Conservation—The Next Generation

While there are many good reasons to conserve natural lands and water quality—the next generation may be the most important. Lands preserved by AOA today bestow the wild places, homes for native plants and wildlife, and the outdoor, nature-based experiences we aspire to for our children and grandchildren.
Conservation—The Next Generation

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After surpassing 2 million people a couple of years ago, the latest insight2050 report projects the addition of a million new residents to the Columbus metro area over the next 30 years. Development of riparian corridors and open space lands including farms and natural areas in central Ohio continues to accelerate.

While we have achieved much in a short time, more hard work is needed to conserve the best of these resources. The legacy of natural and working lands and protected waterways that we achieve today will become the natural, open space and recreational resources that underpin the quality of life, health, wellness and outdoor experiences of our children living in a much more urbanized central Ohio.

Conservation of our most worthy land and water resources is a choice— a mission we are committed to fulfilling. AOA is focused on safeguarding water quality and conserving native habitat, natural features, farms, scenic and heritage resources that serve and benefit our community and will be valued assets to the central Ohio region in 2050 and beyond.

Choose to join with us to help conserve the best of our land and water resources— so that those who follow will still have monarch butterflies in their backyards, native plants and animals to enjoy and wild places for hiking, hunting, fishing, birdwatching and swimming.

Our children and grandchildren are depending on us. Pass it on.

Land Conservation

Utzinger Bog Preserved

AOA utilized funding from Clean Ohio and a donation from the Utzinger heirs to purchase the 85-acre Utzinger family farm on Highway 104 South in Franklin County. Located in a rapidly growing suburb just south of Columbus, the family was committed to conserving the farm property, wetlands and family farm heritage.

The Utzinger property contains four open water ponds created by 20th century peat mining. Prior to settlement, the site was a large kettle pothole and high quality peat-accumulating fen with no natural drainage outlet, a geologic remnant of the last ice age. In addition to the peat mining operation, removal of the forest buffer, intensive farming and site drainage improvements have greatly diminished the quality of the fen habitat and eradicated many of the fen species.

AOA will enhance and restore the wetlands on the property through a program that includes hydrology improvements, wetland expansion and revegetation, invasive plant removal, elimination of intensive agricultural activities and reestablishment of native plant buffers.
Two Properties and over 530 Acres Preserved as part of AOA’s Big Darby Creek Conservation Corridor Initiative

Two Pickaway County properties were added to AOA’s Big Darby Creek Conservation Corridor. AOA negotiated the purchase of the 276-acre Fickardt Farm property from a seven-member family trust. Located on the west side of the river, between Circleville and Darbyville, this site protects 4,440 linear feet of riparian corridor along the river. It is part of a collaboration with ODOT, EnviroScience and The Conservation Fund to conserve habitat for rare bats.

AOA also acquired Mishe Moneto, a 255-acre property from the Cline family. Located along Big Darby Creek adjacent to Darbyville, this property includes 1.8 miles of riparian frontage. This section of the Big Darby is home to numerous species of mussels, including five that have been listed as threatened and/or endangered. Recent bat studies along the Big Darby identified a number of trees that support summer maternity colonies of endangered Indiana Bats located on both the Mishe Moneto and Fickardt Farm properties.

Big Darby Creek is a National and State designated Scenic River that is recognized as one of the most biologically diverse waterways in the Midwest. AOA has now preserved over 700 acres along the Big Darby during the last three years with another 260 acres in process. These properties contribute to AOA’s Initiative to preserve riparian properties and to create a continuous corridor of connected conservation lands to safeguard water quality, natural habitat for native species and the scenic qualities of Big Darby Creek.
Land Conservation

AOA works to conserve land and water resources as sustainable assets for our community. In 2018 AOA increased the conservation lands we steward to 101 properties and over 10,000 acres. We secured funding for numerous additional conservation transactions that are in process.

AOA Conserves Clay Farm Property in the Hocking Hills

AOA worked with the Clay family to preserve the 75-acre Clay farm property with a conservation easement. Situated on a high ridge at the divide between the Bucks Run (Hocking River) and the Laurel Run (Salt Creek/Scioto River) watersheds, several spring-fed headwater streams are located on the property.

In addition to valuable natural habitats, the conservation of Clay farm protects the scenic and rural character of the Hocking Hills. It is prominently located along Highway 180, a primary entry road and corridor through the Hocking Hills which carries many visitors to the parks, recreation areas and attractions.

Clay Farm is part of AOA’s Hocking Hills Conservation Initiative. AOA is presently stewarding 51 conservation properties totaling over 3,400 acres in the Hocking Hills with another dozen properties in process.

AOA Preserves Hocking Canal Lock No. 8 and Ellinger Riparian Property

AOA partnered with the Canal Society of Ohio to preserve the 180-year-old Hocking Canal Lock No. 8 and a section of the canal in Fairfield County. The Canal Society donated funds to help purchase the canal structure while AOA utilized Clean Ohio grant funds to purchase the canal property.

Lock No. 8 is located in Horns Mill a little north of Sugar Grove. Abandoned when the canal was shut down in the 1890’s, the lock is in excellent condition with only a few missing stones.

The Alliance seeks to protect remnant canal features and to establish a continuous corridor along the old Hocking Canal route. This effort is part of AOA’s Hocking Canal Heritage Trail Initiative that will contribute to the eco-tourism base of the Hocking Hills region. AOA has already protected over three miles of the canal right-of-way in Hocking and Fairfield Counties.

AOA worked with the Ellinger family to preserve a 37-acre Hocking River riparian and floodplain property on the north side of Sugar Grove. Twenty acres of highly eroded river frontage was purchased with Clean Ohio monies and will be replanted and returned to a bottomland forest habitat. The family donated a conservation easement on the 17-acre remainder of the property that will continue to be farmed.

Both of these properties are part of AOA’s Hocking River Conservation Corridor Initiative that stretches through Fairfield, Hocking and Athens Counties.
AOA Expands Cackley Swamp Preserve with Two New Acquisitions

AOA added two new properties to our Cackley Swamp Preserve—a 17-acre parcel from the Watson Trust and a 32-acre parcel from the Kiser family. These additions are adjacent to existing Preserve properties and bring the total lands protected in this preserve to over 420 acres.

Located near Oak Hill in Jackson County, Cackley Swamp is a Category 3 wetland that is the largest of seven known relict Teay’s River Valley wetlands. Drained and farmed for many years the swamp was severely degraded. It is presently still in a rehydrating phase, recovering the extent of the former wetland area.

Extensive wetland recovery and site restoration will be carried out on the Kiser property which served as a rock and gravel processing facility for many years. Approximately 8 acres of wetland will be restored to the swamp.

AOA seeks to enhance the natural qualities of existing habitats and to restore and/or re-establish healthy ecosystems focusing on native plants. As once common species become rare, and rare species endangered, it is critically important that we provide homes for these species.

Stewardship

AOA works to enhance our land and water resources as sustainable assets for our community. In 2018 we:

- Carried out a wide range of stewardship and enhancement activities on AOA’s properties, in association with community partners, friends and volunteers.
- Undertook expanded efforts to remove and control invasive species on AOA preserves.
- Completed prairie restoration and site improvement activities at AOA’s Bartley Preserve.
- Cleared the trees that were damaging the newly acquired Hocking Canal Lock No. 8.
- Utilized the board, staff and volunteers to monitor all of our conservation properties.
Generous gifts from friends and supporters enabled the Appalachia Ohio Alliance to accomplish much in 2018. We are grateful for this support, and for continued validation of our conservation mission.

Organizational Enhancement

As AOA continues to grow and evolve we are striving to strengthen our organizational capacity to better achieve our conservation mission goals. In 2018 we:

- Received a range of technical support and assistance from the Land Trust Alliance on organizational and accreditation issues.
- Moved into a larger office space in east Columbus.
- Sent board and staff members to participate in a variety of Ohio and national land trust seminars and conferences as part of our efforts to build stronger leadership and organizational sustainability. The national Land Trust Alliance Rally provided valuable learning and training for board and staff members in land trust standards and practices.

AOA continues to pursue the resources and support needed to carry out our valuable and worthy conservation work. For every $1 donated, AOA is able to protect over $20 worth of land and water resources.

Grants. AOA was fortunate to receive numerous grants this year to support our conservation, stewardship, education and outreach activities. We procured over $10 million in grants from public sector organizations and agencies, helping to maximize the return on our donor’s investments in our conservation work.

Donors. AOA was fortunate to receive many generous gifts this past year including several significant donations for long-term property stewardship and conservation defense.

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AOA provides opportunities for members and the public to participate in and learn more about our conservation mission. We emphasize nature-based education that features conserved lands and local ecosystems, conveying an enhanced understanding of their significance and relevance to our community. Our numerous programs and events help build partnerships, provide outreach, engage the community, provide hands-on learning and stewardship experiences, and allow friends to visit the lands they have helped to conserve—some of the most beautiful places in our region.

Our 2018 education and outreach program consisted of 21 events, providing a wide range of outdoor activities including naturalist-guided field trips to AOA properties, workshops and programs. We also undertook a variety of stewardship-based events focusing on restoration and enhancement of AOA preserves. In all, our programs and events during the past year attracted over 700 participants, inspired by AOA’s conservation work and the beauty of our special landscapes.
2018 AOA Conservation Awards

AOA is fortunate to have many volunteers who assist our mission efforts. We presented Conservation Volunteer Awards to a couple of volunteers who have made particular contributions: Dustin Kraus, for his tireless efforts as AOA’s webmaster, keeping our website informative and up-to-date; and Darlene Sillick, for her long-time participation in AOA events and leadership of many AOA bird events.

AOA bestowed our Conservation Partnership Award on the very deserving ODOT Office of Environmental Services for their efforts to partner with local Ohio conservation organizations including AOA in implementing their bat and wetland mitigation programs, maximizing the long term conservation benefit to the state.

AOA’s Conservation Achievement Award recognizes exemplary dedication, commitment and achievement in the field of conservation. Brian Blair was honored for his many years of dedication and service to southeast Ohio conservation. As a former AOA board member and past president, Brian helped guide the conservation of some of AOA’s early properties, including the first preserve, Trimble Community Forest, in 2007.

Leadership is important to the success of AOA’s conservation mission. To help assure our continued sustainability AOA appointed long-time friend and former board member Russ Scholl to serve as an honorary board member.

The Appalachia Ohio Alliance is a regional non-profit land conservancy that serves central, south-central and southeastern Ohio. The Alliance is dedicated to the conservation and stewardship of our land and water as sustainable natural resources that are an asset and a legacy for our community.