



WEST CREEK
C O N S E R V A N C Y

Summer Newsletter 2025

A NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Though we are seeing (and experiencing) polarization in so much of the news today – a common ground that I hope we all can agree on is that protection of our land and water resources is not just a ‘today’ thing, but rather a generational gift for those that will carry on beyond us.

Thriving communities are built upon so many factors, and we’re a piece of that puzzle; protecting greenspaces, water quality, and wildlife. But in reality, our work is actually more than just land/water/wildlife – it’s the underlying pin of a functional environment. Parklands and our waterways are a place of gathering and recreation, a place of respite, reflection, and solitude. Greenspaces are kidneys for our drinking water (and for our floodwaters). Natural areas are home to our region’s wildlife and pollinators alike; they are our forests to seek shade from or to produce life’s daily products.

The common ground is finding a balance, which is not an easy task by any account.

Much of our work is protecting what natural gems we have left, but so much of what we do is fixing the broken; restoring streams that were buried, building wetlands where they were bulldozed, re-foresting where clear-cut, retrofitting the built environment to manage stormwater or heat-island effects, and even removing development where natural systems need to thrive (too many times un-doing things where water constantly wins the battle).

We’re just past the halfway mark in 2025, and we face a variety of challenges (political, economic, environmental – all colliding at once). Land and water programs are on the chopping block at all levels, which is inherently disenfranchising. Land and water, our parklands – are something that can bridge a divide and provide that common ground by which to connect people and the natural world (and people to each other).

We’ve remained steadfast in our mission and dedicated to our partners even amidst an ever evolving political climate – we’ve not changed our mission, our vision, nor our hybrid approach of protecting and restoring resources. In the face of adversity, we choose to push forward, to demonstrate the criticality of our work within the region.

Thank you for supporting West Creek, and if you’d ever like to discuss our work, how you can become more involved, or how you can become part of change in your community, please reach out; stewardship isn’t just a fancy word we like to throw around – it’s a legacy gift for future generations.

Protect – Restore – Connect
Cheers,

Derek Schafer, Executive Director

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West Creek's Newest Board Member Steve Iannazzi

Steve serves as the Cleveland Market Leader for Cox Communications, the first US telecom company to achieve zero waste to landfill! Originally from Rhode Island, the Ocean State, he developed an early appreciation for protecting and enjoying natural resources. Since relocating to the Cleveland area, he has enjoyed spending time exploring the Rocky River Reservation. Steve is grateful to serve on the board of West Creek Conservancy, an organization dedicated to preserving natural spaces and fostering community involvement.

Right Time, Right Place - A Former Intern's Reflection

"West Creek was an important part of setting my career into motion. A little over 8 years ago, Derek Schafer presented to my class at Baldwin Wallace University, and after hearing about the work and mission of West Creek, the generational impact it has, the community it engages, the partnerships it creates – resonated so deeply that something clicked in me. I chased him out of the classroom to tell him how important that simple presentation was to me. It opened up doors to me that I didn't even know were there. Thank you for simply taking the time to talk to us! I would encourage anyone to invite West Creek into your class or your place of work, and maybe hearing about the mission will impact you the way it impacted me. I'm proud to say that I've continued to stay engaged with this amazing organization – and also thankful to my employer for providing me the opportunity to do so!"

Jon Kuss, West Creek Conservancy Intern - 2016



Park District Surpasses 9,000 Acres with Purchase to Protect Yellow Creek

With support from West Creek Conservancy, Medina County Park District (MCPD) purchased 97 acres in Granger Township this summer. With the acquisition, located on Medina Line Road and north of a planned Menard's-anchored retail complex off State Route 18, MCPD has surpassed 9,000 protected acres.

The recent purchase was made possible with a \$1,388,823 Clean Ohio grant from the Ohio Public Works Commission and \$150,000 from West Creek. The local portion paid by the park district was a little more than \$464,000.

"We've been eyeing this property since 2019," said Nathan D. Eppink, director of MCPD, which is celebrating its 60th anniversary in 2025. "This success story speaks to the power of persistence, partnerships, and leveraging our local tax dollars." The latest acquisition protects woods, wetlands, and 927 linear feet of the headwaters of Yellow Creek, one of the cleanest tributaries to the Cuyahoga River, so its preservation impacts three counties—Medina, Summit, and Cuyahoga.

During a 2024 survey of the parcel, biologists—including staff from neighboring Summit Metro Parks—documented four species of bats, including the Ohio endangered little brown bat, and more than 400 total species of animals, plants, insects, and fungi. Additionally, the property has tremendous restoration and recreation potential. Ten acres have been set aside for 'active' recreation, such as ball fields, and future development will include parking, restrooms, trails, and more.

Eppink said there is no time frame for providing public access, as the property is part of a larger acquisition strategy. The district, together with West Creek, is pursuing an additional 97 acres adjacent to the recent purchase.

"We appreciate the opportunity to be part of this important conservation project," said Joe Leslie, director of real estate for West Creek. "Partnerships and collaboration are critical for the success of a complex project such as this, and we applaud Medina County Park District for its drive to protect such special places for the community."

Since 2019, MCPD has grown by nearly 1,900 acres through donations of land and purchases of important properties, often with grant support. The Yellow Creek purchase represents the third time MCPD has partnered with West Creek. In 2021, MCPD acquired 56 acres in Creston, adjacent to MCPD property, at no local cost. In 2024, West Creek transferred to MCPD 77 acres between two park district properties in Lodi after coordinating and funding restoration activities. The Lodi property cost MCPD just \$75,000.

"We are preserving what people love about Medina County," said MCPD Commissioner Jason Venner. "We can't do this important work alone. It often takes a patient seller and a great partner like West Creek."

In a recent survey of 500 Medina County residents, 35% of respondents said protecting additional open space is important, while 49% said preservation and building parks are equally important. The statistically significant survey was underwritten by the nonprofit Friends of Medina County Parks, Inc.





Irishtown Bend Hill Stabilization

The Port of Cleveland has successfully completed the installation of the final pipe pile - #203 - in the Irishtown Bend Hill Stabilization Project. This marks a major step forward in protecting the Cuyahoga River's navigation channel and the thousands of jobs that depend on it. Thanks to the hard work of our partners, contractors, and engineers, we're one step closer to securing Cleveland's riverfront for future generations.

Photo Credit: Port of Cleveland and Goettle



Talcott Creek Preserve

In 2024, West Creek Conservancy acquired and protected the 114-acre Talcott Creek property in Thompson Township, Geauga County, with support from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources' H2Ohio program. Restoration efforts - funded by H2Ohio, the Ohio EPA's 319 program, and the Great Lakes Commission's Great Lakes Sediment and Nutrient Reduction Program - were completed in June 2025, focusing on restoration of a severely channelized segment of Talcott Creek, a cold-water tributary to the Grand River. Restoration activities included bank stabilization and restoration of a more natural stream channel morphology, as well as installation of in-stream grade and habitat structures. Roughly 47 acres of surrounding agricultural fields were converted to native wetland, meadow, and riparian forest, reestablishing a functional and hydrologically connected floodplain. The project is expected to significantly reduce annual sediment and nutrient loading to Talcott Creek, improving water quality and enhancing habitat within Talcott Creek and downstream in the Grand River watershed.



Vibrant NEO Champion

Our Executive Director, Derek Schafer, was recognized at the Vibrant NEO Champion Awards, which honors standout projects, programs, and policies across Northeast Ohio that are actively shaping a stronger, more sustainable region. These awards celebrate the efforts of communities, nonprofits, businesses, and civic leaders advancing the Vibrant NEO Vision.

Congratulations to this year's winners, recognized for their outstanding leadership and innovation!

Greater Akron Chamber - Sustainable Polymers Tech Hub
City of Cleveland - Site Readiness for Goods Jobs Fund
Derek Schafer - Executive Director, West Creek Conservancy

A Wildly Successful Evening - Up! A Creek 2025

We're still feeling the energy from Up! A Creek 2025, our annual celebration to protect, connect, and restore Northeast Ohio's natural spaces. This year's event took place at the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo on June 28th and brought together hundreds of people who share a passion for preserving the land and water that define our region. Thanks to the incredible support of attendees, sponsors, donors, and volunteers, the evening was a true success. Every dollar raised helps us expand access to green space, protect vital habitats, and move restoration projects forward.

Mark your calendars — Up! A Creek 2026 will take place on Saturday, September 19th at Windows on the River! We can't wait to celebrate with you again next year.



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Creekside Collaborative - Open House Recap

West Creek Conservancy recently hosted an Open House and Native Plant Sale at Creekside Collaborative Partners®, welcoming community members to explore sustainable living through native gardening, conservation, and local food systems. Attendees enjoyed educational presentations from Cuyahoga Soil and Water Conservation District on soil health, Spice Field Kitchen on community food systems, and Meadow City Native Nursery on creating pollinator-friendly backyards. The event also featured a variety of local environmental exhibitors, including the Cleveland Metroparks Watershed Stewardship Center, Western Cuyahoga Audubon Society, McDougald's Pollination Station, and Nature in My Backyard, offering inspiration and resources for healthier, more resilient communities.

If you missed our spring plant sale, don't miss our fall plant sale on September 21st from 10 am - 2 pm!

Location: Creekside Collaborative - 7000 Randolph Drive, Parma, Ohio 44129



Two Years Post Restoration: Stickney Creek

Currently, only two miles of Stickney Creek, a tributary of Big Creek, flows through open channels. Upon exiting the culvert at Ridge Road, in the City of Brooklyn, the stream channel had been straightened and is entrenched for approximately 600 feet. Typical of streams in urbanized watershed, the sediment starved water had previously scoured down to bedrock and was eroding the stream banks. In 2022/2023, in partnership with the City of Brooklyn, with support from Ohio EPA 319 Program, Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District, and the Clean Ohio Greenspace Program - West Creek successfully restored a nearly ½ mile reach, including 6 acres of floodplain

Following restoration, we keep an eye on such sites to ensure they're stable and functioning, as well as to ensure the proper vegetation has re-established. We are happy to say that this site is now healthy and vibrant!



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

Enclosed is my tax deductible contribution of:

- \$1,000 • Watershed Patron
- \$500 • Greenway Champion
- \$100 • Trail Builder
- \$50 • Land Steward
- \$35 • Introductory
- Other

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Please make checks payable to:

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- Please send more information on making a gift to West Creek Conservancy through my will or estate plan
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West Creek Conservancy is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization. Your generous gift is tax deductible.



Supporter Spotlight

Mark Brody – A Lifelong Connection to West Creek

A lifelong resident of Parma, Mark Brody's connection to West Creek runs deep—he grew up just ten feet from its banks, where he spent countless hours exploring the flowing waters and surrounding woodlands. He went on to graduate from Padua Franciscan High School, and then studied chemical engineering and environmental science at Case Western Reserve University.

Since 2019, Mark has been a committed supporter and volunteer with West Creek Conservancy. He brings both expertise and enthusiasm to West Creek's efforts, and his ongoing support has played a pivotal role in advancing key initiatives—most notably our Creekside Collaborative native nursery program. Thanks to Mark's dedication, the program has seen meaningful growth in its capacity to restore native habitats and engage the community in hands-on conservation work. He has also been working tirelessly on a Monarch butterfly project that would help support the population of Monarch butterflies in Northeast Ohio.

Today, he continues to give back not only through his work with West Creek but also as a dedicated volunteer with Cleveland Metroparks. His involvement spans a variety of initiatives, including the Watershed Volunteer Program, butterfly monitoring, and serving as a trail ambassador. He also contributes to rain garden maintenance and native seed collection, supporting the health and sustainability of local ecosystems.

We are deeply grateful for Mark's continued support and for the roots he continues to grow with us at West Creek.

28 YEARS of Making Nature
your Neighbor



Fall Events

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Sept. 20th
9 am - 4 pm | NEORSD Clean Water Fest
Visit cleanwaterfest.com for more information |
| Sept. 21st
10 am - 2 pm | Creekside Collaborative Fall Plant Sale
Keep an eye on our website & socials for more information |
| Oct. 4th
1 pm - 4 pm | Sturgeon Fest
Visit scriver.org/sturgeon-festival/ for more information |
| Oct. 11th
10 am - 2 pm | Blue Heron Homecoming
Visit akronwaterwaysrenewed.com for more information |