



2024 Year in Review

Appalachia Ohio Alliance



Reforesting AOA's Lamb Preserve
Darby Creek Conservation Corridor
Pickaway County

ReWilding and Restoring AOA Preserves

AOA Plants Over 260,000 New Trees and
Carries Out Extensive Stewardship and Ecological Restoration Projects
Restoring Native Habitats and Enhancing Water Quality

Unfortunately, there are no stands of virgin forests left. Our native prairies have been plowed. Virtually all properties have been impacted by human activities to some extent. Development, timbering, grazing, plowing, utilities, mining, drainage infrastructure, pollutants, excessive nutrients, native plant harvesting, species extirpation or over harvesting, introduced non-native species, et al., have taken a toll on our native habitats. The properties AOA acquires have been modified for alternative uses that have eliminated or diminished natural habitats and functions. They need attention - some kind of stewardship action to rewild and ecologically restore the site to its largely natural state and/or to reestablish appropriate native vegetation, habitat and wildlife.

Continued on next page...

22 Years of Conservation Achievement in Central Ohio

More than 16,440 Acres Conserved	183 Properties Conserved	Properties Conserved in 21 Ohio Counties	113 Fee Owned 66 Conservation Easements 4 Transferred / Facilitated / Leased
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ReWilding and Restoring AOA Preserves

Continued from Cover

A lucky few sites need only minimal attention such as invasive treatment, trash clean up, or access control to prevent motorized vehicle trespassing damage. AOA carries out these and other basic stewardship and defense activities for each property we purchase as standard practice - as is our obligation as a nonprofit land conservancy and as is required by Land Trust Alliance Standards and Practices.

Other sites require more intermediate interventions such as utility or infrastructure removal, drainage restoration, conversion of fields to native prairie, reintroduction of native species, tree planting, et al. Many of these activities are initial steps to rewilding previously impacted properties and in many cases may be all that is needed.

Still others require further, more intensive restoration actions: demolition and clearance of substantial structures, such as at AOA's Utzinger Bog Preserve; re-creation of wetlands such as at AOA's Kiser Preserve; and/or reengineered drainage systems designed to retain and filter water vs. discharging it as rapidly as possible, such as at AOA's Genevieve Jones Preserve. Several major ecological restoration / rewilding projects being carried out by AOA are highlighted herein.

AOA is dedicated to completely rewilding our Preserves to support natural systems, natural habitats and native species.

While we cannot expect to recreate Eden, we can build nature preserves that contribute to fulfilling needed ecological functions within Ohio's large landscapes. Our goal is to foster healthy Preserve ecosystems that can support native species as well as the reintroduction of extirpated species. Particularly rarer native species that need homes due to loss of habitats and have to rely on smaller and smaller patches of livable habitat to survive.

Eventually, our aim is to provide Preserves with natural systems and processes that can become more resilient and can be integrated into larger, better functioning, more self-sustaining ecosystems in Ohio.

AOA's conservation strategies also help implement other components of ReWilding principles, including creation of core protected habitat areas and habitat corridors.

Fragmentation of parcels and reduction of core habitat size is a troublesome ecological impact. AOA is addressing this by acquiring multiple adjacent parcels to defragment areas and build cores of habitat suitable to sufficiently support a diversity of native species and perform needed ecological functions. Reference our featured articles on AOA Preserves such as Bison Hollow SNP and Cedar Run for examples.

We are also working to create habitat corridors to facilitate needed species movement and migration. Reference our various featured riparian corridor initiatives for samples of these.

Your participation in and support of our conservation mission efforts is greatly appreciated.

AOA Plants Over 260,000 Trees As Part of Preserve Reforestation

AOA partnered with Living Carbon, a public benefit corporation, to plant 263,000 trees on ~410 acres this past March. That's a lot of trees. New trees were planted on five of our nature Preserves as part of a massive reforestation and site restoration effort.

Most were planted on four Preserves along the lower section of Big Darby Creek, which are part of AOA's Big Darby Creek Conservation Corridor in Pickaway County. The remainder were planted on AOA's EarthTouch Preserve in Vinton County.

AOA's primary mission focus is on clean water and the conservation of riparian corridors and habitats. The historic loss of

forested riparian areas along Ohio's streams threatens aquatic species (e.g., fish, mussels) and the water quality that they need to survive and thrive in their home habitats.

Trees were planted in old, largely bottomland fields, as well as adjacent upland fields, integral to stream corridor protection. The newly planted areas will accelerate the rewilding of the impacted properties and expand the natural habitat and native forest cover. More tree planting on AOA Preserves is planned for next year.



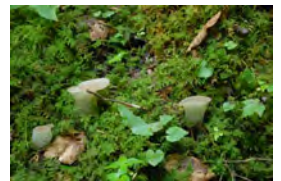


Gertrude Hill Preserve Supplements AOA's Queer Creek Conservation

AOA recently purchased a 32-acre parcel along Queer Creek from the Gerber and Cole families. Located west of Ash Cave at the southern edge of the State-owned Parks and Forests in the Hocking Hills, the Gertrude Hill Preserve contributes to a conservation corridor along Queer Creek, a high priority AOA water quality protection goal.

Although relatively petite, this parcel conserves spectacular Hocking Hills and Blackhand sandstone geologic formations

including high steep bluffs, shelter caves, numerous large slough rocks, and a high, wet-weather waterfall. Most of the site is covered by older growth hardwood forests with large stands of hemlock and many native wildflower species that are becoming increasingly threatened or rare. The property protects 2,875 linear feet of stream corridor, including 625 feet along the East Fork of Queer Creek, which is classified as a Coldwater/Exceptional Warmwater stream.



An old cabin on the property was purchased separately by AOA. The Gertrude Hill Preserve Increases lands AOA has preserved along this portion of Queer Creek to over 600 acres.



AOA Continues Hocking Hills Conservation Efforts with 4 New Preserve Properties Added in 2024

AOA has now conserved 94 properties and over 5,600 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.



Land Conservation

AOA Expands Bison Hollow Preserve – Protecting Queer Creek Water Quality and Aquatic Habitats

AOA acquired another new property that expands our spectacular Bison Hollow Preserve in the upper portion of the South Branch East Fork of the Queer Creek watershed. The 42-acre Crane-Jones site consists of two parcels on the west side of Bison Hollow which served as a second home site for the last decade. The residential structure and associated appurtenances on the property will be demolished and removed by AOA and the home site restored back to native creek-side habitat.

This acquisition protects over 2,900 linear feet of South Branch East Fork of Queer Creek tributaries on the property in addition to several upland headwater tributaries. All of these are high-quality coldwater primary headwater streams that contribute to water quality in Queer Creek. Most of the site is covered in hardwood forests with extensive beds of native wildflowers typical of the Hocking Hills geography.



Conservation Buyers

AOA has been blessed with numerous generous, community-spirited conservation buyers who have stepped up this year to purchase land to hold for AOA. Buyers own the properties until we are able to procure funding to permanently conserve the site, filling a valuable and needed conservation partnership role.

AOA is grateful to Beth and Richard Crane for serving as conservation buyers for this property, holding it until AOA could procure funding and resolve title issues.

The Crane-Jones addition continues our efforts to defragment excessively subdivided properties to assemble a larger block of core habitat along Queer Creek and its tributaries that adjoin ODNR’s Ash Cave Unit of the Hocking Hills State Park. AOA has now conserved over 1,100 acres and 21 largely contiguous parcels that comprise the Bison Hollow Preserve.

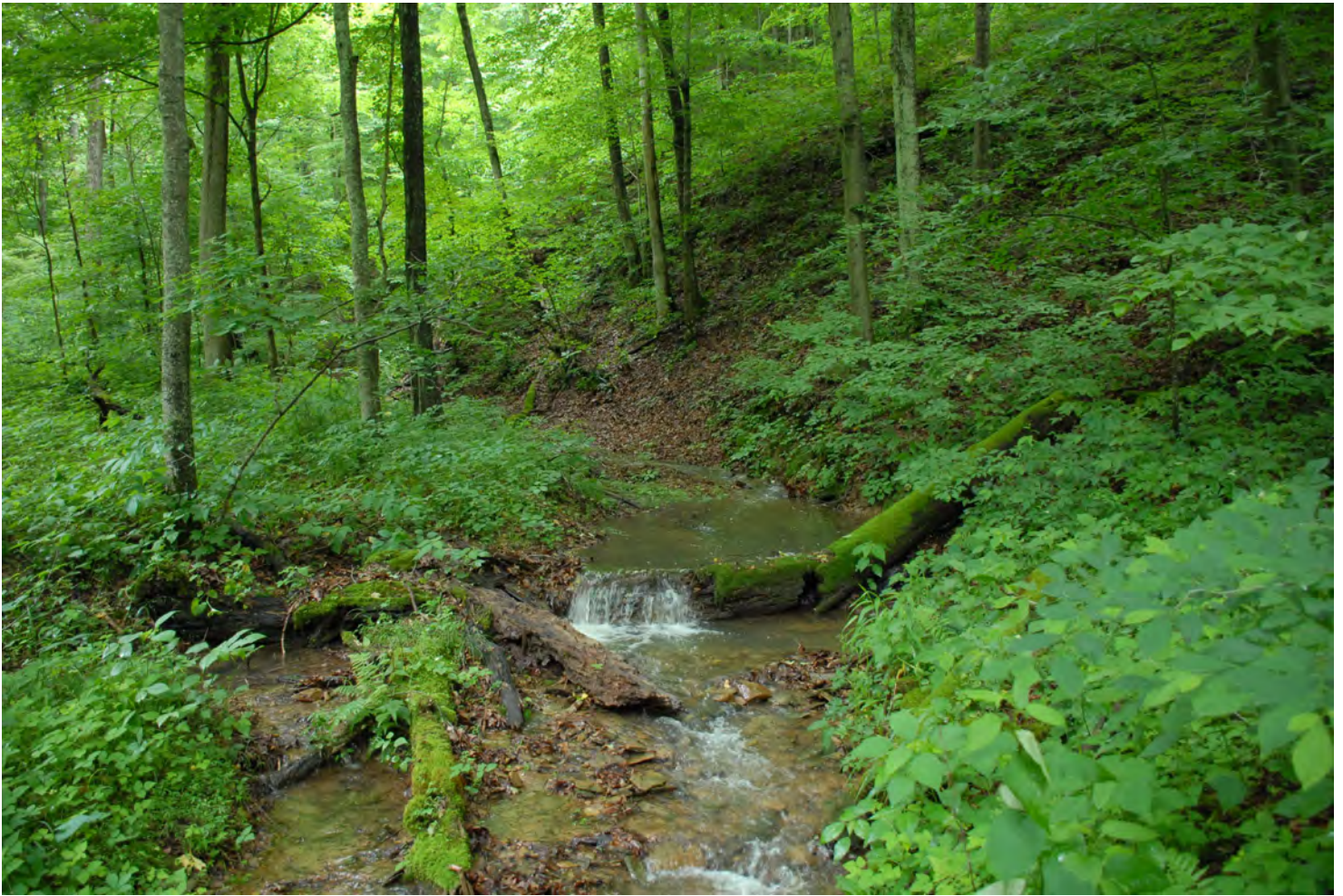


State of Ohio Designates Core of AOA’s Bison Hollow as a State Nature Preserve

On a beautiful snowy winter day representatives of AOA hiked into the deep woods of Bison Hollow for a special event. ODNR Division of Natural Areas and Preserves held a signing ceremony for the recently announced 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



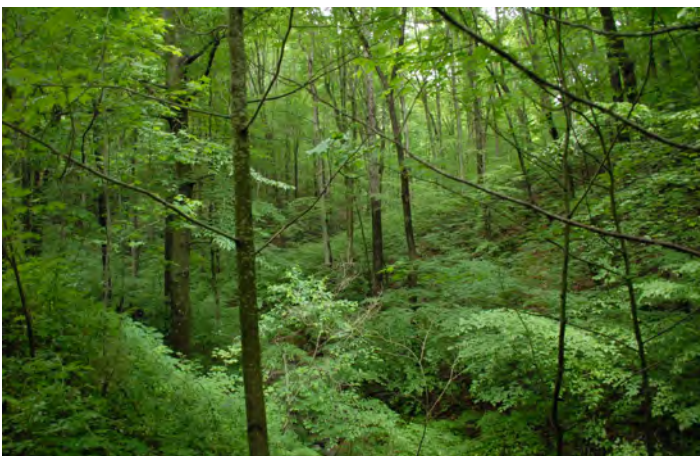
protection of the East Fork of Queer Creek, a Coldwater Habitat system designated Outstanding State Waters, the highest classification in Ohio. The Preserve features a spectacular narrow, steep-walled Black Hand Sandstone gorge with numerous picturesque rock outcrops and waterfalls. It is an important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



AOA Establishes Salt Creek Narrows Big Woods Preserve with BTG Parcels

AOA recently acquired two parcels totaling 280 acres from BTG Pactual to help establish the Salt Creek Narrows Big Woods Preserve. This is the second property AOA has purchased from BTG, a multinational timber company. It supplements two existing AOA preserves in the Narrows.

The Salt Creek Narrows is the site of a unique glacial driven geologic “stream reversal” in the southern extent of the Hocking Hills landscape. Characterized by high hills with very steep slopes



and narrow stream valleys, it is an aesthetically beautiful and ecologically rich area that is a high protection priority for AOA. Tucked away in a relatively isolated part of Hocking and Vinton Counties, the Narrows could be considered one of Ohio’s most overlooked natural features that is very worthy of conservation actions.

Water quality remains high within the Narrows area of Salt Creek, which is designated as an Exceptional Warmwater Habitat (EWH) Superior High Quality Waters stream. The BTG site will preserve over 23,000 linear feet of high-quality Class 3 Primary Headwater Habitat Streams that contribute to excellent water quality in Salt Creek.



Although about half of the site has been timbered in the last 20 years, BTG excluded the riparian corridors which are covered in a relatively mature mixed hardwood forest. The property supports habitat for a number of relatively rare species, including endangered Timber Rattlesnakes.

AOA has numerous adjacent BTG properties in process and/or under contract, providing the opportunity for assembly of a large block of contiguous forested habitat that would eventually provide a needed wildlife connectivity corridor linking Tar Hollow to the Hocking Hills.



The Hocking River as it flows around the northern edge of the Shelly Lakes property

Shelly Lakes Acquisition Will Help Enhance Water Quality in the Hocking River and Hocking Hills

AOA acquired the 112-acre Shelly Lakes property from Shelly Materials, Inc. This site is located on Business Highway 33 south of Lancaster in Fairfield County along the Hocking River. This new Preserve will protect 5,990 linear feet (over 1.1 miles) of Hocking River riparian corridor, while enhancing water quality and aquatic habitat. Virtually the entire property lies within the designated floodplain of the Hocking River.



The property was historically mined for sand and gravel, resulting in two quarry lakes on the site. The southernmost quarry lake is 8.8 acres in size and the northernmost and largest lake is 36 acres.

As the site was quarried, the river channel was constricted by levees that protected the quarry operations but cut off the river from its natural floodplain. AOA plans to construct hydrologic improvements to the larger quarry lake including creation of two large breaches through the levee at the upstream and down-

stream ends. These will be designed to channel floodwaters through the lake and reconnected floodplain, allowing the filtration of nonpoint pollutants and expanding floodwater retention capacity of the riparian corridor.

Shelly Lakes is upstream of the Hocking Valley portion of the Hocking Hills ecotourism area, Ohio's premiere tourism destination. The proposed improvements will help improve and protect downstream water quality along the principal stream and water-based recreation area in the Hocking Hills.

AOA's Hocking River Conservation Corridor Initiative

The Hocking River Conservation Corridor is an important subsection of AOA's Greater Hocking Hills Conservation Initiative. It focuses on the conservation of connected riparian corridors in the Hocking River valley – the primary access route and gateway to the Hocking Hills ecoregion and popular recreation and tourism facilities and amenities.

AOA is working to help protect water quality, enhance wildlife habitat, create protected, natural wildlife corridors, preserve local heritage and culture, retain scenic character and views, and increase outdoor, nature-based recreational, eco-tourism and educational opportunities for the community. AOA has conserved 38 properties and over 1,500 acres in this significant area.



AOA Protects Large Fen in Pickaway County

AOA recently completed the acquisition of the 220-acre Malick property located in Circleville, across from AOA's Bartley Preserve. Designated as Ruggles Fen, in honor of the longtime property owners, the site is significant for including the core largest remnant portion of a large wetland fen. The adjacent 3-acre farmstead area was purchased separately by AOA.



Once reasonably common features in the glacial landscapes along the Scioto River, high quality bogs and fens are now relatively rare. Settlement and the resultant development has reduced and

virtually eliminated these habitats and dependent species through a multitude of actions including draining, filling, native habitat destruction, non-native species invasion, timbering and farming practices (combination of grazing, plowing, herbicides, nutrients, et al.) impacts.

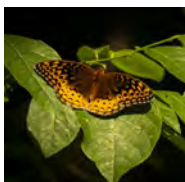
Most of the original bogs/fens in Pickaway County are no longer functioning natural landscapes with native habitats. Ruggles Fen

is one of the largest known wetland sites identified in Pickaway County. Although historically called Kibler Bog, site assessment has determined that it is actually a peat accumulating fen system. The fen is a high-quality, Category 3 wetland resource that contains numerous rare species, including multiple fen-indicator plants and a small fen meadow.

The fen system is surrounded by agricultural land which is intruding into potential wetland areas with hydric soils. AOA will seek to enhance and expand the wetland system through hydrologic improvements, invasive species management, planning of native wetland vegetation and substantial buffer restoration.

Scioto River Flyway Corridor Initiative

AOA continues our ongoing endeavor to protect riparian corridors along the Scioto River and its tributaries as part of our Scioto River Flyway Corridor Initiative. This large landscape-scale project is being carried out by AOA in collaboration with Ducks Unlimited and numerous compatible organizations. Our efforts have so far led to the protection of 50 conservation properties and over 5,300 acres within the Scioto River Flyway Corridor, including significant stretches along the main stem, as well as prominent tributaries such as the Big Darby.



Preserve ReWilding

In addition to basic stewardship activities, AOA undertakes extensive ecological restoration and rewilding site enhancements on many of our Preserves. We seek to create ecological uplift of our Preserve properties, assuring the achievement of natural, native, sustainable habitats that fulfill their appropriate ecological function and role within the larger landscape ecosystem. We are highlighting numerous projects this year that have either been underway or are just getting ready to begin. We hope that you can visit some of these sites.



Kiser Restoration at Cackley Swamp

Located near Oak Hill in Jackson County, Cackley Swamp is a large Category 3 wetland system that is the largest of seven relict Teay's River Valley wetlands. Impaired by many years of draining, farming and filling, Cackley Swamp was severely dehydrated and degraded.

Through conservation and restoration efforts the swamps hydrology has greatly improved and it has recovered much of its original extent. AOA has assembled seven contiguous parcels comprising ~490 acres including most of the existing wetlands, into the Cackley Swamp Preserve.

The 32-acre Kiser site, located near the center of the Preserve area, contained a large wetland area that was filled decades ago as part of a nearby strip mining operation. Part of a large adjacent hill was excavated and used to fill the wetland area. Once filled, the site served as a rock processing facility that included a crusher and gravel storage yard on top of the former wetland.

AOA reconstructed much of the large wetland by contracting for the excavation and removal of the fill to the original hydric soil level to recreate a 6-acre wetland on the property which is con-

nected to Cackley Swamp. The removed fill was used to recreate the topography of the adjacent hill. Two new vernal pools totaling .6 acres were also created next to the wetland.

Native prairie and wetland seed mixes were planted, along with coir mats to control erosion on the restored hillside. AOA's stewardship team are actively working at the site to manage invasive species and to increase the diversity of native vegetation.



Scioto Bend Preserve ReWilding and ReHydration Project

AOA's 309-acre Scioto Bend Preserve is located on a large bend in the Scioto River adjacent to the City of Circleville in Pickaway County. The property includes ~13,880 linear feet (2.62 miles) of Scioto mainstem river frontage. Although the site lies almost entirely within the floodplain, an old levee extending the length of the river separates it from its floodplain, which impairs the floodplain's ability to function properly.

Additionally, decades of impairments on the property from clearcutting, row cropping, cattle grazing and drainage, diminish its natural function.



AOA worked with Civil & Environmental Consultants, Inc. to develop and implement a comprehensive

series of restoration and enhancement activities to reconnect the natural floodplains to the Scioto River and to restore wetlands and natural habitats on the site.

Phase one of this project is nearing completion with the second phase pending future funding.

A large breach of the levee was constructed to reconnect the Scioto River to the floodplain on the Preserve, allowing flooding to occur multiple times per year. Beaver dam analogs were constructed and vernal pools excavated to increase wetland area and help retain floodwaters on the property, which also

improves natural filtration of nonpoint pollutants and removal of nutrients. Edges of an existing pond were regraded to naturalize it and woody debris was placed in the pond and restored wetlands to create habitat and structure. The restored wetland and prairie areas are being revegetated with native species.

AOA's stewardship team has worked extensively at the site to remove large debris and trash piles, remove cattle fencing, undertake revegetation efforts and conduct invasive species treatment.

This project vastly improved the on-site aquatic and riparian system function and habitat while providing profound positive benefit to downstream property owners and communities from cleaner water and flood water control and retention. It continues AOA's efforts to protect and restore water quality in the Scioto River and its tributaries as part of our Scioto River Flyway Corridor Initiative in central Ohio.



AOA Expands and Buffers Cedar Bog Wetland Habitats with Restoration of Adjacent Preserves

Cedar Bog in Champaign County is one of the most ecologically rich State Nature Preserves in Ohio. AOA is implementing a landscape scale strategy for Cedar Run which flows through and sustains Cedar Bog, that seeks to: protect and restore riparian areas that are suitable to be returned to wetland and other compatible habitats, expanding the areas that can support the unique habitats and rare species living in the watershed; help protect and enhance surface and groundwater resources; and provide suitable natural buffers for the unique plant communities found in Ohio's spectacular Cedar Bog State Nature Preserve.

We are currently in the process of rewilding and restoring the four parcels we own along Cedar Run adjacent to the Cedar Bog. AOA has performed extensive invasive control and reseeding of the former fields on the Clark Preserve parcels on the south side of Cedar Bog.

On the north side, we are pursuing a multiyear process of reclaiming agricultural fields on the Newell and Koerner Preserves which we are converting to sedge meadows and upland prairies, as appropriate. Our stewardship team has conducted invasive removal with a focus on reed canary grass management, which will be a long-term effort since the invasive grass is difficult to eradicate. We have planted nearly half of these sites with new native prairie and sedges which include sedge seed collected from Cedar Bog. We have started planting trees along the west branch of Cedar Run and will continue limited tree planting as appropriate to shade and protect the stream.

It is rewarding to watch the rewilding of these sites that will provide new homes for many rare species including the endangered massasauga rattlesnake.



Utzinger Bog Restoration Update

AOA is nearing completion of the restoration activities on our 91-acre Utzinger Bog Preserve in Franklin County. A former farm, the site includes four open water ponds created by 20th century peat mining. Prior to settlement, the site was a large kettle pothole, and high-quality peat-accumulating bog with no natural drainage outlet, a geologic remnant of the last ice age. In addition to the peat mining operation, removal of the forested buffer, intensive farming and site drainage improvements greatly diminished the wetlands and natural habitat and eradicated



many of the native species.

AOA has undertaken extensive restoration activities to rewild and rehydrate the property. Contracted drainage

improvements included field tile removal and ditch plugging. Beaver dam analogs were constructed to retain water and expand the wetlands. Woody

material was added to a couple of the wetlands and native plants and shrubs installed.

Several dilapidated farm structures necessitated demolition and removal. AOA's stewardship team has carried out numerous activities across the

site over the last several years including invasive control, native prairie and wetland planting, removal of field tile, ditch and erosion restoration, tree planting, natural trail



construction, removal of wells and gas tanks, trash and tire removal, et al.

Additional tree planting is planned to complete reestablishment of the native wetland buffers. The nearly finished site is an impressive natural wetland habitat.

Darby Lakes Restoration Continues

AOA continues our rewilding efforts on the 76-acre Darby Lakes Preserve located in Union County in the upper Darby watershed.



This property is a former sand and gravel quarry that was repurposed as a fishing club camp for many years prior to AOA's acquisition.

Bank stabilization and boating structures and appurtenances, including many railroad ties and tons of old concrete, have been removed from the lakes. Banks in many locations were graded to

eliminate steep drops and provide gradual slopes to improve wildlife access and shallow areas for native wetland plants to enhance habitat, floodwater filtration and food sources. AOA stewardship team installed erosion control fabric and seeded the site with native wetland prairie species.

AOA removed tons of dumped construction debris and trash from the property and has fished numerous tires and other junk from the lakes. Invasives, including extensive honeysuckle, have been largely removed with follow up control planned over the next couple of years. Former fields on the property will be reforested with new tree planting this coming year.

COMING ATTRACTIONS - LOOKING AHEAD TO ADDITIONAL PRESERVE REWILDINGS

Genevieve Jones Preserve Restoration. Initial restoration activities are underway. Engineering plans are being finalized for the next phase of a major rewilding and rehydration of the former golf course property which will be completed next year. Stay tuned to this exciting project.

Shelly Lakes Restoration. An old quarry on this recently acquired property will be modified to store and filter floodwaters, enhancing water quality and flood control in the Hocking River, greatly benefiting downstream communities and the Hocking Hills. Engineering plans are in process and construction is scheduled to begin next year.

Our clients are speechless over one of AOA's new Preserves! In this case, a pair of Trumpeter Swans on our Darby Lakes Preserve. Listed as Rare by ODNR, there were only 135 breeding pairs recorded in Ohio in 2022.

They may not be able to say Thank You, but their presence alone is reward enough for the hard conservation and stewardship work we do.

It is always gratifying to see our native friends show up and use AOA's restored Preserves, which serve an important role providing suitable natural habitats and homes for a diverse range of native Ohio species, many of which are increasingly rare, threatened and/or endangered.



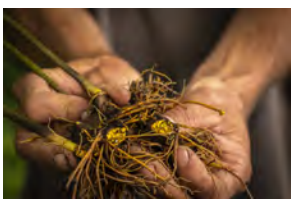


United Plant Savers Goldenseal Sanctuary
Protected by AOA Conservation Easement

Organizational Enhancement

Generous gifts from friends and supporters enabled the Appalachia Ohio Alliance to accomplish much in 2024. 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 2024 to support our conservation, stewardship, education and outreach activities. We procured over \$9 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 2024 we:

- Added a fourth 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.

- Increased our Stewardship and Defense Endowment. **Community Foundations.** AOA continued to receive support through endowed funds at Community Foundations in our service area. AOA now has ten donor advised funds at local Community Foundations that support the sustainability of our conservation, stewardship and defense missions.

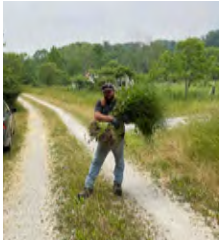


Large Twayblade Orchids, AOA Mercer Woods Old Growth Forest Preserve, Fairfield and Hocking Counties

Photo Credits

Carol Shurlow (pages 1, 4, 8, 9, 11, 14 and 16); Living Carbon (pages 2 and 16), 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

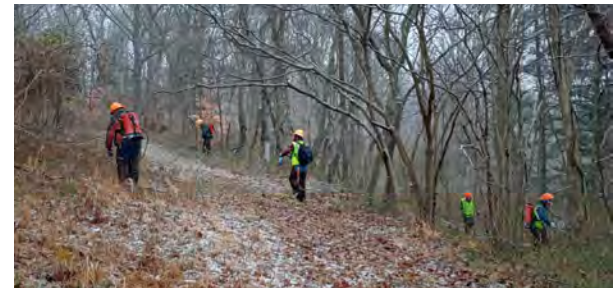


AOA works to enhance our land and water resources as sustainable assets for our community. We undertake a wide range of stewardship activities on our properties annually to preserve and enhance the natural habitats and site features.

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.



AOA continues to utilize 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.



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



Maintained prairies and removed invasive species.



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



AOA Staff Cleans Up Salt Creek

AOA stewardship staff spent a day this fall cleaning trash from a stretch of Salt Creek as it flows through the Narrows in Hocking County - removing several truck and trailer loads of trash and tires that contaminated the stream. Clean streams are a primary component of AOA's water quality protection mission.



Preserve Stewardship

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



Removed utilities, man-made infrastructure, and debris from several Preserves including plugging an old oil well.

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



Restored wetlands



Installed new gates to control vehicular access to our properties to prevent habitat damage from noncompatible site use.



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.

AOA Collaborates with ODNR and Girl Scouts to Plant Trees along Big Darby

Together we planted over 1,200 trees on AOA's Fickard Farm Preserve in April as part of AOA's 2024 reforestation program.

A variety of hardwood trees will help to reestablish upland forest habitat, enhancing the natural buffer along Big Darby Creek.



AOA Monitors Preserves for HWA

The threat to Ohio's beloved Hemlock trees from the invasive Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (HWA) has increased dramatically over the last several years. Unfortunately, HWA infestations are now occurring throughout the Hocking Hills region.



In response, AOA has implemented an

expanded HWA volunteer monitoring program that covered seven Preserves this year. The first HWA were identified on an AOA Preserve last winter. The HWA is a real and present danger to the hemlock trees, a keystone species in the Hocking Hills landscape.



AOA Begins Treating Hemlock Woolly Adelgid Infestations in the Hocking Hills

AOA's stewardship team began intensive treatment protocols for the dreaded Hemlock Woolly Adelgid (HWA) infestation identified this year at our new Menchhofer Preserve. Chemical treatment applied through soil application or injection is the only current viable treatment to help existing trees build up resistance to the HWA. Most infested hemlock trees that remain untreated, will succumb to the HWA, resulting in the loss of individual trees as well as large groves, similar to what has already occurred throughout large parts of the Appalachian region.

AOA is committed to caring for the hemlocks on our Preserves and plans to treat each of our Preserves in coming years.





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 2024 education and outreach program consisted of 30 events, providing a wide range of outdoor activities including naturalist-guided field trips to AOA conserved properties 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.



Salt Creek Narrows Float Trip with ODNR Scenic Rivers

2024 AOA Conservation Awards

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



tion. **Jeff Johnson**, Chief, Natural Areas and Preserves for ODNR, was honored for his many years of dedication and service to Ohio conservation, as both an ODNR employee with DNAP and an original member of AOA's Board of Directors. Jeff has led DNAP partnerships and collaborations with AOA on many conservation projects including Cedar Run and Bison Hollow.

AOA bestowed our **Conservation Partnership Award** on **Living Carbon**, for partnering with AOA to plant a huge number of trees this past year to reforest several of our Preserves.

We are currently planning tree plantings on additional AOA Preserves for 2025 and beyond. Living Carbon is a public benefit corporation, partnering with AOA and comparable groups to carry out reforestation projects to restore ecosystems, improve biodiversity and reduce atmospheric carbon to stable levels.



AOA is fortunate to have many volunteers who assist our conservation mission efforts. We presented our **Conservation Volunteer Award** to the many, many **Conservation Easement Monitors**, who visit our easement properties every year to monitor for encroachments and violations. Annual monitoring is required for AOA to comply with Land Trust Alliance Standards and Practices.

And More...

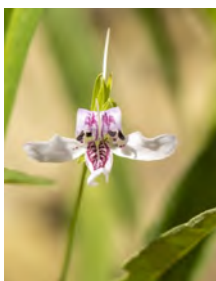
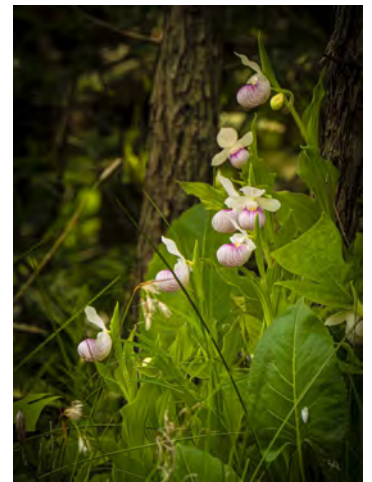


AOA's Holiday Card program provides opportunities to **"give a gift of conservation"** to promote AOA's mission and local conservation to friends and associates. Our 2024 card features a **"Hemlock Sentinels Dressed in White Entering the Narrows"** along Queer Creek Gorge in AOA's Bison Hollow State Nature Preserve.

AOA's **Annual Dinner** was held at ODNR's Hocking Hills State Park Lodge. Bringing together many of our friends and supporters, this event recognized AOA's 2024 land and water conservation and achievements, featuring our success in preserving and restoring water quality and native habitats in Central Ohio. Our keynote speaker was **Kelly Capuzzi, Manager, Ohio's Statewide Water Quality Program**, who spoke about the importance of healthy native riparian buffers to water and aquatic habitat quality in Ohio streams.



Kelly Capuzzi leads her annual AOA In the River event



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.

