



VALLEY TRUST NEWS

Number 80 Spring 2025

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.

Springtime - When Everything is New!

By Donna McCollum

As we thought about a topic for the front page of this spring newsletter, someone came up with the idea of renewal – all things new - and things just flowed from there! It turns out Three Valley has a lot of new things to talk about, as you'll see in the following pages. We have new staff members, new easements expected to close in 2025, a new vehicle, new funding and boardwalks, new spring hikes, new seed libraries ... all things that will help us better achieve our mission of conserving *"natural habitats, waterways and agricultural lands, for the benefit of present and future generations, through partnerships with people and communities."*

We all know how spring makes us feel. Every day we walk in the woods a new kind of flower is blooming. Tree buds are swollen, ready to leaf out. Soils, moistened by the rains, look deep brown and renewed by their winter cover of decaying leaves. Many of us are starting tomatoes and peppers indoors, getting ready for a new season of home-grown vegetables. Farmers are buying supplies so when weather conditions are right, they are ready to plant. All these seasonal cues scream "New! Renewal! Things are looking up!" We *feel* renewed, hopeful. And the only way 3VCT can continue its mission is to remain hopeful, hopeful that we are making a difference, for ourselves, our habitats, our waterways, our families and our futures.

Three Valley staff excel at the last part of our mission – partnerships. A lot of what we do involves partners. Of the seven easements expected to close in 2025, six involve partnerships with state and federal agencies. The recently restored Henshaw Wetland, involving partnerships with three agencies, is providing new habitat for wildlife (that need all the help they can get). By midsummer we expect a boardwalk section to connect two new handicapped parking spaces near the dog park to the already built boardwalk along the OATS trail, all accomplished through the hard work of three dedicated community members and with funding from several community organizations. New educational signage for Ruder Preserve is being designed by a Miami University student and supported by a grant from Butler Rural Electric Coop. Such partnerships are a vital part of who we are.

Conservation partnerships are also being achieved by 3VCT's new seed libraries. Recent talks in Oxford by Doug Tallamy emphasized the need for landscaping with native species. Three Valley seed libraries support this need by making native plant seeds available to people around the county. These libraries support the efforts of another local organization, Wild Ones Miami Valley (<https://mi-amivalley.wildones.org>), to promote native landscapes and connect us with homeowner conservation partners wherever the libraries are sited.

All in all, the theme of "new" is alive and well at Three Valley. We hope that spring, this exciting time of newness and renewal, is alive and well in your life, too. Join us for the next Hike for Acres and immerse yourself in the feelings of renewal we can experience in watching the forest come alive. And read on to get more details about how Three Valley is embracing the new!



By Tom Vogel
Board Chair

All is New: Our Farmers as Land Stewards

As hints of spring appear all around us, I think about what our land stewards, whom we call farmers, are doing to prepare for a successful 2025 harvest. Of course, they are purchasing and storing costly inputs. In addition to that, though, many are planning conservation strategies to protect their land, soil, wildlife, surface water, and groundwater. In many respects, our southwest Ohio farmers are on the front lines of conservation. Many regional farms have family histories going back multiple generations; in some cases the farms were rewards for participating in the Revolutionary War. These farms are family treasures and their owners do everything possible to protect the land for their future generations. They are indeed front line conservationists!

In my day-to-day operation I have contacts with many local farmers and I am always amazed by how deeply they understand the need to protect their agricultural treasures. Although every farm and its stewards are different, four strategies are often undertaken to protect the integrity of their land, soils, and waterways:

- 1. Buffer Strips:** As you travel around the countryside of southwestern Ohio you will see well-planned strips of switchgrass and other native grasses along our waterways. These vegetated buffers afford protection for all types of wildlife. They also trap and sequester pollutants, preventing contamination of our waterways. The USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service spearheads these buffer strips through their popular Conservation Reserve Program.
- 2. Cover Crops:** Cover crops planted in the fall germinate quickly and hold soils in place during the fall and winter. Not only do such cover crops reduce erosion and its inevitable damage to our waterways, they also provide rich humus for the next planting season and sequester carbon in the soil. Cover crops are becoming widespread in their use as farmers understand their benefits to the soil and the environment.
- 3. Crop Rotation:** Farmers in our region have understood the productivity benefits of crop rotation for many generations. Now, they are using crop rotation as a key conservation tool, thus limiting soil erosion, and inhibiting nutrients from entering nearby waterways.
- 4. No-Till Cultivation:** Restricting deep cultivation of the soil enables the annual corn, soybean, or wheat stubble to act as a "lid" to farm fields. This inhibits erosion and the associated loss of nutrients, protecting both our land and waterways.

Modern agriculture is taking more and more practical and scientific steps every day to protect our land and water for future generations. Your Three Valley Conservation Trust is working with them as partners in their success.

Save The Date for the Summer Picnic!



Three Valley will hold its summer potluck picnic this year at Leonard Howell Park. This park has a new playground, a large playing field and a picnic shelter, where we will gather for an afternoon of food and fun.

Location: Leonard Howell Park, 5200 Bonham Rd., near Yager Stadium and new Oxford dog park
Date: July 19, 2025
Time: 11:00am - 4:00pm
Lunch: Around noon

Activities: Music, playground, a playing field (so bring your favorite sports equipment), corn hole games provided. After lunch, as desired, hikes will be led across the street to Ruder Preserve and its board walks to learn its history and the efforts that have made it a great community asset.

3VCT will furnish hot dogs, hamburgers and drinks. Please bring a dish to share with everyone and (maybe) a lawn chair for more comfortable seating.

Executive Director's Report

In this spring newsletter, our focus is on the “new.” While traditionally folks celebrate a new year on January 1st, the return of the daffodils on Rebecca Evans’ easement, bluebirds at the local parks, and red-winged blackbirds on the farm are my reminder that we have finished another rotation around the sun. I enjoy seeing new growth sprouting in all things, including our Three Valley Conservation Trust community. We have been steadily welcoming new supporters, new staff members, and a new board member. Our resources are growing as well, with the purchase of a new stewardship vehicle, with the help of Board Chair Tom Vogel, the Greater Oxford Community Foundation, and Larkin Cobb GMC in Eaton. We are slowly adding new land under easement and working on new projects to protect more land. But with all the new things we are celebrating, we are also facing new challenges. Some of our new projects and easement contracts are on hold due to scrutiny from the new administration in Washington, D.C.



**By Randy Evans
Executive Director**

With so much uncertainty surrounding our tried-and-true methods for land conservation, our board and staff are shifting toward developing new revenue streams, new partnerships, new ways to deliver on our promise to “protect in perpetuity.” The challenges facing our region are real: how our region develops to accommodate growing infrastructure needs will affect our wildlife corridors, the health of our water and air, and our access to green space. The things we hold dear – our family farms, rural landscapes, rivers and streams, and our connection to each other – are at risk. So much of our conservation work relies on federal government funding. Thankfully, our state and local partners are stepping up to fill voids where they are able. We remain optimistic, because if the past 31 years have shown us anything, it’s that through persistence, hard work, and partnership, we can make a difference.

But most of my optimism stems from my visits with our donors. I am humbled by the impact of our work together – regular people from our community coming together time and again to create a new and better future. As you read about the work being done to make sure our natural resources are healthy, I hope you feel optimistic as well. We are profoundly grateful for your continued support. Thank you for being an important part of this journey to help Three Valley overcome new challenges and meet new goals.

Semper Gratus! - Randy

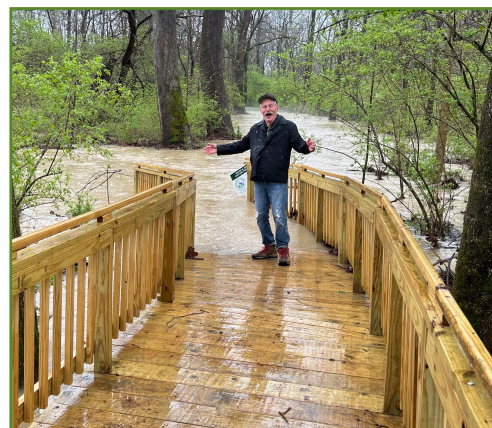
Grants and Boardwalk Booster Initiative Support Ruder Nature Preserve

By April Hamlin, Development Manager

Exciting things are happening at Ruder Preserve! A grant has been received to extend the ADA-accessible boardwalk on the east side of the creek from its northern end along the OATS trail to the handicapped parking spaces at the new dog park. Mark Boardman, Tom Farmer and Steve Nimis, 3VCT’s famous building team, hope to have this extension finished by mid-summer. Way to go guys!

Last year the Boardwalk Booster initiative was introduced by board member and Ruder Management Team member Ed Teets. It opened a brand-new way for the community to get involved and has had exceptional success so far - over 30 plaques have been ordered! It not only provides a unique way to leave your mark on Ruder Nature Preserve but ensures future visitors can continue to enjoy its beauty. Boardwalk Boosters directly contribute to protecting this special place for generations to come.

A \$100 donation allows supporters to design a personalized 3”x5” commemorative plaque displayed along the preserve’s scenic boardwalk. Whether you choose to honor a loved one, celebrate a special occasion, or simply share your appreciation for nature, your custom plaque—featuring up to 40 characters—will serve as a lasting tribute while helping to fund the board-



The Ruder Preserve boardwalk was built and is maintained by volunteers. But that still takes materials, tools and work. The boardwalk construction held up to the recent flood, (see Stephen Gordon right), but has needed maintenance in the past when large trees and branches have destroyed railings and whole sections. (Photo by Edna Southard)

2025 Easements

By Caitlin Brown, Conservation Manager

3VCT anticipates that many of our pending conservation and agricultural easements, totaling 700 acres, will close in 2025. Of the six pending easements in Butler County, one is a donated conservation easement and five are agricultural easements funded by the Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA) LAEPP program or the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) ACEP-ALE program. In Preble County, we also have two pending agricultural easements funded by ODA or NRCS. 3VCT continues to submit applications for both ODA and NRCS for their upcoming funding rounds. For more information about these easement funding programs, please visit our website.

Henshaw Wetland Update

2024 was the first full growth year for our recently established Henshaw Wetland. Despite the extremely dry weather during the wetland planting in the fall of 2023, we were happy to see the establishment of many of the installed trees, shrubs, and wetland plugs. Unfortunately, along with the establishment of what was planted came the invasion of species like Ragweed, Japanese Hops, Canada Thistle, and some additional common invaders. 3VCT is excited for the Davey Resource Group (DRG) to complete the initial invasives species removal of 2025 and to help establish trails connecting the established vernal pools. Our stewardship team will take over the invasive species management after the initial removal.



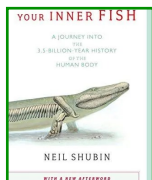
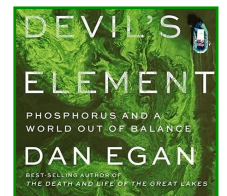
"If you build it, they will come." An American toad hides in a muddy area of the Henshaw Wetland. Photo by Caitlin Brown.

2025 3VCT Book Club Starts off with a Bust and a Bang

January's book club date snuck up on us this year, so we moved that month's discussion to March and now we're back on track. We had a delightful discussion about Crossings: How Road Ecology Is Shaping the Future of Our Planet and we encourage everyone to read it. You might think road-killed animals are all that are included, but Ben Goldfarb writes elegantly and interestingly about interruption of migration, the effect of road noise, and steps being taken to decrease the impact of roads on animals. A wonderful read, even for those of us who think we know all about road effects! Please consider joining us for our next great discussions!

Book club discussions are on the 2nd Thursday of every other month and are held virtually, just click on the link on the website. For more information or to get on the list for updates, contact Ben Mattox at benmattox50@yahoo.com.

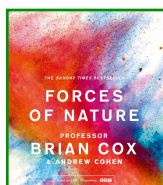
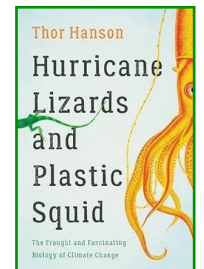
May 8 - The Devil's Element: Phosphorus and a World Out of Balance by Dan Egan, led by Ben Mattox. Egan reveals the history of phosphorus, from its 1600s discovery to its inclusion in some of the most lethal compounds on earth - fire bombs, rat poison, nerve gas. Today it is hidden in one of our time's most important environmental issues.



July 10 - Your Inner Fish by Neil Shubin, led by Karl Mattox

Using fossils and DNA, Shubin shows how related we are to other animals, from fish to worms and bacteria. Come re-examine yourself as you look at the world in a new light. This book is "enlightening, accessible and told with enthusiasm."

September 11 - Hurricane Lizards and Plastic Squid by Thor Hanson, led by Cori Yager. So often when we talk about climate change, everything is doom and gloom. In this book, Hanson shows how animals are already adjusting to it, changing their behaviors or physical characteristics, or sometimes dying out.



November 13 - Forces of Nature by Brian Cox, led by Julie Primack. This Sunday Times Bestseller takes you around the world, from the mid-Atlantic ridge to in search of the fundamental laws that govern it. "Cox's romantic, lyrical approach to astrophysics (*is*) an experience that feels less like homework and more like having a story told to you. A really good story, too."

Introducing Our New Staff Members

Since our last newsletter, 3VCT has hired two new staff members, full-time Stewardship Specialist Tom Buckley and part-time Stewardship Technician Erik Herrmann. I hope you will welcome them when you get to see them, and meanwhile, here are brief introductions to each of them.

Tom Buckley

Tom joined 3VCT in early 2025, after many years in the outdoor education world. From wilderness camps to university programs to parks and recreation, he has led adventures and experiences in the South and Midwest, as well as overseas in the UK. Working at Three Valley completes the circle, allowing him to further put into practice what he learned as a graduate student at Miami University's Institute for the Environment and Sustainability. As the Stewardship Specialist, Tom's focus is monitoring easements, ensuring their conservation values are maintained. When not out in the field avoiding poison ivy and ticks, he spends his time hiking, paddling, and climbing with his son (while also avoiding poison ivy and ticks). Tom has been a Butler County resident since 2008, and loves stewarding for the community he lives in and the neighbors he lives with.



Erik Herrmann



Erik graduated from Miami University in May of 2024 with two Bachelor of Science degrees in botany and geology, and with a strong interest in local plant identification and other naturalist fields. Erik has worked for the Bureau of Land Management in Butte, Montana as an Americorps intern with emphasis in wildlife biology, and for Miami University's natural areas and ecology research center as a student specialist. In his free time Erik enjoys hiking, backpacking, caving, and gardening. He is a local from the Oxford, Ohio area and looks forward to making a positive influence where he grew up!

Welcome aboard, guys!

Help Our Seed Libraries Bloom Next Year!

By Donna McCollum

A big **THANK YOU** to Jan and Roger Ames, whose Santa Open House in December raised over \$2000 for native flower seeds for the seed library at Ruder Preserve. What a great way to spread native plants around!

There's plenty you can do to keep pollinators thriving. Why not "adopt" a library this season? As a **Seed Library Steward**, you would 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 adopt a library? You can support our libraries by making a monetary donation. A donation of \$500 should keep seeds in a library for a year. And any donation can be designated to support 3VCT seed libraries in general or any of the nine libraries around the county.

Finally, we are working on a relationship with the Miami University farm to grow native plants for seed collection. This is in it's infancy, but please look for some kind of seed collecting and or seed sorting and distributing get together next fall - maybe before the next newsletter goes out, so stay tuned to the website.

Ready to sign up or have questions? Email Teri at office@3vct.org



3VCT seed libraries have compartments for 9 types of native seeds inside, free to a good home!

What Have Members Been Doing Lately?

Article and photos by Julie Bath Primack

Annual Meeting 2025



Guests enjoyed the ambiance at the Knolls of Oxford.

The annual meeting gave us an opportunity to catch up with friends and share 3VCT 2024 achievements. We want to thank everyone who helped make the evening a great success, particularly LPL Financial, Roger and Jan Ames, Aaron and Melinda Ames, LaRosa's Pizzeria, Shademakers Nursery and Landscape, Oxford Coffee Company and The Knolls of Oxford.

Jim Vinch was formally voted in as our newest Board Member. He comes with an impressive resume in environmental protection and the laws and policies we need to be

aware of. His expertise is especially important as many protections come under attack.

Our guest speaker for the evening, Brian F. Jorg, came with an amazing presentation on the work he and others have done to reintroduce native plant species to the Cincinnati Zoo's Bowyer Farm. He reinforced his information with amazingly beautiful photos of the birds and wildlife that are reestablishing homes or resting sites at this site.

Thank you Brian!



Brian Jorg, Director of the Cincinnati Zoo's native plants program, speaks after a presentation loaded with beautiful photos, speaks with 3VCT members Steve Sullivan and Steve Gordon.

Lunar Feasts and Why I Am a Fan

I don't like to **clean** my house. I am a good **cook** but find it not worth putting a lot of effort into cooking for myself. I would be happy to cook for my friends without making it into a fund raiser...but inviting friends over for a nice meal seems like a thing of the past. So, by focusing a delicious meal around both friends and supporting my favorite non-profit I get:

- A sense of having done the right thing,
- A clean house,
- Great left overs, and
- An evening with like-minded people!

There is NO pressure from 3VCT to have a Lunar Feast at your home...but consider all you would gain by taking on an event like this. If you are considering taking this BOLD step but need some help/advice, please contact Julie Bath Primack (jbpstone@yahoo.com).

Our next Lunar Feast will be donated by Sandi and Will Hazelton on May 12th, the flower moon. If you're interested in going, contact Teri at the 3VCT office. office@3vct.org or 513-524-2150, ext. 5



Julie's February Lunar Feast, held in her historical farmhouse (above), celebrated the Korean New Year with dumplings (Kamba), sushi wraps (gimbap), kimchi stew and japchae and a dessert of sweet red beans, fruit and ice cream. Thanks for cooking, Julie!

Spring 2025 Hikes for Acres

By Donna McCollum

We started off this year's hikes in March at Preble County's newest park, the Wagers Memorial Memorial Park just outside of Camden, Ohio. About 15 Three Valley supporters were joined by the director of Preble County Parks, Miindy Davidson, and Preble County volunteer and Three Valley supporter, Jon Granville. Jon led us on a delightful hike in the beautiful and historic area, locally known as Devil's Backbone. The 24-acre park includes steep ravines carved by glaciers and lined with lime-stones, shale and mudstone.



Hikers listened with interest to Jon's information on the Ordovician fossils found in Paint Creek and the legends

We all were astounded by the incredible work of a beaver that took down a 14" tree (right) and enjoyed finding the first spring wildflowers (bloodroot, left).

There are more flowers to explore this spring - we hope you can find the time to join us on the next hikes, detailed below!

Remaining Spring 2025 Hikes for Acres

April 24th, 5–6:30pm, followed by pizza at Reily Pizza if you want

Location: Indian Creek Metropark, Springfield Road entrance 6500 Springfield Road, Oxford, OH

Topic: Wildflower walk with local expert Holly Wissing.

Leader: Holly Wissing (Donna McCollum, backup)

Please note: This park entrance is around the corner from Reily Pizza, so we thought a nice way to end the day would be to gather there after our hike.

Wear good shoes, as we will want to descend to the creek on the 0.9-mile Trillium Trail. If we want to and time allows, we will also do the easy half mile of The Mound Trail.

May 29th, 5-6:30 pm

Location: 3655 Oxford Trenton Rd., Oxford, OH

Topic: On one of Three Valley's newest easements, owner Rebecca Evans will show off the last days of her "daffodil hill" blooms, along with other late spring wildflowers and her conservation efforts. Her knowledge and caring guarantee a great hike!

Leader: Rebecca Evans, owner

Please note: Please consider carpooling, ask Teri for details!

Please let us know if you can attend: sign up at www.3vct.org or call Teri at the 3VCT office 513-524-2150 (ext. 5)

All hikes are free, although donations to 3VCT are encouraged and appreciated.



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Tom Buckley
Stewardship Specialist
Erik Herrmann
Stewardship Technician

Newsletter edited by Donna
McCollum, Holly Wissing,
Barb Hamilton, Teri Wickham



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

Other New Things at 3VCT

(There's just not enough room for depth on all the good things going on!)

Spring Restoration Schedule at Ruder:

We have 2 work days still this spring - Sunday April 27th and Saturday May 3rd. Feel free to join us from 9-noon. Is there a group that would like to set up a work day? Contact Donna McCollum at donnamccollum@me.com or 513-544-7638.



New Signage at Ruder:

3VCT has received a grant from Butler Rural Electric Coop that will be used to provide educational signage at Ruder Preserve. A Miami University student is donating her time and talent to begin designing the signs. So keep a lookout at Ruder for some new signage in the next several months.

New Staff Car:

In late 2024, the 3VCT board decided that the benefits of buying a staff vehicle far outweighed the cost of staff using personal vehicles for stewardship visits and required meetings: it will present our name and logo around the 6 counties in which we have easements; will eliminate mileage costs for use of staff's private vehicles and wear-and-tear on those vehicles; and be an identifiable presence when staff are parked at easement properties. Purchase of a Chevy Trailblazer is a significant step forward for the satisfaction of our staff, at no or little cost to 3VCT, due to a grant from Oxford Community Foundation, a discount on the price of the vehicle from Ed Larkin Auto and funds from a private donor.



Thank you to all who made this possible!

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. If you would like to help in any way, contact the 3VCT office at 513-524-2150 for information. Thanks!

Outreach and Education - recruits the next generation of 3VCT supporters, educates current ones, plans and helps with fundraising events, builds community

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.