



Notes from

West Creek Conservancy

A land trust serving Greater Cleveland

September 2015

What Have We Done to the Water?

Each day over 7 billion people are drinking water . . . or trying to.



Photo courtesy of Marvin Fong and The Plain Dealer

Sometimes our Lake Erie water is safe to drink—and sometimes it isn't, as nearly ½ million people in and around Toledo discovered in 2014. For countless generations Lake Erie water was safe to drink with no treatment at all. But in the past two centuries Mother Nature has often reminded us that “what you do to the land is what you do to the water.”

And just what are we doing to the land? We have loaded tons of manure and commercial fertilizer onto it; and we have covered it with acres of roofs and parking lots. When the phosphorus in manure and

fertilizer can soak into the land, it produces our food . . . lots of it. But heavy rainstorms don't just overload our sewage systems, they flush the phosphorus from the land into our streams and lakes where it produces a very different crop. It produces toxic blue-green algae . . . lots of it.

High amounts of phosphorus enter the warm and shallow western basin of Lake Erie at Toledo through the Maumee River, which drains extensive farmlands within its watershed. When Lake Erie warms in August and September, the resulting algal blooms produce a virulent toxin called microcystin, which damages the liver, nervous systems, kidneys, and skin of humans, pets, livestock, and wildlife.



Photo courtesy of Cleveland.com

A second problem arises when the thick mats of algae die and drift eastward along the lake bottom where they are decomposed by bacteria, a process that consumes the available oxygen. Without this dissolved oxygen, fish and plants cannot live. “Dead zones” result.

The health of Lake Erie is vitally important. Over 11 million of us rely on it for drinking water.

West Creek Conservancy and its partners have been undertaking and completing projects that manage storm water, protect lands that soak up and filter urban runoff, and encourage everyone to help us protect Lake Erie. What we do to the land determines what we have done to the water.

Watershed Action Planning - An Ounce of Prevention



West Creek Watershed Action Plan



Watershed action planning is all about improving our water quality. It involves individuals, groups, businesses, and government agencies working together to identify problem areas, develop and carry out solutions, and track progress. It is one of the most cost-effective ways to clean our water, making it - to use Ben Franklin's adage - the ounce of prevention that's worth a pound of cure.

The goal of watershed action planning is to focus on the factors that degrade a stream, river, or lake. One huge factor is stormwater runoff. Harmful algal blooms, fish kills, and a lot of habitat destruction can be prevented by controlling runoff. Heavy rains rush off our pavements, roofs, and lawns and carry with them sediments, nutrients, animal waste, fertilizers, pesticides, oil, trash, and yard waste. By way of storm sewers and culverts, these waters quickly enter our streams and lakes. This presents a perilous condition in northern Ohio, since Lake Erie provides our drinking water, underscoring how critical it is to address the issue in terms of entire watersheds.

The State of Ohio began endorsing watershed action plans in 2003. Full state endorsement requires that nine criteria set by Ohio EPA are met and makes available state and federal resources to fund projects under the action plan. Once a watershed action plan is endorsed, the work is virtually ongoing - there is always another project to start or another parcel of land to protect in a watershed. The plan helps to make sure that priority projects stay on track and no important task is forgotten in the busy world of land conservation and watershed restoration.

Consider West Creek and its 14 square-mile watershed. West Creek Conservancy created the action plan for this watershed in 2004, receiving full state endorsement the following year. The West Creek Watershed Action Plan lays out for the Conservancy and its partners a direction and a means to help restore, reclaim, and reconnect urban and unsustainably developed lands in the watershed. The plan also helps coordinate efforts between partners and set goals in order to keep projects and organizations moving forward.

West Creek Conservancy is pleased to report that most of the high priority projects laid out in the West Creek Watershed Action Plan have been implemented or are in the process of being completed. These include protecting riparian corridors and trail connectors, conserving hundreds of acres of lands and streams in a core area of the watershed with the formation of Cleveland Metroparks West Creek Reservation, and restoring a ten-acre West Creek floodplain habitat near the Cuyahoga River. Partnering with the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District, Cleveland Metroparks, and others, the Conservancy has also created several effective watershed management programs in the West Creek area including the eco-friendly "*Neighborhood Stormwater Stewardship Initiative*," whereby residents have created rain gardens, installed native plantings and rain barrels, and benefited directly by reduced utility fees.

With your support West Creek Conservancy looks forward to continuing its innovative efforts to make our waters clean by partnering with others in the community to protect and restore local natural habitat. Join us as we work to strengthen the invaluable but often overlooked green space that surrounds us. It is an ounce of prevention worthy of everyone's investment.

Through the *Great Lakes Restoration Initiative*, the Ohio EPA awarded West Creek Conservancy funding to not only inventory and prioritize habitat restoration projects, but to also preliminarily design multiple initiatives in order to get them to a shovel-ready status, enabling us to leverage the necessary funds and resources when available! **Planning for Implementation!**

Reclamation of Cuyahoga River Sediment



Jason Ziss of Kurtz Bros highlights and introduces the project

The Great Lakes' first installation of an innovative process that reduces the amount of sediment accumulating in the Cuyahoga River shipping channel is now operating just upstream from the West Creek Confluence in Independence.

Funded by a 1.2 million dollar grant from the State of Ohio, the Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Port Authority has partnered with Kurtz Brothers at their landscaping and waste-processing company beside the Cuyahoga River to install a 30-foot riverbed load interceptor that passively collects upstream riverbed sediment before it encounters downstream contamination. Moving at 4.5 miles per hour, the sediment flows with the river across a stainless steel grate system and collects within

the hoppers below before being pumped out onto a belt conveyor and stockpiled.

Operated by Kurtz Brothers, this completely automated sediment extraction process traps and reclaims 15 to 20 percent of the river sediment that would otherwise drift to the bottom of the wider shipping channel as the river slows to 0.3 miles per hour. As a result, channel dredging and disposal costs are reduced, while the reclaimed sediment is sold for soil blends, structural fill, landfill cover, stream bank restoration, and other commercial, industrial and residential uses.

“Kurtz Bros. is excited to team with the Port and the State of Ohio on this important project, which is a first for the Great Lakes watershed,” said Jason Ziss, Business Development Director for Kurtz Bros. “It’s great to know that we as suppliers can obtain a superior product for our customers while also helping to keep commerce moving on the Cuyahoga and reduce impact on the environment.”



West Creek Conservancy has recently acquired 3 properties along West Creek’s headwaters with assistance provided by the Clean Ohio Greenspace Fund. The structures, which should have never been built in their current location, will be deconstructed then demolished

West Creek Conservancy has already proudly placed an order of the RECLAIMED SEDIMENT to backfill the basements!





Tails for Trails



West Creek Conservancy and Parma Animal Shelter thanks everyone who made our 4th annual Tails for Trails a huge success! Gifted with a beautiful Sunday afternoon, over 100 people and their best friends enjoyed a hike through West Creek Reservation to raise funds for West Creek Conservancy's conservation and trail work efforts and Parma Animal Shelter's efforts to prevent animal cruelty and to educate the public on control of pet overpopulation. Attendees enjoyed a cookout, an agility course, shopping with vendors and crafters, photo booth, music, face painting, kids crafts, and raffles. Thank you to everyone that participated, volunteered, sponsored, donated, and exhibited at the event.

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Sherwin Williams Lends a Much Needed Helping Hand!

A HUGE THANK YOU to all the Sherwin Williams volunteers who graciously provided time and energy at the Historic Henninger House in Parma on August 27!

Volunteers planted over 50 shrubs, painted a barn and 3 picnic tables, removed a 1/4 acre of invasive weeds, spread over 20 yards of soil, and picked up 11 bags of garbage!

Thank you from all of us at West Creek Conservancy!



How does Sherwin Williams Company promote its employee volunteerism?

According to the company: “The Sherwin-Williams Company is committed to being a good neighbor in the communities in which we live and work. We continue to be proud of the time and talents that The Company and our employees contribute to many worthy charitable causes around the world. We are pleased to have the opportunity to support organizations that reflect our Culture of Excellence and serve some of the most vulnerable of our neighbors.

With so many worthy charitable causes in need of support, it is our hope that by ensuring that projects align with our core values and business strategies, we can ensure a positive outcome for all involved. The Company supports employee volunteer efforts with:

- Grants for Volunteers: Employees (or retirees) who volunteer at least 50 hours at a nonprofit guarantee a contribution to that agency. Employees can apply for grants for up to three agencies.
- Matching Gifts for Volunteer Leaders: The Foundation will match gifts from employees who are serving on the governing body (Director or Trustee) at a nonprofit organization.
- The Community Engagement team regularly provides planning support for employee teams in the field interested in giving back to their communities.”

Center Park - West Creek Reservation



The *Super Crew*...not a fictional group of guys, but rather a crew of many skills and traits. Within Cleveland Metroparks' West Creek Reservation, there are many connections to the residential neighborhoods that border it, including Center Park (as pictured).

It may only be a couple acres in size, but it offers a nice retreat for the surrounding neighborhood, including an open playfield, corn-hole, swing set, multiple picnic tables with grills, sandbox, a small trail-head parking lot, a screened in port-a-potty. But it wasn't always like this...

West Creek Conservancy would like to specifically thank the *Super Crew* (technically referred to as the Park Operations Specialist Crew) for all their work to make this such an awesome amenity for the community! Sincere appreciation to:

* Rob Angiocchi
 * Patrick Arch
 * Bob Metcalf
 * Mike Patera
 * Bill Keaton
 * Gary Stroemple



Fall 2015 Events

Stream Restoration Planting

Help us restore a tributary to Rocky River; bank and floodplain planting (trees/shrubs/stakes). Tools and water provided. Please register by September 23 by calling 216-749-3720.

Contact: Jakob@westcreek.org

When: September 26th, 10AM-2PM
Where: Baldwin Creek, corner of Edgerton/Bennett Rd North Royalton

Hemlock Creek Hike:

Want to experience one of Cuyahoga Valley National Park's largest community connectors before the construction begins? Join us for a refreshing Fall hike along the scenic Hemlock Creek! Please register by October 7th by calling 216-749-3720.

Contact: Jakob@westcreek.org

When: October 10th, 10AM
Where: Hemlock Creek Trail, 6801 Brecksville Rd, Independence

Perennial Planting:

Why buy flowers on Sweetest Day when you can plant them? Join us at the Confluence for a morning of planting that will help mitigate possible floods! Arrive dressed ready for working and the weather; tools water provided. Please register by October 14th by calling 216-749-3720.

Contact: Jakob@westcreek.org

When: October 17th, 10AM-1PM
Where: Confluence Site, 6303 Granger Rd, Independence

Baldwin Creek Conservation Update



Baldwin Creek begins in North Royalton, and flows in a westerly direction through the cities of Parma, Middleburg Heights, Strongsville, and Berea before entering the East Branch of the Rocky River near the Berea Water Treatment Plant. It is home to Coe Lake, Lake Isaac, and the Bigmouth Shiner, a state-threatened fish. Land use in this 10-square mile watershed is dominated by post-war, pre-stormwater management residential development.

Like in most headwater streams and tributaries to the East Branch in southwest Cuyahoga County, the increased runoff from the watershed's 25% impervious surface cover leads to flash storm surges, streambank erosion and downcutting of the stream channel, resulting in excessive sedimentation and severe impacts to the creek's aquatic habitat. Recognizing these issues, the Rocky River Watershed Action Plan identifies Baldwin Creek as a critical area for the protection and restoration of stream channels and forested riparian corridors.

West Creek Conservancy, in partnership with the Rocky River Watershed Council, preserved a high priority property along the middle reach of Baldwin Creek in the City of Parma. The 17-acre site includes over 2200 feet of Baldwin Creek and small feeder streams, over two acres of forested wetland, pockets of vernal pools, and a vital reach of accessible floodplain, which helps to filter pollutants and reduce downstream flooding. Though it's located in one of the most densely populated communities of Greater Cleveland, the site is also 95% forested, providing much needed canopy cover to the stream and riparian area.

Funding for the project was provided by the Clean Ohio Greenspace Program and West Creek Conservancy.

Protecting & Restoring

Just upstream of the property depicted above, West Creek Conservancy has partnered with the City of North Royalton and Cuyahoga Soil and Water Conservation District to restore an unnamed tributary that drains to Baldwin Creek.



In 2014, West Creek Conservancy successfully acquired the property, which protected much needed floodplain and riparian area along the corridor (in an area otherwise devoid of protected areas).

About 250 feet of the tributary began restoration in August 2015, and is expected to be complete by late October. A volunteer planting is scheduled for September 26 - please see adjacent page for more info!

Protecting and restoring our urban streams is at the core of West Creek Conservancy's mission, and we're grateful for the partners helping us to make it happen!

Notes from West Creek Conservancy

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Let's continue to protect local natural areas, restore our streams, create hiking and bicycling trails and complete the West Creek Greenway. Your participation makes a difference, and membership donations are tax deductible as charitable contributions.

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