



ANNUAL REPORT

Jan. 1 - Dec. 31, 2022



WEST CREEK
CONSERVANCY



MAKING NATURE YOUR NEIGHBOR

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.



Dear Friends,

West Creek has a vision for a greener and healthier Northeast Ohio to positively impact people's lives and well-being. Our work to protect, restore, and connect is long-term. We have uniquely served our community for nearly three decades and are dedicated to continuing this path in conservation.

In 2022 alone, we have been involved with protecting over 1000 acres for conservation. We served as the catalyst for projects such as our Twinsburg Heights Preserve project, which puts greenspace into a vastly underserved area of the community. These are great wins and are positive indicators of the value West Creek brings to the region.

Citizens concerned by dwindling natural areas initially banded together to push for a healthier Parma. West Creek came into being because these leaders realized that more needed to be done to ensure a better quality of life. Since then, West Creek has grown to include the region, focusing on the people who live and work here and on the children who will grow up here. Our true measure of success is the impact West Creek makes on the people of Northeast Ohio.

Likewise, I want to thank the community for its continued engagement with West Creek. Since 1997 the community has seen the value that West Creek delivers to the people who live here. The community's support of our mission continues to drive our efforts and we thank you for your investment with us toward building a greener and healthier Northeast Ohio.

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

Eric Sluss

Eric Sluss
Chair, Board of Directors



Dear Friends,

Throughout 2022, West Creek's scope of work yet again expanded - protecting amazing places, restoring waterways and other habitats and enabling access to such spaces. The mission-partner focus of this organization is unique and for which I am proud.

It's humbling to have the trust of our partners; so that when they reach out, they inherently know that we'll do everything in our power to bring whatever project to fruition. Within this report, there are a variety of updates, but by no means does it capture the diversity and volume of our work. We're a small staff augmented by a vested and dedicated Board of Directors as well as a small army of truly amazing volunteers.

We're often asked how many acres did you preserve? Yes, that's one indicator of our work, but there are so many other factors by which we measure the return of investment of our work. In 2022, we did in fact protect over a 1000 acres and yes, that's great - but even within those 1000 acres, there are many stories to be told; some of which will be immediately recognized or seen as complete while others are catalytic to larger initiatives that may have taken years or will be ongoing.

Two very highlightable projects within this summary are the Twinsburg Heights Preserve and Spring Creek - and each stand on their own merits (and each will be on-going as we initiate stewardship or activation plans for them). However, a couple other amazing initiatives to note...

East Branch Big Creek. Over the last two years, this organization worked to acquire/protect over 2 miles of East Branch Big Creek; this required working with over 10 individual property owners, two cities, NEORSD as well as a handful of different funding sources. A synergy of resources and coordination is what this project became. Important to note is the coordination factor - how to implement the 'plans' or strategic focus of multiple entities, while ensuring the holistic watershed approach is also implemented. It culminated with 2 miles of waterway, 16 acres of wetland, and 65 acres of much needed urban forest protected. But...what it also led to, is the restoration of over 1/2 mile of stream, the removal of 5 acres of impervious surface, and now a regional stormwater project being led by NEORSD along a critical reach of the stream; a nearly \$6M project.

Lower West Creek Restoration. After decades of community engagement, land protection and watershed planning, NEORSD commenced with a \$20M project within



the Village of Brooklyn Heights. Yes, the Plain Dealer headline was ‘ Helping fish get up the creek without a battle’ but in reality this project is so much more. Not only is a major fish barrier being removed from a heavily altered reach of stream, but critically, this is also infrastructure/ economic asset protection. This is a stabilization along I-480, Resource Drive and Granger Road (protecting transportation and commercial business vitality); ensuring our ‘green’ and grey infrastructure are sustainably protected.

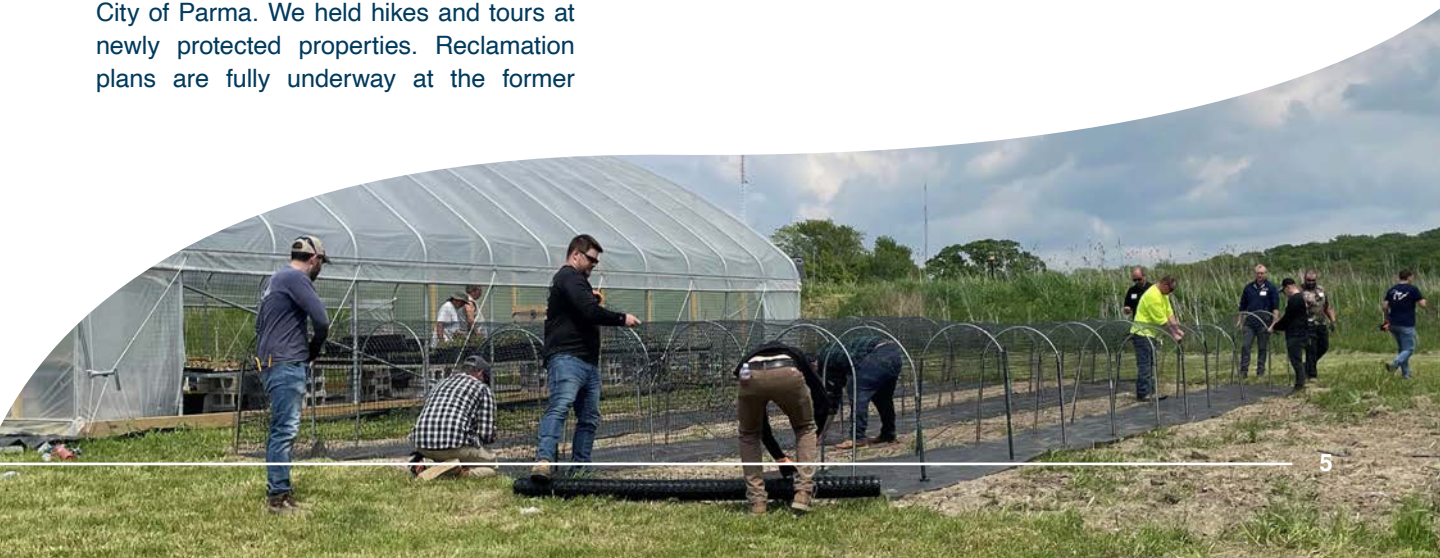
We’re protecting land, restoring water resources, but importantly we’re a resource in the region. West Creek staff is constantly making site visits with landowners, updating watershed plans, coordinating clean-ups, plantings and a plethora of other volunteer activities. We now have a native plant and tree nursery up and running—thanks to the partnership with Cuyahoga County and the City of Parma. We held hikes and tours at newly protected properties. Reclamation plans are fully underway at the former

Haydite mine. Irishtown Bend is moving towards full stabilization; a transformative initiative for the region. Over seven large-scale restoration projects queued up for 2023. Zaclon River landing is up and coming for 2023-2024.

Needless to say, our work, with your support, has kept us more than busy. Which leads me to an apology - we are late in presenting our Annual Report. We are making more of an extended effort to ensure our outreach/communication about such is a higher priority. Thank you as always for your support. I am always more than happy to discuss our work or where you can help us make an impact.

Cheers,

Derek Schafer
Executive Director





CHIPPEWA CREEK FLOODPLAIN & WETLAND RESTORATION PROJECT

Often enough we find farmlands directly adjacent to major waterways. Unfortunately, this also creates a situation where nutrients, sediment, and phosphorus run off directly into the creek or river – and eventually elevate levels of such causing harmful algal blooms.

In 2021, a private landowner reached out to West Creek with the idea of transforming their 50-acre property along Chippewa Creek (downstream of Chippewa Lake, within the Ohio River Watershed) into wetlands or otherwise streamside floodplains; both attributes are critical to ecological components that allow for the settling and filtering of pollutants or in this case, sediment and phosphorus.

Through the support of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources' H2Ohio Program, West Creek worked with a design/build team to fully restore the property.

Derek and his team at West Creek coordinated a seamless process for us to transition our farm property to a long term asset with a dual benefit that protects a major waterway for the State and ensures our property remains a viable natural wetlands for our family to enjoy for generations.”

~ Mike and Megan Wilbur



PARTNERSHIP WITH CLEVELAND METROPARKS

West Creek Conservancy and Cleveland Metroparks have partnered for decades to improve the quality of life for Northeast Ohioans through the protection of vital park land and natural habitats. West Creek Conservancy has been an instrumental partner to Cleveland Metroparks since an initial land donation in 2006 that helped create Cleveland Metroparks' West Creek Reservation with West Creek Conservancy as well as additional partners including the cities of Parma, Independence and Seven Hills. West Creek Reservation has grown in size by nearly 70% since its inception. In 2022, the reservation drew more than 157,000 annual recreational visits – a 54% increase in park visits from 2014, the first full year following

the opening of the Watershed Stewardship Center.

West Creek Conservancy's impact is far reaching beyond the creation and protection of West Creek Reservation. In 2022 alone, West Creek Conservancy helped add new park land across four Cleveland Metroparks reservations: Brecksville, Bedford, Mill Stream Run, and Brookside.

"West Creek Conservancy has been a long-time partner in protecting our region's parks, forests and streams, and connecting people to nature," said Brian M. Zimmerman, Cleveland Metroparks CEO.

"Our communities are greener, healthier and more connected thanks to the strategic efforts of Derek and his team."

Since 2006, West Creek Conservancy has transferred 385 acres of park land to Cleveland Metroparks for permanent protection. 2023 is poised to be another successful year for the partnership with an addition of nearly 100 acres expected to be added to West Creek Reservation.



TWINSBURG HEIGHTS PRESERVE: HONORING THE LEGACY OF AN HISTORIC SPACE

With the 2022 acquisition of more than 76 acres in northern Summit County, West Creek Conservancy is expanding area residents' access to nature.

Twinsburg Heights Preserve is located in Twinsburg Township and the City of Twinsburg, between Hadden Road and I-480, and east of Twinsburg Township's Twinsburg Heights neighborhood. Twinsburg Heights is predominantly African American, recent census data shows, and surrounded on three sides by industrial uses.

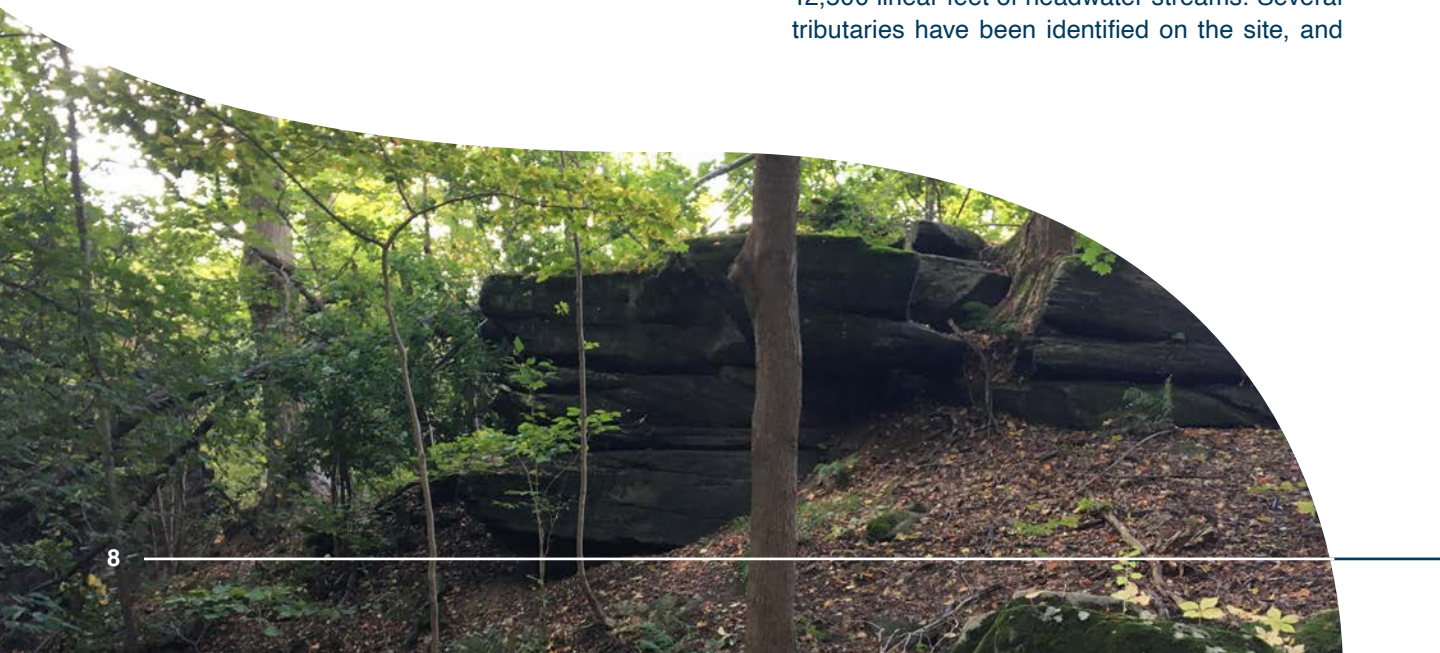
The site has a storied past, as memorialized in *Green Book Cleveland*. Louise Smith of Cleveland, a Black woman, founded Pinecrest Country Club there in 1952. With the vision of providing people with resort amenities that were largely reserved for millionaires at the time, Smith oversaw Pinecrest as president. Pinecrest was described as “beautiful park grounds, only 18 miles from Cleveland,” and was open daily for guests from the Midwest region to convene for recreational events such as meetings, dances, and picnics. The club saw as many as 86,000 guests per year in the late 1950s before closing soon thereafter.

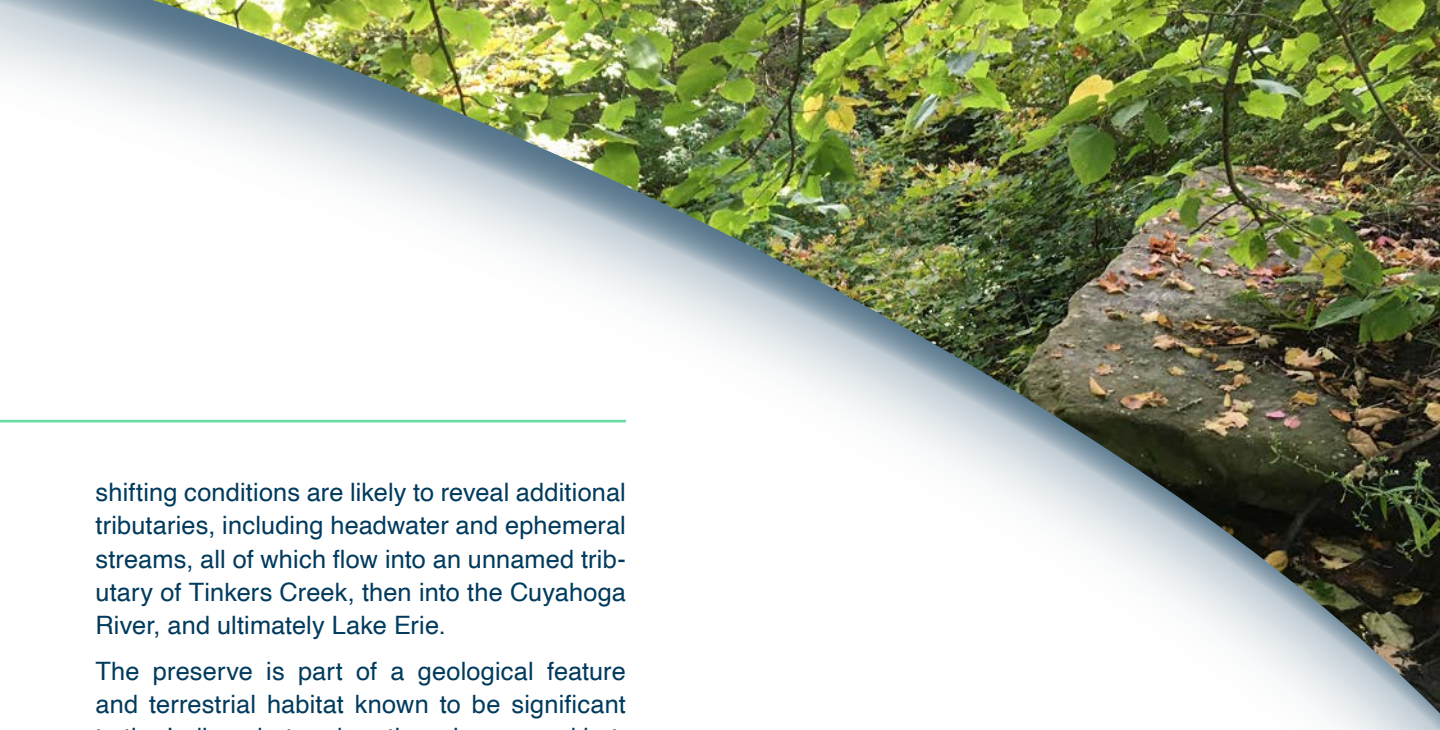
West Creek Conservancy admires and applauds Smith's work, which was part of a much broader movement to create safe spaces where African Americans could peacefully enjoy recreational activities.

Today, permanent conservation of Twinsburg Heights Preserve again provides the local community with access to green space. The preserve's wetlands also control flooding and filter pollutants to abate other ongoing stormwater issues in the area, such as erosion.

This project includes the construction of dozens of houses following the demolition of area homes in the mid-2000s for proposed retail development. No retail spaces nor subsequently proposed industrial buildings were constructed, in accord with the appeals of residents who voiced concerns.

Twinsburg Heights Preserve conserves exposed bedrock outcroppings, successional woodlands, upland old fields, emergent wetlands, shrub/scrub wetlands, forested wetlands, and over 12,500 linear feet of headwater streams. Several tributaries have been identified on the site, and





shifting conditions are likely to reveal additional tributaries, including headwater and ephemeral streams, all of which flow into an unnamed tributary of Tinkers Creek, then into the Cuyahoga River, and ultimately Lake Erie.

The preserve is part of a geological feature and terrestrial habitat known to be significant to the Indiana bat and northern long-eared bat, which are both state and federally listed. The rock outcroppings, caves, and crevasses of the site are part of the Liberty Park Cave Complex that is noted as a significant courtship, mating, and hibernation site for both bats. The preserve also contains suitable forested resources for these species' summer maternity colonization.

West Creek purchased the property with grant funding through the Clean Ohio Green Space Conservation Program, administered by Ohio Public Works Commission, and the H2Ohio

program, administered by Ohio Department of Natural Resources. H2Ohio has also funded the restoration of portions of the preserve.

"This was a special opportunity to recover, restore, and protect natural resources in a densely developed area," said Linda Bailiff, director of the Ohio Public Works Commission. "I am very pleased to see this important project come to fruition and look forward to seeing this property become a green space for the community as opposed to an industrial development."





STEARNS NATIVE NURSERY: SUPPORTING HEALTHY WILDLIFE, WATERS, AND PEOPLE

West Creek Conservancy is committed to conserving natural spaces that support local pollinators, birds, and biodiversity.

At our Stearns Native Nursery, West Creek Conservancy propagates native plants that we incorporate into parks and communities to establish wildlife corridors.

Stearns Native Nursery, at 7000 Randolph Drive in Parma, comprises 16 acres of the 48-acre Stearns Homestead. In 2022, West Creek Conservancy equipped the nursery with a new 1.5-acre growing enclosure, a large hoop house, and a staging enclosure, with the capacity to further expand operations on the property.

A major focus at Stearns is the propagation of keystone tree, wildflower, and shrub species that support the vast majority of pollinators and birds in Northeast Ohio ecosystems. Keystone tree species that we grow include oak, willow, and cherry. As for wildflowers, we plan to start focusing on goldenrods and asters.

Stearns Native Nursery propagates plant stock that supports wildlife, water management, and visitor experiences at West Creek Conservancy's restoration project sites. One such site is off of W. Ridgewood Drive in Parma, the previous home of Padua Franciscan High School's





Camp Corde soccer and lacrosse fields. In 2022, West Creek Conservancy finished full design and engineering on a stream and floodplain restoration project at the site, which will be added to the Cleveland Metroparks' West Creek Reservation.

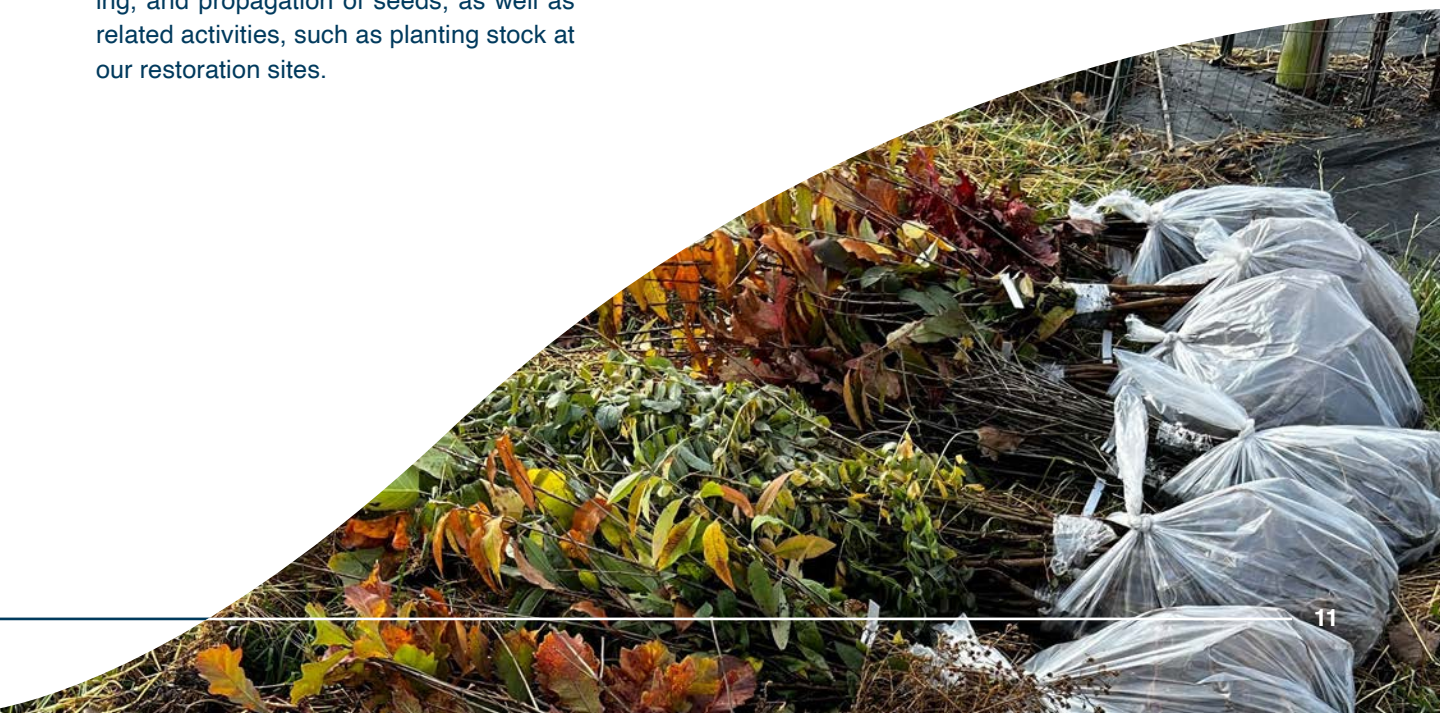
West Creek Conservancy also plants the nursery's native trees within city parks and in right of ways, or tree lawns. The trees absorb water, preventing flooding and erosion. They also provide oxygen and shade to help limit the sweltering effect of heat islands that become established in urban centers.

We offer volunteer opportunities at Stearns Native Nursery, including collection, cleaning, and propagation of seeds, as well as related activities, such as planting stock at our restoration sites.

Stearns Native Nursery is managed by West Creek Conservancy in partnership with the City of Parma and supported by Cuyahoga County and the Cuyahoga Soil & Water Conservation District.

West Creek Conservancy's other partnerships at the nursery include:

- Welcoming the Cuyahoga Soil & Water Conservation District to study the effects of mycorrhizal fungi on soil structure and root health in urban soils in our growing enclosure.
- Supporting The Holden Arboretum to create a local ecotype seed bank intended to reforest the lower Great Lakes region.





MONTVILLE TOWNSHIP: HEADWATERS OF THE CUYAHOGA

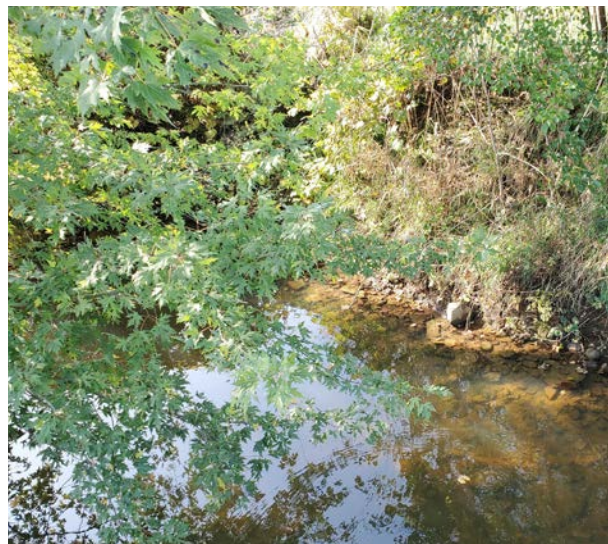


Headwaters Cuyahoga River, Montville Township, Ohio (Cuyahoga River Watershed). In partnership with The Nature Conservancy, over 50 acres of wetland, vernal pool and 1/2 mile of stream restored; in addition to meadow/prairie and upland habitat enhancements.



PROTECTING MANSFIELD'S DRINKING WATER

West Creek Conservancy led the effort to acquire a critical property, now owned by Richland County Park District. The 213-acre Clear Fork Preserve property near Mansfield involves a multi-phased restoration that will include re-forestation, wet-meadow establishment, and elimination of row crops and conversion to wetlands. The property is located within a Drinking Water Source Protection Area, and elimination of agricultural uses along with wetland and stream restoration will have a positive impact downstream. Over 1.5 miles of streams on the property flow into the Clear Fork Reservoir, the primary drinking water source for the City of Mansfield capable of delivering up to 25 million gallons of water per day. Restoration will reduce sediment, nutrient, and phosphorus loading, and will increase species diversity by re-establishing natural habitat and functioning hydrology. The restoration project will also establish riparian buffers and restore over 100 acres of floodplain along highly degraded, channelized streams which will filter agricultural runoff from upstream farms. West Creek will be responsible for all restoration activity on the site and will manage the property through the restoration process in collaboration with the Park District.





SPRING CREEK PRESERVE: PROTECTING HABITATS AND IMPROVING WATER QUALITY

In 2022, West Creek Conservancy acquired an ecologically diverse and important property, the 361-acre Spring Creek Preserve. Located in northeastern Geauga County, the preserve is just 10 miles east of Chardon.

West Creek acquired Spring Creek Preserve with funding by the Ohio EPA's Water Resource Restoration Sponsorship Program. The preserve comprises part of a 700-acre wetland complex known locally as the Montville Swamp, which beavers created by damming headwaters of Spring Creek. Prior to the West Creek acquisition, some beaver dams were replaced with man-made dams.

Spring Creek Preserve's 336 acres of category III wetlands exhibit important environmental function and sensitive habitat. Thriving groundwater forested wetlands and forested mosaic wetlands dominate the preserve, surrounding deeper marsh wetland areas. Hydrologically connected marsh areas produce many plant species, including yellow pond-lily. A high-quality buttonbush swamp contains howe's sedge (*Carex atlantica* ssp. *capillacea*), an Ohio listed rare species.

An abundance of wildlife, including nesting sandhill cranes, dragonflies, amphibians, and turtles, rely on and thrive in the local habitat. Otters, coyotes, and turkeys, as well as bobcat and fisher tracks, have been spotted. Neighbors of the property have also sighted black bear, and West Creek has received reports of other rare and unique wildlife.

The preserve contains four streams, including unnamed headwaters of Spring Creek



and the South Branch Spring Creek, which runs through the property and ultimately to the Grand River. The Grand River drains one of the most biologically diverse of all the Lake Erie watersheds, providing habitat for over 100 species on the state's list of rare, threatened, and endangered species. Through the conservation of Spring Creek Preserve, water quality improvements will also be realized in the downstream waters of Spring Creek and interconnected waterways.

West Creek Conservancy will own and maintain the preserve and will open it to the public for guided hikes by West Creek staff. In coordination with partners and educational institutions, a 5-acre portion of the preserve property containing a barn and two cabins will be used for conservation research and education, stewardship, maintenance, and engagement.

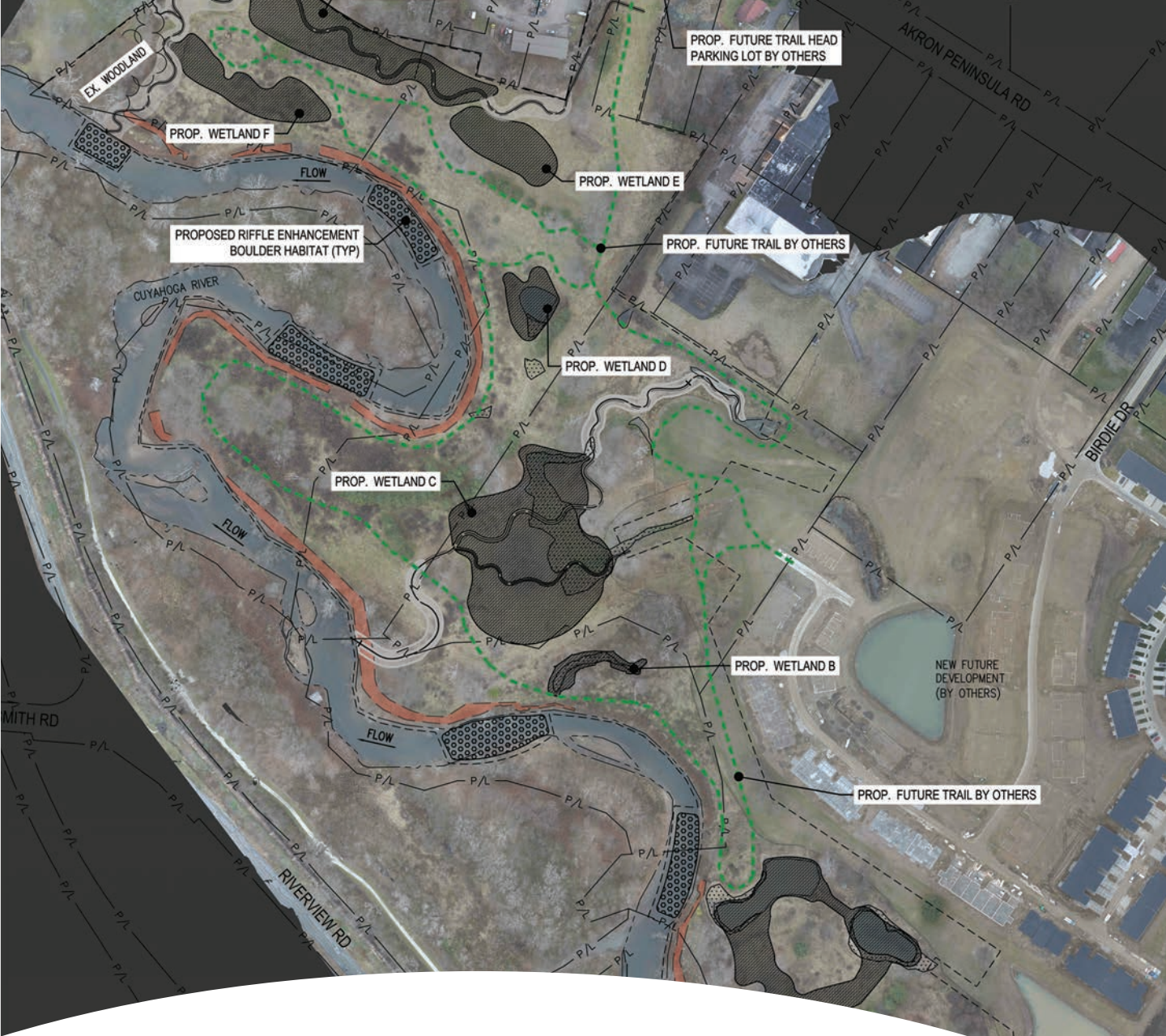


UP! A CREEK 2022

Up! A Creek 2022....an ironic name for an event, where it wasn't a drizzle, but rather a down pour at times! However, with plenty of shelters and not to mention 400 umbrellas on hand, over 700 guests were still able to enjoy the annual conservation party! The 2022 event was held at the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo – fully lit up with the Asian Lantern Festival; a pre-public opening experience for the guests. On top of the inherently amazing atmosphere that the Zoo offers, attendees were also able to enjoy the zipline, carousel, amongst other Up! A Creek favorites...such as the infamous wine toss (proudly sponsored by Parma's own, Little Birdie Wine Nest).

We could not have thrown such an event, without our amazing supporters and sponsors – we extend our sincerest appreciation to Ohio Real Tite Agency, Petros Homes, Kurtz Bros, and Pride One Development!





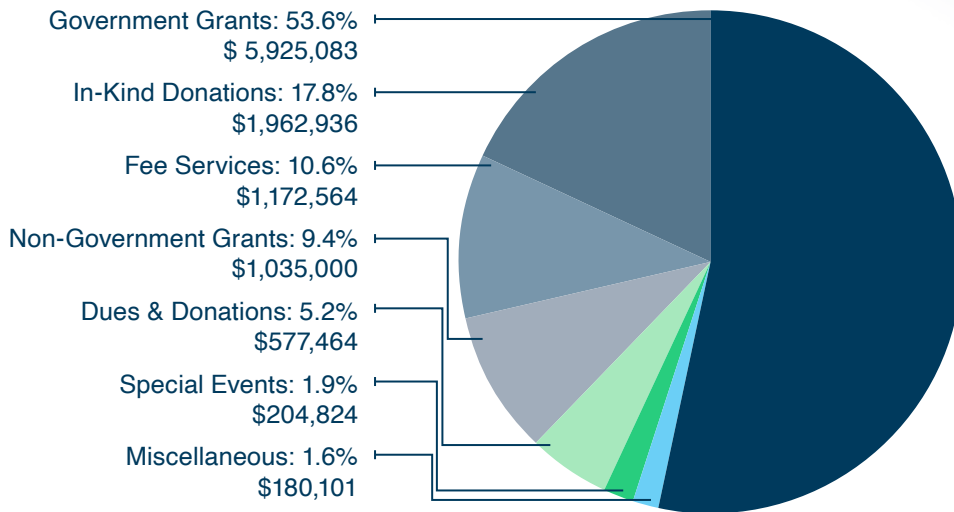
RIVERWOOD PRESERVE

In partnership with Petros Homes, West Creek took ownership of 55+ acres along 1-mile of the Cuyahoga River near the border of Akron and Cuyahoga Falls; an area often referred to as the Merriman Valley and as of late the former 'Riverwood Golf Course.' A portion of the property will be developed by Petros Homes and Pride One, but a significant tract was donated to West Creek – which inevitably enabled us to leverage over

\$1,000,000 to restore the property. Restoration will be underway and completed in 2023; passively accessible with trails and perhaps even a kayak put in/take out. We are sincerely appreciative of the partnership with Petros Homes and very excited about the opportunity to open up yet another mile of the Cuyahoga River. Right across the river is Summit Metro Parks Sand Run Reservation as well as the Towpath Trail.

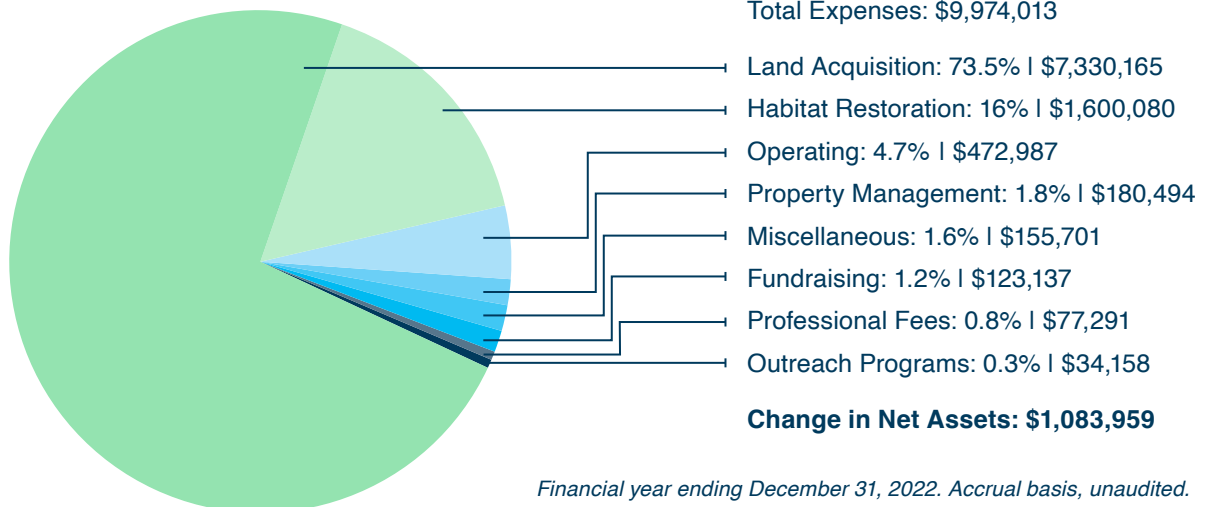
2022 REVENUE

Total Revenues: \$11,057,972



2022 EXPENSES

Total Expenses: \$9,974,013



Change in Net Assets: \$1,083,959

Financial year ending December 31, 2022. Accrual basis, unaudited.

DONORS & SUPPORTERS

You make it possible! In 2022 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, 2022 are listed here.

\$10,000 & Over

Maude L. Campbell
Char & Chuck Fowler Family
Foundation
Cleveland Foundation
Cleveland-Cliffs Foundation
Cuyahoga County
George Gund Foundation
Kelvin & Eleanor Smith Foundation
Lake Erie Commission
Ohio Department of Natural
Resources
Ohio Environmental Protection
Agency
Ohio Public Works Commission
Sherwin-Williams Foundation
United States Environmental
Protection Agency
Willard Stephenson Foundation

\$5,000 to \$9,999

City of Beachwood
City of Brooklyn
City of Garfield Heights
City of Independence
City of Parma
Jen DiGeronimo & The DiGeronimo
Family Foundation
Fred Hipp
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Shaker Lakes Garden Club
Sherwin-Williams Company
Swagelok Foundation

Village of Brooklyn Heights
Village of Cuyahoga Heights
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Village of Valley View
Rich & Barbara Weiser

\$2,500 to \$4,999

Anonymous
Rudolf & Barbara Hermes
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\$1,000 to \$2,499

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Ann Chasar
Coldwater Consultants
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Dale E. & Bernice E. Mansperger
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Evelyn Hinz
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Edie Hoffmann
Joseph Hooven
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Patricia Jatsek
Rick Jaworski
Roy & Maureen Jech
Richard Juby
Geraldine Kaftan
Dennis Kapral
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John Kealy
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Brad Rice
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