

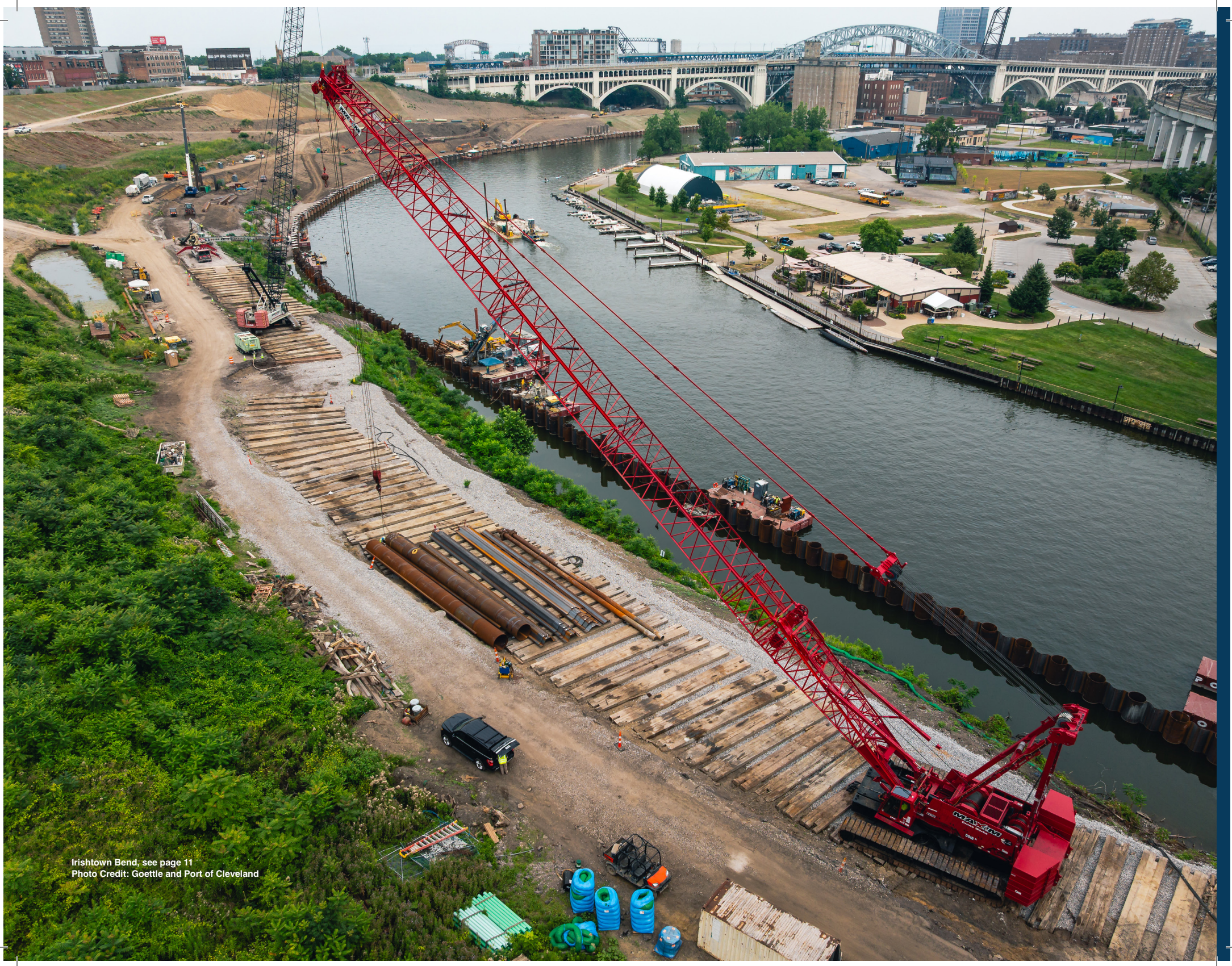


WEST CREEK CONSERVANCY

ANNUAL REPORT

JANUARY 1 - DECEMBER 31, 2025

Photo Credit: Aimee Pierson



Irishtown Bend, see page 11
Photo Credit: Goettle and Port of Cleveland

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Growth Through Collaborative Efforts

Dear Friends,

In 2025, through strong partnerships across Northern Ohio and beyond, West Creek expanded its conservation impact by protecting more than 1,100 acres across 10 counties. This brings our total conserved land to over 6,000 acres in 16 counties. These outcomes reflect the shared commitment and coordinated efforts of public agencies, landowners, and community organizations working together toward common goals.

Our concerted approach also continues to drive the success of Creekside Collaborative Partners, which has expanded its community-based programs, including the Native Nursery, Native Seed Library, and Creekside Field Kitchen. These programs exemplify how partnerships create meaningful opportunities for people to engage with and care for the natural world.

West Creek's most complex conservation efforts are also rooted in collaboration. In 2025, working alongside many dedicated partners, we completed 37 land acquisition projects and 12 restoration projects. Several of these partnership-driven efforts are highlighted in this annual report.

Together, we are delivering lasting conservation and community benefits across Northern Ohio. With your continued partnership and support, we look forward to building on this momentum and increasing our collective impact in 2026.

Thank you for being an essential part of this work, and as always, please feel free to reach out to us at any time.

Cheers,



A blue ink signature of Derek Schafer.

DEREK SCHAFER
Executive Director



A blue ink signature of Michael Mohlenkamp.

MICHAEL MOHLENKAMP
Board Chair



As announced in December, Spice Field Kitchen and West Creek Conservancy have merged, uniting two mission-driven organizations to form a powerful new force for ecological restoration, food systems education, and community engagement across Northern Ohio.

“I am honored to share an important new chapter in Spice Field Kitchen’s story,” said Anne Juster, former Board President of Spice Field Kitchen, now a board member of West Creek. “This transition is an expansion of vision, capacity, and impact.”

“Spice Field Kitchen is an excellent fit with West Creek as our missions are closely aligned,” said Mike Mohlenkamp, Board Chairman of West Creek. “They bring a robust education program and will expand our capacity to engage with communities and connect more people with land and our shared ecosystem.”

For more than seven years, Spice Field Kitchen has delivered innovative place-based learning, hands-on culinary education, and food literacy rooted in land and community. Beginning with a quarter-acre Learning Garden within the 11-acre Spice Acres farm in the Cuyahoga Valley National Park, Spice Field Kitchen became a model for experiential education that connects people to food, ecology, and one another.

In 2023, logistical challenges related to water access, soil conditions, and transportation prompted Spice Field Kitchen to seek a more sustainable path forward. That search led to a conversation with Derek Schafer, executive Director of West Creek Conservancy, about leasing land at Stearns Native Nursery. Derek’s immediate instinct to collaborate created a critical opportunity for Spice Field Kitchen’s continued growth. In February 2024, Spice Field Kitchen relocated to Stearns Native Nursery—now known as Creekside Collaborative Partners.

What began as a practical solution evolved into a deeply mission-aligned partnership. Under the collaborative leadership of Steve Baker, formerly CEO of Spice Field Kitchen and now Director of Education at West Creek Conservancy, and Derek Schafer, educational offerings will expand, partnerships will deepen, and new funding opportunities will emerge.

The heart of Spice Field Kitchen lives on as Creekside Field Kitchen, now supported by a strong organizational foundation. With West Creek, this work will not only endure—it will thrive.

Growing Together – West Creek Conservancy & Spice Field Kitchen Merge





Celebrating 25 Years of Clean Ohio

Twenty-five years ago, Governor Bob Taft championed a unique conservation and restoration initiative known as the Clean Ohio Fund. The intent was to lay the foundation for funding for open space conservation, farmland preservation, trail creation, and brownfield restoration.

The \$400 million bond initiative was embraced by Ohio voters and approved in November of 2000. In 2008, Ohio voters approved the Ohio Bipartisan Job Stimulus Plan of which the Clean Ohio Fund was a critical component. The 2008 ballot initiative was overwhelmingly supported in all 88 counties, which extended funding for Clean Ohio.

In November of 2025, a twenty-fifth anniversary celebration took place at

the Ohio Statehouse Atrium, recognizing the accomplishments of the Clean Ohio Fund. The celebration included inspiring remarks from Governor DeWine, former Governor Bob Taft, Ohio Public Works Commission Director Linda Bailiff, and Ohio Department of Natural Resources Director Mary Mertz, among others.

Administered by the Ohio Public Works Commission, the Clean Ohio Green Space Conservation Fund is dedicated to environmental conservation providing critical funds to preserve open spaces, sensitive ecological areas, and stream corridors. Through the years, West Creek Conservancy has successfully funded 50 conservation projects in 10 counties in northern Ohio, protecting over 3,000 acres. Working hand-in-hand with park districts



Big Creek, Cuyahoga County



West Creek, Cuyahoga County

and municipalities, those projects brought over 40 million dollars to the region and leveraged more than 70 million dollars in conservation projects!

2025 also brought a change to the Ohio Public Works Commission, with Linda Bailiff retiring as Director, and Abbey DeHart stepping into the role. Linda brought civility, open discourse, and consistency to the program and will be greatly missed! “I’ve truly enjoyed working with the West Creek team over the years and seeing firsthand the care, commitment, and skill they bring to maximizing Clean Ohio Green Space Conservation funding,” said Linda Bailiff. “Their work reflects a genuine dedication to collaboration, community engagement, and transparency, and the restoration and reclamation projects they lead don’t just improve landscapes—they strengthen

communities and quality of life. I’m grateful for the partnership and the positive impact their efforts will continue to make long into the future.”

For the past twenty-five years, the Clean Ohio Fund has played a critical role in land conservation throughout Ohio. The Clean Ohio Green Space Conservation Fund has provided nearly a billion dollars of funding, protecting our streams, rivers, wetlands, grasslands, and forests in the state. The multitude of benefits have helped shape the future of Ohio by contributing to the state’s economy, and increasing opportunities for outdoor recreation in communities throughout the state.

Protecting the Upper Cuyahoga River

With the help of two separate landowners, West Creek was able to permanently conserve 80 acres in Claridon Township, Geauga County, comprised of 59 acres acquired through fee-simple purchase and 21 acres generously donated in 2023. While the donated portion had previously not been legally protected, it is now fully safeguarded alongside the newly acquired acreage.

This diverse property is almost entirely floodplain and includes an extensive Category 3 shrub-scrub wetland and emergent wetland complex, as well as 3,000 linear feet of the West Branch of the Cuyahoga River. Beyond these wetlands, the remaining land supports mature hardwood forests and upland shrub-scrub habitats interspersed with vernal pools, offering vital ecological resources for wildlife and contributing to regional biodiversity.

The entirety of the 80 acres has been permanently protected through a combination of a Conservation Easement and a federal Notice of Grant Restriction, in alignment with funding requirements. West Creek will maintain ownership and management of the property, ensuring long-term stewardship. Once access infrastructure is developed, the property will be open to the public seasonally, providing an opportunity for the community to experience and appreciate these unique landscapes.

Importantly, this property is adjacent to 38 acres already protected by the Ohio Division of Natural Resources, creating a larger contiguous conservation area that enhances habitat connectivity and ecological resilience. This project was made possible with generous support from the H2Ohio Rivers Program, administered by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, and the North American Wetland Conservation Act, in partnership with Ducks Unlimited, whose contributions were critical to securing the land and ensuring its protection in perpetuity.



Photo Credit: Jeffrey Suszynski

Cleaner Water Ahead - Prioritizing Phosphorus Reduction



West Creek advanced a major watershed restoration project in 2025, following the 2024 acquisition of a 114-acre property in Thompson Township, Geauga County. The property is along Talcott Creek, an Ohio EPA designated cold-water stream. Historically, Talcott Creek had been channelized and straightened, resulting in degraded water quality, impaired habitat, an inaccessible floodplain and unstable stream morphology. Addressing these impacts required a comprehensive restoration approach.

Stream and wetland restoration was successfully completed in 2025, significantly improving ecological function, water quality, and habitat conditions within the watershed. Aside from the stream being incised or straightened, it was also flanked by farm fields with intensive artificial drainage; these drainage tiles overloaded the stream with sediment, phosphorus and nitrogen – the not so natural cocktail that exacerbates harmful algal blooms. In this circumstance, the restoration not only improved general habitat and fish migration, but it further provided an opportunity to abate (or significantly reduce) loading into the waterway.

In addition to stream restoration, a large area of the former agricultural fields was re-converted back to wetland and open meadow habitat. The forested areas of the property consist primarily of young timber with limited ecological value but provide potential for long-term habitat enhancement.

The long-term goal for the property is to provide public access for passive recreation on an annual basis, while still protecting and enhancing its restored natural resources. This project was funded by the H2Ohio Program, administered by Ohio Department of Natural Resources, the Ohio EPA 319 Grant Program, and Great Lakes Sediment and Nutrient Reduction Program Grant, administered by the Great Lakes Basin Commission, and represents a significant investment in cold-water stream protection, habitat restoration, and community benefit within the watershed.



Progress through Partnerships - Cleveland Metroparks

“West Creek Conservancy has been an invaluable partner in advancing conservation, connectivity, and stewardship throughout Northeast Ohio. Our shared commitment to collaboration allows us to protect natural resources and maximize impact to create places that people can enjoy for generations.”

—BRIAN ZIMMERMAN, *Chief Executive Officer at Cleveland Metroparks*

Progress through partnerships is a core value at West Creek. While partnerships are often discussed in broad terms, their true foundation lies in communication, transparency, trust and a shared commitment to co-implementing missions. These elements not only strengthen limited resources but help overcome perceived constraints and maximize outcomes for the community.

For more than 20 years, West Creek and Cleveland Metroparks have exemplified this approach as trusted partners. From the creation of West Creek Reservation in 2006 to the opening of the Watershed Stewardship Center in 2013, the two organizations have remained closely aligned in advancing conservation and community impact across Greater Cleveland and Cuyahoga County.

Through this cooperative effort, West Creek Reservation has grown nearly every year and has more than doubled in size since it first opened to the public. Sometimes that growth has been significant, such as the additions of the former Padua and Parmadale properties, and other times it has come through smaller “connection” parcels, including extensions into Seven Hills and Independence. In 2025, that growth amounted to just a half-acre. Yet from the beginning, progress has been incremental. Large and small parcels alike contribute to a conservation puzzle that now spans nearly 600 acres across three cities.

West Creek has also been a steadfast partner in operating the Watershed Stewardship Center, which is an epicenter for urban watershed restoration, research and citizen engagement. After 12 years of operation, the Center now serves 100,000 people annually and proudly serves as the home base for the Watershed Volunteer Program.

West Creek Reservation continues to see new amenities through partnerships that has led to increased park visitation, including over 188,000 recreational visits in 2024 alone. Most recently, a new trail connection is nearing completion, linking Camelot Drive to Broadview Road in the City of Parma and connecting to the Seven Hills Hike & Bike Trail (see photo to the right). After nearly 30 years of land assembly and successful fundraising with the City of Parma and the Clean Ohio Green Space Conservation Fund, this half-mile trail, part of the original vision of the West Creek Preservation Committee, is finally becoming a reality. We are deeply grateful for Cleveland Metroparks' partnership and support in bringing this project to fruition.

Across the region, West Creek often takes on complex and catalytic roles. At Irishtown Bend, for example, West Creek played a critical early role in advancing the project, while Cleveland Metroparks is now expertly leading this transformative initiative to the finish line. Likewise, West Creek frequently steps in when swift action is required for land acquisition. In one urgent case involving a property bordering Hawthorn Parkway, West Creek acquired the parcel at auction, preserved the conservation land by transferring it to Cleveland Metroparks, and returned the residential portion to private ownership. Though only six acres, the acquisition created an important natural buffer for the parkway while maintaining residential property.

Partnerships like these are essential, not only for advancing shared missions, but for leveraging the unique strengths and efficiencies of each organization. West Creek looks forward to continuing this work year after year with Cleveland Metroparks, a true gem in Northeast Ohio.



From left to right: Timothy DeGeeter, Mayor of Parma; Tony Vannello, Parma Service Director; Kevin Kussmaul, Parma Ward 6 councilman

From Forgotten to Flourishing

West Creek is a relatively small tributary to the Cuyahoga River, being only nine miles in length and draining approximately 14 square miles. However, as it winds its way through the watershed it's encompassing some of the most densely developed areas, including the City of Parma, Brooklyn Heights, Seven Hills and Independence. Suffice it to say, West Creek's been highly impacted with its banks along the mainstem crowded with development or its tributaries pushed aside and buried. It was actually this threat of loss of green space and water quality that banded together the original volunteers of West Creek Preservation Committee; and from day one of their shared vision, there was an effort to protect and restore West Creek.

Fast forward 29 years, collaborative efforts have protected nearly 80% of the mainstem corridor. Additionally, over that span of time, tremendous efforts have culminated in some amazing restoration projects. Specific to 2025, the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District undertook an additional mile of restoration along Lower West Creek; a reach that extends where the channel pops out of a culvert from Brooklyn Heights Park under I-480 and flows north towards the City of Independence. One of the most intense parts of this restoration paralleled I-480 at a structure formerly referred to as the 'flume' – a stretch of concrete installed during the original construction of 480/77 interchange that also included a large drop structure. This plunge pool effectually created a fish migration barrier, while also inhibiting natural floodplain or riparian area access. This project has culminated in another mile of West Creek being restored.

Project partners including West Creek and the Village of Brooklyn Heights worked for decades securing land and building partnerships for this project, and Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District was able to bring it all to the finish line.



A sincere thank you to The Honorable Mike S. Procuk, Mayor of Brooklyn Heights, for his tireless support for over 20 years in protecting and restoring West Creek.

Stabilizing the Future at Irishtown Bend

2025 has been pivotal for the Irishtown Bend project, with the Port of Cleveland completing the \$65 million stabilization work. This infrastructure is essential for park construction, set to begin in the first half of 2026.

While stabilization was the most visible aspect last year, project partners – LAND studio, Cleveland Metroparks, and Ohio City, Inc. – made significant behind-the-scenes progress. This past year, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed, transferring responsibility for the park's design, construction, and future operations to Cleveland Metroparks. LAND studio and Ohio City, Inc. will continue to contribute by spearheading fundraising efforts, advising on design decisions and providing project support.

As preparations for spring 2026 construction commence, West Creek Conservancy facilitated key easement transfers for the Cleveland Foundation Centennial Trail. Plural Studio and Osborne Engineering are finalizing designs for the Lake Link Trail phase, while Cleveland Metroparks contracted Great Lakes Construction as the main contractor.

In total, LAND studio and Ohio City, Inc. have raised funds totaling \$35 million from public and private sources, including a \$10.8 million federal grant secured through the assistance of Cleveland Metroparks.



Photo credit: Goettle and Port of Cleveland

February 2026



Port completes stabilization. Cleveland Metroparks begins park and trail planning and development.

Late Spring 2026



Construction on the Centennial Trail, funded by NOACA and Clean Ohio grants, begins. Expected to conclude by Spring 2027.

Spring 2027



Construction begins for the remaining phases of the park and is projected to continue until early 2029.





Expanding the Grand River Wildlife Area



The acquisition and permanent protection of a 235-acre inholding within the Grand River Wildlife Area represents a lasting investment in clean water, resilient habitat, and public recreation opportunities. By conserving this critical landscape, West Creek helped to increase habitat connectivity, securing long-term ecological benefits for the region.

The property is located in Bloomfield Township and Bristol Township, Trumbull County, and encompasses high-quality wetlands, cold-water streams, and forested riparian corridors that support thriving populations of beavers, river otters, and numerous fish species. These intact Grand River headwaters and stream systems play an essential role in maintaining water quality, supporting biodiversity, and sustaining the broader watershed. Permanent protection of this land ensures that these ecological functions will remain intact and productive for generations to come.

Identified as a top conservation priority, the property transferred to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources in December of 2025 for long-term ownership and management. The property will become part of the Grand River Wildlife Area, which is now nearly 7,900 acres in size. This acquisition advances landscape-scale permanent habitat protection while expanding opportunities for hunting, fishing, hiking, and birdwatching.

This achievement was made possible through the generous support of Ohio Department of Natural Resource's Division of Wildlife and the H2Ohio Rivers Program. Their partnership enabled West Creek to act decisively when the property became available and secure a high-impact conservation outcome. Together, we ensured that this exceptional natural area will remain protected, publicly accessible, and responsibly managed well into the future.

“This was one of those quick on the draw moments, where a property pops up for sale on a Friday and we get it under contract by Monday. Truly a fine-tuned demonstration of West Creek’s agility to jump on an amazing opportunity.”

- DEREK SCHAFER, *Executive Director, West Creek Conservancy*



Collaborating for Conservation - Cleveland Museum of Natural History

Over the last two years, West Creek Conservancy and the Cleveland Museum of Natural History have sought to formalize and codify their working relationship. The Museum staff and West Creek staff have shared GIS expertise and spatial data in an effort to collaborate more closely on digital data strategies. Stewardship staff from each organization have met to work on management plans and develop stewardship strategies for their respective preserves. Quarterly meetings occur where conservation project opportunities are shared and collaborative opportunities are explored.

West Creek has established itself as one of the region's most celebrated conservation organizations, with extensive real estate expertise and a willingness to take on formidable projects that pose legal and procedural challenges. The Museum has enjoyed tremendous success over the years as a regional leader as it relates to the careful long-term stewardship of ecological resources and the crafting and successful implementation of complex restoration projects. Through closer collaboration, the two organizations can better play to their respective strengths and accomplish more together than either could alone.

SUAWA Conservation Easement

West Creek Conservancy and the Cleveland Museum of Natural History permanently protected 35 acres along the Grand River in Ashtabula County. The SUAWA Conservation Easement expands the Museum's Grand River Terraces Preserve and conserves high-quality forest and riparian habitat supporting multiple species of conservation concern, including the globally vulnerable West Virginia white butterfly. Joint stewardship by West Creek and the Museum ensures this ecologically significant landscape will remain protected for generations to come.



Bronson Creek Forest Preserve

Building on this growing partnership with the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, in 2025 West Creek Conservancy facilitated the addition of the 25-acre Bronson Creek Forest to the Museum's Grand River Terraces Preserve – now totaling over 1,089 acres. Protection of the Bronson Creek Forest property safeguards forested and riverine wetlands along 700 linear feet of Bronson Creek, a high-quality tributary of the Grand River that supports a rare freshwater mussel bed at its confluence with the Grand. With the conservation of the Bronson Creek Forest property, over 4,100 linear feet of Bronson Creek are now protected.



Champion Wetland Preserve

Further upstream along the Grand River, West Creek Conservancy and the Cleveland Museum of Natural History worked collaboratively to protect the 57-acre Champion Wetland Preserve. This property contains some of the highest-quality wetlands in the headwaters of the Upper Grand River watershed, with over 70% of the property dominated by Category 3 wetlands. Now owned and stewarded by the Museum, Champion Wetland Preserve provides habitat for numerous threatened and endangered species, protects Grand River water quality, and supports ongoing research and environmental education.



Headwaters Connector Greenway

The Headwaters Connector Greenway project presented a once-in-a-generation opportunity to conserve and reimagine a nearly seven-mile stretch of continuous green space running through the heart of the City of Solon. Working together with the City of Solon, the City of Aurora, and Open Space Institute, the project permanently protected 86.92 acres along a former rail corridor that diagonally traverses through three counties, linking neighborhoods, commercial districts, and natural areas in a rapidly developing suburban landscape.

This expansive greenway functions as a critical wildlife corridor, with dense vegetative buffers, a mature hardwood canopy, and documented habitat for more than 55 bird species and multiple state-listed bat species. Surveys conducted along the corridor identified rare and sensitive plant species as well as intact dark corridor conditions that are increasingly scarce in urban and suburban environments. By conserving this contiguous greenway, the project protects high-quality habitat, strengthens ecological connectivity across two watersheds, and prevents fragmentation that would otherwise likely result from development or utility infrastructure.

Beyond its environmental value, the Headwaters Connector Greenway is a transformative community asset. The project advances the City of Solon's long-term vision for safer and more connected multimodal transportation and recreation networks. The seven-mile corridor fills a significant portion of the gap between existing and planned regional trail systems, with the potential to connect the Cleveland Metroparks' Emerald Necklace to the Headwaters Trail in Portage County, ultimately connecting trail-goers to a much larger multi-county and multi-state trail network. By protecting this corridor, West Creek Conservancy and its partners have laid the groundwork for future trail development and regional multimodal connectivity that supports outdoor recreation, active transportation, and economic development goals across Northeast Ohio.

At its core, the Headwaters Connector Greenway reflects West Creek Conservancy's mission to protect ecologically significant land while enhancing quality of life for communities. Through collaboration, long-term vision, and science-based conservation, this project ensures that a rare and irreplaceable greenway corridor remains green, connected, and accessible. Funding for the project was provided by the Clean Ohio Green Space Conservation Program, administered by the Ohio Public Works Commission.







Letting the Sun Shine at the Former Haydite Mine

Operating for over 125 years, the former Haydite Mine is historically significant to the industrial heritage of Independence and the Cuyahoga River valley. However, its operation resulted in the channelization and culverting of a tributary to the Cuyahoga River. In 2025, West Creek was able to daylight nearly 500 feet of headwater stream, restoring 1,100 feet of natural stream channel and creating a functioning floodplain across nearly 11 acres. The result is enhanced water quality, reconnected habitats, and improved hydrology along this Cuyahoga River tributary. This project was made possible through the support from the Ohio EPA 319 Program and Ohio Stream Preservation.

This property is not open to the public. It is fenced and gated to restrict entry and is subject to continuous, police-supported security surveillance. Unauthorized access by trespassers is prohibited and may result in legal action.

Chipping Away at Chippewa Creek Conservation

Chippewa Creek has a watershed drainage area of 17.8 square miles, and the stream meanders for nearly 8 miles through Broadview Heights, Brecksville, North Royalton, Seven Hills and Parma. Brecksville Reservation is the largest protected area within the watershed, which includes the Chippewa Creek Gorge Scenic Overlook.

Similar to conservation efforts in other urban areas, protecting these resources requires a puzzle-like approach: acquiring remaining intact land, restoring degraded areas, and reclaiming previously developed sites. Through collaborative efforts, West Creek has preserved land across North Royalton, Brecksville, and most recently, Broadview Heights.

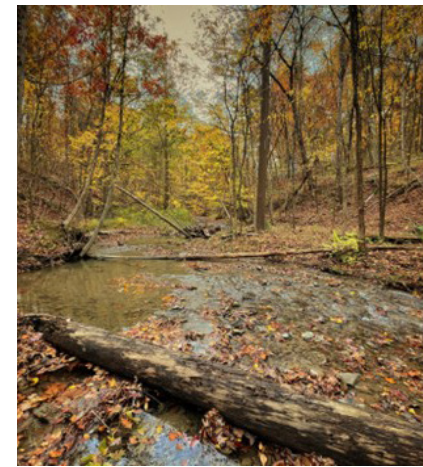
With support from generous donors and Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District, the Chippewa Creek Headwaters Project permanently protects 15 acres in Broadview Heights, including nearly half a mile of stream corridor. Within the broader corridor, the property lies less than 400 feet downstream from an additional 9 acres of protected land and about half a mile upstream from 65 acres the organization protected in 2023.



A Gift for Conservation Along Furnace Run

Located in Richfield Village and Richfield Township, Summit County, the 45-acre property along Furnace Run was generously donated to West Creek and contains ecologically significant headwater habitats within the Furnace Run watershed, one of the cleanest sub watersheds of the Cuyahoga River. These headwaters support coldwater streams, which provide specialized, sensitive, and increasingly rare habitats that are essential for the preservation of coldwater taxa, such as the Redside Dace and the Molted Sculpin.

Surrounded by residential development, commercial parkways, and highways, these properties play an important role in controlling the dissipation and filtration of stormwater, regulating water temperatures through increased riparian buffers, and protecting water quality for the use and benefit of all. In addition to its water quality benefits, the preservation of these properties creates wildlife habitat resilience corridors, preserving and supporting biodiversity in fragmented suburban environments through the conservation and connectivity of untouched land to the neighboring Cuyahoga Valley National Park.



“Protecting critical habitat like the coldwater tributaries we are fortunate to have in the Furnace Run Watershed is crucial to maintaining resilient stream systems and sustaining the remaining biodiversity we have left in our rapidly developing landscapes. Even smaller, and stressed parcels can have a punch in ecological resilience.”

- KENDRA HEISER, Watershed Coordinator at Summit Soil and Water Conservation District



“Thanks to West Creek Conservancy another beautiful and biologically important section of the Grand River corridor is now protected. This is another great example of the productive partnership between Lake Metroparks and West Creek Conservancy that will protect the amazing natural resources of Lake County and will eventually provide another public access point to the Grand River.”

-PAUL PALAGYI, Executive Director at Lake Metroparks



Grand River Gorge Corridor Preservation

In close partnership with Lake Metroparks, West Creek Conservancy completed a two-phased property acquisition along the state designated “wild” section of the Grand River in Painesville Township, Lake County. This project added over 100 acres, including nearly a mile of forested Grand River Gorge frontage to existing natural open space totaling more than 3,700 acres currently owned and managed by Lake Metroparks. West Creek worked diligently to get two separate properties under contract with the individual sellers and then fundraised more than \$1,000,000 to add key

riverfront access to both Helen-Hazen Wyman Park and Hemlock Ridge Park. The Grand River corridor protected by this acquisition, which contains incredible timber resources and several rare, threatened and endangered species, will be available for access through adjacent parks. Future plans for this project include parking and trail access. Funding was provided by the H2Ohio Rivers Program, administered by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, and Clean Ohio Green Space Conservation Program, administered by the Ohio Public Works Commission.



Keeping it Wild – One Man’s Tribute to Conservation

The Vermillion River is a defining natural feature of northern Ohio, stretching nearly 67 miles through Huron, Lorain, and Erie counties. For decades, this river corridor has supported forests, ravines, tributaries, and wildlife—but it has also faced growing pressure from development and unsustainable land use.

One landowner along the Vermillion River recognized those threats early. Long before conservation partnerships entered the picture, he made a personal decision to act. Witnessing development and poor timber practices degrade the river and its surrounding habitat, he chose a different path—using his own resources to quietly acquire and protect parcels along the river, not for profit or recognition, but simply to ensure the land would remain intact.

In late 2025, his long-standing commitment to protection found permanence. After a chance outreach from West Creek - sparked by nothing more than a cold-call letter - the landowner engaged in conversations that revealed how closely his values aligned with West Creek’s mission. What followed was the fulfillment of a long-held goal; ensuring the land he worked so carefully to protect would remain protected forever.

Through the establishment of a conservation easement on 71 acres, including nearly half a mile of Vermillion River frontage, his quiet, personal conservation effort became a lasting legacy. The easement guarantees that the land will remain a natural corridor that supports wildlife, safeguards the river, and stands as a testament to what one individual can accomplish when conservation is treated not as a project, but as a responsibility.





Standing Rock Farms – Protecting Mill Creek

The Standing Rock Farms conservation easement in Lake County exemplifies West Creek Conservancy's partnership-driven conservation approach, which is rooted in close collaboration with local and regional stakeholders. In 2024-2025, West Creek partnered with the Lake County Soil & Water Conservation District, Lake Metroparks, and Standing Rock Farms to successfully consolidate and protect six contiguous parcels spanning 1.85 miles of Mill Creek. Through this coordinated effort, 204 acres of natural land in Madison Township were permanently protected, including hemlock

ravines, upland hardwood forests, and multiple waterfalls.

Between the collaborative efforts of West Creek Conservancy and our partners, we have now helped protect 91.25% of Mill Creek in Lake County, leaving just 0.35 miles (8.75%) of the stream channel unprotected. These results underscore the power of collaboration and shared vision, and West Creek is proud to work alongside partners on regional, high-impact conservation initiatives.



Thompson Ledges – Piece by Piece

2025 marked a major conservation milestone with the permanent protection of a large portion of the Thompson Ledges complex in Thompson Township, Geauga County. West Creek successfully acquired 61 acres of land from four separate landowners, which were then combined with 56 acres already owned by the Thompson Township Park Commission. Together, these efforts safeguard 117 acres of ecologically significant land.

This complex and strategic acquisition ensures the long-term preservation of the Thompson Ledges complex, a geologically unique landscape that includes the northernmost Sharon conglomerate sandstone rock outcropping in Ohio. The protected area also encompasses cold-water springs and cave systems that create a rare and stable microclimate, and the old-growth forest ecosystem provides critical habitat for an array of documented rare, threatened, and endangered species, underscoring its regional and statewide conservation value.

Ownership and management of the land was transferred to the Thompson Township Park Commission, where it will be stewarded as a passive park, enhancing ecological connectivity while preserving the site's natural character.

This project was made possible through funding from the Clean Ohio Green Space Conservation Program, administered by the Ohio Public Works Commission, along with significant support from a large North American Wetland Conservation Act grant, secured in partnership with Ducks Unlimited. Additional financing assistance was provided by the Cleveland Foundation. Together, these partnerships exemplify how collaboration can achieve lasting conservation outcomes and protect Ohio's most unique natural landscapes for future generations.





Conservation Along the Clear Fork – A Win for Water Quality

The Camp Avery Hand – Clear Fork Conservation Project in Springfield Township, Richland County, permanently protected 224 acres within the Headwaters Clear Fork Mohican River subwatershed. The project includes the 110-acre former Camp Avery Hand property and 114 acres of river, wetland, and floodplain habitat surrounding Clear Fork Reservoir in partnership with the City of Mansfield.

For decades, Camp Avery Hand served as a beloved outdoor destination for boy scouts in the region. With this project, West Creek Conservancy has preserved that legacy while seizing a time-sensitive opportunity to protect and restore this important natural area. The project conserves a diverse mosaic of habitats – upland, riparian and white pine forests; wetlands, headwater tributary streams and a fishing pond; and open fields and meadow – supporting more than 300 documented native plant and animal species, including the endangered little brown bat.

The 114-acre property includes floodplain, wetlands, and riparian forest buffering the primary drinking water supply for the City of Mansfield: the Clear Fork Reservoir. A conservation easement permanently protects these important water resources, which include nearly a mile of the Clear Fork Mohican River.

Connecting these two properties is the Ohio Bird Sanctuary – a protected natural area and community organization providing conservation education to thousands of visitors annually. West Creek, the City of Mansfield, and the Ohio Bird Sanctuary will work together to implement restoration and land management across the project area to improve wildlife habitat, protect water quality, and provide public access for nature-based recreation and education. This project was made possible through the generous support of the Clean Ohio Green Space Conservation Program, administered by the Ohio Public Works Commission.

Students Studying our Streams



The Cleveland Area Schools Stream Monitoring Program, entering its 13th year, introduces about 300 students annually to watershed stewardship and the application of Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math (STEAM) with professionals in the field. The program assesses and compares the chemical, biological, and physical characteristics of the east and west branches of Big Creek, a tributary of the Cuyahoga River. Watershed geography and land uses are discussed, while the natural and man-made environments within Cleveland Metroparks' Memphis Picnic Area in the Big Creek Reservation are examined through site tours.

Program partners and their contributions include: Big Creek Connects and West Creek Conservancy, Cleveland Metroparks, and Cleveland Museum of Natural History staff who lead the site tours; Cleveland Metroparks and Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District staff who guide the identification of Macro-invertebrates; Cuyahoga Soil & Water Conservation District staff who direct the assessment of stream habitat; and the General Motors Parma Metal Center's environmental "E-Team" that assists the students with studying chemical parameters of water samples.

The students rotate through the four stations with lunch provided midway during the four-hour program. In addition to learning about the causes of degraded habitats and how to improve them, the students learn about career opportunities in related fields of study. Teachers find the program to be effective in helping students understand the health of our environment and in making connections to what they are learning in class.

The program has been continuously funded since 2014 by a generous donation from the General Motors Corporate Giving Community Impact Grant awarded to Big Creek Connects, which is now a part of West Creek Conservancy. In November of 2025, funding for the Stream Monitoring Program was awarded for yet another year, giving us the ability to once again offer the program to numerous inner ring schools including Berea, Lakewood, Maple Heights, Warrensville Heights; and Cleveland's John Marshall, Rhodes, Max Hayes, Lincoln-West and MC2 STEM High Schools. For more information about participating in this unique hands-on outdoor experience, contact Bob Gardin at bgardin@bigcreekconnects.org.



Partnership Preserves

Footpath Foundation

The nonprofit Footpath Foundation celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2025 – a milestone reached through an ongoing partnership with West Creek Conservancy. Footpath, which helps kids connect with the natural world, took a big step forward by hosting outdoor programming for the first time at its Parma headquarters, a 12.5-acre wooded property leased from West Creek as part of a flood-control project.

Footpath creates outdoor opportunities for youth, including overnight and day camping, hiking, fishing and exploring. Kids grow, become more self-aware and develop a stronger appreciation for nature. During the organization’s 10 years, more than 11,000 young people have spent 127,000 hours outside in Footpath programs. The Footpath-West Creek partnership is helping kids discover new possibilities.

To learn more about Footpath Foundation, visit www.footpathfoundation.org



Dusty Goldenrod Preserve

Dusty Goldenrod Preserve is a 37-acre preserve in Highland Heights that was originally acquired by West Creek with funds leveraged through the Clean Ohio Green Space Conservation Program. Through a strong partnership the property is now stewarded by Friends of Euclid Creek – a ‘partnership preserve’. This site contains a rare wetland in the midst of a suburban area with five streams connecting to Euclid Creek. It is also home to several rare plants in Ohio, including the dusty goldenrod (*Solidago puberula*). In 2025, Friends of Euclid Creek monitored the water quality of the streams and began tracking for bank erosion. Meanwhile, a dedicated troupe of volunteers pulled over 50 bags of invasive species from the property.

Community involvement is so important to the work of Friends of Euclid Creek. They hosted groups from Hawken School, Amazon, and Cuyahoga Soil and Water Conservation District, who assisted in invasive management. Education events included tours of fungi, summer flora and highlights of the Preserve. One volunteer, Neil Barrett, stated that he volunteers at the site because, “Dusty Goldenrod is an oasis, land as nature intended, a place to renew my spirit.”

To learn more about Friends of Euclid Creek, visit <https://www.friendsofeuclidcreek.com/>



Zaclon River Landing

In the shadow of the enormous Cleveland-Cliffs Works No. 1, the Spartan Alumni Rowing Association, in a coordinated partnership with West Creek, has slowly been transforming the Zaclon River Landing from blighted to bright! 2025 marks only the second building and construction season for the 100% volunteer-driven project. Project partners have organized, fundraised, and deployed funding from The Cleveland Foundation, Clean Ohio Green Space Conservation Program, administered by the Ohio Public Works Commission, Ohio Department of Development, Ohio EPA, Cuyahoga County, as well as many private donors. Improvements have included the installation of the river access trail, a 200-foot floating

dock, environmental controls throughout the site, safety infrastructure, and the demolition of outdated and dangerous structures. Site partners like the National Park Service and U.S. Department of the Interior have also classified the Zaclon River Landing as a National Water Trail trailhead. With Phase 1 nearly completed, the organizers look to have the site activated with pilot programming as the weather warms in 2026. Zaclon River Landing is another 'partnership preserve' dedicated to conservation, restoration, and public access along the mighty Cuyahoga.

To learn more about Spartan Alumni Rowing Association, visit <https://www.spartanalumnirowing.org/>

Cultivating Conservation Partnerships

In 2025, Creekside Collaborative Partners continued to grow—both in our nursery operations and in our engagement with the community.

Our native plant nursery thrived, producing 47 species of wildflowers and grasses and 16 woody species, all destined for restoration projects, green infrastructure sites, and community landscapes. Once planted, these natives do more than beautify—they manage stormwater, reduce flooding, and provide essential food and habitat for wildlife.

We welcomed the community to our 2025 Spring Open House and Plant Sale, where partners including Cuyahoga Soil and Water Conservation District, Spice Field Kitchen, and Meadow City Nursery shared educational presentations to the community. A second plant sale in the fall helped us place additional native plants into local communities—creating healthier, more resilient ecosystems.

The fall season also marked a successful seed collection season. With community support, we gathered nuts from 16 native tree species and collected a wide variety of wildflower seeds for our Native Seed Library program. These free, public seed libraries provide regionally appropriate seeds to support pollinator pathways and restore biodiversity. In 2025, we distributed 3,000 native seed packets! We are deeply grateful to the Ohio EPA's Ohio Environmental Education Fund and Cox Charities Northeast Fund for their generous grant support, and to Holden Forests & Gardens for their partnership in growing this program.

We are deeply grateful to Mark Brody, Petros Homes, and the Shaker Lakes Garden Club for their generous and flexible support in 2025. Their contributions strengthened Creekside operations, expanded our Native Seed Library program, supported the installation of pollinator plots and tree plantings, and made possible a community tree planting workshop and giveaway. Through their support, we were able to plant thousands of trees throughout Greater Cleveland. Their generosity not only helped us grow native plants, but also empowered community members to participate directly in restoring and caring for local ecosystems.

Finally, we extend a heartfelt thank you to our partners at the Creekside Collaborative site - Spice Field Kitchen (NKA Creekside Field Kitchen), Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District, City of Parma, and McDougald's Pollination Station. Together, we're cultivating plants, knowledge, and community.



Photo Credit: India Johnson of UAVistas, LLC



Growing Together

The recent merger of Spice Field Kitchen and West Creek Conservancy is a natural evolution of shared values; creating a unified organization that honors both legacies while expanding the ability to serve communities, steward ecosystems, and inspire the next generation of changemakers.

Over the past two years at the Creekside Collaborative Partners site, Creekside Field Kitchen (formerly Spice Field Kitchen) has made incredible strides in agricultural and culinary programming. From building a new hoop house and adding school partners, to offering community classes and summer camps, programming continues to grow. In 2025 alone, 700+ lbs. of produce was harvested for culinary demos and community donations, and nearly 1,000 program participants were engaged in field trips, classes, and camps. This brings the total student impact to 9,650 learners over these last 6 years.

This impact is made possible thanks to amazing strategic partners, board members, volunteers, and generous grant support from foundations, businesses, and community members. 2025 was the 7th consecutive year of funding from the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation, supporting the "Understanding Our Community Food System" programming with the Parma City School District. Additionally, Cox Communications and the Whole Kids Foundation have provided vital sponsorship support for the Living Classroom and Learning Garden development, helping Creekside Field Kitchen create hands-on learning spaces that connect students to nature and healthy food.

Looking ahead, West Creek is excited to continue growing Creekside Field Kitchen programming, focusing on maintaining and building partnerships, expanding educational opportunities, and deepening community engagement!





Celebrating Conservation at Up! A Creek

West Creek Conservancy's annual fundraising event, Up! A Creek, was held on June 28, 2025 at the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo. The event welcomed over 500 guests for an evening dedicated to conservation, community, and support for our mission.

Guests were greeted with a welcome cocktail courtesy of Tito's Handmade Vodka and enjoyed access to several zoo exhibits as they made their way to Stillwater Place, the central gathering space for the evening. Attendees had the opportunity to enjoy food, beverages, and live music as they played Wine Toss, Cornhole Long Toss, and additional games. They also had the opportunity to ride the zipline, have fun in the 360 photobooth,

and browse our raffle and auction items. A highlight of the evening was an exclusive early viewing of the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo's Asian Lantern Festival, offering guests a unique and memorable experience.

Thanks to the generous support of sponsors, donors, and attendees, the event raised funds in support of West Creek Conservancy's work to protect natural spaces, restore ecological value, and connect people to nature. We are deeply grateful for the continued commitment of our community.

2025 Up! A Creek Presenting Sponsor: Bartlett Tree Experts



West Creek is incredibly grateful for the volunteers who dedicated significant time and energy to the organization. Their contributions continue to be a driving force behind the organization's success, and their enthusiasm for the task at hand is exceptionally motivating!

The native plant nursery simply couldn't operate without volunteer support. From up-potting seedlings to give roots room to grow, to weeding specimen gardens and individual pots, and collecting and processing native seeds for propagation and the seed libraries, these tasks are essential to sustaining operations at the nursery. We are deeply grateful for the time and care that volunteers bring every step of the way.

Beyond the nursery, volunteers played a vital role planting at restoration sites across Northern Ohio. From the West Creek Confluence in Independence, to Talcott Creek in Geauga County, their efforts added biodiversity and native species to these landscapes, strengthening ecosystems for the future. Volunteers also helped maintain previously planted sites, including 200 native trees at Walters Grove Park in Parma, which were established in 2024 with funding from the Cuyahoga County Planning Commission. Their maintenance work in 2025 was essential to ensuring these trees thrive for years to come.

We extend a special thank you to corporate volunteer groups - COX Communications, Padua Franciscan High School, Cleveland Cavaliers, CSA Group, and First Energy - for joining in increasing biodiversity and strengthening natural areas.

Every single volunteer's time and dedication to the community and West Creek's mission is invaluable. They are all helping to create a healthier, more resilient environment for generations to come.

Celebrating West Creek's Amazing Volunteers

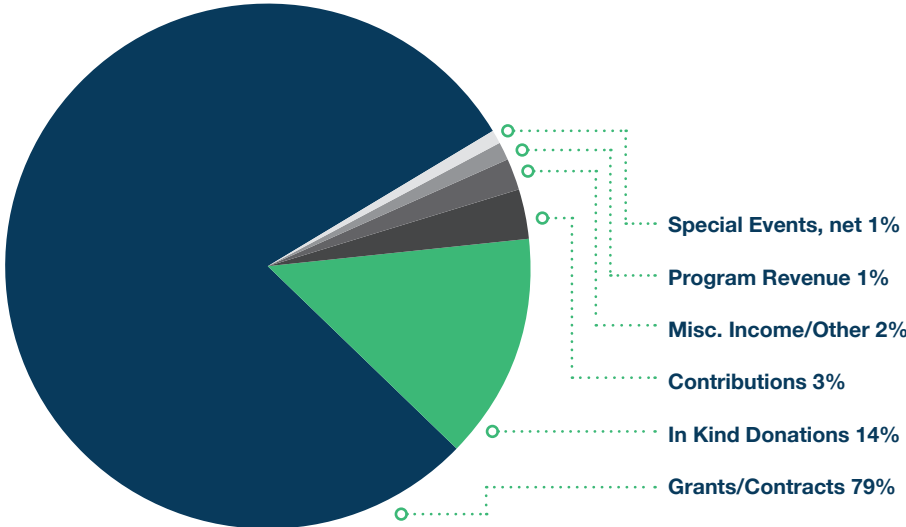


West Creek held a total of 93 volunteer events in 2025. 1,567 volunteer hours provided an estimated \$54,515.93 in value to our mission.

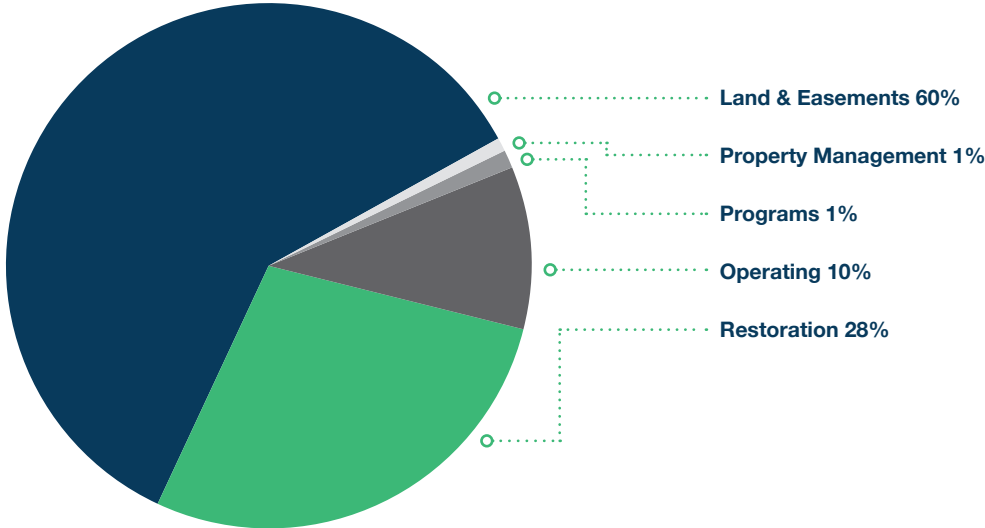
STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES SUMMARY

Financial year ending December 31, 2025. Accrual basis, unaudited.

REVENUE	
Grants/Contracts	10,375,228
Contributions	444,142
In Kind Donations	1,793,745
Special Events, net	130,438
Program Revenue	164,453
Misc. Income/Other	235,307
Total Revenue	13,143,313



EXPENSE	
Operating	1,123,623
Restoration	3,079,465
Land & Easements	6,699,131
Property Management	156,050
Programs	57,497
Total Expense	11,115,766
Change in Net Assets (Net Income)	2,027,547



Revenue Guide:

GRANTS/CONTRACTS: Includes governmental and non-governmental grants and contracts for land/easement conservation/restoration; watershed and other program services; and operational support.

SPECIAL EVENTS: Includes fundraising events, such as Up! A Creek, West Creek’s annual conservation celebration.

CONTRIBUTIONS: Includes individual, corporate, and municipal general support (a critical source of income to support West Creek’s dedicated staff).

IN-KIND CONTRIBUTION: Includes donated time, supplies and materials (mainly associated with project support), and other non-land assets of value.

Expense Guide:

RESTORATION: Includes stream, wetland and other habitat restoration (tree plantings, invasive species removal, ect); as well as trail/greenway development.

LAND & EASEMENTS: Includes the purchase and/or donation of conservation projects (fee simple, conservation easement/covenants, etc).

PROGRAMS: Includes educational/outreach programming, such as Creekside Collaborative Partners; and watershed services.

PROPERTY MANAGEMENT: Includes the costs to maintain and manage properties owned by West Creek or conservation easements held by West Creek.

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION SUMMARY

As of 12/31/25. Accrual basis, unaudited

TOTAL ASSETS	\$9,736,196.12
Total Liabilities	\$2,579,185.23
Net Assets Without Donor Restrictions	\$6,216,793.89
Net Assets With Donor Restrictions	\$940,217.00
Total Liabilities + Net Assets	\$9,736,196.12





DONORS & SUPPORTERS

You make it possible! In 2025 your donation allowed West Creek Conservancy to protect dozens of new properties throughout northern 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, 2025 are listed here.

1,102 Acres
Preserved in 2025

\$100,000 AND ABOVE

Cleveland Foundation
George Gund Foundation
Petros Homes

\$75,000 - \$99,999

Chieftain Trucking & Excavating, Inc.
Mark Brody

\$25,000 - \$74,999

Kelvin & Eleanor Smith Foundation
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Tito's Handmade Vodka
The Char & Chuck Fowler Foundation

\$10,000 - \$24,999

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Martha Holden Jennings Foundation
Ohio Stream Preservation, Inc.
Robert & Ester Black Family Foundation

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The Connor Foundation
The Sears-Swetland Family Foundation
Village of Valley View

\$2,500 - \$4,999

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Jeff Lennartz
Kathleen Novak
Patrick Gsellman
Robert and Diane Maeder
Shaker Lakes Garden Club
Sherwin-Williams Foundation
Shimshon Balanson
The Intihar Family
Whole Kids Foundation

\$1,000 - \$2,499

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Bill & Joanne Grady

Bill Abell
Connor Redman
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Edwin Muckley
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Emily Zeisler
George Zbiegien
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39 Projects Completed in 2025

\$500 - \$999

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Katie Outcalt
Land Trust Alliance
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Mengxue Xie
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Scott McDougald
Spice Catering Co.
Vangaurd Charitable as recommended by The
Witt Family Charitable Fund
Victor Thornburg

\$250 - \$499

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\$100-\$249

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10 Counties
Reached in 2025



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 Gabbriella & Bobby Dagostino
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 Gary Suchocki
 Gary Way
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 Jeanne Cherney
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 Jim Storer
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21 Communities
 Reached in 2025

Conservation Partners

Dennis & Teri Williams • William & Roberta Starkey • Jeffrey & Cynthia Suszynski • Paul Ruez • Ross Road Property LLC

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Tito's Handmade Vodka
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336 Lifetime
Projects Completed



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6,120 Lifetime
Acres Protected

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We make every effort to list our donors accurately.
We regret any errors or omissions.

Please contact Dani at 216-749-3720 ext. 15
or dani@westcreek.org with any concerns.





WEST CREEK CONSERVANCY

P.O. Box 347113
Cleveland, OH 44134

