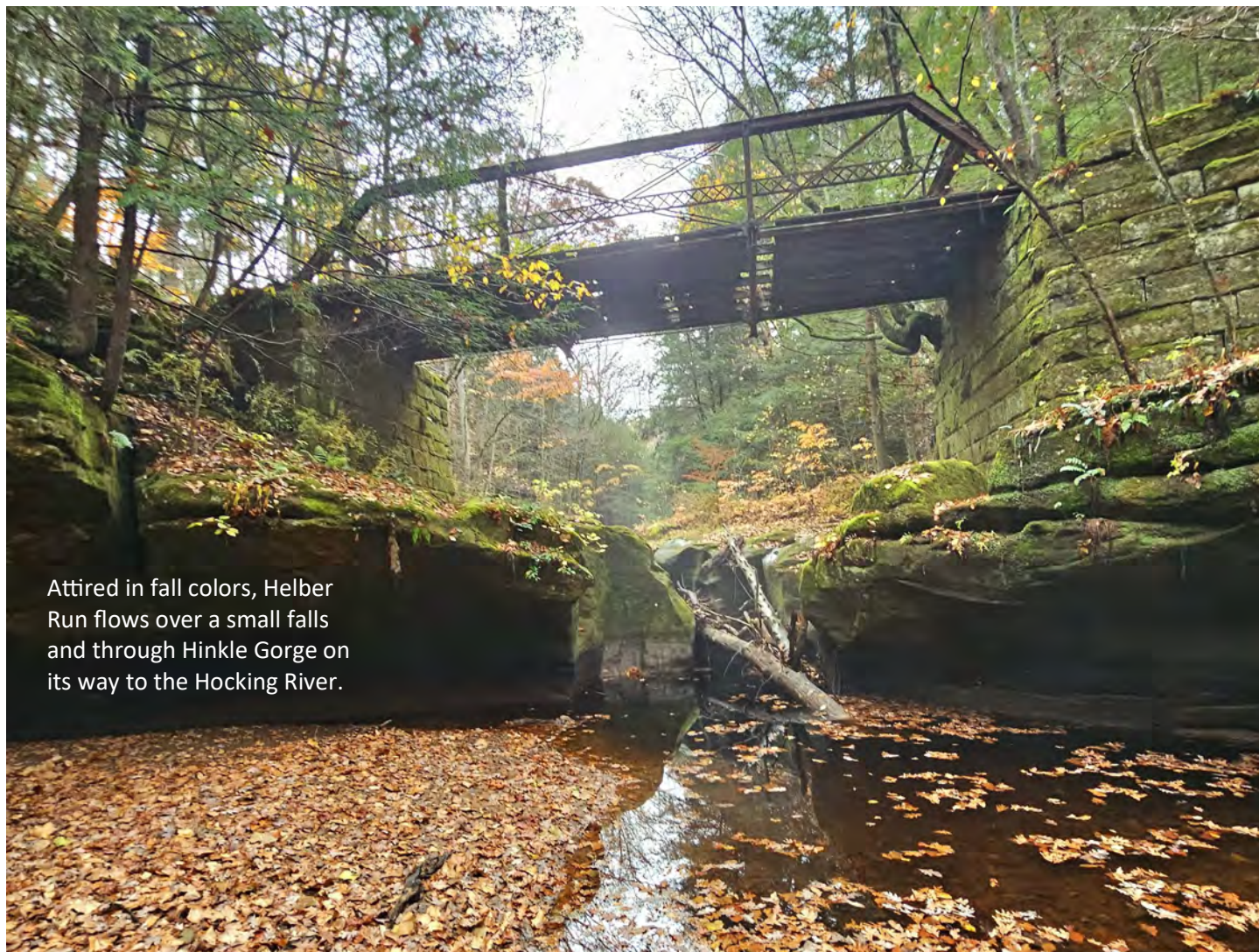
Protection of river corridors vs. increased development is not an either-or proposition. It is possible to have both. Many cities have thriving, healthy, protected natural river corridors that are an asset to their community. It is a choice on how and what we prioritize. The quality of life in our region will be positively impacted by assuring that we have clean water, nearby nature, and wild lands that provide homes for our native species.

AOA has made our choice - we will continue our conservation work and collaborate with other compatible conservation groups to expand the amount of natural, continuous riparian corridor along our rivers and streams in Central Ohio. We hope you will join us.





Land Conservation



Attired in fall colors, Helber Run flows over a small falls and through Hinkle Gorge on its way to the Hocking River.

Hinkle Gorge Donated to AOA

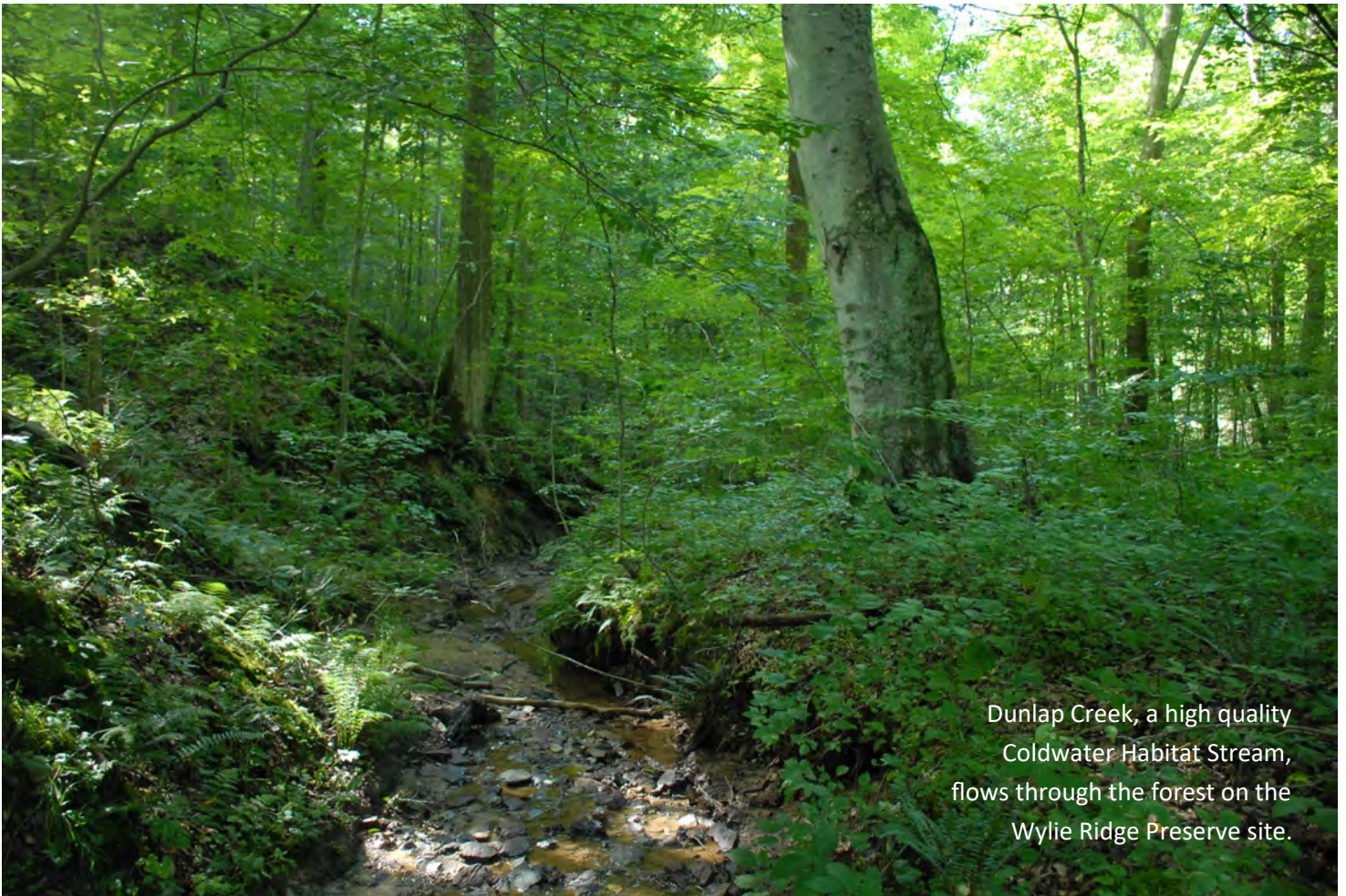


AOA recently conserved a spectacular gorge in the northern extent of the Hocking Hills geography. We are very grateful to the Hinkle family for donating this unique property and assuring the permanent conservation of a valuable piece of the Hocking Hills scenic and natural landscapes.

Although relatively small at a little over 10-acres, the site boasts a very picturesque, if petite, Blackhand sandstone gorge which protects 1,500 linear feet of riparian corridor along Helber Run, a tributary of the Hocking River.



An abandoned township road and bridge once crossed the property and the gorge above a small falls and the site of an old mill dam. The Hinkle Gorge property borders AOA's 106-acre Boesel conservation easement and contributes to our Hocking River Conservation Corridor Initiative.



Dunlap Creek, a high quality Coldwater Habitat Stream, flows through the forest on the Wylie Ridge Preserve site.

Laurel Run Watershed Conservation

AOA recently purchased the 70-acre Wylie Ridge property along Dunlap Road that is part of our Laurel Run Preserve. Protection of the upper Laurel Run watershed has been a priority for AOA as part of our Greater Hocking Hills Conservation Initiative. To date, AOA has preserved 13 properties and over 1,300 acres within this area. In addition to the properties conserved by AOA there are public lands protected by ODNR including several units of the Hocking State Forest and the Rock House and Cantwell Cliffs units

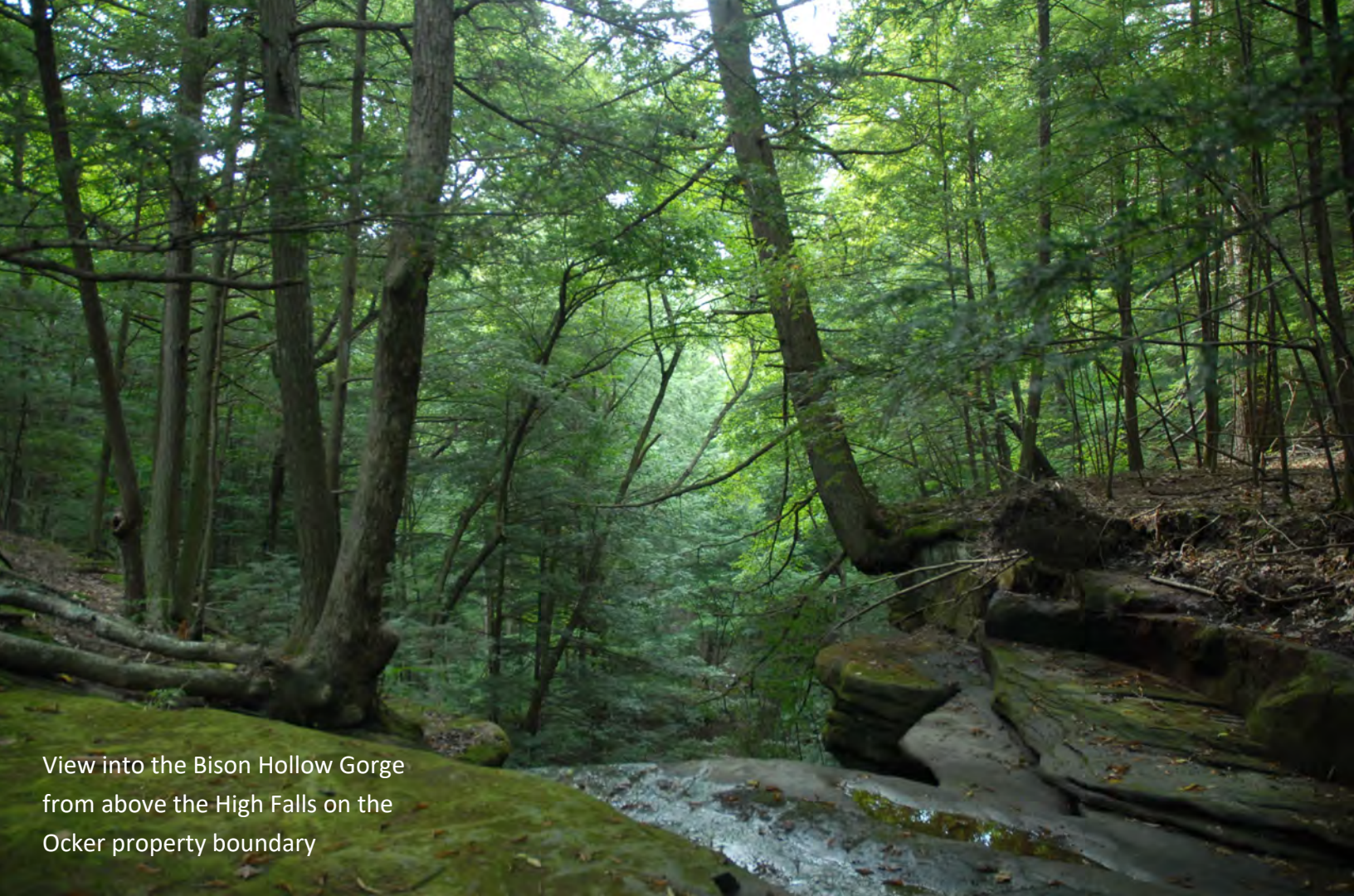
of the Hocking Hills State Park. AOA is working to expand this block of conservation lands and to connect, for habitat contiguity and stream corridor protection purposes, these various state and nonprofit conservation properties.

The new site protects over a mile of stream corridor, including 2,100 linear feet of Dunlap Creek, a very high quality Class 3B Coldwater Habitat stream. Most of the property is covered in relatively mature forest with exposed sandstone and shale bedrock along Dunlap Creek. Portions of the upland area that were previously utilized for a now “retired” golf course will be returned to upland native forest habitat.



AOA Continues Hocking Hills Conservation Efforts with 7 New Preserve Properties Added in 2023

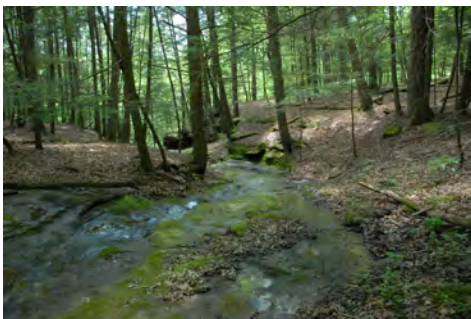
AOA has now conserved 90 properties and over 5,000 acres through our Greater Hocking Hills Conservation Initiative. More properties are in process as we work to protect the wonderful natural resources found in this jewel of Ohio.



View into the Bison Hollow Gorge from above the High Falls on the Ocker property boundary

Bison Hollow Preserve Surpasses 1,000 Acres with 3 New Additions

AOA purchased three new properties that expand our Bison Hollow Preserve in the upper portion of the South Branch East Fork of the Queer Creek watershed. These additions enlarge the existing Preserve by 195 acres, bringing the total largely contiguous



area conserved to 1,059 protected acres - creating a large block of defragmented forest conservation area managed in a “forever wild” state.

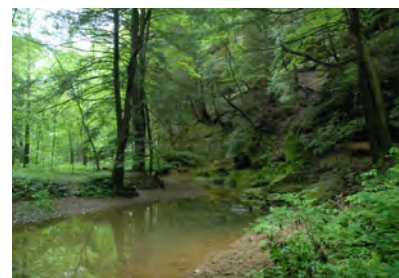
The 104-acre **Medford Woods**

parcel on the east side of Bison Hollow was purchased from the Medford family and includes the tributary and much of the watershed above the “Triple Falls”. An adjacent 70-acre parcel, **Ocker Woods**, split from the neighboring Ocker property, includes the upland tributary above the “High Falls”. These critically important sites are entirely forested with mature older growth forests that protect the upland watersheds feeding the falls.

AOA also purchased the 21-acre **Stevens 2nd** home site property on the west side of the Preserve. The modular home on the property will be removed as part of AOA’s restoration.

Bison Hollow Preserve Receives State of Ohio Nature Preserve Designation

ODNR Division of Natural Areas and Preserves recently announced the designation of core portions of AOA’s Bison Hollow Preserve as Ohio’s newest State Nature Preserve (SNP). Bison Hollow joins Kleinmaier SNP as AOA’s currently designated State Preserves. Located south of Ash Cave, Bison Hollow is centered on protection of the East Fork of Queer Creek, a Coldwater Habitat



system designated Outstanding State Waters, the highest classification in Ohio. The Preserve features a spectacular narrow, steep-walled Black Hand Sandstone gorge with numerous picturesque rock outcrops and waterfalls. It is an important component of AOA’s Greater Hocking Hills Conservation Initiative.



Massive Blackhand Sandstone Overhang
on AOA's new Menchhofer Preserve

Menchhofer Preserve Established

AOA purchased an 86-acre parcel along Queer Creek west of Ash Cave in the southern portion of the Hocking Hills landscape. This parcel conserves spectacular Hocking Hills and Blackhand sandstone geologic formations including a substantial gorge with steep bluffs, a deep ravine, a large shelter cave, a massive rock overhang, and several beautiful waterfalls. Much of the site is covered by older growth hardwood forests with large stands of hemlock and many native species that are becoming increasingly threatened or rare. Riparian corridor conserved along the Class 3B Coldwater headwater tributary stream that runs through the

nently preserved by AOA. It is located adjacent to a 60-acre conservation easement donated to AOA by Larry Menchhofer nearly 20 years ago on the home site then owned by him and Vera Nixon.

The Menchhofer Preserve is an important addition to AOA's Greater Hocking Hills Conservation Initiative that contributes to a conservation corridor along Queer Creek. Former pastures on upland areas will be cleared of invasive shrubs and returned to native upland forest habitat.



gorge, Nixon Branch, will help protect water quality in the adjacent Queer Creek. The preserve protects virtually the entire watershed for the tributary.

The new Menchhofer Preserve honors the past owner, AOA founder and former AOA board member Larry Menchhofer, who requested that the site be perma-





Salt Creek riffle adjacent to AOA's Adelphi Bluff Preserve, on left

Adelphi Bluff Conserved Along Salt Creek Corridor

AOA recently purchased the Adelphi Bluff property along Salt Creek in the extreme southeast corner of Pickaway County, adjacent to Hocking and Ross Counties.

Stream corridor protection and conservation along Salt Creek in the southern portion of the Hocking Hills drainage, which are

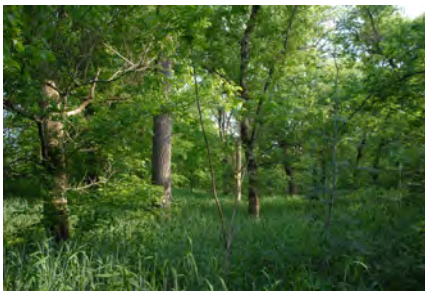
part of the headwaters of the Scioto River watershed, is a high priority initiative of AOA. Part of our Greater Hocking Hills Conservation Initiative, this area lies at the southern edge of the State-owned Parks and Forests

in the Hocking Hills. This initiative seeks to protect riparian corridors and water quality in and adjacent to the core Hocking Hills State Park and Forest areas, while significantly extending the riparian protection zones south and west - eventually to the Scioto River. As part of this effort AOA has been able to protect 48 properties so far in the southern quadrant of the Hocking Hills in the upper headwater portions of the Salt Creek watershed.

The 35.8-acre Adelphi Bluff property lies at the mouth of the Salt Creek valley, at the glacial divide marked by the furthest exten-

sion of permanent glacial ice in this part of Ohio. This scenic site includes a high glacial moraine hill with expansive views in all directions. It is a prime development site that was approved for subdivision for residential development and listed for sale. AOA was able to work with the farmer/developer owner to conserve the property. Lying between the two adjacent villages of Adelphi and Laurelville, it is situated at the western gateway to the unglaciated Hocking Hills.

From an aquatic resource perspective, Adelphi Bluff occupies a key location at the confluence of two significant Hocking Hills drainages in the Scioto watershed - Laurel Run and Salt Creek. Conservation of this property will protect nearly a half mile of riparian corridor along Salt Creek, which is designated an Exceptional Warm Water Habitat stream and is classified as Superior High Quality Waters in this reach.



Moraine in background along Salt Creek floodplain



Shale Bluff along West Branch of Alum Creek on Poston Preserve

AOA Initiates Alum Creek Conservation Corridor with Poston Farm Purchase

AOA conserved a large portion of the Poston farm, our first property along Alum Creek in Morrow County, launching a new initiative that seeks to protect the upper reaches of the Alum Creek



watershed upstream of Alum Creek Lake. Alum Creek is 58-miles long, a prominent Central Ohio waterway originating in Morrow County and flowing southerly through Delaware and Franklin Counties, before merging into Big Walnut Creek, a Scioto River tributary.

Although still largely rural in character, this area like other Central Ohio watersheds, has experienced rapidly increasing develop-

ment pressures from the growth and expansion of the Columbus metro region. Protection of the Poston farm property, which is an exceptional natural site situated at a strategic location at the confluence of Alum Creek and West Alum Creek, is the first step in assembling a larger conservation corridor that protects water quality and native habitat corridors.

AOA conserved approximately 225 acres of the over 400-acre farm property using WRRSP and Clean Ohio funding with a

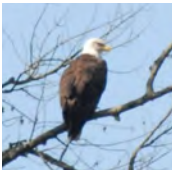
substantial value donation from the property owner. The Poston property has been in the family for multiple generations and has been well stewarded – with relatively light farming and timbering over the years, avoiding habitat degradation from more intensive farming and forestry practices. Much of the timber on the site is very mature.

The Poston property protects both sides of nearly a mile of two high quality stream corridors: Alum Creek and the West Branch of Alum Creek – both classified by Ohio as Superior High Quality Waters. The conserved areas also protects two Class 3 primary headwater tributaries of Alum Creek and a number of Category 3 wetlands, including a large, forested wetland in a mature old growth forest.

All of the waterways on the Poston property are very scenic outwash streams created when melting glaciers cut through formations of Ohio Shale. There are towering, very steep cliffs of exposed shale along each stream, with some outcrops over 60 feet high and virtually vertical to the stream bed.

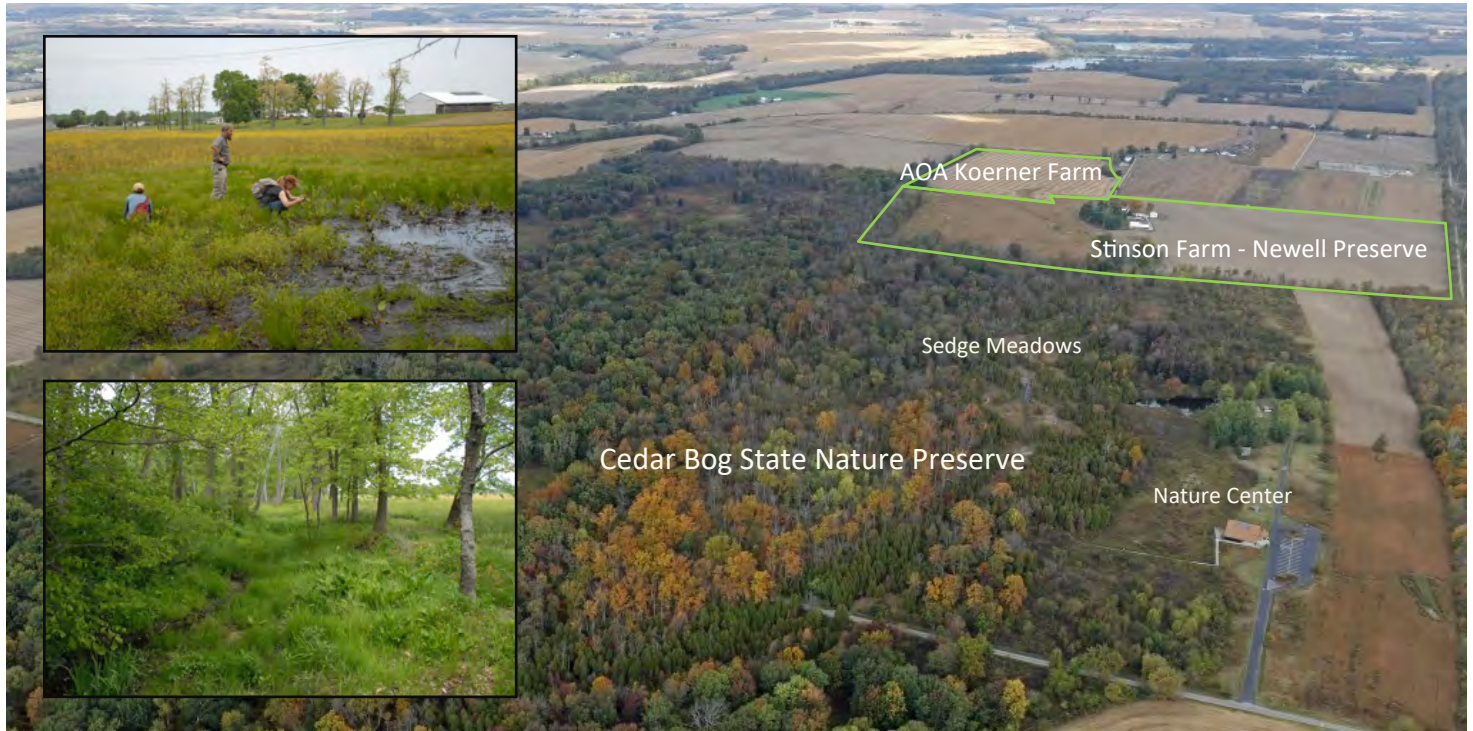
As part of this purchase, AOA acquired the former Poston home/farmhouse, a very early relic of Ohio settlement and locally important heritage site. Built circa 1803, it is a former stagecoach inn and stop on the underground railroad. The old stage road is still visible and useable through the adjacent forest.





Land Conservation

AOA works to conserve land and water resources as sustainable assets for our community. In 2023 AOA increased the conservation lands we currently steward to 173 properties and over 14,750 acres. We have secured funding for numerous additional conservation transactions that are in process.



AOA Adds Newell Preserve to Cedar Run Watershed Conservation and Protection of the Exceptional Cedar Bog Nature Preserve in Champaign County

AOA recently acquired the 74-acre Stinson farm which is adjacent to the northern upstream boundary of the Cedar Bog State Nature Preserve. This preserve provides critical protection and buffering for one of the most valued and unique natural areas in Ohio - an exceptional remnant Coldwater, spring-fed wetland ecosystem, that has been eradicated from surrounding areas. Named for a relict population of northern white cedar, Cedar Run is home to numerous rare, threatened and/or endangered species and one of the most diverse habitats in Ohio.

Designated by AOA as the Newell Preserve, in honor of a former owner of the property, this site conserves critical portions of both the East Branch and West Branch of Cedar Run. These high-quality spring-fed Coldwater habitat headwater streams comprise one of the primary groundwater sources which sustains the unique habitats in the Cedar Bog State Nature Preserve.

The Stinson farm has long been a key property important to the long-term protection of Cedar Bog ecosystems. AOA has initiated site restoration that focuses on the conversion of former agricultural fields to native habitats comparable to those found in adjacent portions of Cedar Bog. A primary goal is the protection of water sources and water quality entering the Bog through the reduction of nutrients, pesticides and herbicides.

The Newell Preserve supplements AOA's three previously conserved properties along Cedar Run and brings the total we have protected to ~155 acres. It continues AOA's initiative to conserve the relatively small but highly significant Cedar Run watershed in the Mad River valley, protecting and expanding the unique habitats and species that are endemic to this important natural area as well as Ohio's natural resource legacy.

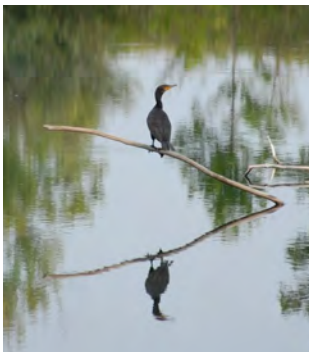




Darby Lakes Addition to Darby Creek Conservation Corridor

AOA acquired the 76-acre Darby Lakes Preserve property from the Smith family as part of our Darby Creek Conservation Corridor Initiative. Located in Union County in the upper Darby watershed, this property is the site of a former sand and gravel quarry that was repurposed as a fishing club camp for many years. The property was subdivided into residential lots for development and would have been sold off in pieces if not purchased by AOA.

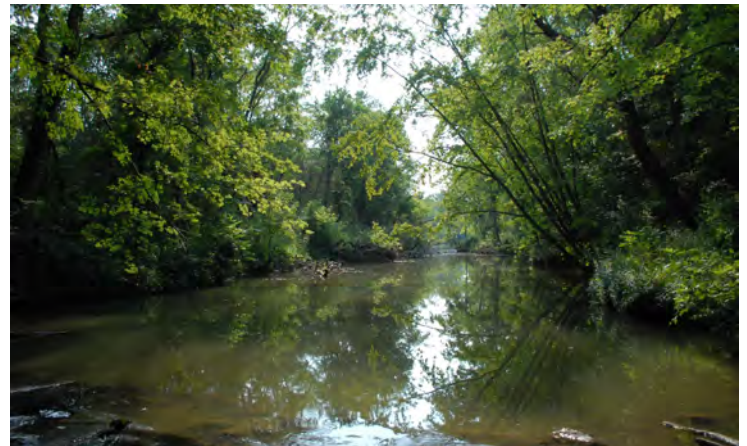
Darby Lakes Preserve includes 27 acres of lake surface including two islands. It provides excellent habitat for migratory birds. The



preserve protects 1,800 linear feet of forested riparian corridor along the Big Darby, which is classified as Outstanding State Waters and an Exceptional Warmwater Habitat stream. It is widely recognized for its exceptional water quality and species diversity.

ODNR Scenic Rivers owns 86 acres adjacent to the new preserve. AOA is collaborating with ODNR on site

restoration and stewardship activities. Combined with the Scenic Rivers property, the new preserve creates a block of over 160 acres of natural habitat along a one+ mile stretch of the upper Big Darby - the largest block of conserved land on the upper Darby for a distance of 30 river miles.



AOA's Darby Creek Conservation Corridor Initiative

AOA has conserved 17 properties and nearly 1,600 acres as part of our Darby Creek Conservation Corridor Initiative. Recognized as "one of the most biologically diverse aquatic systems in the Midwest," Darby Creek is home to 38 known state and federally listed species, including numerous freshwater mussel species and fish. For a waterway its size, the Big Darby has the greatest diversity of freshwater mussels of any in the entirety of North America. However, these mussel and fish populations are under numerous threats related to nutrients, sedimentation, excessive development, et al. Much more riparian corridor protection is needed along this special stream to safeguard water quality, aquatic species, native habitat and species diversity.

Double Falls on
Menchhofer Preserve
from AOA Waterfall
Photography Trip



Organizational Enhancement

Generous gifts from friends and supporters enabled the Appalachia Ohio Alliance to accomplish much in 2023. We are grateful for this support, and for continued validation of our conservation mission.

AOA continues to pursue the resources and support needed to carry out our valuable and worthy conservation work. For every \$1 donated to AOA, we are able to protect over \$20 worth of land and water resources.

Grants. AOA was fortunate to receive numerous grants in 2023 to support our conservation, stewardship, education and outreach activities. We procured over \$10 million in grants from public sector organizations, helping to maximize the return on our donor's investments in our conservation work.

Donations. AOA's conservation efforts benefited from many generous gifts this past year including several significant donations for land conservation and long-term property stewardship and conservation defense.

Capacity. As AOA continues to grow and evolve we are striving to strengthen our organizational capacity to better achieve our conservation mission goals. In 2023 we:

- Added a third full-time stewardship staff member.
- Participated in a variety of Ohio and national land trust seminars and conferences as part of our efforts to build stronger leadership and organizational sustainability.

Community Foundations. AOA continued to receive support through endowed funds at Community Foundations in our service area. AOA now has eight donor advised funds at local Community Foundations that support the sustainability of our conservation, stewardship and defense missions.



Vernal Pool on AOA's
Fickardt Farm Preserve

Photo Credits

Carol Shurlow (pages 2, 3, 11, 14, 15 and 16); Victoria Williams (pages 3 and 15); Kathy Cubert (page 3); Jim McCormac (page 9); Doug Shevelow (page 11); and AOA Board and Staff.

AOA seeks to enhance the natural qualities of existing habitats and to restore and/or reestablish healthy ecosystems focusing on native plants. As once common species become rare, and rare species endangered, it is critically important that we conserve and restore natural habitats that provide homes for these species.



Stewardship

Conducted Woolly Adelgid surveys on Hemlock trees in our Hocking Hills preserves.

AOA works to enhance our land and water resources as sustainable assets for our community. We undertake a wide range of stewardship activities on our properties to preserve and enhance the natural habitats and site features.

In association with community partners, friends and volunteers, during the past year we have undertaken extensive site management and restoration activities on AOA preserves.



Reintroduced declining native species and augmented populations of forest medicinals such as Goldenseal to suitable habitats on our preserves.



Maintained prairies and removed invasive species.

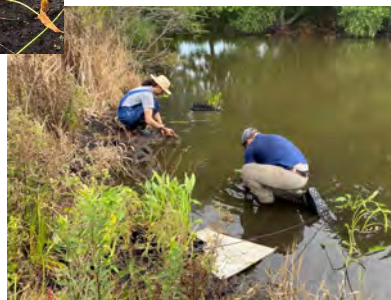


AOA has utilized staff, volunteers and contractors in a massive effort to remove and control non-native species throughout many of our preserves, targeting destructive invasives—particularly Japanese Honeysuckle, Multi-flora Rose, Tree of Heaven, Autumn Olive, Reed Canary Grass, and Garlic Mustard. We removed large honeysuckle bushes from over 500 acres of forestlands.

Reestablished native plants as part of Utzinger Bog restoration.



Removed woody trees and shrubs from over 100 acres of existing prairies.



Preserve Stewardship



Harvested seeds from rare species to help increase their distribution and support habitat restoration activities on our Preserves..

AOA sponsored over 30 workdays for volunteers and partner groups such as AmeriCorps to assist with stewardship activities at our preserves.



Removed utilities, man-made infrastructure, and debris from several preserves including Smith Lakes and Genevieve Jones.



Restored wetlands on Kiser Addition at Cackley Swamp Preserve



Removed field tile and old drainage pipes to reestablish natural drainage.



Performed numerous botanical / species surveys, monitored streams and identified new rare, threatened and/or endangered plant species on AOA Preserves as part of site resource assessments.



Planted over 600 trees to help reestablish bottomland and upland forests on numerous preserves.



Demolished dilapidated structures and removed legacy trash, debris and tires from AOA preserves.





Nature-Based Outreach and Engagement





AOA provides opportunities for members and the public to participate in and learn more about our conservation mission. We emphasize nature-based education that features conserved lands and local ecosystems, conveying an enhanced understanding of their significance and relevance to our community. Our numerous programs and events help provide outdoor recreational activities, build partnerships, engage local communities, provide hands-on learning and stewardship experiences, and allow friends to visit the lands they have helped to conserve – some of the most beautiful places in our region.

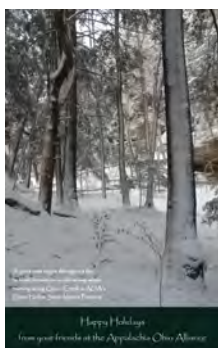


Our 2023 education and outreach program consisted of 30 events, providing a wide range of outdoor activities including naturalist-guided field trips to AOA conserved properties, workshops and programs. In addition we undertook a variety of stewardship-based events focusing on restoration and enhancement of AOA preserves. In all, our programs and events during the past year attracted over 800 participants, inspired by AOA's conservation work and the beauty of our special landscapes.



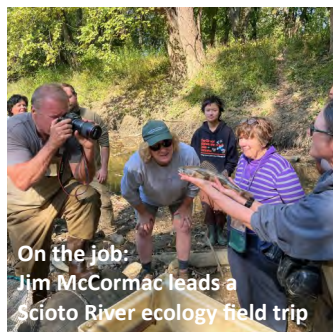
Hinkle Gorge tour led by conservation donor, Kevin Hinkle

And More...



AOA's Holiday Card program provides opportunities to "give a gift of conservation" to promote AOA's mission and local conservation to friends and associates. Our 2023 card features a "Hemlock Forests on a cold snowy winter morning" along Queer Creek Gorge in AOA's Bison Hollow State Nature Preserve.

AOA's **Annual Dinner** was held at ODNR's new Hocking Hills State Park Lodge. Bringing together many of friends and supporters, this event recognized AOA's 2023 land and water conservation and stewardship achievements, featuring our success in preserving river corridors in Central Ohio. Our keynote speaker was **Jim McCormac, Ohio Photographer, Author and Naturalist**, who spoke about the natural value of the Scioto River corridor.



On the job: Jim McCormac leads a Scioto River ecology field trip

2023 AOA Conservation Awards

AOA's **Conservation Achievement Award** recognizes exemplary dedication, commitment and achievement in the field of conserva-



tion. Former AOA Assistant Director **Steve Goodwin** who retired earlier this year, was honored for his many years of dedication and service to Ohio conservation, as both an ODNR employee with DNAP and Scenic Rivers, and following his retirement from the State of Ohio, his second career in conservation working with our land conservancy.

AOA bestowed our **Conservation Partnership Award on ODNR Scenic Rivers** for numerous collaborations over the years that helped facilitate conservation and build awareness regarding water quality and aquatic resource issues. In addition to collaborating on land conservation, Scenic Rivers has led annual canoe trips for AOA members and friends on several Central Ohio area rivers.



AOA is fortunate to have many volunteers who assist our conservation mission efforts. We presented our **Conservation Volunteer Award to Kelly Capuzzi**, who has led and participated in many AOA education and outreach events over the years. An OEPA employee, Kelly is committed to protecting water quality and aquatic habitats in Ohio and works to build public awareness of the importance of conservation of our aquatic resources.



Steve Goodwin Receives COLT Recognition

Steve Goodwin was recognized with a service award from the Coalition of Ohio Land Trusts (COLT), the statewide organization that helps promote and lead private conservation in Ohio. This award, presented at the May 5, 2023 meeting, honors Steve's many years of service as a founding member and key contributor to COLT. In conjunction with the award COLT established the Steve Goodwin Scholarship Fund, which will provide free registration for environmental and natural resource students attending COLT conferences and training.

The Appalachia Ohio Alliance is a regional non-profit land conservancy that serves central, south-central and southeastern Ohio. The Alliance is dedicated to the conservation and stewardship of our land and water as sustainable natural resources that are an asset and a legacy for our community.

