

Notes from:

# WEST CREEK CONSERVANCY

a land trust serving Northeast Ohio

## Progress Through Partnerships: Irishtown Bend

Irishtown Bend (ITB), once the site of a 19th-century Irish settlement, is a largely deserted, overgrown green oasis that in recent years has geologically moved, slipping enough to split roads and shake up a major sewer line. Because of this, in 2017 a community-based effort created a vision of what the future greenspace could look like. Since then, a coalition of governmental and nonprofit partners have been working together in order to stabilize the hillside and build a 23-acre, waterfront park, replacing and vacant land and buildings with a welcoming space open to all people in Ohio City, Cleveland, and beyond. That space will provide incredible views of the

downtown skyline, which has been obstructed for decades.

Additionally, the new Irishtown Bend Park will improve connections between Ohio City and the Flats, Downtown, the Cuyahoga Riverfront, and Lake Erie through the completion and connection of regional trails like the Redline Greenway, the Towpath Trail, and more.

Demolition of existing buildings, which happened this past spring marked the beginning of the next phase in this process. Including a recently launched effort to conduct more community outreach and engagement with those living closest to the proposed project and

*continued on page 5*



Article courtesy of OhioCity, Inc.



Our mission is to enrich the lives of all people in Northeast Ohio by conserving natural habitats, restoring the ecological value of our region's lands and waters, and expanding opportunities to connect people from all cultures to experience nature and discover our great outdoors.

## Conservancy Intern Recap: Summer 2021

For the summer of 2021 we were able to proudly bring back our Summer Internship Program. The following are articles written by the three students who joined our team this summer... sharing their background and experience. It's not only helpful to have more hands on deck, but it's always valuable to show students the variety of professional opportunities that a career in the environmental field may offer. If you or someone you know might be interested in exploring such internship opportunities with West Creek Conservancy, please email [info@westcreek.org](mailto:info@westcreek.org)

### Critters in the Stream

*By Caitlin Jurcago, summer 2021 intern*

The Cleveland Metroparks has set out on a summer-long mission to assess over one hundred streams within the park system to gain insights on the health of the ecosystems. Claire Weldon, an Aquatic Research Coordinator for the parks, is leading the effort through utilizing the Qualitative Habitat Evaluation Index (QHEI), which is based on criterion for both the physical and biological conditions of a particular stream. My fellow interns and I from West Creek Conservancy had an amazing opportunity to assist Claire on three stream assessments within the temperate oasis of South Chagrin Reservation.

To begin the analysis, a snapshot of each stream of two hundred meters was designated as the area for evaluation. Basic measurements were then taken to get the physical metes and bounds of the stream, such as the width of the channel, deepest pool depth, and substrate material.

While the rocks in the stream don't move, all of the little critters sure do, which makes looking for biological indicators of stream health trickier. To begin the investigation we checked under and in the crevices of the stream rocks for any residencies of salamanders, frogs, or fish. The two main salamander species we discovered in these streams were the northern dusky and the northern two lined.



Along with salamanders, we also surveyed each stream for macroinvertebrates such as crawfish, stoneflies, caddisflies, and mayflies.

Stream assessment at South Chagrin Reservation: Both the physical and biological characteristics reveal information on the health of the stream and its accompanying ecosystem. The physical conditions can indicate any erosion patterns as well as nearby land use. The presence

of pools within and near streams is important as they can serve as essential breeding habitats for amphibians like salamanders, which are indicators of good water quality. The macroinvertebrates that we found present in the streams of South Chagrin Reservation are also known indicators of a healthy stream.

Healthy streams are the building blocks to a healthy watershed, as streams are what foster larger bodies of water such as rivers and lakes. Streams on their own have crucial functions within a watershed which include providing wildlife habitats, flood protection, and drinking water supplies, which is why it is important to protect and restore those that we can! Conducting stream assessments with Claire for just one day provided a new perspective on watershed health, which is one that starts small – with the little creatures that call streams home.



## Field Work at Brooklyn City Halls' Stickney Creek

By Natalie Feighan, summer 2021 intern

Brooklyn Ohio's Stickney Creek is located in Veterans Memorial Park, a public greenspace that provides the community with opportunities for recreation and exploration. At one point however, runoff from the city had gotten so intense that it was causing Stickney Creek to rapidly erode. Stream erosion occurs when a powerful flow of water carries sediments and debris downstream in such a way that the natural landscaping becomes deteriorated. In the case of Stickney Creek, the excessive water flow was a result of stormwater runoff traveling downstream over the city's nearby impervious surfaces. However, the community was able to combat this issue through collective efforts to control the erosion in order to restore the nature of the creek.

*continued on page 11*



## Invasives Removal at Dusty Goldenrod Preserve

By Dana Lettl, summer 2021 intern

In May of 2019, West Creek Conservancy, along with several other partners, including Friends of Euclid Creek and the city of Highland Heights, purchased 37-acre Dusty Goldenrod Preserve as part of a larger mission to improve water quality in and around Northeast Ohio. The preserve is most commonly recognized as the only preserve in Ohio to house

Dusty Goldenrod—a state endangered native plant. The four wetland habitats found on the preserve are part of the remaining 5% natural wetlands found in Euclid Creek, making this site a hidden gem in Northeast Ohio. Part of protecting the natural habitats and wildlife in the Dusty Goldenrod Preserve involves the removal of non-native and invasive species.



Species such as the narrowleaf bitertress, Canada thistle, and monkeywortpose a threat to native Ohio plant species, largely because invasive species can have adverse effects on species diversity and can alter entire habitats. Throughout the spring and summer, it is important that diligent efforts are made to control non-native species populations. Commonly,

invasives are hand-weeded at the root before seed dispersal to prevent future generations. Most invasive removal is targeted near stream heads and along stream banks, but it is also important to weed within the open meadows found at the preserve, a critical habitat for the dusty goldenrod.

While weeding plants might seem like a frivolous and mundane task, removing invasive plants can have ground-up benefits for stream and wetland habitats. Nearby aquatic systems can see direct impacts on diversity and density of macroinvertebrates as a result of invasive removal. These macroinvertebrates within our wetlands serve as a living filter for water pollutants — and healthy streams mean healthy water for us.

# West Creek Greenway Expansion

Throughout 24+ years of conservation within the West Creek watershed, there have been multiple levels of success (to which of course, we thank all of those that have supported or partnered with us). The 'Greenway' vision by those that started West Creek has culminated in the assemblage of hundreds of properties in and around the stream corridor. All in all, nearly 85% of the greenway has been protected – and now it's all about connecting the dots. To highlight a few of the major successes: Brooklyn Heights Park (also referred to as Tuxedo Park) – a 70-acre gem along West Creek; the Seven Hills Hike-Bike Trail – a pivotal east-west connector in the Greenway; the reclamation of the West Creek Confluence (where it meets the Cuyahoga River); the Hemlock Creek Trail (the largest connector to the Towpath Trail); and the heart of the greenway being the creation of the Cleveland Metroparks West Creek Reservation & Watershed Stewardship Center – now topping 180,000 visitors each year (kind of ironic that one of our first publications about the area was titled: From Trash to Treasure).

Simply put, acquiring such land, restoring streams/habitat, and building trails are by no means quick initiatives. In such a densely populated and developed region, these tasks are often expensive, commonly require clean-up/demolition

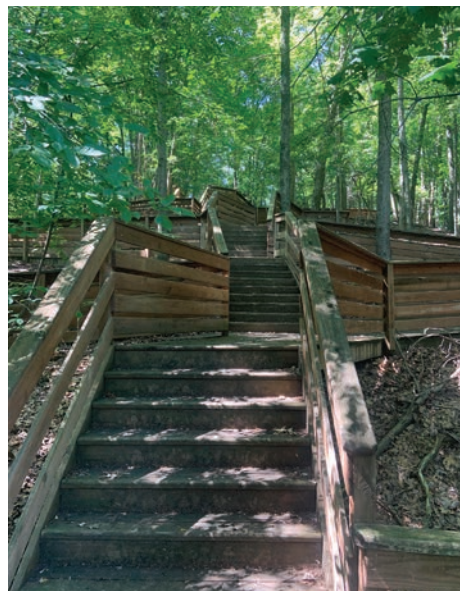
the park. Following a tough ride of unforeseeable events (to say the least), the final phase of demolition of the former Parmadale campus was underway. Once complete, this will add another 80-acres to the park.

**Acquiring such land, restoring streams/habitat, and building trails are by no means quick initiatives.**

or other reclamation needs, and require the coordination of multiple governmental partners, funders, and regulatory entities. Policy and public support are also an ever-changing factor. Year by year, various successful acquisitions have enabled the expansion of the West Creek Reservation. By the end of 2020, the park's boundary formally expanded into the cities of Seven Hills and Independence. By the first of this year, we completed the preservation of the former Padua Franciscan Park; a 19-acre addition and key access and linkage to the park (to undergo restoration in 2022). Just this summer, we were able to tidy up the conservation of 35 acres on the northeast end of

It's important to note that the acquisitions of the above-mentioned properties are rather large in acreage (being 19, 35, or 80). There are so many parcels of land within West Creek Reservation that are a mere 1-acre, 1/3 or even 1/10 of an acre! They were each important, often came with their own set of complexities, or simply took years to negotiate.

Watershed restoration is a long play for regional sustainability - a generational impact. The West Creek Reservation and Greenway continues to expand, protecting waterways, forests and wildlife corridors, while also providing much needed natural areas for all of us to enjoy and which to find respite in.





## Stearns Tree Farm Update & Volunteerism Highlights

Within a 16-acre area of the 48-acre Stearns Farm property, West Creek is working with the City of Parma with support provided by Cuyahoga County to create a native tree nursery that will propagate native trees. These native trees will be utilized to re-forest the tree canopy within the City of Parma and Greater Cuyahoga County region. Multiple additional partnerships are being leveraged to ensure its success as well as provide additional benefits and services to the community.

Though it took a great deal of pre-planning and strategy, the Stearns Native Tree Nursery is well underway! Through our corporate volunteer program we recently hosted volunteer groups from Audacy and Key Bank that helped begin the transformation from a fallow farm to booming and productive tree nursery. This winter and into spring a dedicated group of stakeholders will put together a comprehensive development plan to begin production as early as Spring 2022.



*Above: volunteers from Key Bank. Below: Audacy volunteers*



### *Irishtown Bend, continued from page 1*

creation of a small Committee of Champions, hyper-local residents who are guiding the project team in engagement with the rest of the community in an equitable fashion.

With the help of the Committee of Champions and the entirety of the project team, it is time to start designing the final Irishtown Bend Park, moving from the vision of 2017 to the reality of this beautiful 23-acre change to the face of Cleveland. We are inviting and asking for your input, advice, and support as we move forward.

The Irishtown Bend project is made possible through a collaboration of both public and private partnerships. Alongside LAND studio, Cleveland Metroparks, Ohio City, Inc., West Creek Conservancy, Cleveland Metropolitan Housing Authority, The Port of Cleveland, City of Cleveland, NOACA, NEORSD, and Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless are working to stabilize the Irishtown Bend hillside, creating a trail that connects to the Cuyahoga Valley National Park and a greenspace with spectacular views of the downtown skyline and the Cuyahoga River.



## Stickney Creek Restoration Complete

With the stream restoration complete, and Stickney Creek functioning again as an ecological asset in the City of Brooklyn's Memorial Park, we are proudly collaborating with the City to re-connect portions of the park to the community. Mayor Gallagher and the City of Brooklyn have been awarded an ODNR Recreational Trails Program grant to enhance neighborhood connections, create new trails, and even install a footbridge over the creek. We encourage you to visit this exciting project and experience ecological restoration in a public/private partnership within a high profile city park.

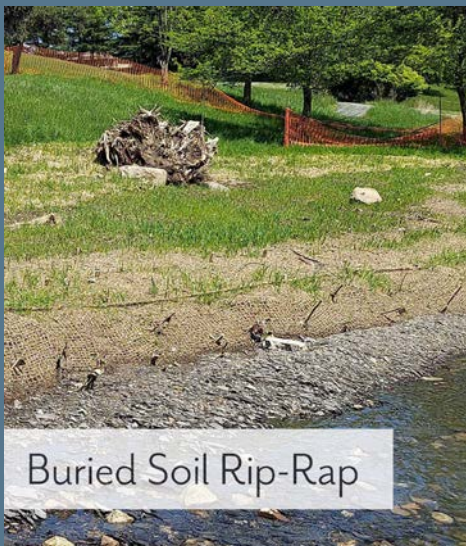
### BEFORE AND AFTER RESTORATION OF STICKNEY CREEK



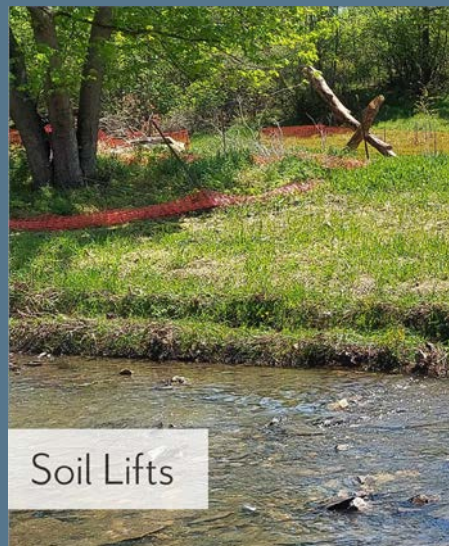
Before and After: Eroded Trail Section



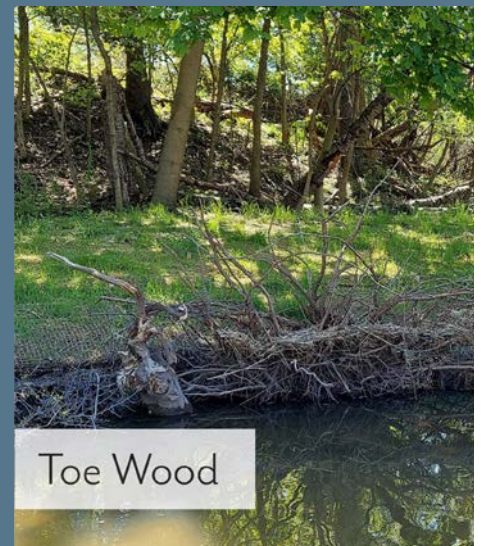
Before and After: Immediately Upstream of Bridge



Buried Soil Rip-Rap



Soil Lifts



Toe Wood

Restoring Stickney Creek required some very special design and construction techniques



## Bird Family Bog Preserve



West Creek is pleased to announce full funding for The Bird Family Bog Preserve from H2Ohio and Clean Ohio. The 171-acre property presented a rare opportunity to protect one of the few extant bogs in Ohio. The bog is the only historically known site in Ohio of the rare and endangered Labrador Tea. The property has been referenced in scholarly studies of peatlands of Ohio for decades, and the level of research and attention to this bog over many years created a unique opportunity to conserve an important natural feature that is likely to yield new findings through the years, working with West Creek's professional and academic partners.

Only two percent of Ohio's peatlands remain which are generally concentrated in Northeast Ohio. This

rare habitat in Ohio remains under threat from development, mining, agriculture, filling, draining, and dredging. The Bird Family Bog has been subject to attempts at drainage over the past 50 years to little avail.

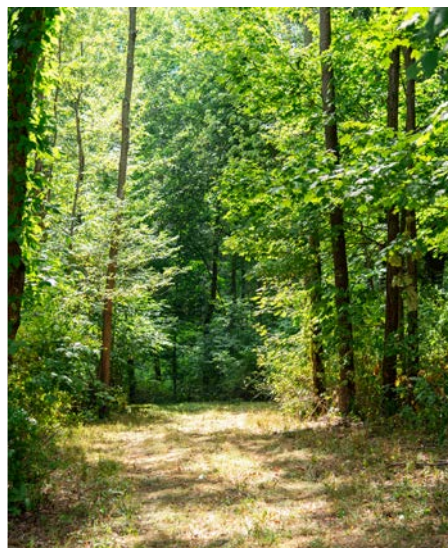
This and other threats to the bog created an immediate need to conserve the property and decrease potential hardwood succession

within the bog. Seven hundred linear feet of tributary to the feeder canal of the Breakneck Creek runs along the northern portion of the property within a 63-acre floodplain area, and the property contains 43 acres of category three wetlands.

The bog is surrounded by a wooded upland buffer and several agricultural fields. The conversion of the agricultural fields to successional riparian upland buffer will further enhance the ecological functionality and diversity of the Bird Bog and provide a vital buffer for the bog.

Resource conservation and elimination of agriculture on the site will help to meet the goals of the Middle Cuyahoga Watershed Action Plan to reduce flooding, reduce sediment and nutrient runoff, and provide opportunities for passive recreation. The property is contiguous to private land conserved through a conservation easement and is within the Portage Park District's envisioned Breakneck Creek Greenway. The

*continued on page 8*



## Why Did I Join West Creek Conservancy's Board of Directors?

**Shimshon Balanson**, Board Member with West Creek

### Why do you support West Creek Conservancy?

It's simple: West Creek's mission aligns with my personal values. The organization does tremendous good throughout NE Ohio through its stewardship, conservation, and remediation activities. I also believe strongly that access to greenspace and natural settings improves quality of life and connectivity in communities.

### How did you first become interested in conservation?

As a child, I spent a lot of time hiking and exploring the outdoors. I first became aware of conservation as a principle through my passion

for animals. Like many Cleveland youth, my first exposure to conservation was through the zoo. National Geographic magazine and PBS programming also played no small part in shaping my perspective.

### As a child, what kind of access did you have to green space? And why was it important?

I grew up in Cleveland, so, as a child, I had access to large, contiguous green space through our great Metroparks system. I also found refuge in a smaller parcel of green space in a vacant lot around the corner from my childhood home and in my small Cleveland Heights backyard. Green space gave me the



freedom to explore, to run around (my parents were the most thankful for that), and the opportunity to get a glimpse of wildlife.

*Bird Family Bog Preserve, continued from page 7*

acquisition and protection of the property meets the goals of the Portage Park District's Master Plan, and the area is identified as a sourcewater protection area for the cities of Ravenna and Kent.

Preserving the entirety of the property was imperative to protection and restoration measures along Breakneck Creek. Conversion to any other use would have been devastating for the bog, as well as associated drinking-water feeder streams and wetland complexes. Continued farming practices would also have impacted the bog. Management plans will include management of potential invasive species (although none have been identified within the bog), reforestation and meadow restoration of former fields, and enhancement of the manmade 3-acre farm pond.

West Creek will be the interim owner of the property while some of the restoration, reforestation, and bog management occur. Ultimately, the property will be turned over to the Portage Park District as a park and preserve.

Projects like this would not be possible without the help and support of our partners, including the Portage Park District, H2Ohio and the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Clean Ohio Greenspace Conservation Fund and the Ohio Public Works Commission, The Nature Conservancy, Ohio Natural Areas and Preserves Association, Cleveland Museum of Natural History, The Ohio State University, Portage Park District Foundation, Rootstown Township, Portage County, and of course the efforts of all of our staff and Board.



## Looking for a Winter Hobby in 2021? Start Winter Native Seed Sowing!

If you enjoy growing seeds, then you need to give winter sowing a try. With winter sowing, you put your seeds outside, so they don't take up space in the house. Plus, you don't have to buy any expensive equipment, or fuss over tender seedlings for months on end.

### What is Winter Sowing?

Winter sowing is a fun and easy way to start seeds outside during the winter. You plant your seeds in miniature greenhouses made from recycled plastic containers, and then put them outside in the cold. Once the weather starts to warm up in the spring, the seeds will germinate at their own pace.

### When Can You Start?

One of the best things about winter sowing is that there is no set schedule. You don't have to think about frost dates or time your plantings to avoid leggy seedlings. You just need to wait until freezing temperatures are here to stay and that's it!



## How to Winter Sow Seeds

Winter sowing is super easy since there is no fancy technique or complicated equipment involved. The basic things you need are soil, containers, and seeds.

Any all-purpose potting soil without fertilizer will do just fine. We like to keep fertilizers out of our natives for the wildlife that enjoy them as well!

There are a lot of different types of containers you can use to make your mini greenhouses for winter sowing.

We found the easiest and most on-hand item is a milk jug or 2-liter bottle. The container should be deep enough to hold 3-4 inches of soil in the bottom with a few inches of headspace for the seedlings to grow.

We recommend starting with native plants or vegetable seeds. This is where you can get creative about what type of plants you want in your yard and what native

wildlife you would like to support with these plants!

Once you picked out the soil, container, and seeds you are ready to setup your winter sowing. First, cut the container in half. Then, poke holes in the bottom and top for drainage and ventilation. Next, fill the bottom of the container with 3-4 inches of your soil. Plant your seeds, making sure you space them at least an inch apart so it is easier to transplant later. Water the seeds in and make sure you label your containers. Lastly, use duct tape to reattach the top of the container.

Move them outside in a spot protected from heavy wind but that gets moisture and full sun. Then forget about them until spring! Usually, the seeds will start to germinate in March so we recommend waiting until at least then to transplant.

# Biodiversity: Critically Important to Our Survival

By Jennifer Hartzell, board member, Bay Village Green Team

There was an article in the New York Times titled “The Most Important Global Meeting You’ve Probably Never Heard of is Now.” No, Caitrin Einhorn, the reporter, was not referring to the climate summit that recently occurred in Glasgow. She was referring to an international environmental meeting happening last



month in China to problem solve the global crisis of a rapid collapse of species and systems. Everyone has heard of the climate crisis and solving that problem is critical to our existence. However, the earth’s biodiversity crisis is equally important and a topic that receives far less attention. Brian O’Donnell, director of the Campaign for Nature, says focusing on only climate change and ignoring biodiversity loss is “(the) equivalent of having a flat tire and a dead battery in your car at the same time. You’re still stuck if you only fix one.”

As with all my columns, I’m going to try to break down this issue for you in a relatable way, and let you know how you as an individual can help!

Over the past century, urbanization has occurred in the United States: 54% of the land in the lower 48 states is made up of cities and suburbs, and 41% is made up of agriculture. We, as humans, have taken over 95% of nature. Lawns and exotic ornamental plants have taken over ecologically productive land. Lawns cover over 40 million acres in the United States, and over 3,400 species of alien plants have invaded 100 million acres, and that is expected to double in five years. Furthermore, since 1990, we have lost at least 20 percent of the average amount of native species in most environments world-wide. Climate change also drives biodiversity loss.

Landscape that is human-dominated is not able to support functioning ecosystems. As a result, biodiversity (the variety of life in a habitat or ecosystem) has greatly suffered. All life depends on biodiversity, including humans

and birds. Local birds would not survive without the insects that have evolved along with native plants. For example, native oak trees have been shown to host over 500 species of caterpillars; Ginkgo trees host only five. This is a significant difference when it takes over 6,000 caterpillars to raise one brood of chickadees. Song birds have been in decline

since the 1960’s, with 40% of them gone so far.

How can you, an individual living in the suburbs of Cleveland, help preserve biodiversity? The answer is actually quite simple, and if you do it, you will absolutely contribute to helping the problem. All you have to do is plant native plants and trees on your property. Planting native plants gives local animals what they need to survive and produce. Every single animal gets their energy from plants or from something that eats plants. This is why insects are a vital component of the ecosystem. Alien ornamental species supports 29 times less biodiversity than native ornamentals. Even modest increases in native plants in suburbs significantly increases the number and species of breeding birds. Native plants also help you use less water, as their deep root systems increase the soil’s capacity to store water. Native plants significantly reduce water runoff and flooding.

How do you know if a plant or tree is native? The Audubon Society has a handy native plant database on their website. All you have to do is enter in your zip code and the plants and trees native to your area pop up. You can search by the type of plant, the type resource the plant provides, and the type of birds it attracts. Also, I have seen more and more “native plant” sections at gardening stores, such as Cahoon Nursery. I hope, as you make landscaping decisions for your home, you will take this issue into consideration and choose only native plants. Your yard will look beautiful, and the nature around us will love it even more.

*Originally printed in Westlake Bay Village Observer 10/19/21*



*Stickney Creek, continued from page 3*

During the time we spent at Stickney Creek, our main purpose was to stabilize the creek using natural restoration practices known as bioengineering. We worked alongside experts and volunteers from a nearby school to install a variety of native plants around the creek. The vegetation was planted in different locations around the site to ensure thorough stabilization.

These locations include along the stream banks, and in various wetland surroundings. When the land becomes eroded and bare, it promotes more erosion because there is nothing to hold back the runoff. Bioengineering however, helps to stabilize the creek by slowing and reducing sediment overflow that would otherwise disrupt the proper soil structure. The incorporation of vegetation works to restore habitats and natural stream functions. An additional benefit of greenery on stream banks is that the plants are able to filter out any impurities that could potentially harm the aquatic ecosystem. Periodically keeping up with these plants helps to ensure that the stream is being maintained and that the erosion is under control.

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**Yes, I want to help West Creek Conservancy and help protect greenspaces in Northeast Ohio.**

Enclosed is my tax deductible contribution of:

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- ☐ Email me updates on programs and member events.

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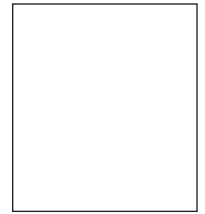
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**THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!**

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## You can help make a difference!

During this season of giving, you can help make a generational impact in your community! You can help protect natural places, help restore rivers and streams, help plant trees, and help build bridges and trails connecting people to nature. There are many unique ways of giving to support the work of West Creek Conservancy, some of which may offer significant tax savings to you.

**Consider a monthly gift or a multi-year pledge** which would provide a vitally important, steady stream of reliable income to West Creek.

**Double your impact!** Consider consulting your employer as you make a gift to West Creek. Many companies will match contributions to charitable organizations.

**Consider the gift of appreciated stock.** You may be able to avoid capital gains taxes by donating stock directly to West Creek.

**Consider an outright gift** of real estate, or any kind of tangible asset, which could be transferred directly to West Creek. This may provide you with the benefit of a charitable deduction.

**Consider a gift of your Retirement Funds.** Those over the age of 70 ½ must withdraw funds from their

retirement account every year (Required Minimum Distribution), typically resulting in state and federal tax consequences. Fortunately, you may be able to avoid the tax consequences by giving a Qualified Charitable Distribution donation to West Creek.

**Consider a Charitable Gift Annuity or Donor Advised Fund.** Doing so would fulfill your giving goals and provide a stream of reliable income to West Creek, while potentially offering you tax savings.

**Plan your giving!** One of the simplest ways to pay tribute to what matters most is to leave a lifetime legacy gift through your will or trust. You may also wish to consider a legacy gift or gift through your life insurance - Your gift will be impactful for generations to come - a gift that keeps on living!

Please consult your tax and legal advisors to better understand the benefits of the many ways to give, and the benefits of the gift of charitable contributions.

**Please visit [www.WestCreek.org](http://www.WestCreek.org) to learn more about helping to make a local impact!**