

# AOA Statement

## Bison Hollow State Nature Preserve Dedication Ceremony

Steve Fleegal

Executive Director

Appalachia Ohio Alliance

I would like to thank Governor DeWine, Director Mertz, Assistant Director Gray, and the exceptional staff of ODNR which we have had the pleasure of working with for many years –

First for their realizing that the outstanding natural and scenic resource features of Bison Hollow are worthy of State Nature Preserve recognition,

Second, for their on-going support for AOA's conservation mission which has extended for over 20 years,

and Third, for their exceptional efforts to permanently conserve so many valuable land and water resources throughout the State of Ohio.

AOA is comprised of a collaborative team of dedicated, hardworking people who care about Ohio's land and water resources. This dedication honors many who are not here today including Donors, Supporters, Volunteers, Consultants, Board and Staff, who share much of the credit for this accomplishment which we celebrate today.

We are excited to be collaborating on habitat conservation with ODNR's Division of Natural Areas and Preserves at Bison Hollow. We couldn't have created and conserved this special place without the support and assistance of ODNR. We would also like to recognize the Division of Environmental and Financial Assistance at the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency and the Clean Ohio Program at the Ohio Public Works Commission for their generous funding assistance which has supported AOA's conservation and stewardship efforts at Bison Hollow.

AOA remains dedicated to the conservation and stewardship of Ohio's land and water as sustainable natural resources that are an asset and a legacy for our community. We will soon have conserved nearly 190 properties and over 17,000 acres.

Bison Hollow Preserve is one of the jewels of the distinctive Hocking Hills landscape. As you can readily see, Bison Hollow is covered in deep older growth hardwood forests with large

stands of hemlock that provide homes for many native species that are becoming increasingly threatened or rare. The high Blackhand sandstone bluffs, gorges, rock shelters and caves, numerous waterfalls and relatively rare high-quality Coldwater habitat streams, are very worthy of conservation from degradation.

Our conservation actions at Bison Hollow have extended for 15 years, from our acquisition of the 76-acre Harwood property in 2009. Today, Bison Hollow Preserve is comprised of 20 tracts and over 1,000 acres of largely unfragmented habitat, all acquired from voluntary sellers who supported AOA's vision for conservation of this spectacular natural landscape.

Bison Hollow Preserve extends the conserved Hocking Hills geography into Vinton County and provides a physical habitat corridor that connects the Hocking Hills State Park lands to the Wayne National Forest.

Our efforts at Bison Hollow and elsewhere in the Hocking Hills helps compliment and safeguard the previous investments made by the State of Ohio to protect and showcase the priceless Hocking Hills landscapes that are a valuable component of Ohio's ecotourism economy.

AOA has a long-term presence and investment in the conservation of exceptional Hocking Hills landscapes, natural resources, native habitats and rural character. Our commitment dates to our first conservation easement in 2002. AOA will soon surpass 90 properties and over 6,000 acres of conserved lands in the Greater Hocking Hills Region.

Unfortunately, we recognize that the Hocking Hills Region retains a significant number of potential vulnerabilities and liabilities that threaten the sustainability of its natural resources, habitats and water quality, as well as its viability as a high-quality ecotourism destination.

While AOA has achieved many successes there is much conservation left to accomplish to sufficiently conserve the natural heritage and resources so precious to the Hocking Hills region, creating a permanent legacy for the long-term benefit and enjoyment of us all.

As we pursue this goal, we hope to continue our long-term collaborative relationship with ODNR which has led to so many conservation successes for Ohio.

Thank You.