



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

Fall Newsletter 2025

# A NOTE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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It's been, dare I say, a dry...but beautiful fall in Ohio. The colors are amazing across our region, and I can only hope that amidst the busyness of everyday life that you're able to take a walk, hike, or ride and take a little respite in the natural world! Within this update, there is a vast array of conservation and engagement work highlighted and we're happy to share them with you - as it's your support that helps us do what we do. Sometimes we take our parks, greenspaces, and trails for granted, and I'll be just one of many to say - that each one of those parks, trails and greenspaces takes a lot of work, as well as patience, partnership, and regional support. Partnerships are often the facet of such work that may not be clear; there's so many collaborations that happen with many not knowing or it's simply not clear who does what. Our region is blessed to have a vast network of watershed groups, park districts/metroparks, conservation organizations, and other community groups fighting every day to make the area where we live, work, and play a better place. What's difficult right now is simply the uncertainty of programs, initiatives, and policies that support land and water resource conservation. We've made so much progress in Ohio and it would be devastating to see that fall. We, as a region, convened over 50 years ago, following a series of fires on the Cuyahoga, to enhance policy and practice, to establish programs that protect land, water, and wildlife, and to dedicate funding on the pure recognition that it was important to us as a state and nation. There are so many important things that need or require our attention that it becomes overwhelming. And there are so many times when we simply say 'I've got to take a walk and clear my head' and so many of those walks are within the trails, parks, and greenspaces that we've all worked so hard to protect, restore, and connect to the community. At West Creek, we're humbled that we get to protect such amazing places - an impact now, but a generational gift. We're sincerely appreciative of all that supports us, through contributions or partnerships, and we'd welcome you to get involved as well!

Protect – Restore – Connect

Cheers,

*Derek Schafer*

*Derek Schafer, Executive Director*



## Thank you, Cox!

Through the Cox Charities Community Investments Grants, Cox employees awarded a total of \$15,000 in grants to 3 local nonprofits. West Creek was awarded one of these \$5,000 grants for our Creekside Collaborative program. This will help us teach residents across Cuyahoga and Lake counties how to turn their lawns into vibrant native gardens to improve soil health, reduce water use, support pollinators, and create habitats for birds and insects to thrive. Creekside Collaborative is so named due to the multitude of partners who bring the vision of a sustainable urban nursery to life. With this grant, Cox is one of these incredible partners who make what we do possible. These funds will support the expansion of our Shrink Your Lawn and Native Seen Program, which engages community members in ecological restoration and sustainable landscaping practices. A sincere thank you to Cox for their support!



## Thank you, First Energy!

West Creek Conservancy recently welcomed volunteers from FirstEnergy Corporation to Talcott Creek Preserve in Thompson, Ohio, where they donated and planted over 400 native trees along a newly restored stream corridor. These trees will help rebuild forest cover and provide crucial shade for the creek. Shaded streams stay cooler, supporting native fish and aquatic species that depend on stable temperatures and oxygen-rich water. Tree roots also strengthen streambanks, filter runoff, and create vital habitat for birds, insects, and other wildlife—helping the entire watershed thrive for years to come. We are sincerely grateful for FirstEnergy Corporation's support!



## Fox Riparian Protection Project

The Fox Riparian Protection Project involved the acquisition and permanent conservation of a 235-acre inholding of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) Grand River Wildlife Area. The property contains diverse habitat, including high-quality wetlands and streams, with the meandering Grand River providing habitat for colonies of beavers, river otters, and many fish species as it flows through the property. Due to the property's tremendous natural resources, it was a high priority for conservation for West Creek and ODNR, which manages the surrounding 7,664-acre Grand River Wildlife Area.

When the property was listed for sale, West Creek sprang into action. With support from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources' Division of Wildlife and the H2Ohio Rivers program, West Creek was able to acquire the property in September 2025. Ultimately, this expansive natural area will be transferred to ODNR for long-term ownership and management as part of the Grand River Wildlife Area, providing permanent habitat protection and responsible management as well as opportunities for public recreation, including hunting, fishing, hiking, trapping, and bird watching.



## Former Haydite Mine

The former Haydite Mine, surrounded by the Cuyahoga Valley National Park in the City of Independence, operated for over 125 years. While the mine is historically significant to the industrial heritage of Independence and the Cuyahoga River valley, its operation resulted in the channelization and culverting of a tributary to the Cuyahoga River. With support from the Ohio EPA 319 Program and Ohio Stream Preservation, West Creek has daylighted nearly 500 feet of headwater stream, restored 1,100 feet of natural stream channel, and restored functioning floodplain across nearly 11 acres. The result is enhanced water quality, reconnected habitats and improved hydrology along this Cuyahoga River tributary.

**This site is considered private property at this time and is under 24/7 police enforced surveillance. Please do not attempt to enter this site.**



## Oxbow Wetlands Preserve

The Oxbow Wetlands Preserve project was made possible through the Gorman family's generous donation of a 79-acre property along the Clear Fork Mohican River. Several other funding sources enabled the acquisition and protection of an adjacent 24 acres, with extensive floodplain and habitat restoration throughout the entire 103-acre property. As a result, West Creek and Richland County Park District have successfully protected and restored over 2 miles of the Clear Fork Mohican River, while providing a new public access point to the 18-mile Richland B&O trail. Support provided by the Ohio Public Works Commission – Clean Ohio Green Space Conservation Program, Ohio Department of Natural Resources – H2Ohio Program, and Muskingum Watershed Conservancy District. A partnership with the Richland County Park District.



## Thompson Ledges North

The Thompson Ledges Township Park is the place to explore Thompson Ledges – a unique geological complex representing the northernmost Sharon conglomerate sandstone outcroppings in Ohio. This fall, West Creek helped the Thompson Township Park Commission more than double the acreage of Thompson Ledges Township Park with the addition of 59 acres, and helped them permanently protect the full 117 acres of natural area. This newly protected acreage contains caves and sandstone ledges, old-growth forest, coldwater springs, rare and endangered species, and some of the best remaining examples of Ohio's pre-settlement ecosystems. Support provided by the Ohio Public Works Commission Clean Ohio Program.



## Chippewa Creek Headwaters

Tucked behind residential neighborhoods in Broadview Heights, the Chippewa Creek Headwaters project protects 20 acres of restored stream, wetland, and forest habitat. This project, completed in partnership with the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District, removed blighted structures and impervious surface area that were threatening water quality and hydrology in the headwaters of Chippewa Creek. Now, protected streamside habitat and over 3,000 feet of Chippewa Creek headwaters protects water quality in the Chippewa Creek and Cuyahoga River watersheds, and mitigates downstream flooding.



## Champion Wetlands Preserve

The Champion Wetland Preserve project in Champion Township, Trumbull County, protects one of Northeast Ohio's highest-quality wetland complexes, safeguarding critical habitat for rare, threatened, and endangered species while improving downstream water quality in the Grand River watershed. Now under the Cleveland Museum of Natural History's ownership, the 57-acre Champion Wetland Preserve property will serve as a resource for public education and research, and may catalyze additional conservation of high-quality wetland and forested areas in the project's vicinity. Support provided by the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency's Water Resource Restoration Sponsorship Program.



## Bronson Creek Forest Preserve

The Bronson Creek Forest Preserve adds 25.5 acres, including 5 acres of high-quality forested and riverine wetlands, to the Cleveland Museum of Natural History's Grand River Terraces Preserve, which spans over 1,000 acres in Ashtabula County. The five-acre property also contains over 700 feet of Bronson Creek – a tributary to the State Wild and Scenic Grand River. Permanent protection of these water resources preserves water quality in the Grand River and safeguards habitat for a downstream freshwater mussel bed that supports numerous rare and endangered mussel species. Funding provided by the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) through a partnership with Ducks Unlimited.

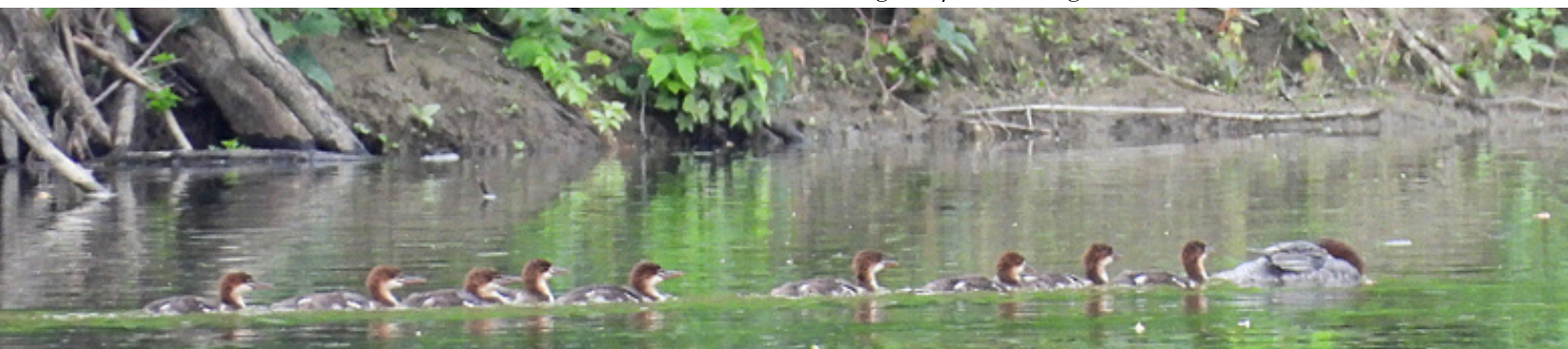


## Upper Cuyahoga Headwaters Preserve

The Upper Cuyahoga Headwaters Preserve protects 80 acres of high-quality floodplain habitat along 3,000 feet of the West Branch of the Cuyahoga River. The property is comprised of an extensive Category III shrub-scrub wetland and emergent wetland complex in addition to mature hardwood forest and upland shrub-scrub habitat. Through the combination of a 21-acre land donation and the grant-funded acquisition of an adjacent 59 acres, West Creek has permanently protected the Upper Cuyahoga Headwaters Preserve and created an 80-acre conservation corridor along the West Branch of the Cuyahoga River. Support provided by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources – H2Ohio Rivers Program and the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) in partnership with Ducks Unlimited.

## Casement Springs Preserve

West Creek Conservancy has acquired the former Casement Club Golf Course, a 68-acre floodplain property along  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile of the Grand River in the City of Painesville and Painesville Township. This abandoned landscape is being restored into a vibrant mosaic of wetlands, riparian forest, and meadow habitat. The restoration effort will improve water quality in a critical area of the Lower Grand River, while enhancing habitat for numerous state-listed bird and bat species. Trails and a parking area will provide public access to this restored riverfront landscape in 2026. Support provided by the Ohio Public Works Commission Clean Ohio Program, Ohio Department of Natural Resources H2Ohio Program, the Ohio Lake Erie Commission, and the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency 319 Program.





## Creekside Collaborative Partners

This summer, we were excited to welcome Elise Taylor, a Civil & Environmental Engineering student from Princeton University, as our intern at Creekside. During her six-week stay, Elise applied her skills by designing and installing a custom irrigation system for our air-pruning propagation boxes — the heart of our native tree-growing efforts. Thanks to her contributions, we're now better equipped to expand our capacity to grow healthy native trees.

As the seasons changed, we kept the momentum going with an evening Urban Ecology Walk. Community members joined us for a guided tour of the property, where they learned about stream ecology and picked up practical tips for managing wet backyards. Each participant went home with a native plant to support stormwater management on their own property.

At our Fall Native Plant Sale, nearly 1,000 native plants found their way into yards and gardens across the region — from pollinator-friendly blooms to resilient native grasses — each one contributing to the restoration of beauty and biodiversity in our local landscapes.

With generous support from the Shaker Lakes Garden Club, we also hosted a hands-on Tree Planting Workshop. Attendees learned best practices for planting and caring for native trees, and each left with a tree of their choice and protective materials to ensure long-term success.

We loved seeing neighbors come together, share stories, and leave inspired to care for the natural world around them. These community-driven efforts are a powerful reminder of what's possible when we work together — growing not only plants and trees, but also stronger connections and healthier ecosystems.





## Fall/Winter Yard Maintenance

As the days shorten and your garden begins to fade, resist the urge to “clean up” too much—your native plants are already preparing for next spring, and a little messiness is actually a good thing!

Leave seed heads standing for winter birds and pollinators; they’re nature’s built-in bird feeders and shelter. Fallen leaves can be gently tucked into garden beds as mulch, insulating roots and enriching the soil as they break down. If you must trim, wait until spring when insects have emerged and temperatures consistently stay above 50°F. Leaving 12"-18" of dead stem provides nesting habitat for our native bees. The old growth will soon be covered with this year's growth

Fall is also the perfect time to shrink your lawn and create a more resilient landscape. You can easily create a new bed for native wildflowers or pollinator gardens by smothering turf grass with overlapping layers of cardboard topped with leaves or mulch. Over winter, this no-dig approach naturally breaks down the grass, builds healthy soil, and sets the stage for a vibrant, living landscape that supports pollinators, improves watershed health, and reduces maintenance next year.



## Fee Reduction Program

You may be eligible to reduce your stormwater fee and help West Creek!

The Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District not only treats sanitary sewage, but it also manages stormwater. Its Regional Stormwater Management Program addresses problems related to stormwater runoff from hard surfaces. Uncontrolled stormwater runoff from parking lots and rooftops contributes to regional stream flooding, erosion, and water-quality issues. You can help protect our local waterways by taking simple steps to better control runoff on your own property. By simply disconnecting downspouts, installing rain barrels, or planting rain gardens, you can receive up to a 25% credit on your stormwater fee. To learn more, go to the NEORS D’s Stormwater Fee Finder website at <https://www.neorsd.org/stormwater/stormwater-fee-finder/>.



**Northeast Ohio  
Regional Sewer District**



Yes, I want to support West Creek Conservancy and help protect green spaces 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

Name \_\_\_\_\_

(AS YOU'D LIKE RECOGNIZED)

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

**Please make checks payable to:**

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

Alternatively, join online at [www.westcreek.org](http://www.westcreek.org) or by scanning the QR code. You can also join by calling us at 216.749.3720 ext. 15



- Please send more information on making a gift to West Creek Conservancy through my will or estate plan
- I have already included West Creek Conservancy in my will or estate plan
- Email me updates on programs and member events.

West Creek Conservancy is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization. Your generous gift may be tax deductible to the extent permitted.



## A Former Intern's Reflection: Jakob Hamlescher

“I worked at West Creek Conservancy from May 2014 until September 2018 as an intern and then as Stewardship and Outreach Manager. I remember the first interview I had for my internship was Derek showing me around Kinsman Farm. I showed up in a sports coat. To a farm. Derek still brought me on to help at the farm as an intern for the summer, and that turned into a more broad reaching internship through the winter of 2014/2015. In 2015 I was brought on as Stewardship and Outreach Manager. That position sounds vague, because it was purposefully vague. At the time I was the third employee and the job was wide reaching. I helped with just about everything West Creek did. Fundraising, leading hikes, managing interns, tabling events, doing presentations, helping with urban agriculture efforts, and (my favorite) protecting/restoring natural areas. During my time with West Creek I learned a lot about the industry, I grew a lot as a person, and I made a lot of connections. I worked often with partner organizations, including Cuyahoga Soil & Water Conservation District where I have been employed as an Urban Technician since 2020. I appreciate my time at West Creek Conservancy because it gave me the experience and the confidence to continue to do environmental work.”

**28** YEARS of Making Nature  
your Neighbor



## Save the Date

**West Creek Annual Meeting**  
**April 14, 2026**

Keep an eye on our website & socials for more information.

**Up! A Creek 2026**

**September 19, 2026 at Windows on the River**

Keep an eye on our website & socials for more information.