

Ohio's 13th Water Trail: The Cuyahoga River



Did you know that the Cuyahoga is Northeast Ohio's largest river? It flows over 100 miles in an unusual U shape. This results in its mouth at Lake Erie being only 30 miles away from its headwaters. It begins as two branches in northern Geauga County, flowing south, they come together and eventually head west. As the river passes through Akron it starts flowing north straight through Cuyahoga Valley National Park then through the 26-foot deep shipping channel in Cleveland before finally spilling out into Lake Erie.

A water trail may not be your first thought when you hear the name Cuyahoga. What probably comes to

mind is the 1969 incident in which the heavily polluted river caught fire. Though the Cuyahoga was not the first river to burn, its picture was captured on the front page of the New York Times half a century ago and it put the entire nations eyes on Cleveland. This famous article put massive pressure on our country's leaders to better our environmental laws. Thanks to Cleveland and the Cuyahoga's striking image, the Environmental Protection Agency was created the next year and in 1972 Congress passed the federal Clean Water Act.

The Cuyahoga River remains a symbol of America's efforts to clean and restore

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Urban parks, trail projects link more people with nature

By Derek Schafer

Parks and green spaces are must-haves for livable, thriving communities.

Trails and natural parks provide people a path to mental well-being, healthy lifestyles, social vitality and neighborhood pride. On many levels, they also generate economic benefits for our residents and our communities.

But such natural areas -- and people's access to them -- are limited in many of our urban neighborhoods. That is why the recent creation and improvement of a number of parks in Cleveland and its inner-ring suburbs

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The mission of West Creek Conservancy is to enrich the lives of people in Northeast Ohio by conserving natural habitats, restoring the ecological value and sustainability of urban lands, and expanding neighborhood opportunities to experience nature.

Ohio's 13th Water Trail, continued from page 1



Photo credit: Share the River

its waterways. Infamous for catching fire, the Cuyahoga is now sparking a different type of excitement. Wildlife and people are returning. More recently, 80 plus miles of the Cuyahoga have been designated by Ohio Department of Natural Resources Director, Mary Mertz, as the 13th official water trail. What is a water trail? As defined by the National Park Service, it is a recreational route on a waterway with a network of public access points supported by broad-based community partnerships. Water trails provide conservation and recreational opportunities.

The Cuyahoga River water trail will take advantage of new opportunities. Together it will allow us to:

- Increase public access to and along the 100+ miles of the Cuyahoga for all people
- Share resources for better safety, amenities, and paddler etiquette
- Enjoy the health of and beauty of Cuyahoga River
- Boost tourism and economic drive in nearby communities

An amazing consortium of stakeholders referred to as 'The Cuyahoga River Water Trail Partners' (CRWTP) started their pursuit of state designation almost 7 years ago. This incredible effort was started by Friends of the Crooked River who then passed the torch to Andrea Irland of the National Park Service- Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance Program who helped to spearhead the work from there - the anticipatory objective being that of state designation! The Cuyahoga River water trail not only provides a valuable resource for low impact recreation, economic development, and tourism, but it further builds upon support to enhance river appreciation, conservation, and stewardship.

West Creek Conservancy provided fiscal administration but the heavy lifting was completed by the managing partners, the City of Akron, City of Cuyahoga Falls, City of Kent, Cleveland Metroparks, Cuyahoga Valley National Park, Portage Park District, Geauga Park District, Summit Metro Parks, Mantua Village and the Village of Silver

Lake as well as many other stakeholder partners who were critical in the designation of this water trail (a full list of partners can be found on our map/website). Generous funding was provided by The George Gund Foundation, Akron/Summit Convention & Visitors Bureau, REI Co-op., Ohio & Erie Canalway Association & the Ohio Department of Natural Resources.

The Cuyahoga River Water Trail received designation on October 4th, 2019. The beautiful fall day brought in over 200 people to listen to remarks from funders and partners of the organization who officially designated the trail. Several efforts were made in order to receive designation including, but not limited to: open houses, letters of support and resolutions, and identifying and vetting access points along the river.

Everything has its challenges, but the Cuyahoga River has already overcome many including dams, portages, limited access, debris, seasonal and storm overflows, and safety. These have all been taken into consideration. Many have



Photo credit: NPS/DJ Reiser



Photo credit: Share the River

already been met with possible solutions and are an ongoing conversation between the water trail partners, who continue to meet and work together to provide everyone using the CRWT the best experience possible.

We thank everyone who has supported the water trail in this ever-flowing process (pun intended). We hope that you will continue to help us grow and create a trail that is used by all who enjoy spending time in, on and around the river. Please, if you have any comments send them our way! You can contact us on Cuyahogariverwatertrail.org or contact us directly at info@cuyahogariverwatertrail.org.

See you on the river,

The Cuyahoga River Water Trail Partners



Photo credit: NPS/Arrye Rosser

What Does the River Know

by Charlie Malone

The river knows when we got here
and it knows who was here first.
The river knows about the signal tree
pointing to warm homes, to summer.
The river knows how blood moves in our hearts,
it knows where tears come from.
The river doesn't know it is two parts hydrogen;
it is three parts time and one part dream.
The river knows if a duck's quack echoes.
The river knows the smell of iris blossoms,
and the lick of cold silt.
I think the river knows where we are going,
and I don't mean North and South.
The river knows how to reveal and how to frolic
these are lessons for a poet.



Photo credit: Share the River

JAWBONE PLEDGE

By Carrie George, Cameron Gorman,
Samantha Horwitz, and Charlie Malone

I pledge allegiance to the Cuyahoga, its crooked chin and cheek.
To the heron who stands on the ragged bank,
slender beak poking at the wet sky —
I pledge allegiance to the pinch of Pinery Narrows crossed by
iron trusses, to its song of industry and transportation.
To the migrating warblers, their visiting
sopranos repeating overhead.
To the beeches and oaks clinging to steep valley walls,
To spotted, silvery sycamores and fat, fissured
cottonwoods lining the floodplain.
To the rising burbles of a submerged turtle, her shell
thick with algae from the body of the canal.
To children's laughter lost in waves carried,
a soccer ball, a bobber.
Not to purple mountains,
just the rising smoke of the train. To the daffodil-painted station.
Not to the bird on an old quarter
but eagles nesting on a tangle of limbs
on a bare tree above the marsh,
their white heads flashing above the nest's rim.
I pledge allegiance to the river water, sometimes roaring,
sometimes sauntering once dammed and deprived,
now but healing, patient and hopeful.

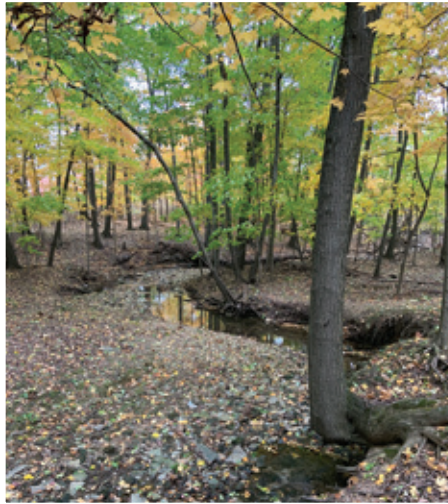
Poem after Gary Snyder

Urban Parks, continued from page 1

has been such a welcome development for the larger community.

A few of these notable projects include:

- The Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail is a 100-plus-mile recreational economic engine that provides millions of people a connection between Akron and downtown Cleveland.
- The Cleveland Foundation Lake-Link Centennial Trail is the newest off-shoot path, going through the heart of the Flats to Lake Erie and Wendy Park/Whiskey Island.
- In Ohio, less than 15 percent of the Lake Erie shoreline is publicly accessible. Cleveland Metroparks Lakefront, Euclid Creek, Edgewater and Huntington reservations are welcoming millions per year to the lakeshore, complementing the amazing ring of protected lands and waterways that have been the backbone of our region for over a century. A thesis could be written on the Cleveland Metroparks system and its importance to every one of us -- directly and indirectly.
- Irishtown Bend Park is a massive undertaking to not only stabilize the Cuyahoga River shipping channel -- a \$3.5 billion asset to the region -- but also create a direct waterfront connection from Ohio City, including residents of CMHA's Riverview Terrace.
- Morgana Bluffs Nature Preserve and Learning Center, which opened Oct. 18, is a 4.5-acre natural refuge in Cleveland's Slavic Village neighborhood. It creates a learning lab for thousands of children from the neighborhood, Mound STEM



School and Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland.

- In Parma, a city where green space makes up less than 7 percent of the total acreage, West Creek Reservation -- the 16th park in the Metroparks Emerald Necklace -- is now getting more than 175,000 visitors per year.

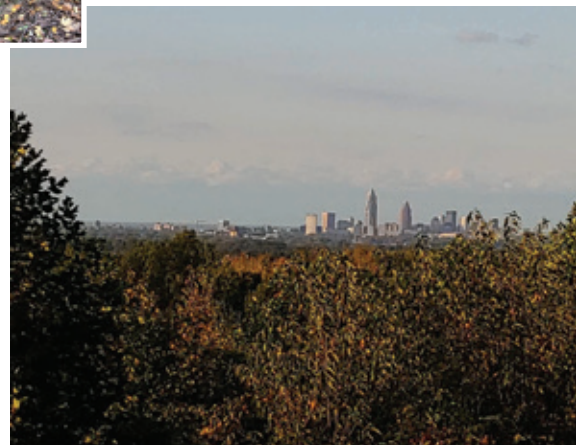
According to the National Recreation and Park Association, 93 percent of people believe it is important to protect natural resources with parks, trails and greenspaces, with 85 percent believing that such high-quality park and recreational amenities are a factor in choosing a place to live.

In addition, parks and green spaces are vital to a community and region, not only because of their recreational attributes, but also for ecological functionality -- providing tree canopy cover, shielding from heat island effects, filtering storm water and other pollution, supplying habitat for wildlife and pollinators, and, inevitably, protecting drinking water.

Following the late 1950s, development was at an all-time high, and natural waterways, forests and habitat became disconnected and, in many cases, inaccessible. To get to a park, people had to drive.

While there is no turning back the clock on development, we are making it easier for families to enjoy nature by creating more opportunities right in their back yards.

Protect, restore, connect.



Derek Schafer is executive director of West Creek Conservancy, an organization centered in Cuyahoga County with operations reaching into five adjacent counties. He is responsible for implementing the Conservancy's land acquisition initiatives, watershed restoration projects and trail/greenway development programs. In his 15-plus years with West Creek, he has seen through the formation of West Creek Reservation, the implementation of the largest community connector the Cuyahoga Valley National Park and played a key role in the creation of the future Irishtown Bend Park.

Igniting the Future

Throughout 2019, West Creek Conservancy led the Xtinguish Celebration in commemoration of 50 years of restoration since the famed 1969 Cuyahoga River Fire. There were over 300 organizations, municipalities, agencies, and corporate partners involved; bringing the entire watershed in solidarity around our shared waterway. Through our original programming we have managed to directly engage over 100,000 individuals, in addition to 60 featured articles from 22 publications, a guest spotlight on NPR, front page attention in the Plain Dealer, the installation of 4 pieces of permanent public art on the river, and the privilege to work closely and enhance our partners efforts as well. The Xtinguish Celebration included 2 main focused programs that were executed throughout the year. These efforts were the TorchFest and the Crooked River Conversations.

TorchFest

The TorchFest occurred between June 19th and June 22nd along the full length of the 100-mile Cuyahoga River. This consisted of a water honoring and seven festivals from the headwaters to the mouth of the waterway. There were designated, handpicked torchbearers for each segment. These torchbearers are the voices of our river's unsung heroes that deserved the limelight for this notable event.

We began the journey at Headwaters Park in Geauga Park District with a water-honoring ceremony led by the Lake Erie Native American Council. Being the keepers

of our lands and waters, it was an honor to have their voices be the first heard to carry our team downriver. We then traveled to Mantua, Kent, Cuyahoga Falls, Akron, Peninsula, Cuyahoga Valley National Park (CVNP), and Cleveland for arts/culture/music festivals in each of the respective locations. Along the trip Xtinguish sculptures were appropriately unveiled in Kent, Cuyahoga



Falls, Peninsula, and CVNP. The torchbearers, in order, were Marlys Rambeau- Lake Erie Native American Council, Elaine Marsh- Friends of the Crooked River, Don Howdysell- Cuyahoga Falls Kayak Race, Gary Whidden- 'Citizen of the Valley', Meg Plona- CVNP, and Frank Samsel- first to successfully clean up the Cuyahoga with his Putzfrau boat.

The terminus of the TorchFest procession occurred during Share the River's Blazing Paddles Paddleboard Race. It formally ended with ceremonies and festivities in partnership with the City of Cleveland's Cuyahoga50 effort. The TorchFest was supported by The Cleveland Foundation, Cuyahoga River Restoration, Burning River Adventures, Fran and Jules Belkin, ASCVB, CVNP and all our locational sponsors.

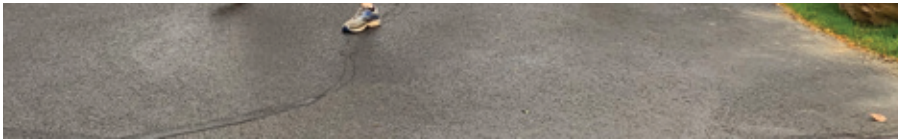
Crooked River Conversations

The Crooked River Conversations widened the lens focused on the river through photography, film, cocktails,



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2019 Hemlock Hustle Challenge



A trail 15 years in the making opened to the public on September 14th. The Hemlock Creek Trail is 1.7 miles long, inclusive of multiple bridge trusses over the creek and Cuyahoga River, and connects Independence to the historic Ohio and Erie Canal Towpath Trail in the Cuyahoga Valley National Park. This is the largest community connector to CVNP and a pivotal linkage to the West Creek Greenway. The City of Independence was a huge supporter and partner on the project.

To further commemorate the trail, we held our annual race there on September 28th. The rain cleared just in time for runners to hustle their way to the finish line, accompanied by Sasquatch of course! Before the race, attendees were able to enjoy snacks and sip on some delicious hot chocolate and coffee courtesy of The Morning Owl Coffee Bar. Our participants were able to take in the views of the beautiful bridges, the river, and the beginning of the fall foliage, while pacing themselves for the challenging 11% grade uphill run back. Once they crossed the finish line, attendees were able to enjoy some breakfast courtesy of A Taste of Excellence and sip on some local Great Lakes Brewing Company brew.

From the attendees - to our sponsors/donors - to our volunteers, we would like to extend a sincere thank you to all who helped make this event a success! Funds raised from this event helps West Creek Conservancy work towards our mission ~ to create a greener Greater Cleveland! We are excited to challenge more runners with the Hemlock Hustle Relay Run on May 2, 2020. For more info on this event and future events, please visit www.westcreek.org.

To learn more about our work in the community, visit www.westcreek.org, call us at 216-749-3720 ext 10, or email info@westcreek.org. Don't forget to follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram!

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2019 Restoration Successes

West Creek Headwaters Restoration “Buckeye”



A stretch of West Creek in Parma, one that had become sandwiched between a power equipment retailer and a senior living center had been moved and channelized completely diminishing its ecological value. The nearly 700 linear feet of channelized stream contained an unnatural 90-degree angle, and had no signs of viable wildlife habitat, nor functional floodplain. Following the successful acquisition, West Creek Conservancy commissioned Biohabitats to relocate and re-meander this stretch, connecting and creating a robust floodplain (a stage 0 channel) for stormwater

retention as well as creating an urban oasis for wildlife. The riffle structures and step pools allowed for oxygenation of the water and plantings along the project area help better filter out the pollutants before heading downstream. Since restoration, amphibious life has taken hold, birds are nesting, and pressure has been taken off of the system downstream.

This project was supported by the OhioEPA 319 Program, City of Parma and Mayor DeGeeter, Metro Health, West Creek Conservancy, NEORSD, Biohabitats, and Cleveland Metroparks Watershed Volunteer Program.

West Creek Headwaters Restoration “Coventry”

Just North of Normandy High School, on a headwater stream that feeds West Creek, there was an incised 300 linear foot area where the banks were failing, and floodplains weren't being utilized to their fullest potential. Again, following successful acquisition, West Creek Conservancy commissioned EnviroScience to engineer and stabilize these banks and reconnect the stream to the adjacent inaccessible floodplain.

Restoration included adding toe rock, bioengineering, and branch layering. Upstream, many riffles were regraded to make the floodplain more accessible. The failing hillsides were graded back and secured to reduce the sediment loading downstream. The outlet culvert that goes under Coventry Drive was protected and cleaned of debris.



This project was supported by the OhioEPA 319 Program, City of Parma and Mayor DeGeeter, Cleveland Metroparks, West Creek Conservancy, EnviroScience, River Reach Construction, and NEORSD.

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Volunteering with West Creek

We would like to thank our most recent volunteers for all of their hard work! Together, we planted over 150 trees, cleaned up 10 different properties, built 3 rain gardens and pollinator gardens, marked 760 storm drains, and maintained Spring Hill Nursery. Conservation is very important in our urban setting and so is the stewardship of our lands. We couldn't have done all of this without your help. Thanks for helping us make our community a greener, greater place to live!

CSA Group helped us maintain Spring Hill Nursery, by transplanting plants and working on our compost bin, with nursery lead, Terry Greathouse.



Cox Business was a huge help at our native nursery and the grounds. Together, we transplanted trees and maintained the stream nearby.



In partnership with Cuyahoga Soil & Water Conservation District and Hawthorn School, we built a pollinator garden at the new Conservancy office!



Entercom Communications joined us to take on Kinsman Farm on Earth Day! We prepared a large section of the farm to get it ready for the growing season.

**Are you, or your company,
interested in volunteering?**

Contact Emily at emily@westcreek.org
or 216-749-3720 ext. 11.

Restoration Success, continued from page 7

Mill Creek Headwaters Restoration in Highland Hills

West Creek Conservancy has secured funding and is commissioning EnviroScience to restore a degraded stretch of Mill Creek just downstream from the Highland Park Golf Course in the Village of Highland Hills. This portion of the creek has 12ft tall eroding banks, a decommissioned bridge (which we will be removing), inaccessible floodplains, and a pond we will be taking a regenerative approach toward restoring. This project will take place mid-2020!

This project was supported by the OhioEPA 319 Program, Village of Highland Hills, City of Cleveland, West Creek Conservancy, Mill Creek Watershed Partnership, NEORSD, and EnviroScience.



Stickney Creek- Brooklyn Memorial Park Restoration



In partnership with Big Creek Connects and Mayor Gallagher of the City of Brooklyn, West Creek Conservancy has been awarded funds to restore Stickney Creek within Brooklyn's Veterans Memorial Park. This stretch has been increasingly eroding, compromising city infrastructure and sending large amounts of sediment downstream. We will be reconnecting the floodplain, stabilizing the bank, and planning for reconnecting the trail system to keep a good solid loop for residents to enjoy their newly restored waterway!

This project was supported by the OhioEPA, City of Brooklyn and Mayor Gallagher, West Creek Conservancy, Big Creek Connects, and NEORSD..

Pints & Pierogies in the Park

On October 18, 2019, West Creek Conservancy and Young Professionals of Parma co-chaired Pints and Pierogies in the Park at the Watershed Stewardship Center in West Creek Reservation. The event included a



perfect fall dinner of pierogies (courtesy of Rudy's Strudel and Bakery), sausage (courtesy of State Meats), plenty of Great Lakes Brewing Company beer, and lively music by Baker's Basement.

We appreciate all that sponsored and the 200+ attendees that came out to show their support for West Creek Conservancy and the Young Professionals of Parma. Proceeds go towards supporting our missions to strengthen Parma and the Greater Cleveland area.



2019 Up! A Creek Conservation Gala

On August 17, 2019, friends, partners, and community supporters gathered at Windows on the River to celebrate 22 years of conservation work. With a sold-out crowd of 600 attendees enthusiastically participating in the live/silent auctions and raffles, we successfully raised funds for West Creek Conservancy's land and water conservation programs throughout Northeast Ohio.

The evening kicked off with cocktail hour in the Greater Cleveland Aquarium, where guests toured the aquarium as they mingled over hors d'oeuvres and cocktails. The



evening also featured an elegant dinner, delicious desserts from A Taste of Excellence and Nothing Bundt Cake, plentiful local brew & spirits, and lively music, courtesy of Zach Friedhof and K Street Band. MC/

Auctioneer Bob Hale masterfully kept the live auction crowd engaged and entertained as they raised their bid paddles in support of the Conservancy's efforts. Due to the support of over 150 generous businesses, we were able to comprise six incredible live auction prizes, five silent auction prizes, and thirty-four raffle baskets.

The always-popular wine toss, a lively game of Heads or Tails, cornhole and Jenga on the riverfront patio, and a photo booth rounded out the options for partygoers throughout the evening.

Cox Communications

Cox Communications is committed to creating meaningful moments of human connection through broadband applications and services. The largest private telecom company in America, we proudly serve six million homes and businesses across 18 states. We're dedicated to empowering others to build a better future and celebrate diverse products, people, suppliers, communities and the characteristics that makes each one unique. Cox Communications is the largest division of Cox Enterprises, a family-owned business founded in 1898 by Governor James M. Cox.

A three-term governor of Ohio, James Cox launched what today is known as Cox Enterprises with the acquisition of the Dayton Evening News. He fostered within



his employees a sense of obligation to take care of the communities in which they lived, concentrating on both the less fortunate and the great outdoors. Today, his spirit of charity is seen most clearly in the company's support of the Connect2Compete program, a low-cost, high-speed internet offering for families of school children who are enrolled in low-income assistance programs. In addition, Cox has devoted resources in support of the missions of organizations like West Creek Conservancy, both through charitable grants and volunteerism, to clean up and restore natural resources while ensuring future generations understand the great responsibility they have for preserving Ohio's wild and unspoiled beauty.

The celebration was sponsored, in part, by our tremendous community partners – DiGeronimo Companies and Cox Business. We thank each of the nearly 50 companies and organizations who also generously sponsored the event. Of course, we also thank our Events Committee for pulling it all together. Finally, we extend our sincere appreciation to our honorary event chair, Victor DiGeronimo Jr., CEO of DiGeronimo Companies. We could not have pulled off the event without your ongoing partnership! We would like to extend our gratitude to the community of donors, volunteers, and supporters who made it all possible!



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Since 1956, we have been a leader in challenging heavy civil construction and now we bring our experience and reputation for honesty, integrity and outstanding performance to the world of development, design and management in order to ensure the best results for our partners, our sub-contractors and our community.

By definition, a partner is an ally, a teammate, someone to be treated as family. We've been the trusted development and construction partner for hundreds of companies, offering solutions for every project from the ground up. For 65 years, we've combined family-values and integrity with unrivaled standards through a diverse portfolio of services. DiGeronimo Companies is not just a choice—we're a value-added partner for all of your project needs.

With a common vision of preserving nature and unique ecological resources, the DiGeronimo Companies and West Creek Conservancy are natural partners. We truly believe in their mission to protect and enhance our Greater Cleveland neighborhoods and honored to be recognized with the Legacy Preservation Award in 2019.



FEATURED AUCTION PRIZE: HERE WE GO BROWNIES

Get your Brown's gear ready! Enjoy a 10-person suite to a Cleveland Browns game with parking and a suite visit from Hanford Dixon, Kevin Mack, and Bernie Kosar. Before the game, you and 3 guests will receive on-field passes and First Energy footballs for autographs. This package also includes autographed footballs from Denzel Ward and Jarvis Landry and an autographed Nick Chubb picture.



FEATURED RAFFLE PRIZE:

SUP GREAT LAKES

Paddleboard lessons for 2 and \$150 gift card to Great Lakes Brewing Company and tour. (\$330)



**We hope to see you at next year's
Up! A Creek event on September
26, 2020 at Windows on the River!**

Igniting the Future, continued from page 5

dialogue and beyond. The conversations were as follows:

Crooked Cocktail:

Designation of an official cocktail in partnership with the US Bartenders Guild at the Cleveland Bar Association.

Crooked Composition

production of two original songs with Riparious that were published on Rock The Lake and Cleveland.com.

Crooked Cinema

co-hosting a 48-Hour Film Project (48HFP)-Xtinguish where 6 local film crews came together to create films on and around the River.

Crooked Creations

engaging over 335 students from 15 schools and youth organizations that created river-oriented art including paintings, posters (through the Cuyahoga SWCD), and poems (from Lake Erie Ink and Kent State's WICK Poetry Center).

Crooked Canvas

Helped to coordinate the re-commissioning of Wyland to restore the "Song of the Whales" mural on the Cleveland Public Power building on the lakeshore in partnership with the City of Cleveland and the Wyland Foundation.

Crooked Chronicles

A dialogue series incorporating scholars Kristin Ohlson (author- *The Soil Will Save Us*), the Stradling Brothers (authors- *Where the River Burned*), Will Friedman- Cleveland Port Authority, Bryan Stubbs- Cleveland Water Alliance, and numerous others. Subjects focused on the economy, culture, soil and agriculture, and past/future river-environmental efforts as well.



Crooked River Contrasts

A traveling photo art exhibit that incorporated historical Cuyahoga River photos in 'contrast' to some of the more modern photos taken by eight esteemed photographers, making stops at eleven regional galleries, three festivals, two conferences, and our very own Up! A Creek Conservation Gala. This conversation as well as the Crooked Chronicles were supported by the Cleveland Foundation, Tri-C's Mandel Humanities Center, ASCVB, Summit SWCD, Cuyahoga SWCD, Fran and Jules Belkin, Cleveland Hopkins International Airport, Ohio Humanities Council, CVNP, and all of our partnering galleries.

Looking Forward

Building off the momentum and excitement that the Xtinguish Celebration fostered, West Creek Conservancy partnered with PHASTAR to acquire and subsequently restore the Putzfrau - the first boat to help clean up the Cuyahoga River. This exciting project will protect and restore the historical vessel that helped clean up our waterways and connect students and the public to the history of our region through our natural resources on the water. Early supporters of this effort include The Cyrus Eaton Foundation, Char and Chuck Fowler Family Foundation, Ohio Humanities Council, and numerous individual donors.



Photo credit: Share the River

Nature in Your Community

Upper Cuyahoga Conservation

Working in a unique partnership with The Nature Conservancy, West Creek Conservancy coordinated the preservation of 119 acres in the headwaters of the Cuyahoga River, in Montville Township, Geauga County. Over the course of the next couple years, significant stream and wetland restoration will occur - providing vital ecological functionality for the Cuyahoga River watershed. "The Nature Conservancy is really excited to collaborate with West Creek Conservancy on the purchase and restoration of the 119-acre property, which is situated in the very headwaters of the Cuyahoga River watershed. Through the project, we



aim to restore and protect 44.6 acres of wetlands and 74 acres of forested buffers. Of the wetlands already existing on site there are 30.5 acres of Category 3 wetlands, which is the classification given to the highest quality wetlands in the state. Additionally,

an endowment will be set up to fund long-term management of the site into perpetuity."

- Devin Schenk, Program Manager, The Nature Conservancy



Expanding West Creek Reservation

Since 1997, WCC has been tasked with preserving lands within the West Creek watershed, which began with the larger tract of land located off W. Ridgewood in the City of Parma, which is now the 16th gem in the Cleveland Metroparks Emerald Necklace, topping over 500 acres. Once a forgotten valley the park is now receiving over 175,000 visitors each year, including the thousands of children educated at the Watershed Stewardship Center - an epicenter of urban watershed restoration, education

and professional development; all made possible because of a unique public-private partnership between WCC, Cleveland Metroparks, the City of Parma and the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District. Within the last 12 months, WCC has preserved an additional 70+ acres in the watershed, including miles of stream channel, important floodplain, upland forests and wetland complexes. The West Creek watershed, following WWII, experienced some of the fastest growth in the state if not the country. WCC's initiatives are helping to literally piece back together an otherwise broken puzzle of green space and water ways.



Partnerships Protecting Parkland

West Creek Conservancy recently partnered with the Portage Park District in protecting an additional 12.7 acres of woods and wetlands that was added to Towner's Woods Park in Franklin Township near Kent. The Park District was contacted by the neighbors who desired to sell their back acreage that is adjacent to both the 245-acre Towner's Woods and the PORTAGE Hike and Bike Trail that runs between Kent and Ravenna. West Creek was put in contact with the landowner to negotiate a purchase agreement, potentially using wetlands mitigation funds to buy it. When the timing didn't work out for that, WCC and PPD decided to partner on a Clean Ohio Greenspace Fund grant application in January, 2019, which was successful.



"We appreciate West Creek Conservancy's partnership in acquiring this beautiful addition to our park system. The permanent conservation of this parcel helps to protect very special wetlands habitat with rare bog and fen species, and serene natural beauty along the trail", said Christine Craycroft, Executive Director, Portage Park District.

East Branch Rocky River



Within the last 7 years WCC has assisted various partners in protecting land along waterways in the Rocky River Watershed, including 49 acres along the East Branch, 30+ acres in the Baldwin Creek Watershed, and 7 acres along Healey Creek. This summer, we worked with a family to protect what is essentially their backyard, a stream teeming with fish, beaver, soft shelled turtles, and an amazing Blue Heron Rookery.



Mud Brook Beginnings

Straddled along the municipal lines of Akron and Cuyahoga Falls, WCC has been successful in protecting over 74-acres of land along Mud Brook, a tributary to the Cuyahoga. Forested and functional floodplain - everything that Mud Brook really needs, with over 1-mile of stream corridor between them!



New nature preserve in Slavic Village opens with a flurry of seed ‘bombs’

The 4-acre Morgana Bluffs Nature Preserve and Learning Center in Cleveland’s Slavic Village neighborhood was dedicated October 18 by kids and guests chucking milkweed seed “bombs” into the new urban park.

The dedication ceremony, which included about 150 public officials, neighborhood advocates, project partners and members of Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland’s Broadway Club, marked the opening of the preserve on property where the powerhouse for the massive Cleveland Worsted Mill Co. complex once stood. The Broadway Avenue site is next to BGCC’s Broadway Club, the Morgana Run Trail and Cleveland Metropolitan School District’s Mound STEM School. The preserve will be used for nature-based programming. It is open to the public.

“All kids need outdoor experiences to become responsible and productive adults. This project will give approximately 1,700 youth in this neighborhood access to a place where they can discover nature,” said Ron Soeder, president and CEO of Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland, which coordinated the project along with, the City of Cleveland, Cleveland Metropolitan School District,

“All kids need outdoor experiences to become responsible and productive adults. This project will give approximately 1,700 youth in this neighborhood access to a place where they can discover nature.”

- Ron Soeder,

President & CEO, Boys & Girls Club of Cleveland

the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District, the Clean Ohio Fund, the Ohio & Erie Canalway, Slavic Village Development Corporation and West Creek Conservancy.

Soeder added, “This project is an investment in the neighborhood and the opportunity to turn a vacant lot into a community asset.” He said the entire learning center “campus” – the project site plus the adjacent school, trail and BGCC properties – actually totals about 13.5 acres.

The project, which features trails, boardwalks and



an amphitheater, was funded with money from the state’s Clean Ohio Greenspace Conservation Fund (\$297,790), a Green Infrastructure Grant from the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District (\$242,420) and the Ohio & Erie Canalway Strategic Initiative Program (\$46,230). In addition, key in-kind services were provided by West Creek Conservancy (consulting and planning), Cleveland Metropolitan School District (donated conservation easement) and Slavic Village Development (consulting and planning). Third Federal Foundation has also agreed to assist with grounds maintenance.

The project improves the quality of the existing wetlands, restores degraded landscapes, removes invasive plant species, creates areas for outdoor programming, improves water quality and protects rare plant and animal species.

Attendees and Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland mem-

bers tossed milkweed seed “bombs” – seeds encased in mud – into the new preserve to mark the opening. The seed bombs will promote the growth of milkweed, the sole host plant of the endangered monarch butterfly.

Worsted Mill, which operated from 1878 to 1956, was once one of the largest garment manufacturers in the country. The factory sat on the upper property that is now Boys & Girls Clubs of Cleveland’s headquarters, while its powerhouse was located on the project site below.

After the mill closed, the buildings were never fully occu-

pied, though sometimes used as warehouses for smaller firms and other times being vacant. On July 4, 1993 a devastating fire destroyed the complex.

In 2011, the city and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency conducted an environmental assessment and remediation on the lower portion of the site, cleaning up remnants of a junkyard, reviewing fuel tank locations and removing a crumbling smokestack. The remediation also removed several tons of junk tires and filled in the old tunnels that led to the upper mill site.

Irishtown Bend

West Creek Conservancy, LAND studio, the Port Authority, and Ohio City Inc. are working to transform Irishtown Bend into an urban park connecting Ohio City to downtown and Lake Erie. Because the scale of the project is such that it will take years to complete, the partners are implementing shorter-term interventions on the hilltop along West 25th Street.

Progress has been made in regard to the stabilization of the hillside. In July, the U.S. Department of Transportation awarded a \$9 million grant to the Port to install bulkheads necessary to protect the river from a landslide. In addition, a \$1.8 million commitment was made by Cuyahoga County to fund the relocation and reconstruction of Franklin Avenue—a key component of Irishtown Bend Vision Plan.

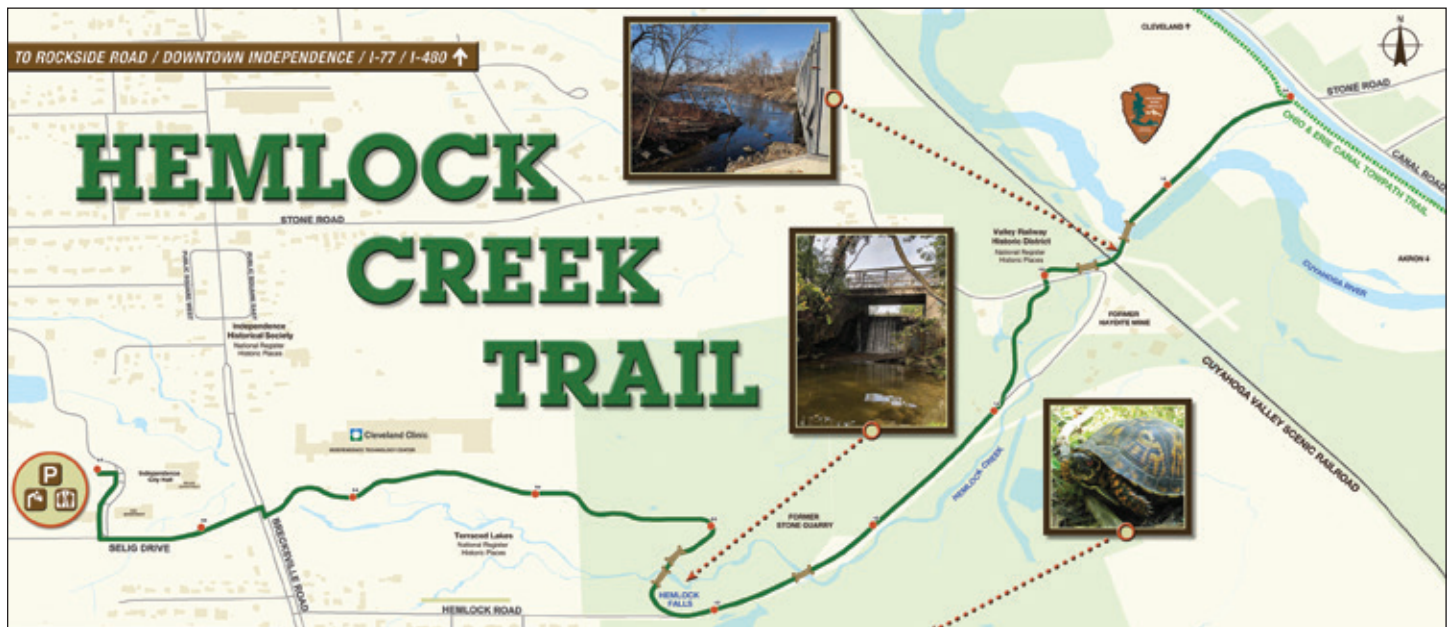
In June, LAND studio and West Creek Conservancy completed the transfer of over twelve acres of land and two buildings from



CMHA. This transfer gives the project partners site control over all but 2 parcels within the future park’s footprint. It is expected that the buildings will be demolished during the first half of 2020.

The Port has contracted with Osborn Engineering to fully engineer the hillside on an 18-month process. Once that work has established the new grading contours of the hillside, project partners can begin turning the Irishtown Bend Vision Plan into schematic plans for the park. Scott Cataffa of Plural (formerly with CMG) will develop a Phase 1 design plan for the neighborhood park along the upper bank of Irishtown Bend parallel to West 25th Street between Detroit and Bridge Avenues. To date, support for hilltop design work has been secured from the Tecovas Foundation, Dominion Energy, the Fred A. Lennon Charitable Trust, and the Louise H. and David S. Ingalls Foundation.

Hemlock Creek Trail OPENED!



Have you hiked the newest & largest community connector to the Cuyahoga Valley National Park and Towpath Trail? The Hemlock Creek Trail, almost 2 miles long with a 200-foot bridge spanning the Cuyahoga River, opened this fall in Independence off Brecksville Road!

The project culminates over 14 years of planning between the City of Independence, West Creek Conservancy, Cuyahoga Valley National Park and Cumberland Development. Funders for this project

include: Federal Transportation Bill, ODNR Clean Ohio Trails Fund, The City of Independence, the Ohio & Erie Canalway Association, Rails to Trails Conservancy, Coca-Cola Foundation, Independence Garden Club, and individuals - too many to enumerate.

This new all-purpose trail is a key part of the 25-mile West Creek Greenway. The Greenway radiates from West Creek Valley in Parma, linking the Towpath Trail in Cuyahoga Valley National Park

to neighborhoods across seven communities. About 50,000 people live or work within a 15-minute walk of the proposed West Creek Greenway. When the entire Greenway is complete, you will be able to travel from the Towpath Trail in Valley View to Big Creek Reservation in Parma Heights to West Creek and Ohio & Erie Canal Reservations as well as to Brooklyn Heights Park and numerous other city parks, many of which have been expanded through the efforts of West Creek Conservancy.

Conservancy Office

From 2003 to 2018, our offices were located in an office building off Rockside Road, but as the organization expanded, so did our need for space, as well as a need for us to be in our element. As of June 2019, we officially moved our offices (still in Parma) into a house we successfully retrofitted into an office. With amazing support provided by The Cleveland Foundation and ArcelorMittal, we were able to not only make it



a working/functional office, but such support provided the opportunity to install a geothermal heating and cooling system and a 16-panel solar array. Of course we also built a series of rain gardens, installed rain barrels, and are working to restore the forest understory. Eventually, this property will also provide a significant trail access point to the West Creek Greenway, and connection to Seven Hills, which will lead to the Hemlock Creek Trail, and Towpath Trail.

We are sincerely appreciative of the support provided by The Cleveland Foundation and ArcelorMittal enabling us to create a facility not only functional for our conservation operations, but also as a facility with model green energy and storm water control practices.



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Yes, I want to help West Creek Conservancy and help protect greenspaces in Greater Cleveland.

Enclosed is my tax deductible contribution of:

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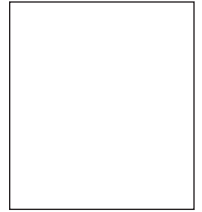
You can also join by credit card online at
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Connect with us!   

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Welcome New Board Member: Robert Brill



Robert is the Vice President and Market Leader for Cox Communications, Cleveland. A native of Northeast Ohio, he is active in supporting the local communities and serves on the Board of Directors for the Parma Area Chamber of Commerce. "I strive to leave the planet a better place and I am proud to support and serve West Creek Conservancy," says Robert.

Upcoming Events

Annual Meeting

April 21, West Creek Watershed Stewardship Center

Hemlock Hustle Relay Race

May 2, Hemlock Creek Trail

Greater Cleveland Trails and Greenways Conference

June 11, Lago East Bank

Up! A Creek

September 26, Windows on the River

Pints and Pierogies

October 16, West Creek Watershed Stewardship Center

For more information, visit: Westcreek.org or contact us at info@westcreek.org or 216-749-3720 ext. 10