



## 2021 ANNUAL REPORT







Dear Friends,

Our thoughts have been with you and your families during the past year of hardship. While the pandemic has driven away much of our daily normalcy, we have heard countless stories of how Ohioans found respite in nature and the outdoors. Having access to those areas shows how our communities have been fortunate for the investments made in conservation over the past 100 years.

In 2020 West Creek went through a strategic planning exercise, including updating its vision and mission statements. In particular, West Creek's updated mission statement now says "West Creek enriches the lives of all people in Northeast Ohio...". We want to put an emphasis on all people. In recent years, West Creek and our partners have planned and implemented greenspace in vastly underserved communities in Northeast Ohio. However, too many of our communities still have inadequate greenspace access.

Research has long shown the inequality of America's parks and greenspace. Access to greenspace throughout much of America varies across neighborhoods based on racial and economic boundaries. Looking at our own communities, we find those same boundaries create islands of greenspace inequality right here in Northeast Ohio.

Everyone in our Northeast Ohio community needs access to greenspace. Although greenspace inequality is a national problem, our region should not settle for being another data point of perpetuation, but a model for change. Our region has the potential to be the archetype for the rest of the country. How can we expect a child to grow to care for the earth if they have never experienced the magic of nature?

West Creek will continue protecting, restoring and connecting greenspace, but now with a greater focus on those underserved populations.

As always, do not hesitate to reach out to us with your thoughts.

Eric Sluss  
Chair, Board of Directors

Derek Schafer  
Executive Director



# PROTECT

## SAVING BRANDYWINE PRESERVE

### WEST CREEK ACQUIRES 202-ACRE BRANDYWINE CREEK PROPERTY

After many years of speculation over the future of a 202-acre property along the Brandywine Creek, West Creek Conservancy stepped up and acquired the Brandywine Preserve property located in Boston Heights and Northfield Center Township.

The Brandywine Preserve property is within a thriving commercial area along the heavily traveled Route 8 corridor. West Creek recognized the importance of protecting the property from the threat of development or other unknown outcomes. While the property contains high quality wetland woods and floodplain inundation area from Brandywine Creek, a significant portion of the property was deemed to be developable and is zoned for commercial development.

### A LONG AND STORIED HISTORY

It is hard to imagine a city more passionate about sports than Cleveland. Fans were elated to cheer on the 2016 NBA champs with over 1,200,000 in attendance at a downtown parade! Fans also refer to the city as Believeland - the home of the kardiak kids, the fumble, the shot, and many other painful moments in sports history.

In 1978 the Cleveland Force became the model franchise of the Major Indoor Soccer League, and professional indoor soccer became a hotbed in Cleveland. In 2004, after decades of enthusiasm for the sport, a \$165,000,000 soccer stadium was being planned on the Brandywine Preserve property. However, just a few years later optimism



wore thin, and the Cleveland Force folded, ending an era of indoor soccer in Cleveland and dashing the hopes of an indoor arena on the property.

Still, the vision of a \$265,000,000 Lifestyle Center offering retail, specialty shops, restaurants, hotels, and offices was being pitched for the property. The property was also offered for sale by the developer at well above \$15,000,000.

In May of 2012, the property was foreclosed upon by the mortgage holder. As soon as the mortgage holder took possession of the property and became the landowner, they began to market the property for sale at a price of approximately \$7,500,000.

In 2020, in an effort to liquidate the property, the landowner offered the property through a sealed

bid reserve auction. This became an immediate call to action and West Creek began to aggressively pursue acquisition of the property to mitigate any potential for an unknown outcome for the property. By May of 2020, West Creek made a \$300,000 cash offer for the property with an extraordinarily quick two-week closing. Fortuitously, the offer and quick closing were appealing to the landowner and West Creek closed on the property on June 1, 2020. This would not have been possible without the partial financial backing of the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District, who understood the importance of conservation of this property.

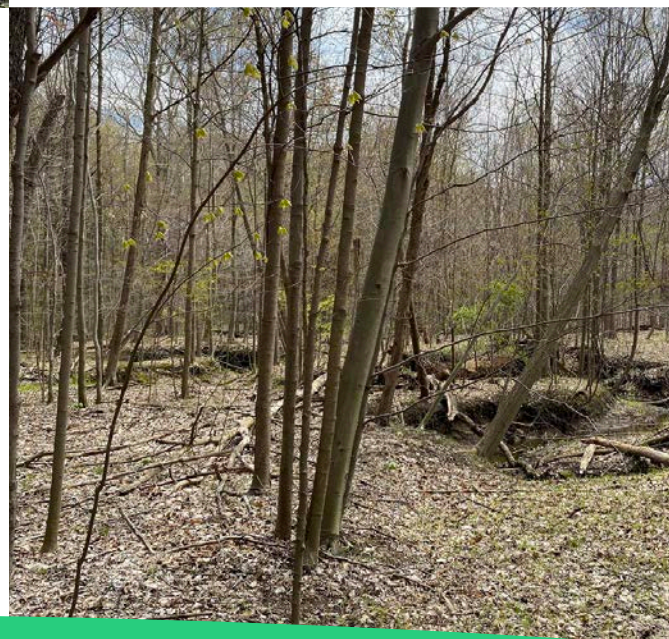
### PROTECT-RESTORE-CONNECT

West Creek views the Brandywine Preserve property as a critical property for flood water storage capacity, floodplain protection, wetland

protection, and stream protection. The Brandywine Preserve property contains approximately 145 acres of high-quality wetlands, over 5,000 feet of Brandywine Creek, 4,000 feet of other unnamed streams, and a considerable amount of floodplain along the Brandywine Creek.

The future of Brandywine Preserve involves a large-scale restoration of the property to re-meander the stream and re-establish the floodplain. This will give the stream opportunity to breathe and filter out pollutants found in storm water runoff. It will also assist in reducing downstream flooding in the Northfield Center and Macedonia communities and beyond.

Once the restoration is complete, West Creek will make the preserve more accessible, so the community can enjoy the 202-acre property, experience nature, and appreciate the great outdoors at the Brandywine Preserve.





# MERRIMAN VALLEY

The Merriman Valley resides just north of the City of Akron and can be considered a gateway to the Cuyahoga Valley National Park. Throughout the Valley you can experience hiking and biking along the Towpath Trail, kayaking and fishing in the Cuyahoga River, as well as trips to Hale Farm and Summit Metro Parks. However, there are also larger tracks of land with abundant wildlife, forest and water resources, such as streams and wetlands, that are often facing threats of development.

West Creek took action to leverage over \$1,500,000 in an effort to permanently protect over 140 acres of land including over 2 miles of waterway. With the awarding of a Clean Ohio Greenspace grant, West Creek subsequently leveraged approximately \$600,000 in private financing to complete a series of three acquisitions. This catalyzed our ability to work with additional stakeholders and landowners

in the Valley to protect another 60 acres; an effort that will topple \$5,000,000 in conservation and restoration.

This is a generational impact to the Merriman Valley by not only extending current park and trail systems, but also adding to the character and uniqueness of the region. The series of properties are located within the Mud Brook and Woodward Creek watersheds, both direct tributaries to the Cuyahoga River, and they each provide a long-term opportunity to further increase conservation and restoration initiatives within the Valley.



# PROTECT

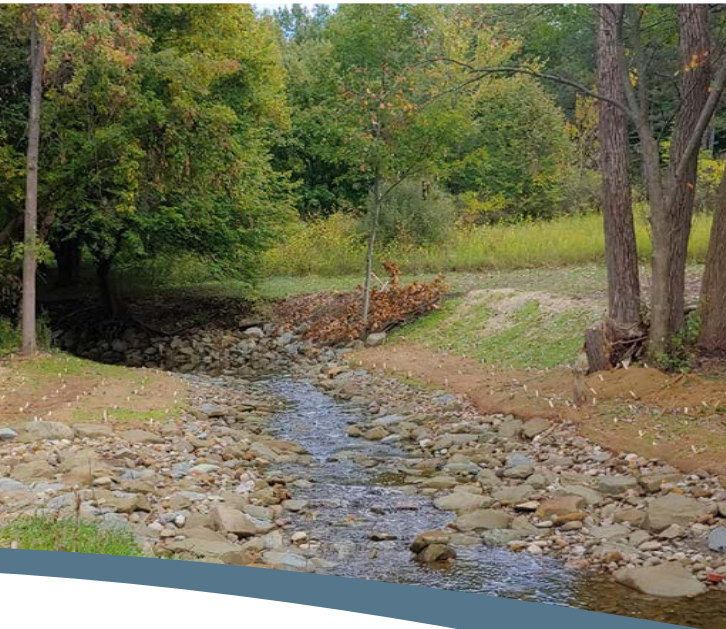
# RESTORE

## MILL CREEK - HARVARD

Approximately 1000 feet of Mill Creek was severely impaired with 12-foot high eroding banks, a failing decommissioned bridge, inaccessible floodplain, and incised banks along the entire area of impact. This section of the stream was eroding and sending massive amounts of sediment downstream. With the support of the City of Cleveland, Village of Highland Hills, Ohio EPA, and NEORSD, West Creek conserved and restored the 10-acre property.

West Creek leveraged funding through the Ohio EPA, which was matched by NEORSD, to stabilize the banks, connect the property's wetlands to the stream and floodplain, and enhance the pond to filter out stormwater pollutants. The strategic engineering of both EnviroScience & GPD, and construction of RiverReach helped West Creek maximize the natural benefits of this section of Mill Creek.

This restoration activity was part of a larger watershed plan that included the 2016 Highland Park Golf Course Restoration, the 2021 Patterson Parkway Restoration, and many more downstream efforts that are working to re-naturalize this very urbanized creek.





# CONNECT

## EXPANDING WEST CREEK RESERVATION AND GREENWAY

If you've followed or otherwise been aware of West Creek Conservancy, you know that a park and greenway bear our namesake – the West Creek Reservation & Greenway Trail System. Since 1997, initiated and driven by local citizens, there has been an effort to restore and reclaim the West Creek Valley. Only 9 miles in length and stretching from Broadview Heights to its confluence with the Cuyahoga River in Independence, West Creek is one of the most urbanized watersheds in Northeast Ohio and had experienced unprecedented growth since WWII. This presented an opportunity to connect hundreds of thousands to such urban greenspace.

Fast forward to 2006, after this organization had pieced together nearly 100 different properties, the once-forgotten and inaccessible Valley turned an amazing and precedent-setting corner. It was at this time that approximately 324 acres were turned over to Cleveland Metroparks – a public private partnership with the City of Parma, Cleveland Metroparks and the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District.

Year by year, West Creek has persistently worked to reclaim and restore the valley and greenway, not only to enhance its ecological function and sustainability, but also to further connect people to this special place. In 2013, the Watershed Stewardship Center opened and quickly became a regional epicenter of urban watershed science, programming, and volunteerism.

By 2015, the park expanded yet again to over 350 acres, and only two years later it topped 400 acres of protected land. By 2017, West Creek created an opportunity to add another 80 acres to the park, with the need to fully reclaim the site prior to its integration. Rallying upon such growth and expansion within a year that pointedly demonstrated the important work of this organization, we were able to officially

expand the West Creek Reservation into the cities of Independence and Seven Hills. It was only one year prior, the Hemlock Creek Trail (one of the largest community connectors to Cuyahoga Valley National Park and the Towpath Trail) was officially opened.

By the end of 2021, another 41 acres will be added to the park and trail system. Plans are already underway to add more than 20 acres of fully restored land in 2022 along with a new trail connection out to Broadview Road from the southernmost section of the park.

The West Creek Greenway is an inter-community trail and greenway system connecting a tremendous number of people directly to the natural world and each other. It's easy to minimize the impact of conserving an acre or two. However, every single acre requires negotiation, funding, partnerships, management, maintenance, and most often clean-up, demolition or some other form of intensive reclamation.



## CONSERVATION AMIDST COVID

Most of the world will never forget the year 2020 - a year that brought to light the importance of parks, trails, and open spaces. Thus, as people began to live life social distancing, and flocked to parks in order to escape the confines of their homes, public spaces quickly became epicenters of activity. At times, overburdened, open spaces were saturated with people walking, running, biking, reading, picnicking, fishing, or simply relaxing. These spaces are a place to spread out, recreate, relax, disconnect from the day, commune with family and friends, and are overwhelmingly a place to enjoy the natural world.



West Creek is committed to linking neighborhoods and uniting people by expanding our park, trail and greenway systems. Equitable access and proximity of open spaces to neighborhoods has become a regional priority. Our region developed rapidly, often fragmenting greenspace. Many antiquated policies, whether they were local, state, or federal, were crafted in a manner that gave little consideration to parks,

trails, and intermodal connectivity. Plans were created from a mindset of the fastest way to a destination, as well as the fastest way to dissipate water off a site. High density development was incentivized with little to no foresight of the 'green infrastructure' that truly makes our region, community and neighborhoods thrive sustainably. Our parks and trails should no longer be referred to as an ancillary amenity or treated separately as green infrastructure - they are truly our infrastructure and should be prioritized as such.

West Creek has assembled thousands of acres throughout Greater Cleveland and Northeast Ohio, all in an effort to protect, restore and connect greenspace. It is indeed important to protect the amazing places that remain. It is also critical to restore the functionality of systems that are otherwise degraded, and subsequently, de-fragment our waterway and greenway corridors. The many layers of benefits these corridors provide are so very important for our communities. Healthy stream corridors reduce flooding, protect our hard infrastructure, reduce pollution and runoff, protect our drinking water, provide vital habitat and wildlife corridors, and often have the ancillary benefit of a recreational trail or park system that connects throughout the region.

We are very fortunate to have an amazing array of park districts within Northeast Ohio. The interconnecting parks and trails that have been created within our major metropolitan areas are critical to our physical, social, and mental health.

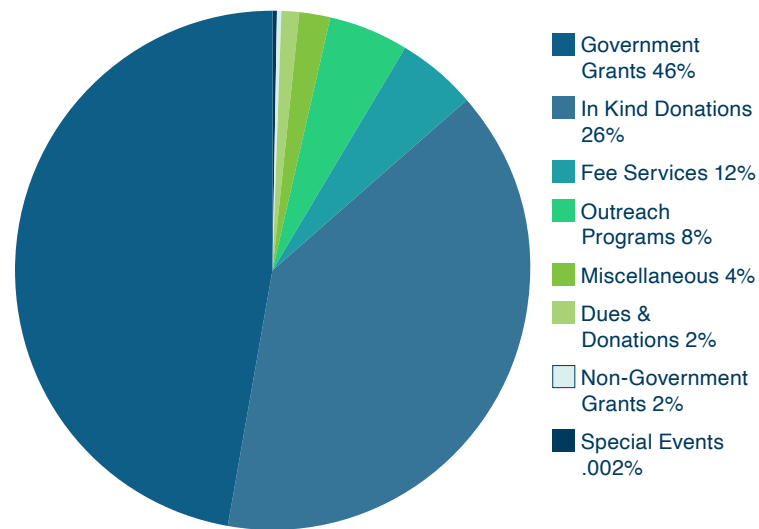
West Creek adjusted to the conditions and challenges of 2020, but remained mission-partner oriented, while ensuring safe operations for the staff, board and dedicated volunteers. We're proud and humbled that our work has been so pointedly important throughout the last year.

# CONNECT



# OUR YEAR

## 2020 REVENUE



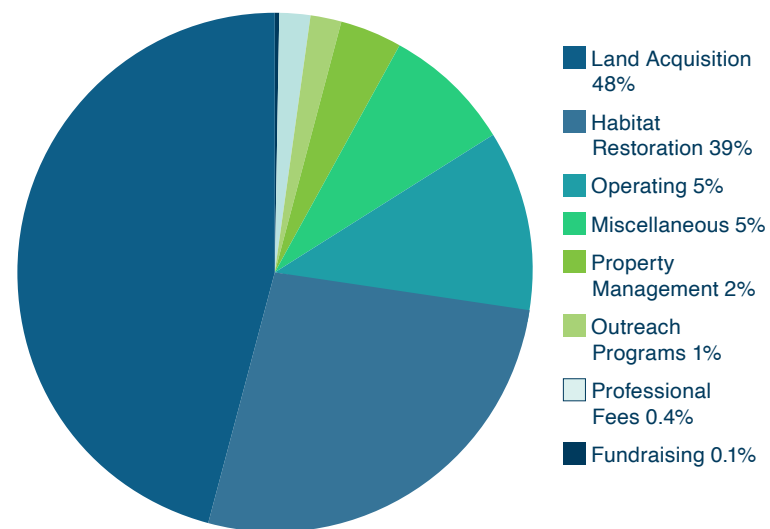
### 2020 Revenues Amount

Government Grants	\$3,586,614
In Kind Donations	\$2,044,476
Fee Services	\$884,629
Outreach Programs	\$635,223
Miscellaneous	\$313,556
Dues & Donations	\$173,392
Non-Gov. Grants	\$150,500
Special Events	\$13,999
<b>Total Revenues</b>	<b>\$7,802,390</b>

## 2020 EXPENSES

### 2020 Expenses Amount

Land Acquisition	\$4,160,631
Habitat Restoration	\$3,428,348
Operating	\$470,201
Miscellaneous	\$464,304
Property Management	\$155,287
Outreach Programs	\$49,677
Professional Fees	\$37,179
Fundraising	\$6,776
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$8,772,402</b>
<b>Change in Net Assets</b>	<b>-\$970,012</b>



Financial year ended December 31, 2020. Accrual basis, unaudited.

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# DONORS

You make it possible! In 2020 your donation allowed West Creek Conservancy to protect dozens of new properties throughout Northeast Ohio. We are grateful to all the individuals, corporations, foundations and organizations who have supported our vital work. Contributions received from January 1 - December 31, 2020 are listed here.

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James River Figure Skating Club  
Roger & Sharon Judson  
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Nordonias Hills City School District  
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Thomas Toledo  
Steve, Eileen, and Nadia Torok  
Laurie Toth  
Jacob VanSickle  
Brianne Vasarhelyi  
John & Sharon Vasarhelyi  
Mark Vasarhelyi  
Mark Warman  
Ron White  
Dick & Jane Whitehead  
Jacquelyn Zevenbergen  
Dan & Pam Zupancic

### In Memory of Nicholas Caruso

Edward & Rosemarie Dooner  
ID Consultants  
Diane Kloenne  
Jeff Lennartz  
John & Sharon Vasarhelyi  
Jennie Vasarhelyi  
Dorine Yelton

### In Memory of Dorothy Hazel

Mrs. Helene Dreibelbis

### In Memory of Lois Ebenger

Katherine Schneider

### In Memory of Mike Szpatura

Stephen Szpatura



[www.westcreek.org](http://www.westcreek.org) | 216-749-3720 | [info@westcreek.org](mailto:info@westcreek.org)



West Creek Conservancy  
P.O. Box 347113  
Cleveland, OH 44134