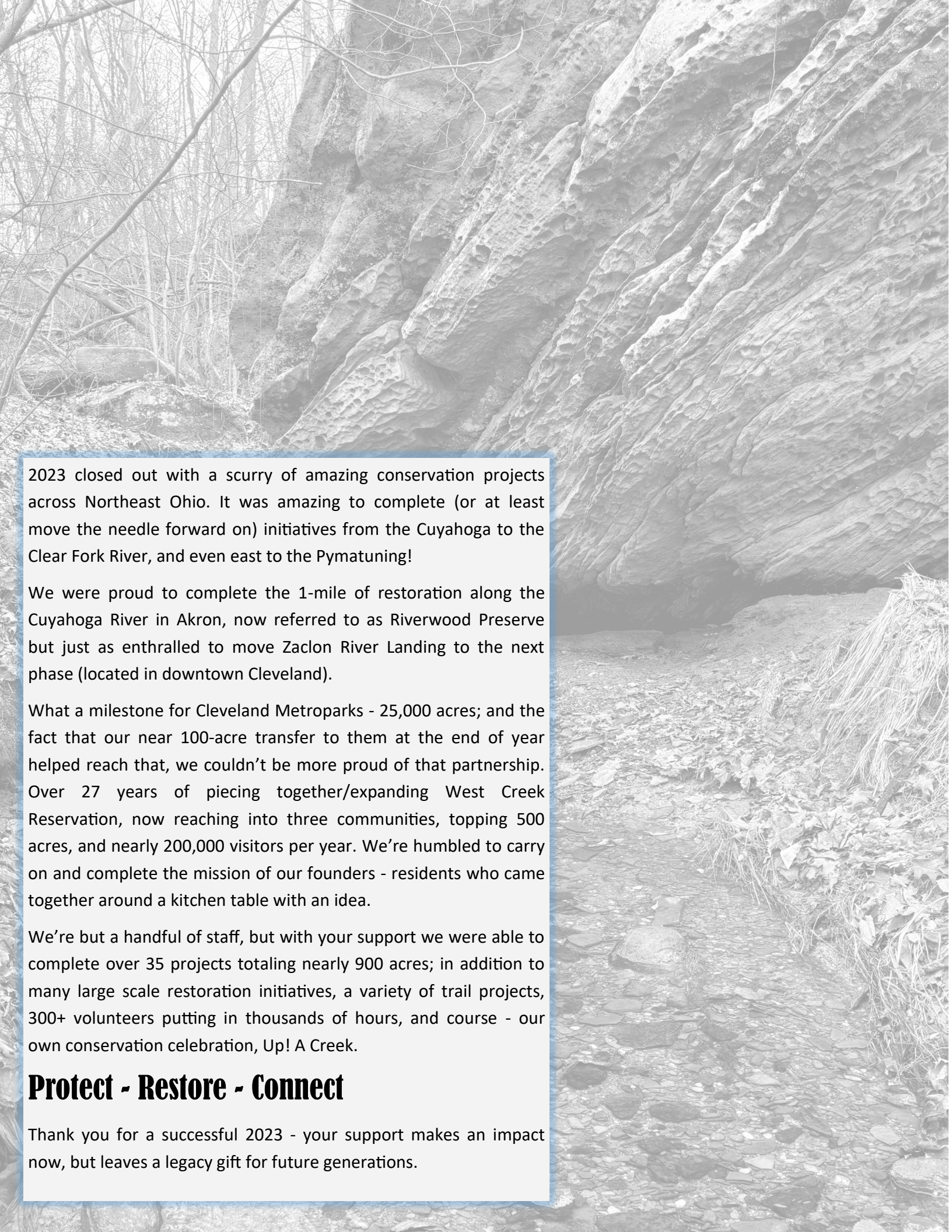


Protect - Restore - Connect

West Creek Conservancy



A grayscale photograph of a rocky riverbank. In the foreground, a path made of small stones and dirt leads from the bottom right towards the center. To the left of the path, there are some dry, leafless bushes and trees. The background is dominated by a large, steep rock face with visible horizontal geological strata. The sky is not visible, appearing as a bright, washed-out area at the top.

2023 closed out with a flurry of amazing conservation projects across Northeast Ohio. It was amazing to complete (or at least move the needle forward on) initiatives from the Cuyahoga to the Clear Fork River, and even east to the Pymatuning!

We were proud to complete the 1-mile of restoration along the Cuyahoga River in Akron, now referred to as Riverwood Preserve but just as enthralled to move Zaclon River Landing to the next phase (located in downtown Cleveland).

What a milestone for Cleveland Metroparks - 25,000 acres; and the fact that our near 100-acre transfer to them at the end of year helped reach that, we couldn't be more proud of that partnership. Over 27 years of piecing together/expanding West Creek Reservation, now reaching into three communities, topping 500 acres, and nearly 200,000 visitors per year. We're humbled to carry on and complete the mission of our founders - residents who came together around a kitchen table with an idea.

We're but a handful of staff, but with your support we were able to complete over 35 projects totaling nearly 900 acres; in addition to many large scale restoration initiatives, a variety of trail projects, 300+ volunteers putting in thousands of hours, and course - our own conservation celebration, Up! A Creek.

Protect - Restore - Connect

Thank you for a successful 2023 - your support makes an impact now, but leaves a legacy gift for future generations.

Irishtown Bend...update



If you've driven down W. 25th or Detroit or sat across the river at Merwin's Wharf, you've likely seen a slight change in Irishtown Bend. Over the course of the initial stabilization phases, more than 60,000 cubic yards of material has been removed off the site (to date). And this Spring, the steel will start to arrive in preparation for the bulkhead replacement along the Cuyahoga River. Stay tuned & take a look from Merwins!

Kinsman Swamp Preserve & Restoration Project



In another amazing partnership-driven project, West Creek Conservancy was able to help protect 196 acres within the Shenango River watershed (which goes to the Ohio River). Located in Kinsman Township, Trumbull County, the project protects over 1.5 miles of stream and 126+ acres of Category III wetland.

By summer of 2024, we will have also removed and daylighted agricultural drain tile, and restored approximately 15 acres of seasonally wet forest and 16.7 acres of upland meadow; all in all converting 30+ acres of existing agricultural fields into a web of interconnected landscapes including forest, meadow, and wet meadow with vernal pool microtopography (reducing nutrient loading to Maple Creek and eventually to Pymatuning Creek).

A partnership initiative with Trumbull Metro Parks, and proudly supported by the Ohio Public Works Commission Clean Ohio Greenspace Program and Ohio Department of Natural Resources H2Ohio Program!



West Creek Conservancy Helps Cleveland Metroparks Achieve 25,000 Acre Milestone

Cleveland Metroparks has expanded from an initial three acres a century ago to over 25,000 acres of protected park land in its 106th year. The Park District reached the historic milestone following the addition of more than 100 acres in West Creek Reservation including the former Parmadale campus and Padua soccer fields. Since Brian Zimmerman joined Cleveland Metroparks in 2010, the Park District has grown by over 18%, adding nearly 4,000 acres including an estimated 500 acres in 2023.

West Creek Reservation – which directly serves Seven Hills, Independence and Parma – has more than doubled in size since it became Cleveland Metroparks 16th park reservation in 2006. The major additions of four separate properties to the western portion of West Creek Reservation will provide additional recreational opportunities for park visitors including a planned expansion of the reservation's trail network and future greenway connection to the Cuyahoga Valley National Park and Towpath Trail as well as protect natural resources including forests, streams and the surrounding watershed.

"Cleveland Metroparks continues to prioritize strategic acquisitions that connect communities and protect our region's natural resources in the vision of the Emerald Necklace that was established more than a century ago," said Cleveland Metroparks CEO Brian M. Zimmerman. "With this significant expansion of West Creek Reservation thanks to the support and partnership of the West Creek Conservancy, Cleveland Metroparks has passed a major milestone 106 years in the making with the protection and conservation of more than 25,000 acres of parks across 49 communities."

West Creek Conservancy and Cleveland Metroparks have partnered for decades to improve the quality of life for Northeast Ohioans through protection of vital park land and natural habitats.

Since 2017, West Creek Conservancy has led the significant environmental cleanup and restoration of the approximately 80-acre former Parmadale campus, including removal of 18 structures. The Conservancy also undertook stream and floodplain restoration of the adjacent former Padua soccer fields, a 19-acre property on W Ridgeview Drive that was also transferred to Cleveland Metroparks for permanent protection and recreation.

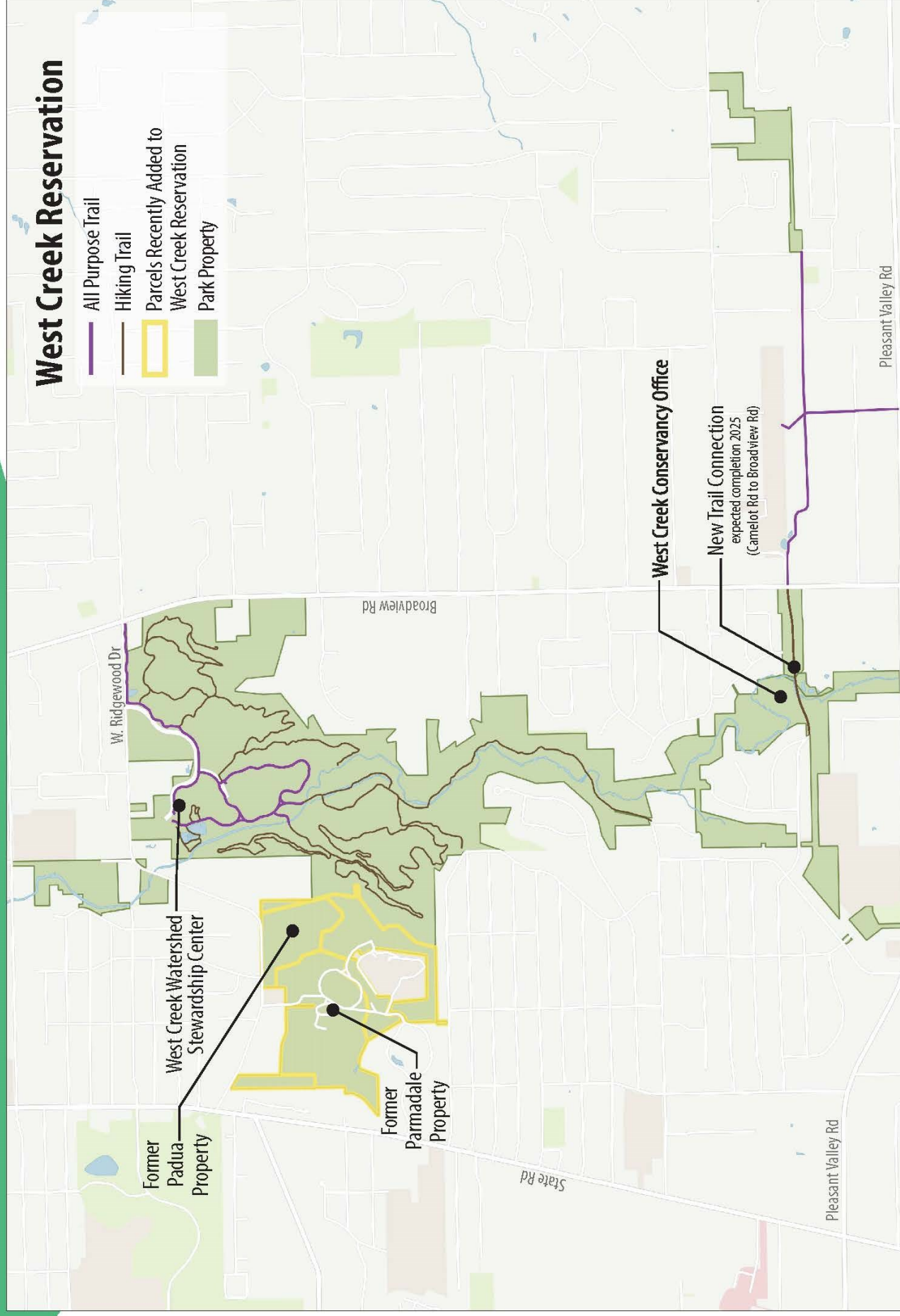
"We love seeing the growth and expansion of West Creek Reservation and ultimately the Greenway, which was one of the original dreams of this organization's founders," said West Creek Conservancy Executive Director Derek Schafer. "From all of us at West Creek Conservancy, we extend our most sincere appreciation to Cleveland Metroparks, a critical partner not only in West Creek, but throughout Northeast Ohio. Importantly, I'd like to also recognize the instrumental support from Mayor DeGeeter, the City of Parma and the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District – Progress Through Partnerships."

In 2023 Cleveland Metroparks anticipates adding a total of 500 acres across 11 park reservations including:

- Approximately 154-acre Ironwood Golf Course added in Hinckley Reservation
- Approximately 48-acre Gordon Park South added to Lakefront Reservation
- Approximately 3 acres in The Flats added to Lakefront Reservation
- Approximately 150 acres of the former Hawthorne Valley Country Club are expected to be added to South Chagrin Reservation by the end of 2023.

**press release courtesy of Cleveland Metroparks, visit: clevelandmetroparks.com/news-press for full information*

West Creek Reservation



Footpath Finally Gets a Home Through West Creek partnership

A 7-year-old nonprofit organization dedicated to providing outdoor experiences for all children finally has a permanent home in Parma, thanks to a partnership with West Creek Conservancy.

Footpath Foundation, which helps connect youth with nature through camping, education and other outdoor activities, has agreed to a five-year lease with West Creek on a single-family home. The property on West Pleasant Valley Road was acquired in conjunction with a handful of other properties all along the East Branch of Big Creek.

In addition to the ranch home, the property has a wooded backlot and fenced-in garden.

Footpath will use the site for offices, storage and small-group programming. For years, the nonprofit has worked from temporary quarters and stored camping equipment in the homes of staffers, board members and storage units.

“We are so excited to finally have a home, and we are grateful to West Creek Conservancy for making it possible,” said Footpath CEO and President Mary Macias, who co-founded the organization with Sarah Tabeling in 2016. “Our missions are closely related. West Creek preserves and restores the valuable natural resources that kids need for their overall well-being.”

West Creek Conservancy Executive Director Derek Schafer said, “it just made sense! We love it when mission-synergy is catalytic and we see this as a win-win. We look forward to working with Footpath Foundation and even more the opportunity to provide youth an outdoor experience.”

Footpath won't be doing any major construction but does hope to add landscaping with native plants, revive a dormant fenced-in vegetable garden, establish trails and install a low ropes course. The property does need some repairs and improvements, and Footpath is reaching out to its supporters and volunteers to get the bulk of the fixups completed this spring.

For more information on Footpath or volunteering, visit www.footpathfoundation.org.

In 2023, Footpath Foundation served more than 2,200 kids and sent more than 450 to overnight and day camps. The organization hopes to reach even more kids in highly developed neighborhoods – kids who might otherwise never experience the joys and benefits of nature.

Macias recently received the Friends of Camping Award from the American Camp Association's Ohio Local Council. David Faulstich, executive director of Red Oak Camp in Kirtland, nominated Macias.



Progress
Through
Partnerships

Andover Meadows

Andover Meadows Acquisition & Restoration

West Creek Conservancy in partnership with Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), Pheasants Forever, Ashtabula Soil & Water Conservation District (ASWCD) and the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) has now acquired 119 acres in the Village of Andover in Ashtabula County. The property is adjacent to Ashtabula County Metroparks' Pymatuning Valley Greenway Trail and is only a single property removed from Pymatuning Lake State Park.

This project was funded by NRCS with over \$400,000 invested and an additional \$330,500 was secured by West Creek from ODNR through the H2Ohio Program for supplemental restoration and property acquisition.

Prior to the acquisition, the property contained approximately 97 acres of agricultural fields and row crops which have now been converted into 44 acres of wetlands, 26 acres of pollinator habitat and 27 acres of reforestation. In addition to the restoration efforts, 22 acres of existing mature hardwood forest have now been protected in perpetuity. Once the restoration is complete, West Creek intends to make Andover Meadows open to the public for passive recreation and maybe someday connect it directly with the Pymatuning Valley Greenway and Pymatuning State Park.



Spring Creek Preserve Update

In late 2022, West Creek Conservancy with the help of Ohio EPA completed the purchase and acquisition of approximately 361 acres in Montville Township in Geauga County which has since been named Spring Creek Preserve.

Since taking title to the property, West Creek has begun implementing a comprehensive management & restoration plan focused on improving water quality & wildlife diversity and removing invasive species and forest monocultures throughout the preserve. In 2023 West Creek began the first phase of opening the existing trail system on the property to solidify maintenance access and implemented a racoon management program to increase the breeding success of ground-nesting birds and turtles.

West Creek also forged a partnership with Ducks Unlimited (DU) to conceptualize a network of water control structures throughout the site to develop, enhance and maintain the diverse wetland complexes located throughout the preserve. Later this spring, West Creek and DU plan to finalize engineering and then apply for funding to implement this comprehensive restoration plan which can hopefully be permitted over the summer and begin in the Fall of 2024 or early 2025.



Conservation Partnership in Brooklyn Heights

Kurtz Bros. Donates to Revitalize Village of Brooklyn Heights

Kurtz Bros., Inc., a well-established waste-to-resource business in Cleveland, Ohio, is continuing their long-standing relationship with the West Creek Conservancy by donating to them, their Valley Belt property in the Village of Brooklyn Heights. This donation will help to restore this former recycling facility back to its natural state and improve its ecosystem for the community.

Following West Creek Conservancy's reclamation plans, native trees and shrubs will be planted on the property, and an improved natural habitat will be created. This will help further a healthier environment for the local wildlife and provide a safe and enjoyable outdoor space for the community to enjoy.

Kurtz Bros. has been a supporter of West Creek Conservancy's projects for many years and has partnered with them on various initiatives aimed at improving local conservation efforts and creating positive environmental impact. "We are proud to be able to support West Creek Conservancy's mission," said Kurtz Bros. CEO, John Kurtz. "We are committed to making a positive impact on our local environment and are excited to see the positive changes that this donation will bring to the Village of Brooklyn Heights."

Derek Schafer, Executive Director of West Creek Conservancy, expressed his excitement. "We are thrilled to receive Kurtz Bros.' generous donation of the Valley Belt property, which will play a pivotal role in the restoration of this site to its natural state and provide a sustainable habitat for local wildlife. We look forward to working with the Kurtz team in this endeavor and creating a healthier and more vibrant environment for the Village of Brooklyn Heights and its surrounding communities."

"We are deeply grateful for Kurtz Bros.' donation of the Valley Belt property to the West Creek Conservancy. This gift will help to create a eco-friendlier and more sustainable environment for our community, while also providing a safe and enjoyable outdoor space for everyone to appreciate. We commend Kurtz Bros. for their dedication to improving local conservation efforts and creating a positive impact on the environment. The Village of Brooklyn Heights looks forward to the positive changes that this donation will bring to our community and the surrounding areas within Cuyahoga County." - Mayor of the Village of Brooklyn Heights, Michael Procuk.

Kurtz Bros.' donation of the Valley Belt property is a major step forward in West Creek Conservancy's mission to create a healthier and more vibrant environment for the Village of Brooklyn Heights and other nearby communities. With their generous donation, Kurtz Bros. is helping to create a better future for the community and its environment.



Partner Guest Article - Bike Cleveland

As an organization that values partnerships, one organization that shares similar goals with Bike Cleveland is West Creek Conservancy. Both of our missions focus on enriching the lives of people living in Northeast Ohio by changing the way people interact with their environment. For West Creek that takes the shape of restoring our lands and water while connecting people of all cultures to the outdoors. For Bike Cleveland that takes the shape of creating a region that is sustainable, connected, healthy, and vibrant by promoting bicycling and advocating for safe and equitable transportation for all.

Imagine children safely walking and biking to school, families comfortably biking to a nearby park, neighbors running errands by bike, a community where biking and walking are just a normal part of daily life. This is the vision behind Bike Cleveland's relentless efforts to make Greater Cleveland a more bikeable and walkable community, a region pulsating with energy and possibility, where every pedal stroke propels us towards a greener, more connected tomorrow.

The work we do is comprehensive and encompasses advocacy campaigns to influence policies and road redesigns that improve safety for people biking and walking, safe riding education for people of all ages and abilities, community engagement and exciting events that bring our community together. From mobilizing the community to support a trail or bike lane project to spirited group rides and enlightening workshops, we're reshaping the narrative of cycling culture, one revolution at a time.

It's easy and rewarding to get involved with Bike Cleveland. You can visit BikeCleveland.org to learn more about our programs and advocacy work, as well as the latest about upcoming events and action alerts. We also have volunteer opportunities for those interested in helping out with education programs and events. And lastly, as a membership based organization you can support our work for safe streets by becoming a member.

Jacob VanSickle, Executive Director

www.bikecleveland.com



Stearns Native Nursery

First and foremost, we want to extend a heartfelt THANK YOU to our seed collection volunteers! This past fall, your tireless efforts in collecting seeds from native species were instrumental in enriching our inventory at Stearns Native Nursery. We're thrilled to announce some exciting additions to our growing stock, including, Bitternut Hickory, Chestnut Oak, Buttonbush, Witchhazel, Grassy Leaved Goldenrod, New England Aster--to name a few! Collecting and propagating seeds from local ecotype plants is vital to protect the genetic diversity of our regional flora. This significance cannot be overstated! This diversity is what equips our local plants to withstand the challenges posed by climate change and ensures that they flourish in community plantings and restoration projects. If you're intrigued by this endeavor, keep an eye on our volunteer communications – we're poised to expand the program this year!

Now, what lies ahead? Working hand in hand with our volunteers, we've completed the meticulous task of cleaning the seeds and initiated the stratification process. Stratification involves a period of cold, moist storage that effectively breaks seed dormancy and sets the stage for germination and growth. In the coming months, we'll be diligently potting these seeds in our greenhouse, nurturing them towards their full potential.

We invite you to explore volunteering opportunities on our website: www.westcreek.org/support-us/volunteer. Your contribution, no matter how big or small, makes a significant impact in our mission. Let's grow together!



Cold-Weather Cultivation: 8 Steps to Winter Sowing and Seed Stratification

No need to let winter slow you down in the garden! Winter Sowing turns ordinary milk jugs into mini-greenhouses, mimicking the conditions that are ideal for seed starting. It's a fun way to keep busy and give your seeds the cold kick they need to grow.

Here's how:

Step 1: Gather Containers: Collect milk jugs, vinegar jugs, or similar containers.

Step 2: Prepare the Containers: To facilitate drainage, puncture holes in the container bottoms.

Step 3: Fill with Damp Soil: Populate the bottom portion with 3 inches of moist soil, setting the stage for optimal seed germination.

Step 4: Sow the Seeds: Plant the seeds as directed, taking note of individual preferences for depth.

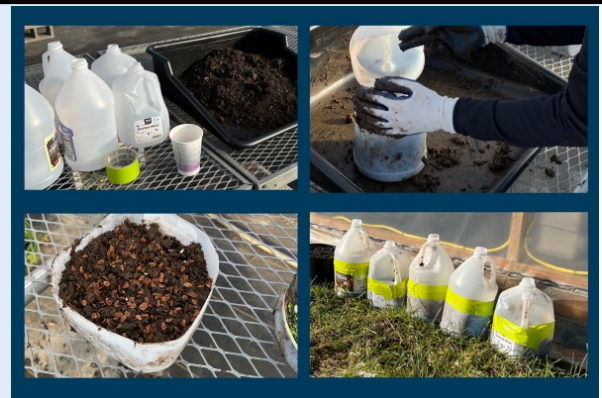
Labeling (Optional): For an added level of organization, add a plant tag.

Step 5: Seal and Secure: Close the jug securely, utilizing duct tape all around.

Step 6: Outdoor Placement: Position your container(s) in a sunny outdoor location that receives natural rainfall. **Step 7: Monitor Temperatures:** Keep a watchful eye on unexpected warm temperatures.

Step 8: Transplanting Time: Once your sprouts have blossomed into a lush greenery that fills the jug, it's time to transplant.

As those winter-planted seeds bloom into lively green wonders, Winter Sowing proves nature's resilience and adaptability. Turning regular containers into growth hubs is a simple nod to the marvels of gardening, even in the heart of winter. Learn more at <https://westcreek.org/watershed-resources/winter-sowing/>



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West Creek Conservancy
PO BOX 347113
Cleveland OH 44134



www.westcreek.org contact us at info@westcreek.org

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Protecting your land!

At West Creek, we are humbled to protect our land and water resources for future generations. Whether the land gets integrated into a park or trail system, or simply preserved for its beauty or uniqueness, we're proud to provide such stewardship and care for it.

We welcome opportunities across Northeast Ohio to preserve our natural heritage: woodlands, wetlands, rivers and streams, farms or family homesteads.

If you ever want to consider conserving your property, please feel free to reach out!

Protect - Restore - Connect

An impact now but a legacy gift!