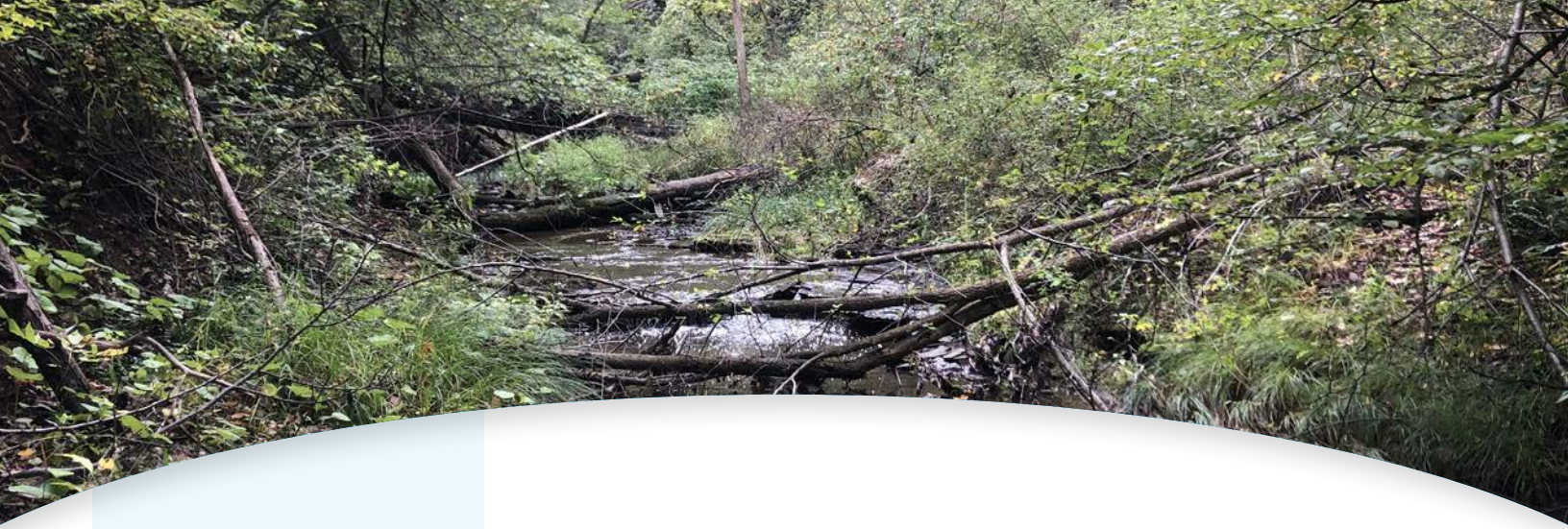


ANNUAL REPORT

JAN 1 - DEC 31, 2023

WEST CREEK
CONSERVANCY



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PROGRESS THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS IN 2023!

Dear Friends,

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

We offer our heartfelt thanks to the communities of Northeast Ohio. The ongoing strong engagement and support from these communities have enabled West Creek to grow and expand our efforts and impact from an initial focus in Parma to now encompass the broader Northeast Ohio region. With this support, we continue to advance our mission to protect natural habitats, restore the ecological value of our region's lands and waters, and connect people from all cultures and backgrounds with nature.

Our true measure of success is the impact West Creek has on the people of Northeast Ohio. Since 1997, we have protected over 5,000 acres, provided hundreds of thousands of people with access to natural areas, and tackled some of our region's most complex conservation projects. Some project successes have been very visible, while many other smaller achievements each year are the puzzle pieces we continually put together to deliver lasting benefits to communities throughout Northeast Ohio.

Our focus remains on the people who live and work here, as well as the children who will grow up here. Your continued investment with us will help build a greener and healthier Northeast Ohio!

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

Eric Sluss
Chair, Board of Directors (2023)

Derek Schafer
Executive Director

MOVING MOUNTAINS: IRISHTOWN BEND UPDATE

A groundbreaking event was held in late August after reaching an agreement to purchase a holdout property from a local real estate developer and restaurateur. The settlement lifted the final obstacle that was holding up the $100 million Irishtown Bend project for nearly two years. The groundbreaking initiated the removal of 250,000 cubic yards of soil to stabilize the slope and prevent a landslide from occurring, which would have been catastrophic to the heavily used shipping channel and thus the local economy. Once completed, the $60 million dollar stabilization project will provide the platform for the Irishtown Bend Park, which will transform the property into a dynamic public space for the city.

Irishtown Bend Park will provide incredible views of the downtown skyline and include riverfront walking and biking trails connecting the entire near west side to the Cuyahoga River. Project planners received final conceptual approval for the concept designs for the park in 2023. Park improvements are estimated to cost $40 million and the project could be completed by 2027.

Irishtown Bend's rich cultural history dates from First Nation settlements, to European colonists, early American pioneers, and most recently the site of a 19th century neighborhood of Irish immigrants and Irish Americans along the tight meander in the Cuyahoga River with the steep hillside above.

Irishtown Bend is a collaboration of many stakeholders, including West Creek Conservancy, Clean Ohio Green Space Conservation Program, the Cleveland Foundation, the Gund Foundation, LAND Studio, the Port Authority, Cleveland Metroparks, Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District, Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority, the City of Cleveland, Ohio City, Inc., Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Agency, and many others.





WEST CREEK HELPS CLEVELAND METROPARKS REACH 25,000-ACRE MILESTONE

In late 2023, West Creek Conservancy transferred more than 100 acres to Cleveland Metroparks, including the former Parmadale campus and the former Padua soccer fields. As a result, Cleveland Metroparks expanded from an initial three acres a century ago to over 25,000 acres of protected park land in 2023, its 106th year.

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 long and arduous task of removing the structures was met with many unforeseeable events such as vandalism and fires which caused a significant delay. Ultimately the demolition of the final three buildings on the site occurred allowing the property to be restored and reclaimed. The multiyear task of reclaiming the site also removed 12 acres of impervious surface to restore forest habitat and reduce stormwater surges.

The restoration of the former Padua soccer fields involved the reshaping of streams, and restoration of floodplains, wetlands, and natural habitats. Re-establishment of the headwater stream's original, sinuous shape reduces flooding risk, while preventing flooding and erosion of the stream. Overall, the restoration will reduce sediment in the water, ensuring healthy respiration for aquatic animals and clean drinking water for Ohioans. Securely installed dead and dying trees serve as snags — habitats for wildlife such as birds and mammals. Native trees were also planted throughout the property to collect water and





add wildlife habitat, and for visitors to experience the shade, aesthetic value, and health benefits that living trees provide.

With more than 40,000 people living within 1 mile of West Creek Reservation's park and trail system, residents of Parma and surrounding communities will have greater access to green space and more opportunities for hiking, cycling, and birding, with the completion of the project.

The addition of the Parmadale campus and former Padua soccer fields increases the size of the West Creek Reservation – which directly serves Seven Hills, Independence and Parma – and has more than doubled in size since it became Cleveland Metroparks 16th park reservation in 2006.

"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" said Cleveland Metroparks CEO Brian M. Zimmerman. 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.

Support for this long-term initiative has included the Ohio Public Works Commission's Clean Ohio Green Space Conservation Program, the Ohio EPA's 319 Program, Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District, Cleveland Metroparks, the City of Parma, Ohio Stream Preservation, and the James M. Cox Foundation.



CELEBRATING PROTECTION OF A TAMARACK BOG

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources celebrated the Bird Family Bog Rehabilitation Project with a ribbon cutting ceremony in October 2023. The ribbon cutting headlined a bioblitz event, where park staff, natural resource professionals, and members of the community visited the bog to help identify as many species and plants as possible in one day. The 170-acre property, located within the Cuyahoga River watershed in Rootstown Township, Portage County, will help improve water quality by preserving the bog and transforming formerly farmed land into wetlands. The property was acquired by West Creek Conservancy with funding from Governor Mike DeWine's H2Ohio initiative and the Clean Ohio Green Space Conservation Program. Now under the ownership of Portage Park District, the bog has become a protected gem for generations to come.



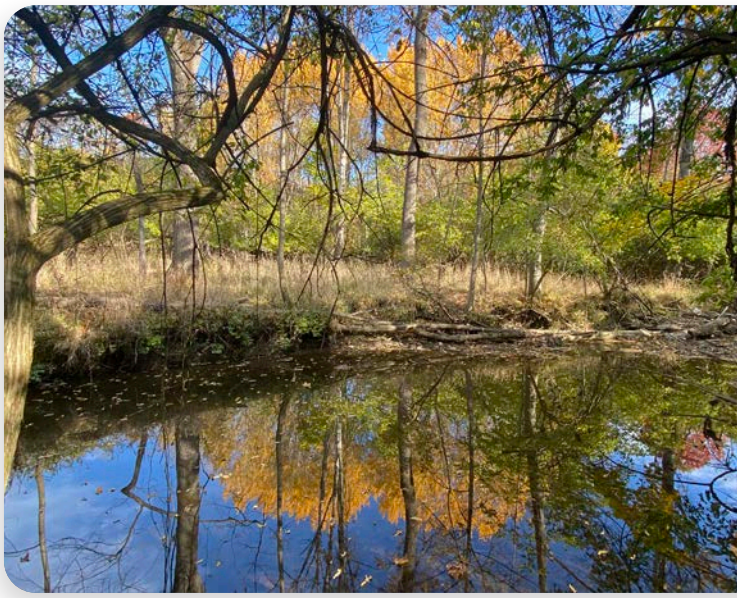


IMPROVING WATER QUALITY IN THE BLACK RIVER

The Black River Preserve restoration project involved the acquisition and restoration of formerly farmed land in the Village of Lodi, Medina County. This critical 76-acre parcel had been impacted by the straightening of streams, extensive drain tile, and antiquated farming practices. Rehabilitating the degraded streams, wetlands, and former wetlands will improve water quality in the Black-Rocky River watershed by reducing the influx of fertilizers, pesticides, and sediment. In addition, the property provides connection of Medina County Park District's East Fork Nature Preserve to their Black River Nature Preserve, Bluebell Valley, Hidden Hollow Camp parklands. The project is a collaboration of Governor Mike DeWine's H2Ohio initiative, West Creek Conservancy, The Nature Conservancy, and Medina County and is now under the ownership of Medina County Park District.

PROTECTING HABITAT FOR RARE SPECIES

The Champion Creek Connector Project involved the acquisition and preservation of a key 10-acre parcel situated in an otherwise highly developed area within the City of Medina. The property holds the confluence of a class-III primary headwater stream and the mainstem of Champion Creek at the headwaters of the West Branch Rocky River. In an area that is only 17.7% forested, the site contains upland forests and is dominated by almost 8 acres of mature floodplain forest that is home to the Northern Clearwater Crayfish, a state listed Species of Concern. The land was acquired by West Creek Conservancy with funding from the Clean Ohio Green Space Conservation Program as well as the generous support of the Tom and Jill Lincoln Foundation and the Willard Stephenson Foundation. Now under the ownership of the City of Medina the property links the 29-acre Crestwood Park to the 35-acre Roscoe Ewing Park, thus enlarging the City of Medina's park and trail system.



CONNECTING VILLAGE GREEN SPACE

The Glenwillow Greenway Expansion project involved the acquisition and preservation of a 21-acre parcel in the Village of Glenwillow, Cuyahoga County. The project was identified as a Critical Area that is highly urbanized and impaired by the issues from suburban development and historical channel modification. The natural landscape will be preserved to provide important recreational and educational opportunities to residents throughout the region which will maintain valuable wildlife habitat and flood storage that the natural, undeveloped landscape provides. The land was acquired with funding from the Clean Ohio Green Space Conservation Program. Now under the ownership of the Village of Glenwillow the property supports a larger initiative known as the Tinker's Creek Trail Connection -- an initiative to connect several Village-owned properties as well as Cleveland Metroparks' Bedford Reservation together via walking trails.









KINSMAN SWAMP PRESERVE: RESTORING OHIO'S SWAMP FORESTS

In another amazing partnership-driven project, West Creek Conservancy was able to help protect 196 acres located within the Shenango River watershed in Kinsman Township, Trumbull County. The project protects over one and one-half miles of stream and 126 acres of Category III wetland.

Decades of agricultural use had flattened the natural topography and compromised this landscape's ecological function. As a result, the Pymatuning Creek watershed experienced an increase in nutrient loading. West Creek Conservancy sought to restore the natural landscape, reduce nutrient loads to downstream water bodies, and bring functional hydrology, habitat, and connectivity back to the area.

Together with the design-build team of Biohabitats and Meadville Land Service, West Creek successfully restored natural hydrology to the site by placing wattle structures in





agricultural ditches and adding hummock and hollow grading to the landscape to simulate natural varied forest topography. Vernal pools were added to create new wetlands and expand the site's existing Category III forested wetland complex.

The site was revegetated with more than 900 native trees and shrubs, and habitat complexity was further enhanced with the installation of over 35 woody habitat features. The project restored riparian forest habitat, thus expanding the adjacent forested wetland complex footprint. The restoration design also laid out two potential loop trails which would provide visitors with unique opportunities to experience the restored habitat, along with the diversity of wildlife it supports.

The property was acquired and restored with funding from the Clean Ohio Green Space Conservation Program and Governor Mike DeWine's H2Ohio initiative. Now under the ownership of Trumbull County MetroParks, the project fulfills their mission of promoting health, recreation, conservation, and economic development for residents and visitors by developing, preserving, and managing park properties.

PRESERVING HEMLOCK RAVINES

The Chippewa Creek Conservation Corridor project involved the acquisition of 53 acres within the Chippewa Creek watershed in the City of Broadview Heights, Cuyahoga County. The project protects over one mile of high-quality stream and 12.8 acres of wetlands and contains a variety of habitats including mesic and wet meadow, upland young to mature forest, mature valley wall forest, hemlock ravines (a rare habitat in northeast Ohio), dramatic cliff gorges, stream habitat, and riparian wetlands. A tributary to Chippewa Creek flows through the property, which supports the mature forest riparian wetland habitat along the streambed. West Creek Conservancy acquired the property with funding from Clean Ohio Green Space Conservation Program in partnership with Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District and the City of Broadview Heights







CONNECTING SCHOOLS TO GREEN SPACE

The Furnace Run Land Lab project involved the acquisition and preservation of the 37-acre property in the Village of Richfield, Summit County. The project was a high priority due to its high-quality water resources, and proximity to schools and other parkland. The project protects over 3,700 linear feet of headwater stream and over 24 acres of forested wetland complex. The property is contiguous with Richfield Elementary School to the east, and Revere High School and Revere Board of Education to the south. In addition, the property is approximately one-half mile from the Cuyahoga Valley National Park and Summit Metro Parks reservations. The property was acquired with funding from the Clean Ohio Green Space Conservation Program and is now under the ownership of Summit Metro Parks.

CONSERVING FLOODPLAIN FORESTS

The Pond Brook Aurora Lake Project involved the acquisition of 43 acres, and the permanent protection of 41 acres through a Conservation Easement, within the Tinker's Creek-Pond Brook watershed in the City of Reminderville, Summit County. The project protects high-quality stream habitat, forested wetland complexes, Category III wetlands, and headwaters of Pond Brook. Pond Brook flows directly into the main channel feeding Aurora Lake and is the largest external contributor of phosphorus into the lake. The lake has experienced considerable issues as a result of rapid development in the area. Preservation of the property will reduce nutrient loading, improve water quality, and help mitigate adverse impacts such as harmful algal blooms. The property was acquired by West Creek Conservancy with funding from Clean Ohio Green Space Conservation Program in partnership with the City of Reminderville.



Photo: Judy Semroc



Photo: Judy Semroc



PROTECTING FORESTED BAT HABITAT

The Watershed Divide Preserve project involved the acquisition of 75 acres in the City of Brecksville and the City of Broadview Heights. Not only does it straddle the two cities, but it is also located at the precipice of a watershed divide, between Furnace Run watershed and the East Branch of Rocky River watershed. The project protects 7.5 acres of wetlands and strong stands of upland forests and woodlands, lending itself to a phenomenal habitat for bats. Several listed bat species were confirmed on the site including the Federally Endangered northern long-eared bat. The property was identified in the Furnace Run Balanced Growth Plan as a Priority Conservation Area, and aligns with the goals of the Rocky River Watershed NPSIS Plan. The property was acquired by West Creek Conservancy with funding from Clean Ohio Green Space Conservation Program.

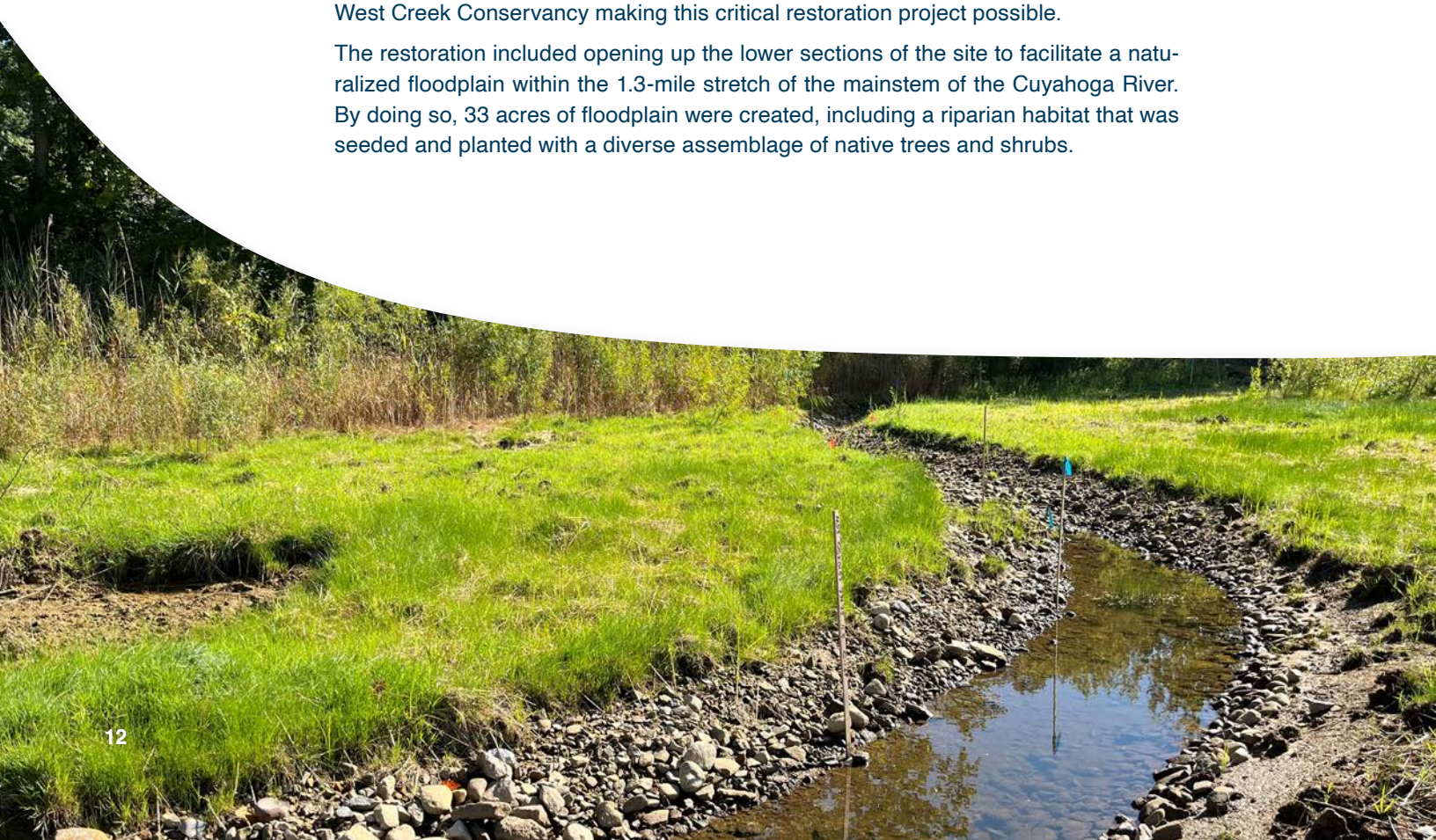
CONVERTING A GOLF COURSE INTO A FUNCTIONING FORESTED FLOODPLAIN

The Riverwood Restoration project involved the restoration of a 57-acre former golf course in the City of Akron, Summit County. Located on Riverview Road adjacent to the Cuyahoga River, it is just across the river from the 988-acre Summit Metro Parks Sand Run Metro Park; a sprawling park with several trail heads and park areas.

The project created approximately 9.1 acres of wetland, 11.2 acres of floodplain, 3,784 linear feet of headwater streams, and 25 acres of upland habitat.

The restoration site sits within the FEMA floodplain between River Mile 38.5 and 39.7, and it acts as the natural riparian zone for the mainstem of the Cuyahoga River along a section of the river known for migratory spawning of Steelhead Trout. Furthermore, there are two tributaries that join the Cuyahoga River at and upstream of this site -- Sand Run and Mud Brook -- both of which increase the volume and velocity of the water in the Cuyahoga River. A local developer, Petros Homes owned the property and had a development plan in place to develop the entire site. West Creek Conservancy worked with the Petros Homes to limit the development and impact to upland sections of the site outside of the floodplain. Petros Homes generously donated the property to West Creek Conservancy making this critical restoration project possible.

The restoration included opening up the lower sections of the site to facilitate a naturalized floodplain within the 1.3-mile stretch of the mainstem of the Cuyahoga River. By doing so, 33 acres of floodplain were created, including a riparian habitat that was seeded and planted with a diverse assemblage of native trees and shrubs.





The restoration project began with the breakage of drain tiles and the decompaction of the soil. Subsequently, the restoration focused on bank stabilization along the Cuyahoga River to restore the natural riparian habitat. The project also enhances fish habitat in and along 1.3 miles of the Cuyahoga River within the Cuyahoga River Area of Concern, which will help meet the State of Ohio's Beneficial Use Impairment Restoration Targets for fish habitat. Fluvial and adfluvial fish habitats were enhanced and expanded.

The site was also home to invasive plant species, which were treated with herbicide and physically removed. In addition, this project will provide an important marsh and riparian habitat for the black-crowned night heron, a threatened species in Ohio, which was recorded at the Sand Run Metro Park just across the river.

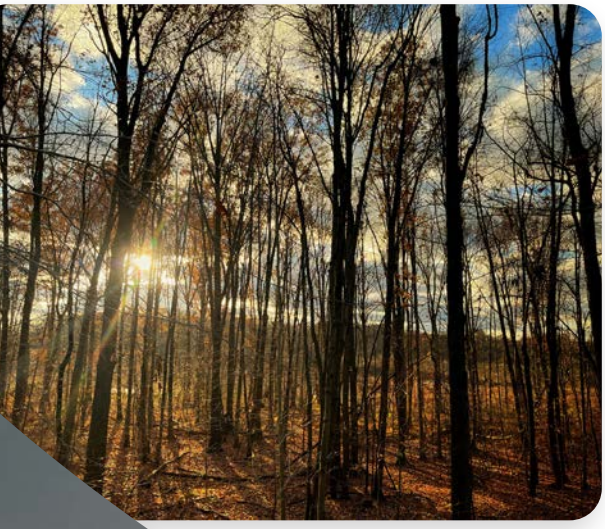
The project will also result in an important reduction of sediment, phosphorus, and nitrogen loading through the restoration of the site's natural ecological functionality, inclusive of, but not limited to stream channels, direct tributaries, wetlands, vernal pools, floodplain, and riparian areas. Restoring these numerous wetlands and riparian areas where the golf course once stood now captures nutrients and sediment from residential runoff nearby. The shuttering of the golf course has removed a massive amount of phosphorus from fertilization practices that were draining directly into the river.

Ultimately, public access will include a trail system complete with public trailheads and potentially a kayak ramp to place this site as a put-in/take-out along the State designated Cuyahoga River Water Trail.

The project was undertaken by West Creek Conservancy with funding from Clean Ohio Green Space Conservation Program and Governor Mike DeWine's H2Ohio initiative, in partnership with Petros Homes.







SPRING CREEK PRESERVE: CULTIVATING CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIPS

In late 2022, West Creek Conservancy with the help of Ohio EPA completed the purchase and acquisition of approximately 361 acres in Montville Township, 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 to conceptualize and design a network of water control structures throughout the site to develop, enhance and maintain the diverse wetland complexes located throughout the preserve. West Creek and Ducks Unlimited plan to finalize engineering and apply for funding to implement this comprehensive restoration plan. West Creek also forged a partnership with The Nature Conservancy to survey the extent of invasive species in the vast wetland complexes on-site with the goal of developing a master invasive species plan for the Preserve which will be initiated in 2025.

Conservation of the Spring Creek Preserve property has resulted in an abundance of wildlife enjoying the diverse habitat of the site. There is evidence of bobcats and river otter and sightings of black bears and fishers at the Preserve, all four of which were extirpated from northern Ohio in mid-1850s. The wetland habitat has drawn many unique bird species to the Preserve, including nesting sand hill cranes (state threatened) as well as bald eagles, osprey, green heron, snowy egret, and dozens of species of nesting and migrating waterfowl.





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

Stearns Native Nursery comprises 16 acres of the 48-acre Stearns Homestead in the City of Parma. A major focus at Stearns Native Nursery has been the propagation of native, local ecotype plant stock that supports biodiversity, stormwater management, and enhances visitor experiences in parks and at West Creek's restoration sites. The nursery's stock has been installed in restoration sites, city parks, and on tree lawns to absorb stormwater which helps reduce flooding and erosion. These plantings provide oxygen and shade to help limit the sweltering effect of heat islands that become established in urban centers, not to mention the natural beauty and increase in home values that trees offer!

Stearns Native Nursery has prioritized the propagation of keystone species. Keystone species are trees, wildflowers, and shrubs that support the vast majority of mammals, pollinators, and birds in our local ecosystems. Keystone tree species being grown at Stearns include a variety of oak, hickory, and cherry. There is also a plan to increase propagation of keystone wildflowers, such as goldenrods and asters.

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. In the fall of 2023, volunteers spent many tireless hours collecting seeds from wild, native species which were instrumental in enriching the inventory at Stearns Native Nursery. West Creek staff worked hand in hand with volunteers, who completed the meticulous task of cleaning the seeds and initiating the stratification process. Stratification involves a period of cold, moist storage that effectively breaks seed dormancy and sets the stage for germination and growth. Once the seeds are stratified, they are potted within the greenhouse and nurtured toward their full potential.









VOLUNTEER UPDATE: WE COULDN'T DO IT WITHOUT YOU!

Volunteers are critical in helping to advance the mission of West Creek Conservancy to ensure that our natural areas, streams, and wetlands are healthy and well protected for generations to come.

In 2023, West Creek enjoyed the participation of hundreds of volunteers who assisted with a variety of stewardship, outreach, and office activities. The volunteers included corporate groups from Cox Communications, Ernst & Young, Stantec, Global Prairie, and the Ohio Contractors Network's Young Professionals, who assisted with property stewardship, invasive species management, and restoration. Individual volunteers and community groups, such as the Girl Scouts of Northeast Ohio and Padua High School, participated in tree plantings, site clean-ups, seed collection and propagation at Stearns Nursery, as well as events such as *Up! A Creek*.

West Creek Conservancy was formed by a group of volunteers and without the help of volunteers our work would not be accomplished. There are many opportunities for volunteering, and a variety of ways to contribute to the mission of West Creek. Whether your interests lie in restoration activities, educational events, or helping out at the office, there are always an assortment of projects that are sure to excite you! Tools and refreshments are always provided, so all that is necessary is your helping hand! If you have an interest in volunteering or know of a group or company who might be interested, please contact kara@west-creek.org. Your contribution of time, no matter how big or small, will make a significant and lasting impact.

Let's grow together!





UP! A CREEK 2023

West Creek Conservancy's signature fundraising event, *Up! A Creek* was held on August 12, 2023 at Windows on the River. Attendees at the conservation gala were greeted with appetizers and refreshments and enjoyed a trip through the Greater Cleveland Aquarium.

The event was a crowd pleaser with live entertainment, and games such as Heads and Tails and West Creek's infamous Wine Toss Game, all in support of West Creek's mission. Raffle baskets, silent auction items, and live auction items such as a blimp ride and a Cavs party for 12 also helped successfully raise vital funding needed for land conservation, stream and river protection, habitat restoration, and greenway development efforts.

With your help, West Creek is creating a greener greater northeast Ohio!

Up! A Creek was presented by Ohio Real Title Agency LLC and C&J Contractors, Inc.



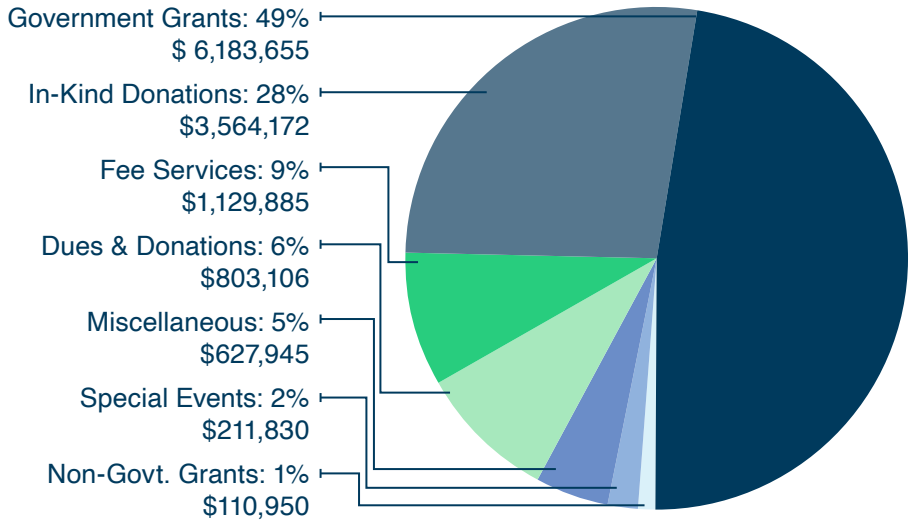




REVENUE & EXPENSES

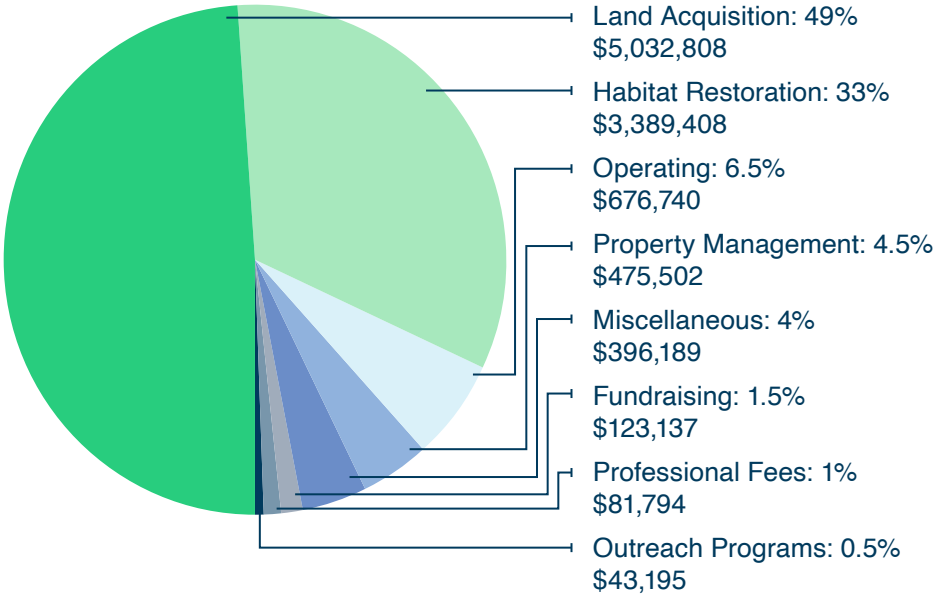
2023 REVENUE

Total Revenues: $12,631,543



2023 EXPENSES

Total Expenses: $10,228,622



Change in Net Assets: $2,402,921

Financial year ending December 31, 2023. Accrual basis, unaudited.

DONORS & SUPPORTERS

You make it possible! In 2023 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, 2023 are listed here.

$10,000 & Over
ARPA Community Grant Fund
Char & Chuck Fowler Family Foundation
Cleveland-Cliffs Foundation
David Farrier
George Gund Foundation
Kelvin and Eleanor Smith Foundation
Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District
Ohio Department of Development
Ohio Department of Natural Resources H2Ohio Program
Ohio EPA
Ohio Lake Erie Commission
Ohio Public Works Commission
Ohio Stream Preservation, Inc.
Tom and Jill Lincoln Foundation
Village of Glenwillow

$5,000 to $9,999
Donald L. Barr
City of Beachwood
City of Broadview Heights
City of Brooklyn
City of Highland Heights
City of Independence
City of Parma
Cox Comunications
Fred Hipp
John Kurtz
Jane Maderka
Village of Brooklyn Heights
Village of Cuyahoga Heights
Village of Valley View
Rich & Barbara Weiser

$2,500 to $4,999
Anonymous
Benjamin Borns
Full Moon Empire Inc.
Patrick Gsellman
Rudolf & Barbara Hermes
Heroux Devtek
Jeff Lennartz
Michael Mohlenkamp
David & Laura Sangree
Shaker Lakes Garden Club
Sherwin Williams
Eric Sluss

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Joseph Blanda
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Giving Well Family Foundation
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$500 to $999
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Robert Brill
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Cuyahoga County Port Authority
Davey Resource Group
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Marks Construction Inc.
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David Roth
Ed & Brendalee Salk
Eric & Debbie Schafer
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Steven and Ann Pigoni Family Foundation
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$250 to $499
AmazonSmile Foundation
Anonymous
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Jennifer Vasarhelyi
Verdantas LLC
Dr. Gregory Warren & Karen Seawall
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Mengxue Xie
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Anonymous (3)
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John Mitterholzer
Ralph & Theresa Mog
Monica Moore
Kevin Moriarty
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Donna Nettgen
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James Petras
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