



OUR MISSION IS TO CONSERVE NATURAL HABITATS, WATERWAYS, AND AGRICULTURAL LANDS
IN SOUTHWESTERN OHIO, FOR THE BENEFIT OF PRESENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS,
THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS WITH PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

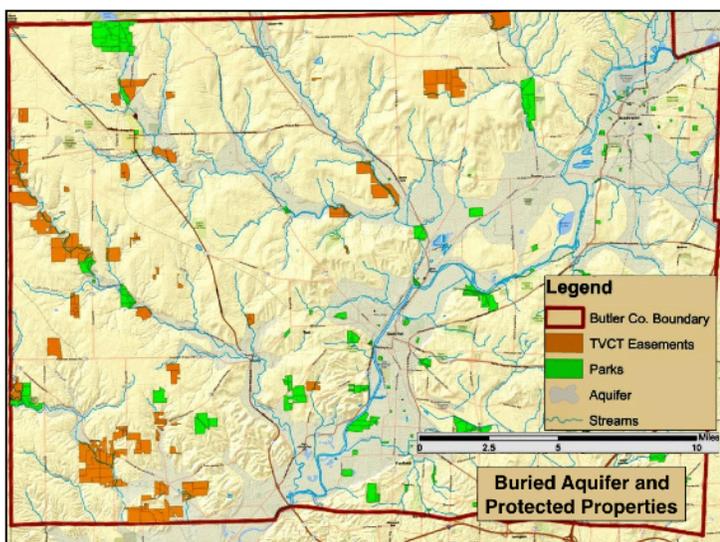
Riparian Forest Buffers: Why Do They Matter?

How would you define “riparian”? How about “buffer”? Well, riparian buffers are a big reason Three Valley Conservation Trust (TVCT) exists, so we thought we’d take a moment to define what they are and why they matter.

In the mid-1990s, the Trust was started by a small group of people who wanted to protect the area along Four Mile Creek from development; in fact, the original name was Four Mile Valley Trust. Since then, the area the Trust protects has expanded to include most of the major valleys in Butler and Preble Counties in southwest Ohio.

Despite this expansion of territory, TVCT’s focus has continued to be riparian areas, those lands “at the edge” of a water body, including any adjacent area influenced by it. When land close to the stream is vegetated, those grasses or forests “buffer” the stream from the influences of land use in upland areas nearby. TVCT’s founders recognized the importance of riparian buffers and wanted to protect them because of their ecological and human importance.

Historically, nearly all SW Ohio streams had wooded riparian areas; when Europeans arrived in Ohio, the estimated forest cover was 95% (ODNR). According to Ohio EPA, “The first settlers ... had never seen such grand forests and big trees. After many days of traveling under the thick forest, they thought they would never see the sky again.” Today, Ohio is about 31% forest and riparian buffers have shrunk, as land has gone into urban or suburban development or been cleared for agriculture.



Protected properties and buried aquifers in Butler County



So what do riparian buffers do? Why are they important? DeGroot (1992) lists two ecological functions. The first, biogeochemical regulation, includes absorbing flood waters, reducing erosion, and filtering nutrients, sediment, pathogens and toxins from the water, among other things. The latter of these is especially important in Butler County, where streams overlay the Great Miami River Buried Valley Aquifer (blue hatched area in map to left). This aquifer provides drinking water to ~2.3 million people, including Oxford and Hamilton. The water in the aquifer is replenished from water trickling through porous, gravelly stream bottoms – so the clean-

(continued on page 2)



From the Board Mark Boardman

190 easements and counting
21,000+ acres preserved and counting
200 easements likely in 2018

Conservation Is Our Legacy.

These are numbers to be proud of because they represent the success of decades of work by hundreds of persons to conserve for today as well as the future.

In addition to those wonderful and powerful numbers:

We now monitor some easements using a drone. Randy Evans (Stewardship Specialist) trained and studied to be a certified drone pilot, a drone was donated to Three Valley, and Randy will perform drone surveys as needed, providing improved access to many of our easements. Monitoring by drone will likely occur on an alternate year schedule.

Three Valley expanded its outreach and education programs designed to promote a stronger community conservation ethic - especially targeting younger community members (see page 4).

The Trust's very first land responsibility, Ruder Preserve (a donated parcel of land along Four-Mile Creek), is being restored by volunteers to a more natural riparian woodland by removing invasive honeysuckle and replanting native trees. It is becoming a showcase of conservation where we can walk through a forest of trees - not a thicket of honeysuckle (see page 5).

Our partnerships with Ohio EPA, Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS-USDA), Great Parks of Hamilton County, and MetroParks of Butler County resulted in creating two new parks (over 200 acres) in the former Fernald region. This partnership (Paddys Run Conservation Project) will continue in 2018, and new partnerships are being developed (e.g. with The Nature Conservancy), see page 6.

We moved our offices to a new location - one with windows in all the offices, adequate parking for the 3 staff and 2 Paddys Run contractors, interns, and members, with a dedicated conference room, faster internet, and better storage. It's a much more professional office, and the total cost is no higher.

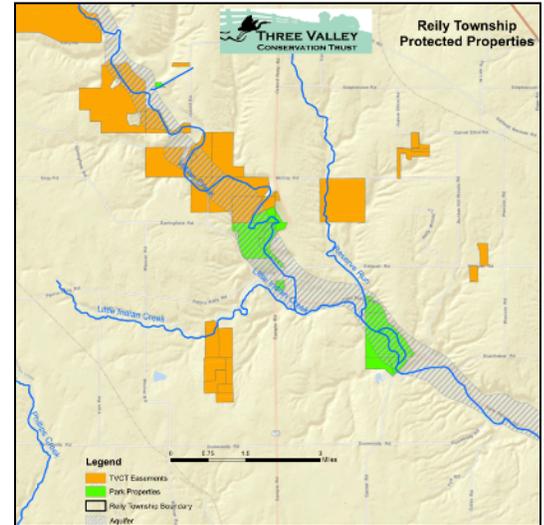
We are addressing our budget needs by downsizing our full-time staff from 4 to 3 persons and consolidating our endowment funds with a new fund manager (LPS Financial - Roger Ames and Associates) These changes coupled with prior changes to our budgeting policy will generate a balanced budget for 2017 and beyond.

We were dismayed to learn that we failed to retain accreditation by the Land Trust Alliance. We will continue our membership while we reinforce protocols leading to reaccreditation in the future.

We have a new Executive Director. Our patience and perseverance and diligence was rewarded as we searched for a replacement for Liz Woedl who retired at the end of February. **Chad Smith** was selected from over 60 applicants and several on-site interviews. His most recent post was as Park Manager for East Fork and Stonelick State Parks (Clermont County). Prior to that he served 8 years as Park Naturalist at Hueston Woods State Park and several years in other park-related positions with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR). We are delighted to welcome Chad on board.

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er the water in our streams, the better the water is from the aquifer into our taps. Streams, and their vegetated flood plains, also absorb enormous quantities of floodwaters allowing the water to slowly filter down to replenish the aquifer. The aquifer provides an average of 295 million gal/day (Miami Conservancy District, 2014).



Three Valley easements plus land protected by MetroParks of Butler County create a riparian corridor that protects the buried aquifer.

The second function is one of habitat. Riparian forests house up to twice as many plant and animal species as upland forests. You may have noticed the species differences - towering American sycamore or cottonwood at the edge of a stream and paw paw and woodland wildflowers in the moist, rich soil of flood plains. These plant species are associated the animals that use them and the habitat they provide; wood ducks and belted kingfishers are only found in riparian forests and Acadian flycatchers and yellow-billed cuckoos prefer to nest there. Trees close to the stream provide shade to keep water cool for fish and woody debris for invertebrate habitat. Finally, the linear nature of streams allows animals and plants to disperse safely to and from other patches of habitat.

To highlight TVCT's efforts in riparian conservation, we need only look at Indian Creek. Seven easement properties north of Reilly have protected over 4 miles of riparian habitat. This protects the aquifer, the stream, and both stream and riparian inhabitants.

Symphony on the Farm

In August, board-member Amy Weber partnered with the **Preble County Historical Society** and the **Richmond Symphony Orchestra** to create a wonderful evening: **Symphony on the Farm**. The evening included a gourmet dinner created from locally grown food by Ann Geddes and Frank House. The meal was served in an historical farm by volunteers from both TVCT and the PCHS. Special thanks to Misti Spillman, Steve Townsend, and Agnes Marchlewska.



Following the meal and a very short stroll to the Historical Society's beautiful outdoor amphitheater, an octet of the **Richmond Symphony Orchestra** presented a concert of civil-war era music. This was a fabulous night out, complete with a perfect summer sunset.

From the Executive Director Chad Smith



It is with great enthusiasm that I join the Three Valley Conservation Trust. As a Butler County native, I am thrilled to be working back in Southwest Ohio. My wife and I look forward to active involvement with Three Valley Conservation Trust as we raise our two small children here in Oxford and with Three Valley's legacy of conservation in mind.

I am continuously impressed with the professionalism, knowledge, and passion for land conservation that is showcased by Three Valley's members and supporters. While only on the job since September, it is apparent that Three Valley is well-supported by a dedicated group of staff and board members; and for that I thank you. I would be remiss not to specifically thanking Mark Boardman, Randy Evans, and Agnieszka Marchlewska, for progressing the agenda of Three Valley Trust this past year.

As we head into the fall, let us pause and reflect on numerous accomplishments from the past seasons. The closing the ODA "Cottingham" easements and securing the donation of the "Gardner" easement are noteworthy. These easements are prime examples of staff - aided by the Land and Stewardship Committee- collaborating with landowners to fulfill a commitment to land conservancy. Equally, the Fernald Paddy's Run project continues to progress under the guidance of Eric Hollis and Steve Gordon; the partnerships and exposure this project has brought to Three Valley and our mission are invaluable.

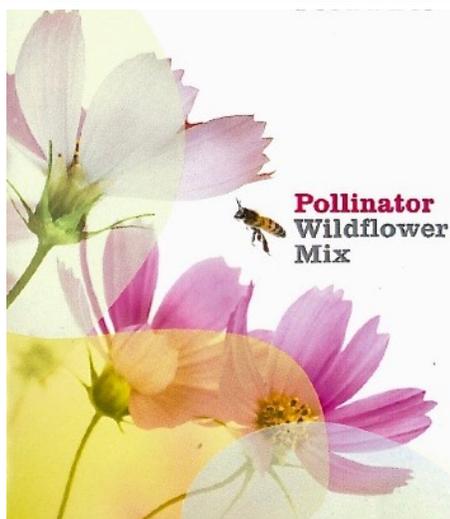
As we head into 2018, we will continue to enhance the collaboration among, staff, committee members, and board members. Partnerships with Butler County Metro Parks (on the "Angst" family property in Hamilton) and the Ohio EPA and The Nature Conservancy will allow us to grow and expand our reach to new landowners, members, and supporters.

I look forward to meeting everyone at the Auction for Acres on November 12th. If I can be of service to you as we work together to reach our goals, feel free to contact me at director@3vct.org or 513-524-2150

Preserve, Protect, Pollinate !

The core of the Three Valley mission is ensuring land is conserved. A logical extension of land conservation is to use the land wisely and sustainably – i.e. Stewardship. Randy Evans, Stewardship Specialist at Three Valley is ready to help landowners identify optimal locations for pollinator habitat without the loss of productive farmland. One of his passions is encouraging landowners to remove invasive plants and restore wildlife habitat. In addition to offering presentations on Monarch butterflies and gardening with native plants, Randy has partnered with Dirk Morgan (Morgan's Canoes) to obtain locally sourced milkweed seed and packets of wildflower seed.

For more information about establishing or expanding pollinator habitat on your land, contact Randy Evans (revans@3vct.org or 513-524-2150).



Great Day in the Morning! What was happening at TVCT over the summer?

We had a very busy summer, with a variety of activities, from educational series to one-time fun events. A hearty thanks to all the volunteers who helped out and to all who attended!

Our goals were to support our mission and increase TVCT's visibility to the general public. We thought the best way to support our mission over the long-term is to get people connected to the outdoors. An anonymous person once said "In the end, we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand, and we will understand only what we are taught." Our second goal, then, was to "teach" people about what we are trying to conserve, with the belief that they may then want to help us achieve our mission "to conserve natural habitats, waterways and agricultural lands in Southwestern Ohio". Here are some highlights captured by camera.



Community Bike Riding:— Amy Weber led 5 monthly bike rides in Butler and Preble Counties. The best turnout was in June when 10 folks rode the Great Miami River bike path even through thunderstorms!.



Precious Preschoolers - Latricia Hilman enjoyed Saturday mornings all summer with preschoolers. Here 3 cousins look at what they found in the creek!



Back Yard Birding - In June, Suellen Albert met every other week to explore what birds lived in different habitats around Oxford with 3rd - to 6th graders. We look forward to getting about 15 new birders next year, so let us know if you have a friend or grandchild who would like to be included.



On June 26 we held a combined **Summer Picnic** and **Founder's Day Celebration**, which honored **Orle Loucks**, by planting a tree and unveiling a stone memorial at Ruder Preserve.

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RUDER PRESERVE

Three Valley's Showcase

Three Valley "walks the talk" of **its mission:**

**To conserve natural habitats, waterways
and agricultural lands in
Southwestern Ohio**



Ruder Preserve is a 14-acre riparian woodland that was the initial donation to the Four Mile Conservation Trust; thus it "seeded" the entity that is now Three Valley Conservation Trust. It is adjacent to Miami University (across from Yager stadium), and, during the 20 years since it was donated, had become significantly degraded as a wood-

land because of

invasive species - mostly Amur honeysuckle. In 2016 a plan was initiated to restore this 14 acres to a more natural, forested condition. . . beginning with removing honeysuckle.

through partnerships with people and communities

Restoration work definitely has been a community effort! During the past year, ≈ 5 acres have been cleared of honeysuckle by over 150 student volunteers and members of Three Valley Conservation Trust (*a few members that I recall: McCollum, Cummins, Christman, Hoxie, Edwards, Nelson, Boardman, Marchlewska, Evans, Ford, Gordon, Steward*). Over 200 trees, all native to this area, have been purchased, planted, and (some) guarded by staked fencing to reduce destruction by grazing deer and rabbits.

Trees were purchased by a grant from Taking Root (a Green Umbrella organization centered in Cincinnati) or donated by L'Obel Nursery (*Dick Munson and Libby Burch*). Trees were bought as locally as possible from Preble Soil and Water District, Woody Warehouse and L'Obel Nursery. Fencing was purchased or donated from Ace Hardware (*Jeff and Debbie MacDonald*). A



Caged tree

sign was created and tree stakes were donated (*Linda and Mark Boardman and Donna McCollum*). The City of Oxford provided mulch and mows their sewer easement area. Oxford Township continues to mow the roadway, and Miami University Natural Areas maintains the current running trail (*Jim Reid*). The trees are being monitored for deer browsing and survival by students of Miami faculty.

for the benefit of present and future generations.

The goal is to create a conserved area that can be accessed and appreciated by the public. We want our members and community to know what a natural forest ecosystem looks like and how they can restore their own landscapes. We want to create a refuge of naturalness - an arc - where native plants and animals are valued and protected.

If you have anything to contribute - spare tree seedlings, time, food for volunteers . . . feel free to contact the lead person in this effort, board member Dr. Donna McCollum. Thank you to all *who are contributing to make a difference!*



Cleared area

ACTIVITIES

NOVEMBER

12 Sun 5:30-8:30 Auction For Acres

JANUARY

28 Sun 5:30 - 8:30 Annual Member Mtg.

visit: www.3vct.org

Paddys Run Conservation Project (PRCP) Passes More Than 4000 Acres Protected

Article by Steve Gordon, Paddys Run Project Contractor; Photos by Three Valley Staff



Conserving land while enhancing habitats and species diversity are core functions of the Three Valley Conservation Trust's mission. Toward this end, the Trust is fortunate to have the support of its members and partnering organizations. In November 2012, the first conservation easement was signed in the Paddys Run project area using funds from the Fernald Settlement. Today, over 4,000 acres of diverse habitats and agricultural lands have been protected in the Paddys Run drainage.

Partnerships and Collaboration: These preserved acres result from the collaboration of many entities, and each one of them deserves our admiration and applause for their contributions to creating a better world, thoughtfully conserved. The major entities include:

- private landowners who made personal decisions to limit future uses of their land,
- local governments who agreed to forego potential tax revenue from development in exchange for the amenity of perpetual green space (especially Morgan and Ross Townships in Butler County and Harrison and Crosby Townships in Hamilton County),

- the state (Ohio Environmental Protection Agency and the Ohio Department of Agriculture),
- federal agencies (Department of Energy, Natural Resources Conservation Service - a division of the Department of Agriculture, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife), and
- non-governmental organizations - including MetroParks of Butler County, Great Parks of Hamilton County, and us - THREE VALLEY CONSERVATION TRUST.

The role of Three Valley Conservation Trust (TVCT) and our contractors is to integrate the many self-interests and differing points of views of these entities into a set of contracts upon which all can agree. Eric Hollins and I (project contractors) worked in the TVCT offices and were assisted by the expertise of staff members at the Trust (primarily Randy Evans, Agnes Marchlewska, and Liz Woedl). Together we accomplished the juggling and leveraging, explaining and reviewing, contacting banks (mortgage holders) and heirs needed for success. For Three Valley Conservation Trust, success meant recorded contracts (conservation easements) resulting in 4000+ acres of land that will be conserved in perpetuity.

Recent accomplishments:

New County Park: In May 2017, 125 acres of restored woodlands, meadow, and prairie were transferred to MetroParks of Butler County to become a restored passive park: **Salamander Run Preserve**. Remaining funds allocated for the suppression of invasive plant species will be used by MetroParks staff to cut and spray Amur honeysuckle and Autumn Olive to continue the process of restoration. Access to the Preserve can be made by contacting MetroParks. Guided tours in Salamander Run, in conjunction with MetroParks of Butler County, were given by Miami Valley Audubon, Miami Hamilton Biology Department, Fernald Preserve staff and contractors.

Creators of Salamander Run Preserve

(L-R): Steve Gordon, Randy Evans, Eric Hollins, Tom Schneider, Laura Hafer, Agnes Marchlewska





Over 4000 Acres: A 12 acre easement / preserve, dedicated to the memory of Benjamin Jason Thacker, was created by Ed Teets, TVCT Treasurer, and put the total lands conserved in the Paddys Run Conservation Project over 4,000 acres.

Projects Underway:

At **Fossil Creek**, a 44-acre property along Paddys Run, Three Valley has contracted with Songbird Environmental to begin an extensive program to suppress invasive plants. In sensitive areas along Paddys Run, invasive shrubs will be hand cut and the remaining stumps painted, while in the meadows and woodlands a fall foliar spraying approach will be employed.



Wetland Restoration: A 164 acre property currently under consideration for an easement is also being evaluated for a stream restoration project with funding through **The Nature Conservancy (TNC)**. Stream-bank erosion along Dry Fork Creek (right) has resulted in the loss of prime soils and threatens aquatic life. Funds from the *Ohio Mitigation Program* administered by TNC will help restore streamwater flow.

Ongoing Commitments

The Trust is responsible for annual monitoring of easement properties. Volunteers are needed to help monitor the 43 recorded easements in the PRCP. The TVCT is required to monitor each easement annually and in perpetuity.

Although the project has greatly benefited from partnerships with several organizations and governmental bodies, member and donor support of the Trust is essential for conservation projects to continue.

If you care about reducing the carbon footprint, enhancing species diversity, conserving woodlands, prairies and prime farmland, the Three Valley Conservation Trust is the only local non-profit organization committed to these goals. Your support is needed.

Annual Meeting
January 28, 2018

**A Celebration of the
Paddys Run Conservation Project**

**Fernald
Visitor's Center**

Join new and old members of Three Valley Conservation Trust on January 28 as we celebrate the remarkable success of the Paddys Run Conservation Project. Many of the leaders and contributors of this project will be on hand. Tom Schneider, OEPA, will be the keynote speaker and will help honor the originators and movers and significant collaborators of this project.



5995 Fairfield Road
 P.O. Box 234 Oxford, OH 45056
 513-524-2150 www.3vct.org

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- Randy Evans
Stewardship Specialist
- Agnieszka Marchlewska
Land Protection Specialist
- Eric Hollins
Paddys Run Contractor
- Steve Gordon
Paddys Run Contractor

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Wonderful Wednesdays continued this year with 10 weeks of programming for adults and

kids. The most well-attended event was a fossil hunt and organic gardening tutorial at the home Frank House, attracting about 25 people for the programs and a feast of home grown produce provided by Ann Geddes and Frank.



One Wednesday evening, we toured Oxford area back yards to see how some neighbors created wildlife friendly back yards complete with native plants and landscaping - a welcoming environments for many critters.

Annual Hike-and-Pie this year was held at **Silvoor Nature Preserve** where TVCT has some of its earliest easements. as part of **Green Umbrella's Great Outdoor Weekend**.



We hope to continue these activities next year, but we need **your input**. All the programs were organized and led by volunteers – which is a lot of work! Overall over 200 people attended programs and we did attract 30+ new people to our events, who often returned for multiple event, but with nearly 20 different programs offered that is not as many as we hoped for.

So . . . we'd like your thoughts. Is there a program you would like to see us offer? Would you like to host a

program next summer or be the TVCT representative at one? Would you like to be involved this winter in the planning for next summer's programs? Do you have any ideas on how to publicize our programs? Please let us know!

Meanwhile, join us this **November 12th** for our **annual fundraising auction (5:30-9 pm at the Oxford Community Arts Center)** and in **January** for our **annual meeting**. Next spring, be on the lookout for our list of activities. We will continue to engage our members and communities in connecting with the outdoors and sincerely hope you will join us when you can!

If you prefer to receive the Valley Trust News by email instead of by postal mail (or not receive it at all), please let us know at office@3vct.org.

Three Valley Conservation Trust (TVCT) is a member-funded, not-for-profit organization certified by the IRS under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Your contribution/donation is deductible.