



## Spring has Sprung!

By: Holly Wissing

Spring is happening out in the woods around us. Many of us will be too busy to notice, but if you take an hour or two from your day for a walk in the woods (suggested hot spots at end of article) you will be richly rewarded.

The explosion of wildflowers, which begins in March with delicate blooms like hepatica and the tiny snow trillium, typically hits its peak in the last two weeks of April. Beneath an awakening forest canopy, wildflowers are often coming into bloom against a backdrop of blossoming red bud. Large-flowered trillium, Toad-shade trillium, bellwort, blue-eyed Mary, wild delphinium, white and yellow trout lilies, rue anemone, and blue bells bloom with abandon.

This is the miracle of spring. It occurs because the sun is warming the leafy compost on the forest floor. Spring wildflowers have a few short weeks to emerge, produce flowers, set seeds, and produce the fuel reserves they need to repeat their cycle of life next year.

Look up at the canopy of hardwood trees and notice that leaves are starting to unfurl. By late May the forest floor will be shaded, and the annual spring show will be shutting down.

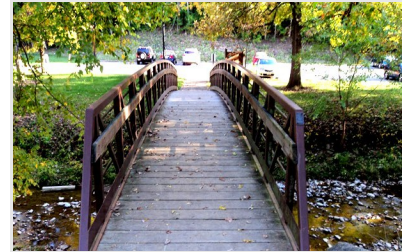
If you can, venture out every week starting in late March through mid-May to see the changes in the woods. When you find a diversity of spring wildflowers, whether in your own woods or in public woods, you are looking at the kind of healthy plant community that is becoming increasingly rare.

What was once common is now threatened by encroaching development and invasive species. Thanks to Three Valley Conservation Trust numerous woodlots and forests in our area are protected from suburbanization. With those easements and dedicated landowners, the phenomenon of spring wildflowers will continue for future generations.



Spring Beauty

## Holly's Top Four



Here are four top spots to view spring wildflowers recommended by Holly Wissing, who with her husband Tom, maintains a wildflower preserve on their TVCT property.

**Silvoor Biological Sanctuary, Oxford.** Accessible from Silvoor Lane or from Pepper Park on US 27. As you walk from the parking lot turn left at the shelter and continue diagonally to an opening in the chain-link fence. Guided wildflower walks at 1 p.m. every Sunday through Mother's Day, May 12.

**Hueston Woods State Park.** The Big Woods Trail is spectacular in the spring. Accessible from parking lot at the end of Brown Road.

**Indian Creek MetroPark of Butler County, Reilly Twp.,** Springfield Road entrance. A loop trail from the parking lot follows the creek. Great overlooks plus the added bonus of Indian mounds.

Further afield, **the Arc of Appalachia Preserve System in eastern Ohio**, headquartered near Bainbridge, has magnificent wildflowers. The Valley of the Ancients and Etawah Trails, both adjacent to the headquarters, descend 100 feet to Rocky Fork Gorge and are stunning short hikes. Longer trails available. Annual wildflower weekend in mid-April, too.



## From the Chair of the Board

### Mark Boardman

In this newsletter, you will hear the exciting news that Three Valley Conservation Trust is poised to close on easement # 200. This event is quite a milestone, and it will certainly be deservedly celebrated. We can all be proud to be a part of this success. TVCT only succeeds because its members care enough to give enough to ensure a legacy of conservation.

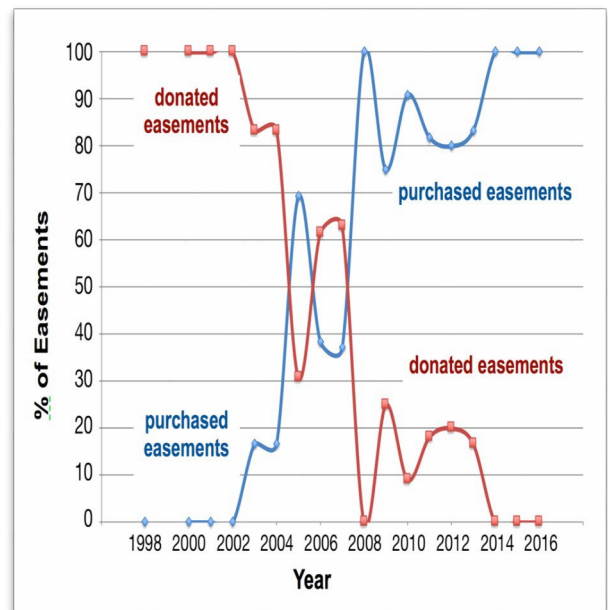
Today, Three Valley Conservation Trust is the third largest land trust in Ohio (based on acres preserved). By tracking our impacts over time, we see major milestone events, as well as incremental changes and adaptations that occur without much fanfare. Both are instrumental to our emergence as a premier land trust in our state. Below are some examples of adaptation and incremental change that are not always marked by milestones:

**Adapting the TVCT service area.** Upon recognizing that there is a need to serve landowners and landscapes beyond the Four-Mile Creek watershed, and that the original “Four-Mile Valley Conservation Trust” could and does serve that need, TVCT now serves all of Butler and Preble Counties.

**Adapting to financial and legal complexities.** Our easements changed from being exclusively “donated” by landowners to easements that are leveraged or purchased by federal and state funds. While external funds enable us to conserve more land acres, these connections to government funding are accompanied by complex legal easement writing and monitoring processes that necessitate a professional staff. Land conservation in the future may include new mechanisms like these, and your TVCT will adapt and continue to strategically conserve land in perpetuity.

**Adapting operations.** We evolved from an all-volunteer run operation to an operation run by paid professionals. An Executive Director was hired in 2001, a secretary added soon after, a full-time Land Acquisition professional was added in 2012, and full-time Land Stewardship professional added in 2014. Our easements are legally sound and robustly protected. *Note: We recently successfully defended one of our easements in a nationally significant legal dispute, confirming that conservation easements are perpetual and fully protected by law.*

**Adapting partnerships.** We are increasingly integrated with local and state partners. TVCT was entrusted to preserve and protect the land degraded by the uranium processing operations surrounding Fernald (federal, state, and local partners), and it is entrusted to monitor and defend the conservation value of parks owned by MetroParks of Butler County and Five Rivers Metroparks near Dayton.



These meaningful adaptations do not always have a single significant event to mark them, but they are part of the incremental change that drives the growth and maturation of TVCT. Three Valley is a successful and potent land trust, in part, because of these adaptations and incremental change.

One more effort that deserves applause is the successful “cleaning” of the easement files - performed by Tad Liechty. Tad has gone through every piece of paper in every easement to confirm that all the important and legal documents are there, digitizing them as needed, removing duplicates, and identifying improvements. Though the task may seem mundane, improved easement files will be a cornerstone for reaccreditation and help ensure that our easements will defend land conservation in perpetuity. Thank you, Tad.

So, while reflecting on many years of adaptation and change that signify our growth and success, I plan to celebrate the 200<sup>th</sup> easement as a major milestone and achievement. And I also will celebrate the hundreds of contributions by hundreds of people - past and present - that ensures the *Legacy of Conservation* embodied by Three Valley Conservation Trust.



## **From the Executive Director**

### ***Chad Smith***

Here we are, already more than four months into 2019! TVCT is increasingly busy and constantly adapting to serve our members and the communities within our service area. The staff have been hard at work “sharpening their saws” this winter; attending various professional development and training opportunities, and staying up to date on nationwide trends and opportunities in the Land Trust community. The ongoing cultivation of our partnerships with Metro Parks of Butler County, Five Rivers Metro Parks, Miami University, Ohio EPA, City of Oxford and many others has strengthened our organization and allows us to further fulfill our mission of conservation in Southwest Ohio. Our increased presence at civic and government functions throughout Butler and Preble County as well as at the State level has given

us a greater understanding of the interest and needs of our region. We know that the citizens want protected agricultural and natural lands in and around their communities and we are as poised as ever to make that happen!

Of the many easement opportunities available at TVCT we are continuing as application sponsors in Butler and Preble County for the Ohio Department of Agriculture, Local Agricultural Easement Purchase Program. Interest in this program remains high as new applicants continue to contact our office on a weekly basis. Our Land Protection Manager, Agnieszka Marchlewska diligently and faithfully facilitates these applications and works closely with landowners interested in this program as well as those considering other programs and donated easements with TVCT.

Good weather means good monitoring for Stewardship Manager Randy Evans. While we anticipate closing our 200<sup>th</sup> (TVCT) easement this year. The Stewardship Section is already monitoring more than 210 easements when counting those that we are contracted to monitor for local Park Districts. Aided by a Drone, loyal interns/volunteers, and Randy’s effective and efficient workstyle, as usual, the annual monitoring is on track to meet every deadline in 2019. Helping to get the monitoring reports sent out to the landowners as fast as they are recorded and streamlining the way our office communicates on a daily basis is our Stewardship and Communications Coordinator, Maria Fagin. Her adaptability and commitment to TVCT is evident in our revamped publications and advertisements which allow us to get our message out to more and more people every day!

It was great seeing so many of you at the Fernald Preserve for our Annual Meeting on January 27<sup>th</sup>. It was our privilege to return to this unique location for a second year in a row to showcase our ongoing partnership with the Ohio EPA and celebrate the years of success the Paddys Run Conservation Project has had protecting land in Butler County. We were delighted to award Tom Schneider the Walter Edwards Conservation Award for his years of management of the project. Tom and his team have been a model for collaboration and shared interest in conservation. As most of you are aware the Paddys Run project has been further supported by Sub-Contractors Eric Hollins and Steve Gordon since 2011. As the project winds down over the next year, TVCT Staff will take over the day to day work on Paddys Run knowing that Eric and Steve and their institutional knowledge of the program is only a phone call away. We hope not to bother Eric Hollins too much as he announced his retirement in March! TVCT wishes Eric and his family all the best and are grateful for the many years of service and support. We know we will continue to see Eric at the TVCT events for years to come!

As we look forward to the rest of 2019, perhaps my favorite part of the year has already occurred, as it was in February our Chair of the Board of Trustees, Mark Boardman was awarded the honor of Oxford Citizen of the Year for his many years of volunteer service to Three Valley Conservation Trust and our local community. This proud moment was amplified as we remember our founder Wally Edwards being given the same award in the 1990’s. As we look forward to celebrating our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary later this year, I believe these two awardees embody the charge of Three Valley as we work tirelessly to conserve land for our future generations.



“Alex and Mindy are actively implementing their changes: pollinator habitat is growing, and their bee population is expanding. The queen rearing cabin (pictured) is completed and serves a dual purpose as an apiary training center for local

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## Spring is Here!

**By Randy Evans, Stewardship Manager**

With the arrival of spring, the Three Valley Stewardship Team is dusting off their boots and hitting the road for our annual easement visits. Our stewardship staff and volunteers are our connection to the landowners. Building relationships with landowners, walking their land with them, and working to address common concerns or meet common goals goes a long way toward protecting these lands for future generations. We enter this year anticipating the enormous milestone of closing on our 200th conservation easement. With every property Three Valley Conservation Trust helps protect with a conservation easement, we assume an obligation to ensure the easement terms are upheld and the unique conservation values of the property remain intact, forever. But easements are not meant to unreasonably hinder growth or change.

Our staff is committed to serving as a resource to meet any land use challenges you may encounter. Beyond our annual monitoring visits, it is our pleasure to assist with proposals to expand or change farming operations, apply for grants, or develop habitat restoration strategies. The Three Valley approach to stewardship has evolved over the last 20 years. While monitoring visits are required annually to help us ensure the minimal easement obligations are met, tangible stewardship happens on our walks with landowners or while sitting on the front porch or around the kitchen table.

It was during one of these visits in 2017 that Alex Roux first discussed his desire to make some changes in his farm management. NRCS and ODA funds helped purchase the easement on their 132-acre cattle and row crop farm in 2012. Alex and his wife, Mindy, wanted to expand their existing farm operations to include a full-time apiary business. The proposed changes required approval from the Three Valley board, NRCS, and ODA so the family could convert some production land to pollinator habitat and construct new buildings for honey processing, queen rearing, and equipment maintenance. Our stewardship manager, Randy Evans, helped the family complete a comprehensive application establishing the overall conservation gain of the proposal and ultimately receiving approval by all easement stakeholders. Today, Alex and Mindy are actively implementing their changes: pollinator habitat is growing, and their bee population is expanding. The queen rearing cabin (pictured) is completed and serves a dual purpose as an apiary training center for local beekeeping enthusiasts. We are proud of them for their commitment to conservation and honored to have a small part in their success.

Please reach out to our stewardship staff if you plan to expand, change, or upgrade your land use operations, restore natural habitat, enter the fight against invasive species, or sell your easement property. There are ways we can assist, and we cherish this opportunity to be your resource and partner in saving land.

## Chip's Run, A Dream Fulfilled

### Stephen Gordon, Paddy's Run Conservation Project Subcontractor

Charles "Chip" Hafele is the quintessential work-driven man. By day he oversees two businesses, and when time allows he pursues his childhood dream. Growing up in Cincinnati, Chip envisioned a wildlife sanctuary that he and his family could enjoy and share with others. Twenty-two years ago, Chip's dream moved closer to reality when he purchased 160 secluded acres in western Butler County. Challenges remained, however, as he had his businesses in Cincinnati to manage and a family to help support. There was precious little time for his 160 acre paradise, yet Chip managed to plant grasses and legumes for wildlife habitat.

Fast forward to 2017. TVCT Trustee Ed Teets needed tree work done on his easement property, and Chip was called to do the work. The two men hit it off, and Ed mentioned the benefits of a conservation easement (CE). A new chapter in Chip's dream was being written. TVCT, Ohio EPA and Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) staff began a series of property visits. Chip now laughs that during the first site visit staff hiked less than 300 yards during the first two hours. The reason: Chip's property had such a rich diversity of plants. Over 100 plant species have since been recorded that include spring ephemerals and 41 species of trees and shrubs. Field surveys by ODNR recorded 66 macroinvertebrates along Dry Fork and 23 fish species on Dry Fork and Sours Run. Results from Jeff Davis's initial field survey indicates that Chip's Run ranks among the richest sites for herpetological species in Butler County.



With such rich habitat and species diversity, the Paddy's Run Conservation Project (PRCP) is funding several restoration projects. A five-year plan to retire three bottomland crop fields to grasslands, prairies and savanna began in March 2019 through the expert guidance of Al Gerhart. This conversion will facilitate Chip's dream of increasing the property's wildlife population and species diversity. Conservation and Woodland Stewardship Plans underwritten by the PRCP will provide a blueprint for best land management practices.



This will be Chip and his daughter's first spring living on "Chip's Run." A chorus of spring peepers will fill the night with sound while turkey, deer, beaver, and countless small mammals will increasingly populate the bottom fields. Native forbs and grasses will emerge from former corn and soybean stubble, and their seeds and nectar will foster insect and bird diversity. Removing invasive plants like honeysuckle will facilitate emergence of ephemerals and understory trees. Gradually, Chip's Run will be transformed into a diverse, carefully managed sanctuary. Chip's dream will have entered its final phase. Amidst the demands of work, Chip will set aside time to sit back and take in the sights, sounds, and smells of a truly special place.

## Farm Bill Update for Land Conservation Programs

By Agnes Marchlewska, Land Protection Manager

On December 20, 2018 a new Farm Bill was signed into a law. The Land Trust Alliance played an important role in advocating for the key policy provisions to strengthen conservation programs and increase benefits for soil health and water quality.



One of the biggest changes to the previous farm bill is the increase of funding for the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) from \$250 million available in 2018 to \$450 million awarded annually for next five years. ACEP, administrated through the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), consists of the Agricultural Land Easements (ALE) Program and the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). The ACEP program provides the technical and financial assistance for farmland protection and wetland restoration projects. Through the voluntary sale of an easement, landowners limit future development to protect prime farmland, critical water resources, and wildlife habitats. ACEP provides matching funds that land trusts can use to purchase conservation easements on agricultural land, grasslands, and wetlands. The proceeds from selling the easement enable landowners to reinvest in their farming operations, make necessary improvements, and offset the cost of implementing conservation practices.

The new Farm Bill also continues to support other programs offering assistance for landowners to conserve resources by improving land conservation practices on their working farms:

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) focus on helping landowners improve the vitality of the soils on their properties and protect water quality. By implementing best management practices, landowners have experienced improvements to farming operations, increased crop yields, improved grazing conditions, and improved wildlife habitats.

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) encourages landowners to temporarily retire highly erodible farmland or other sensitive acreage from the production and convert it to prairies, riparian buffers, filter strips and other natural areas supporting wildlife habitats and clean water. Farmers enrolled in the CRP program receive funding to help implement vegetable cover practices. In addition, the program provides annual rental payments to the landowners for the duration of the CRP contract.

The changes proposed by the 2018 Farm Bill are now open to the public for commenting as the NRCS works on adopting the new policies and developing new guidelines and procedures. For more information about the programs, please check: [www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs), contact Three Valley Conservation Trust, or visit your local Farm Service Agency or NRCS office.

## Ruder Restoration Project

### Recent accomplishments:

- Removed ~9 acres of invasive bush honeysuckle, Asian bittersweet
- Planted ~2500 native trees, shrubs, and flowers
- Hosted educational events and research projects

### Future goals:

- Expand honeysuckle removal efforts to east bank of Four Mile Creek
- Utilize completed boardwalk for educational and social programs
- Improve access with parking spaces for patrons with limited mobility

### Upcoming volunteer

work days:

April 27, 2019

9:00am—12:00pm,

Lunch provided

May 9, 2019

9:00am—12:00pm,

Lunch provided



Ruder Preserve Flood– 2018

## Ruder Preserve: A Three Valley Showcase

By Donna McCollum, Board Member, Ruder Restoration Project Manager, and Easement Partner

About a year ago, Stephen Gordon sent me a picture he had taken from Bonham Road, looking downstream

(south) toward Oxford. As you can see in his picture, Ruder Preserve is part of the flood plain of Four Mile Creek. During that 15-year storm, the creek rose all the way to the hillside along Shadowy Hills Drive and on both sides of the stream. A single acre with water just one foot deep holds approximately 330,000 gallons of water; the flooded portion of Ruder was at least 12 acres! This is the benefit of a well-functioning flood plain: as water soaks into the ground it slowly returns to the stream and keeps streams flowing during dry summer months. When the permeable soils of flood plains are replaced by hard-surface infrastructure, water is immediately channeled downstream - often with negative impacts like flash-flooding. The presence of undeveloped riparian habitat, such as at Ruder Preserve, is critical for flood remediation and stream flow maintenance. One of Three Valley's goals is to continue to protect riparian areas from development.

Ruder is also part of an almost entirely forested riparian corridor that connects Hueston Woods to the Miami Natural Areas. In our increasingly fragmented landscapes, plants and animals disperse through corridors and, in moving from one larger area of habitat to another, keep their breeding populations healthy by allowing genes to mix. The distance between these two large forests is 4.4 miles if you follow the stream. Of this distance, approximately 58% (2.5 mi) is permanently protected, since Three Valley holds an easement on the Mill Race and, thanks to the generosity of the Ruder family, TVCT owns Ruder Preserve. Riparian land north of Mill Race is still in farmland and woodlot; an easement on that land would help protect it forever. South of Mill Race is the MU athletic complex, which includes (very) narrow forested strip. Thus, Ruder Preserve contributes an integral piece of the corridor connecting 4,000+ acres of forest.



## More on Ruder Preserve:

In February 2019 the TVCT board of trustees formally approved the following items:

- Ruder should be a showcase of land conservation and stewardship;
- Habitat enhancement should continue, including the removal of invasive species and planting of native species
- Accessibility should be improved, particularly for those with limited mobility, and may include paths, boardwalks, platforms for resting/meditation/observation, and parking that balance a “desire to maintain a more natural habitat with the desire to provide access.”

To achieve these goals, we are:

- Continuing invasive species removal this spring and expanding our efforts onto the ;
- Planning education and social programs for the summer and fall that will use the current boardwalk at Ruder; and
- Planning to provide parking spaces at the entrance to Ruder Preserve for those with limited mobility.



## Phenology: “Nature’s Calendar”

### Suellen Albert, Board Member

Phenology is the study of plant and animal life cycle stages like the leafing and flowering of plants, emergence of insects, migration of birds and the maturation of agricultural crops. The timing of these environmental changes can be impacted by changes in weather and climate conditions. For example, a warmer, wetter winter might trigger flowers to bloom sooner, and you might experience an early bout of allergies as a result.

There is much more to learn about the influence of weather and climate on plant and animal life cycle stages - and you can help! The USA National Phenology Network is a consortium of individuals and organizations that collect, share, and use phenology data to learn more about “nature’s calendar,” and how plant and animal life cycle stages respond to changing weather and climate conditions. Researchers and resource managers use this information to determine how and when environmental changes occur on a local, national and global level, and what those changes could mean for people and for wildlife.

The Three Valley Conservation Trust Education and Outreach Committee is in the preliminary stages of creating a phenology walk at Helen S. Ruder Preserve in Oxford, Ohio. Board members Amanda Bentley Brymer and Suellen Harbron Albert are partnering to develop an online plant monitoring program using Nature’s Notebook, a user-friendly interface where local residents and visitors to Ruder Preserve can record data that will be synced with the national network and used by resource managers, educators and researchers.

The Oxford community, along with the general public, are invited to participate in this community-based conservation project. There is a “launch date” of June 26th at Ruder Preserve where an overview of the project will be presented. Interested parties can sign up for additional information and training opportunities.

For more information, check out these resources:

<https://www.usanpn.org/usa-national-phenology-network>

[https://www.usanpn.org/natures\\_notebook](https://www.usanpn.org/natures_notebook)



**Indian Creek Nature Preserve- Historic church and burial ground**

## Celebrating Community

### Conservation at Indian Creek

**By: Holly Wissing, Member and Easement Partner**

Want to get together with other TVCT supporters while immersing yourself in local history?

Plan to attend the annual Salute to the Pioneers at 12:30 p.m. Sunday, May 19, at Metroparks of Butler County's Indian Creek Church and Pioneer Cemetery.

Chad Smith, executive director of TVCT, will be guest speaker. In conjunction with his presentation on "Preserving Our Rural Landscape" TVCT easement owners will be asked to stand and be recognized for their efforts to protect our rural heritage.

Indian Creek Church was built in 1829 and sits atop a hill overlooking Indian Creek Road, one of the most scenic roads in Butler County. A citizens committee that organizes the annual Salute to the Pioneers also maintains the site by removing honeysuckle, planting native wildflowers, trees and shrubs, and restoring the property to look as it did when the early pioneers worshipped there.

Along with the committee's efforts, several farms on Indian Creek Road maintain conservation easements through Three Valley Conservation Trust, ensuring that Indian Creek Church and the surrounding landscape will be forever protected from future urbanization.

The Salute is a casual event. In addition to a brief speech (20 minutes tops) there is old-time music by Pineridge Partners Judy and Warren Waldron, followed by a social hour with homemade cookies and punch.

The event is free and there is plenty of parking as well as a van to drive people up the hill to the historic church and burial ground. The nearly 200-year-old Reily Twp. church is located at 3000 Indian Creek Road, Oxford, OH 45056. Anyone with questions should contact Holly Wissing at [wissinhd@miamioh.edu](mailto:wissinhd@miamioh.edu)

#### 2019 Schedule:

June 19th - Creeks with Lynn White, Butler County SWCD

June 26th - Phenology at Ruder Preserve with Suellen Albert, TVCT

July 10th - To Be Announced/Finalized

July 17th - To Be Announced/Finalized

July 24th - Backyard Birding with Donna McCollum, TVCT



## Wonderful Wednesdays

**By Amanda Bowers, Board Member**

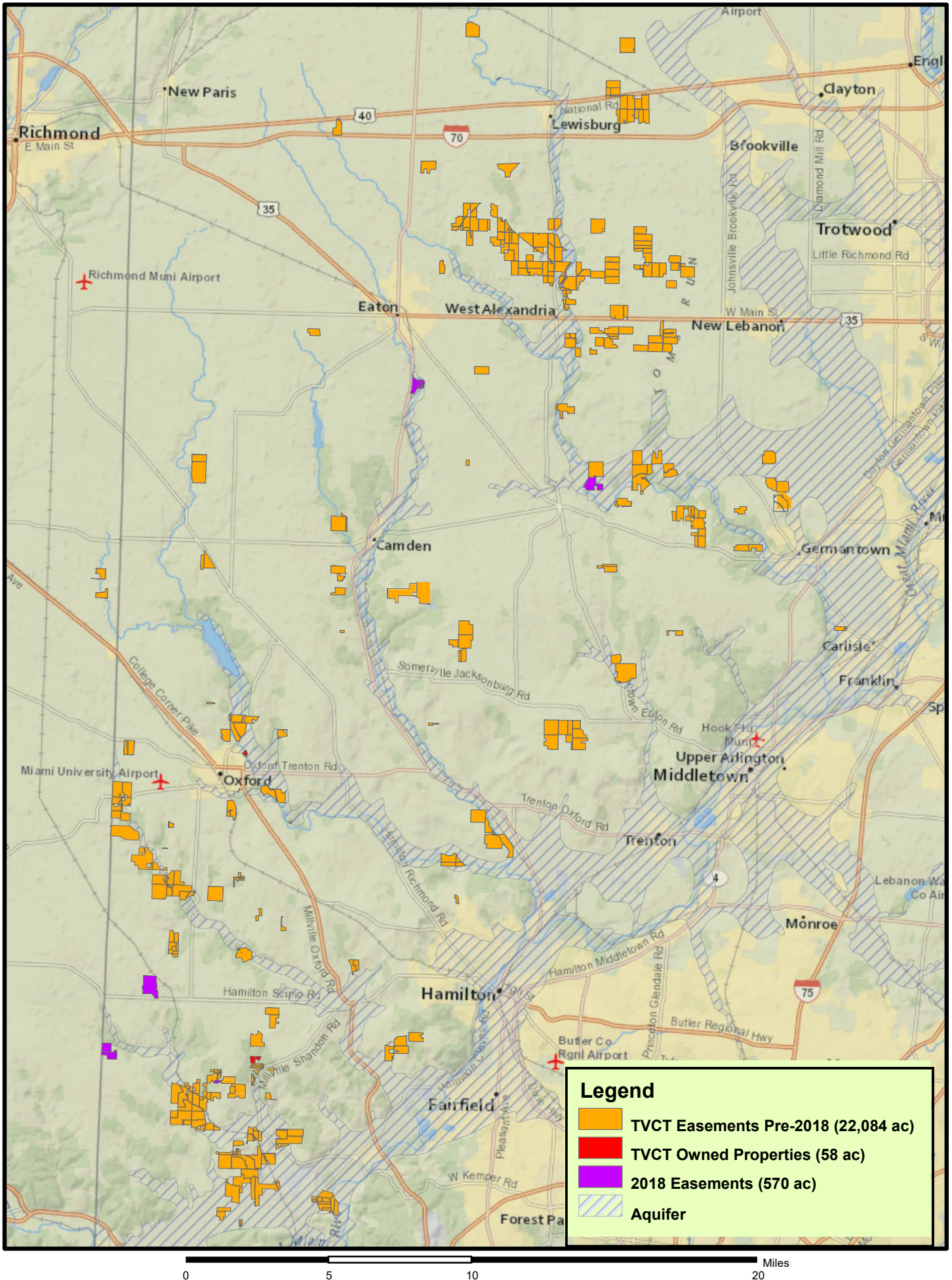
Looking for fun ways to get outside and explore this summer?

Bring the kids and grandkids and join TVCT for Wonderful Wednesdays throughout June and July! Splash in a local creek, break out your binoculars for some birding, or become a citizen scientist while helping us observe and collect data about local plants and animals. Our crew of volunteers specializing in flora, fauna, and fun are excited to guide your next outdoor adventure! You'll also learn how TVCT members and easement owners are implementing conservation practices and exploring nature in their own backyards. Final dates, times and presenters will be posted on TVCT website, Facebook and Instagram.

Check out the TVCT Events Calendar for up-to-date information:

<https://www.3vct.org/events-activities-news#Calendar>

# Three Valley Conservation Trust Protected Lands



# Thank You 2018 Donors!

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published twice a year.

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## Save The Dates!

**June 2**– Sumer Picnic– 12-2pm

**August 17**– Anniversary Fundraiser– River Center, Middletown

**November 4**– Auction for Acres– 5:30-8:30pm

## Save The Date!

November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2018  
Oxford Community Arts Center



Visit [www.3vct.org/events](http://www.3vct.org/events)

for full schedules and details  
about all 3vct activities and  
events!



### SUMMER PICNIC

**June 2, 2019**

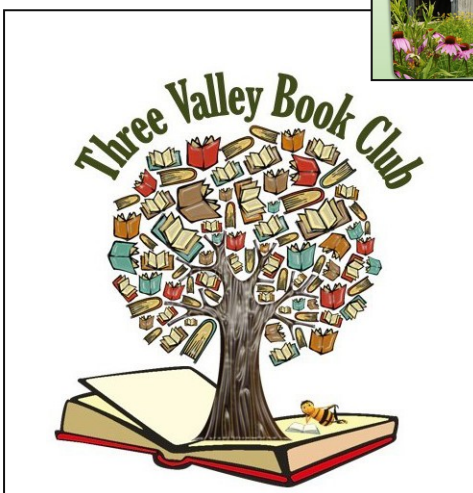
Leonard Howell Park  
Bonham Rd. Oxford, OH 45056

**12-2pm**

Explore the OATS bike trail  
and four mile creek watershed!

Silent raffle, food and drinks  
provided





All book club meetings held at  
LaRosa's Pizzeria, 21 Lynn St.  
Oxford, OH 45056

#### Meeting Dates:

February 28- 6:00pm - 8:00pm

May 9- 6:00pm - 8:00pm

August 8- 6:00pm - 8:00pm

November 14- 6:00pm - 8:00pm

#### GIVE WHILE YOU SHOP



**Kroger Community Rewards:** enroll via:  
[www.kroger.com/topic/kroger-community-rewards-3](http://www.kroger.com/topic/kroger-community-rewards-3)  
just use your Kroger Plus account;  
TVCT's KROGER ID number: 80803

**AMAZON SMILE:** enroll and shop via:  
<http://smile.amazon.com/about>

**amazon smile**  
You shop. Amazon gives.



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