



VALLEY TRUST NEWS

Number 79 Fall 2024

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.

In This Season of Thanks, Thank You for Three Valley By Donna McCollum

Did you know 2024 is Three Valley Conservation Trust's thirtieth anniversary? We hope you do! We have spent the year exploring our roots with articles "Celebrating 30 Years" and "Founders" in the 2024 spring newsletter, enjoying several Lunar Feasts, and celebrating at the lovely Farmer's Feast dinner and anniversary event in September. We have celebrated the advances 3VCT has made from being a completely volunteer organization with a handful of easements to having a professional staff handling 220+ easements that protect over 25,000 acres. We thought in this time of thanksgiving we could get an idea of what 3VCT easement-property owners and partners think. Here's how a few answered the question, "What has Three Valley meant for you?" If you have comments we could add, perhaps on the 3VCT website, please contact Donna McCollum (editor of this newsletter).

Joe Dumyahn, Senior Natural Resources Manager, MetroParks of Butler County

Thanks for giving MetroParks the opportunity to give our perspective of what 3VCT means to us. First, MetroParks considers Three Valley Conservation Trust a strategic partner in the conservation of natural habitats in SW Ohio. Angst Nature Preserve is a prime example of this relationship. Through our combined efforts we were able to add 84 acres of protected land to the MetroPark system, deterring development, creating wildlife habitat, and providing additional green-space for recreation. Salamander Run MetroPark is another example. Three Valley Conservation Trust and their contractors converted a 126-acre, rundown farm with overgrown pasture and degraded agriculture fields to a diverse native habitat. This high value natural area is now maintained by the MetroParks and open to the public. There are conservation easements on both of these properties and others, including Mill Race Preserve MetroPark and Timberman Ridge MetroPark. Through this important relationship there are likely to be more easements and MetroParks in the future.

Donna McCollum and Hays Cummins, conservation easement on 33 acres of forest, wetlands and prairies:

Hays had a vision of what we could do with our acreage near Reily. We could work with US Fish and Wildlife (USFWS) to turn our marginally-arable acres into a prairie and wetland complex, then use those and the forest as an educational lab for ecological restoration, prairie establishment, wetlands, and stream protection. However, USFWS programs generally protect large properties, not small acreage like ours (11 acres then). It was our conservation easement that convinced them this small piece of land was worth some funding. Without permanent protection, USFWS would not have helped us create this complex of habitats that allowed Hays' vision to become a reality. Since 2007 thousands of people have come here for experiences in nature, hard work, and good times, usually followed by good food! For us, as educators and advocates for the natural world, it has been a dream come true. Thank you, Three Valley!

Jullie Primack, conservation easement on horse farm:

Old Stone Riding Center, a beautiful 70-acre farm, was passed to me in 2000 from my parents, who had owned and run it for 20+ years. Land ownership is a legal construct I have been happy to buy into, but as we cannot take money or possessions with us when we leave this earth, 3VCT's easement provides me the comfort of knowing stewardship of the farm will continue in future generations. I did not understand the complexities of what 3VCT does until I joined the Board in 2020. Although I still have much to learn, I have a great deal of respect for the founders, staff and Board members. In addition to peace of mind about the future, 3VCT has helped me find friendships with people who have sharp minds and similar interests. Thanks 3VCT!

Jeff Davis, ODNR Approved Herpetologist

As an undergraduate student at Miami University, I conducted an amphibian survey of Butler County. When I knocked on people's doors to ask if I could wade in their streams or hike through their woods to search for frogs, toads, and salamanders, it seemed I was turned away by more landowners in Morgan and Ross Townships than in other parts of the county. At the time I had no idea my livelihood 35 years later would center around amphibians. When Three Valley contracted with me to conduct surveys on properties it protected as part of the Paddys Run Conservation Project, I was introduced to many great conservation-minded landowners in those two townships where I was so often turned away as a college student. It might have been 35 or 40 years later, but thanks to Three Valley, I was given access to some wonderful properties and documented very diverse amphibian communities on them. Five of those properties are inhabited by the state endangered Cave Salamander. Thanks Three Valley, for protecting the habitats of my favorite creatures!



**By Tom Vogel
Board Chair**

Looking Backward and Leaning Forward

Autumn is that time of year in which I tend to reflect on the accomplishments of the past year. This year, and virtually every year of my life, I have had so many reasons to be thankful - for my personal health, the success of my farmers, and most relevant to this article, the success of YOUR Three Valley Conservation Trust. This is my sixth year of involvement with Three Valley, and by all measures, this has been the most successful year by far. It all starts with you, the supporters of Three Valley. You are the heart and soul of the trust. You make it tick day in and day out. You entrust me and the Board with the role of ensuring our staff and leadership are faithfully and responsibly carrying out their roles of land stewardship in southwestern Ohio. I am so grateful to report to you that YOUR Trust continues to make progress every day! We certainly face challenges, as does any organization, but thanks to the leadership of Randy Evans and the talent and commitment of his staff, coupled with the

oversight of the Board, Three Valley is on course for long-term success as a leading steward of the land in southwestern Ohio.

We currently have 213 members of and 311 donors to Three Valley. I simply cannot convey my deep appreciation for your commitment to Three Valley, as your involvement gives me and every other Board and staff member the incentive to keep forging ahead with our mission of easements and stewardship of some of the finest and most diverse properties in the region. Your support enables the Board and staff to accomplish our dual mission most efficiently and effectively.

I recently hiked one of my own easement properties in the southwestern corner of Montgomery County. At one point, I stopped and gazed out over the golden grain and beautiful tree-lined Little Twin Creek. My thoughts were focused on the notion of a perpetual easement of this property. Its diverse wildlife, free-flowing stream, unique archeological history as evidenced by many native American artifacts, an early 1800s family cemetery, and the fertile soil for feeding and energizing the world...these natural, cultural, and economic resources are being conserved in perpetuity by your commitment of affiliation, time, and treasure to Three Valley Conservation Trust. I cannot thank you enough for making my lifelong dream a reality. Ohio farms are absolute treasures in my mind, and you are protecting these lands for coming generations. What a tall legacy you are enabling through your membership and support!

Be a Boardwalk Booster: Leave Your Mark on Nature By April Hamlin

Support the boardwalks at Ruder Preserve with a personalized commemorative plaque! As a Boardwalk Booster, your 3"x5" plaque will be prominently displayed along the boardwalk, celebrating your contribution to help build and maintain this community amenity.

For just \$100, you can honor a loved one, commemorate a special occasion, or proudly showcase your name as a nature enthusiast. Each plaque can be customized with up to 40 characters, making it uniquely yours.



Your Name

BOARDWALK DONOR



Your donation directly supports the construction and maintenance of the boardwalk, ensuring that visitors can continue to enjoy the beauty of it and the nature surrounding it for years to come.

Boost the boardwalk and make a lasting impact today!
https://secure.lglforms.com/form_engine/s/2qFNR6gX4N2FkybCvy-

Executive Director's Report

As the leaves begin to paint our landscapes in vibrant hues of red and gold, we are filled with immense gratitude for your unwavering support and commitment to our Three Valley mission. Celebrating our 30th year with all of you has brought a renewed energy and purpose to our conservation efforts.

During the summer months, your land trust remained dedicated to an array of crucial initiatives. We were engaged in restoring native habitats, fostering valuable partnerships, developing new projects to increase water quality, diligently stewarding our beloved easements, and laying the groundwork to protect an additional 2,170 acres in SW Ohio. This summer's accomplishments were made possible through the generous support of our members, devoted staff & volunteers, interns, many community foundations, and our working board & committees.



By Randy Evans
Executive Director

But that's not all! This fall, we've put forth an array of engaging programs that we hope helps to deepen your connection with nature. From guided nature hikes to lunar feasts, these experiences were designed to instill camaraderie and an appreciation for the environment that surrounds us. Our SW Ohio Woodland Association welcomed members to Doug Gale's Hickory Holt near Middletown where we learned valuable lessons on forest management and woodland invasive species eradication.

As the crisp air envelops our region and thoughts shift toward the holidays, we invite you to embrace the season with us - explore our new boardwalk extension at Ruder Preserve, join us at the Roger and Jan Ames Holiday Open House to benefit our native wildflower seed libraries, lend your expertise as volunteers, join or renew your annual membership, and above all, continue to champion our mission. Together, we can ensure that SW Ohio's natural landscapes and beauty remain a source of inspiration and wonder for generations to come.

Semper Gratus!



3VCT Board Chair Tom Vogel, Director Randy Evans, easement holder Fred Voge, and Caitlin Brown at closing.

2024 Easements

By Caitlin Brown, Land Protection Specialist

Three Valley's first easement to close in 2024 was an Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA)-funded agricultural easement on Fred Voge's 82.589-acre farm in Twin Township, Preble County, Ohio. The Voge family protects over 1,100 acres of agricultural land in Preble County, with 21 3VCT easements within a 2-mile radius of the newest one. Fred's 83-acre farm is also Three Valley's first regenerative agriculture case study site, which is supported by soil health grants from American Farmland Trust and Land Trust Alliance. We hope that Fred's tremendous results from incorporating regenerative agricultural practices on cropland with past conventional management will provide inspiration to local farmers to integrate regenerative farming into their own practices.

Additional Land Protection Updates

By Sarah Dumyahn, Chair, Land Protection Committee

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) manages the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) with two program components: Agricultural Land Easements (ALE) and Wetland Reserve Easements. There is substantial financial support for ACEP through the Inflation Reduction Act, which will provide \$1.4 billion over five years. Three Valley Conservation Trust continues to partner with the NRCS serving as an agricultural easement co-holder for the ACEP-ALE program. For the October application round 12 new applications were submitted along with four reapplications. The next ACEP-ALE application deadline is December 20, 2024.

For more information see the following websites: <https://www.3vct.org/conserving-agricultural-natural-lands> and <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/acep-agricultural-conservation-easement-program>

Lunar Feasts Will Continue in 2025

In 2024, several members provided lunar feasts. These dinners, scheduled around full moons, were a big hit. They were a great way to get a few people together for a dinner party and to support 3VCT in the process was a lot of fun. So **we will continue these small get-togethers in 2025.**

If you'd like to host a dinner and collect a few donations for 3VCT for your hospitality, please let us know! It's simple - invite whomever you want and ask if they might make a donation of their choosing to 3VCT. If you'd like to enjoy someone else's dinner, let us know that, too! To get into the loop, **email donnamccollum@me.com or text or call 513-544-7638.**



Ready to Read? 3VCT Book Club Begins New Year

Book club discussions are on the 2nd Thursday of every other month and are held virtually. For more information or to get on the list for updates, contact Ben Mattox at benmattox50@yahoo.com. Our first two books of 2025 are:

Jan. 9 - Crossings: How Road Ecology Is Shaping the Future of Our Planet by Ben Goldfarb

March 13 - The Devil's Element: Phosphorus and a World Out of Balance by Dan Egan

A Legacy of Joy and Stewardship By April Hamlin, Development Manager

Not long after I moved to my neighborhood, I began hearing stories about a "bug lady." Neighbors would ask, "Have you met the bug lady?" "You have to see her garden!" Then one day, while working in my flowerbeds with my daughter, I heard a cheerful "Helloooooo." I looked up to see an older woman with soft white hair, a radiant smile, and her dog by her side. In her hands, she held something she was eager to share.

This was Miss Chris, a neighborhood treasure with an endless love for nature. She introduced herself warmly and got right to the point. "I see you're cleaning up your flowerbeds. Did you know many critters spend the winter there? I have some milkweed for you—you'll have monarch butterflies by next year!"

Miss Chris was a magnet for children and adults alike, always sharing her plants, knowledge, and time. Her garden was alive with native plants, and once, she even gifted us a chrysalis in a terrarium so we could watch a monarch emerge—a magical moment we'll never forget.

Not long after Miss Chris passed, I was talking with a neighbor who shared that she had planned a charitable bequest to Three Valley Conservation Trust. I'd just recently started working with Three Valley, and I didn't know about Miss Chris's connection with the organization. It felt serendipitous, like the universe was gently connecting the dots. Miss Chris cared deeply about our mission, and she made sure her legacy would continue to nurture the causes she loved.

In reflecting on Miss Chris, I'm reminded that taking care of what brings us joy can extend far beyond our time. Including a charitable gift in your plans can create a lasting impact and bring joy for generations to come. If you're interested in exploring this, FreeWill is a simple place to start and offers a free online estate planning tool (<https://plan.freewill.com/>). We also offer a planned giving brochure on our website (www.3vct.org), filled with helpful information to guide you.

As we approach this season of gratitude, we hope you and your family find joy in the things that matter most.

Save These Dates!

We have several events happening before we will send out another newsletter, so keep your eyes on the website, emails from Three Valley and our social media to be sure you don't miss anything.

Coming up fast is the **Holiday Open House hosted by Jan and Roger Ames** - see details to the right!

After the holidays we'll get back to business with our **2024 Annual Meeting** at the Knoll's of Oxford on **February 2nd**. This is always a fun evening to catch up on what 3VCT has been doing for the last year, welcome new board members, enjoy a nice meal with folks with similar interest as you, and hear a great speaker talk about a topic meaningful to our conservation work. We still need to find a speaker - so if you have a good idea, please let us know!

Finally, everyone seems to be enjoying the **Hikes for Acres**, so plan to come join us in the spring. We will likely have the first of three hikes on March 27th, followed by hikes on the last Thursday of April and May. Look for details this spring on the 3VCT website.

HOLIDAY OPEN HOUSE

hosted by Jan & Roger Ames

A Festive Celebration to view the Ames Family's extensive Santa Claus collection. They have been collecting Santa's for nearly 50 years and have a large variety of sizes, styles, etc.

- Refreshments will be served - punch, cookies, etc.
- A jolly good time for all, spreading holiday cheer.
- All proceeds benefit the Three Valley Native Wildflower Seed Libraries in Butler County.

Tickets: \$50.00

Sunday, 15 December 2024 | 6 - 8 pm

1026 S Locust St, Oxford, Ohio 45056

Purchase your tickets online here:
www.3vct.org
or
Contact office manager, Teri Wickham
513-524-2150 or via email at office@3vct.org

Help Our Seed Libraries Bloom Next Year!

By April Hamlin, Development Manager



Though our seed libraries are tucked away for the season, there's still plenty you can do to keep pollinators thriving! Why not "adopt" a library in 2025? As a **Seed Library Steward**, you'll care for one or more of our libraries—stocking them, checking for any damages, and keeping them tidy. It's a fun way to help our native plants grow!

Not ready to volunteer? Support our libraries by becoming a **Seed Supporter**! Your donation will keep our libraries full of native seeds for all to share. One way to do this is to join us at our **Holiday Open House**, where all proceeds go to the seed libraries! Tickets are available on our website—don't miss out on the festive fun!

3VCT seed libraries are attractive boxes with compartments for 9 types of native seeds inside, free to a good home!



A final way to support our libraries is by collecting and preparing native plant seeds for distribution. At right Joe Dumyahn and Donna McCollum discuss ways to prepare harvested seeds. On November 7th Julie Primack hosted a seed-processing potluck - quite fun!

Ready to signup or have questions? Email April at ahamlin@3vct.org



What Have Members Been Doing Lately?

Fall Hikes for Acres: *In Appreciation of the Partnership between Metro Parks and 3VCT!* Article and photos by Julie Bath-Primack

This fall's Hikes for Acres had a theme: all three parks we visited are now Butler County MetroParks. All three properties belonged to individuals who wanted to preserve these special areas for future generations. Although not the final custodian of these properties, 3VCT partnered with other organizations, including MetroParks, Ohio EPA, U.S. Department of Energy and U.S. Fish and Wildlife to restore these properties and protect them with conservation easements. 3VCT often supervised ecological restoration efforts to make these properties perpetually beautiful, peaceful sanctuaries for the many native species of this area. No property takes the exact same pathway to becoming a MetroPark, but all three are now open to residents and visitors to this area, and to their grandchildren and their grandchildren's grandchildren!

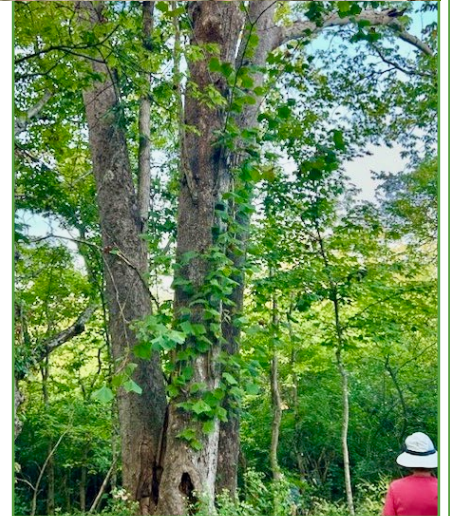
Our first two hikes were led by MetroParks Senior Natural Resource and Conservation Manager, Joe Dumyahn. On August 29, we visited Sycamore Bluffs Area, Four Mile Creek MetroPark, which spans both sides of Four Mile Creek. Recently-opened trails, about 1.3 miles, climb a modest hill on an old road through ridgetop woodlands before dropping to more meandering paths long the creek.

On September 26, we visited the Mill Race MetroPark, beginning at the Black Covered Bridge and lying along Four Mile Creek. The 75 acres of Mill Race is divided into a pollinator garden, a prairie and some forested strips between and around these two meadows. One highlight of the park is that 120 species of native species were planted in the pollinator garden! The abundance of flowering species maximizes the time something is blooming for pollinator use as well as providing the different host plants fed on by pollinator larvae. Joe Dumyahn helped us recognize the enormity of the work done to restore the area - removing invasive species, planting native species and remediating areas to support plants that supply food and habitat for twidlife. 3VCT is very grateful to MetroParks, Joe Dumyahn and the rest of the staff for all their hard work!

Our third hike was on October 24 at Salamander Run MetroPark. A previous 3VCT



*Above: Joe Dumyahn introduces the Sycamore Bluffs Area to the brave hikers not put off by 90+ heat in August!
Right: Sycamore Bluffs boasts many large, old trees, like this American Sycamore after which the area is named.*



Fall maple foliage was beautiful in the background as some hikers paused to talk about a large (persimmon?) tree at Salamander Run MetroPark.

board and staff member, Eric Hollins, was influential in getting this property in the Paddy's Run watershed into a conservation easement and converted into another fabulous MetroPark. Eric, with his wife Catherine, did a wonderful job of introducing us to some of the native plant species currently supported by this area. Also present was Tom Schneider, Environmental Supervisor for the Ohio EPA and leader in the Paddy's Run Conservation Project. Salamander Run opened to the public in 2023. It boasts, among many other things, several salamander species, including Cave (OH endangered!), Eastern Red-backed, Southern Two-lined, and Streamside Salamanders. Spotted salamanders were introduced and are now thriving, plus we have high hopes that red-spotted newts will make their way there from easement properties nearby.

We hope you'll join us in the spring for three more hikes to explore Three Valley easement properties and other natural areas in the area. Check the 3VCT website for details in the spring.
www.3vct.org

The Farmer's Feast 30th Anniversary Celebration

This year, Three Valley took its Farm-to-Table dinner to a new venue, the Champion Mill Conference Center in Hamilton, or Spooky Nook. This renovated paper mill space greeted our guests with a view of the beautiful Great Miami River and a large grazing table that fed us all even before dinner!



Highlights of the evening included two local vendors who gave us a look at what kinds of produce are available near Oxford, music by the bluegrass band The Farmer and the Crow (photo below), a short presentation of 3VCT's accomplishments, and

plenty of good food and wine! Spooky Nook's chef worked with 3VCT to source as much as possible from local farmers.

The staff and board would like to thank all who attended. We hope you not only had a wonderful evening of food and community, but that you feel good about helping to support the 3VCT mission.



Three Valley also thanks the band (The Farmer and the Crow), photographer (Ron Stephens), and our sponsors, who helped make this a fundraising success:

- Presenting Sponsor-Vogel Farm Enterprises
- LPL Financial
- Fred P. Kreuzer CPA & Associates Miami Valley Gaming
- Meat Donations: Rodeffer Meats and Yeagar Farms
- Flower Arrangements: Schaefer's Farm Market



Guests (2 photos above, Jan and Ed Teets below) enjoyed themselves, with abundant food, wine, music and friends. 3VCT's director Randy Evans (above right) cleaned up quite nicely to present the Trust's accomplishments.

Congratulations to Wallace I. Edwards Award Recipients

Every year, 3VCT's staff and board select a recipient of the Wallace I. Edwards "Conservationist of the Year" award. This year, the award was presented at the Farmer's Feast celebration to a group of six. These six have been responsible for turning the Helen S. Ruder Preserve into a community amenity, with boardwalks that allow everyone, even people with mobility challenges, to get out into a woodland being restored to a more natural state. Many, many hours of volunteer labor have gone into the removal of other invasive species and planting native species, with volunteer efforts led by Donna McCollum and Steve Gordon. Many, many hours also have gone into the construction and maintenance of nearly half a mile of boardwalks compliant with the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) standards, accomplished mainly by Mark Boardman, Steve Nimis, Tom Farmer, and Ed Teets. They won't stop here though - invasive species management is ongoing, and the east bank boardwalk will be extended to near the new dog park when funding can be secured. Kudos to you all!



Recipients of the Wallace I. Edwards Award for 2024: Mark Boardman, Steve Nimis, Ed Teets, Donna McCollum, and Stephen Gordon. Additional recipient, Tom Farmer, is not pictured.



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*“Valley Trust News,”
the newsletter for members
of Three Valley
Conservation Trust,
is published twice a year.*

Three Valley Enjoys Five-Year Partnership with Farmers and Hunters Feeding the Hungry By Tom Vogel, Board Chair



Fossil Creek is a 43-acre property in Butler County that your Trust owns and manages. Five years ago, we established a partnership with Farmers and Hunters Feeding the Hungry (FHFH), an organization in Maryland and Ohio that utilizes the abundance of wild game to feed millions of people across the country. Three Valley enables honorable hunters in the area to harvest deer off the property, and with the volunteer efforts of local processing facilities, they provide protein-rich venison to food-deprived residents of southwest Ohio. Every step along the way, from the hunters to the food pantries themselves, is staffed by volunteers and others to provide an avenue for less-fortunate residents to enjoy venison in their diets.

Sadly, one in eight Americans is food-deprived. FHFH helps fill the food gap by providing thousands of pounds of wild game each year to food banks and pantries across the country. Since their inception in 1997, the organization has provided over 23 million meals to needy Americans. An average-size deer can supply 160 meals to those in need. Our partnership with FHFH at Fossil Creek not only provides venison for local residents, it also enables the hunters to watch over the wooded area to ensure no illegal poaching of deer is occurring. Thus, it is a win-win for all involved – the hunters, local food outlets, and of course, those in southwest Ohio needing food for their families.

I have had a partnership with FHFH on my own properties for over 20 years and what has impressed me the most is the complete integrity of the farmers and hunters who cooperate with the organization. Everyone I have had contact has been highly honorable and professional, committed to using the wildlife resources of our area to benefit those less fortunate. This is another important mission Three Valley has undertaken to make a difference in southwestern Ohio...and it all starts with land conservation!

Would you like to help?

Three Valley couldn't accomplish its mission without many committed volunteers. As we plan for 2025 and beyond, we want to encourage you to help out however you feel comfortable doing so. One of the best ways to volunteer with 3VCT is to join one of our committees. Please consider helping out where you can. Thanks! If you would like to help in any way, contact the 3VCT office at 513-524-2150 for information.

Outreach and Education - recruits the next generation of 3VCT supporters and educates current ones, plans and executes fundraising events

Land Protection & Stewardship - evaluates properties proposed for easements

Property Management - decides about activities at Trust-owned properties

Development - determines strategies for developing a financially sustainable organization through key partnerships and donors

Finance - keeps track of accounts, formulates the budget and informs the board on all financial matters

**Three Valley Conservation Trust is a member-funded, not-for-profit, charitable organizations certified by the IRS under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.
Your contribution/donations can be tax deductible.**