



Mike DeWine, Governor
Jon Husted, Lt. Governor
Laurie A. Stevenson, Director

October 30, 2019

Limited Environmental Review and Finding of No Significant Impact

**Appalachia Ohio Alliance – Hocking County and Vinton County
Corby Addition to Bison Hollow Preserve Project
WRRSP Loan number: WR391662-001 1**

The attached Limited Environmental Review (LER) is for a nonpoint source project in Hocking County and Vinton County, near Hocking Hills, Ohio, which the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency intends to finance through its Water Resource Restoration Sponsor Program (WRRSP). The LER describes the project, its costs, and expected environmental benefits. Making available this LER fulfills Ohio EPA's environmental review and public notice requirements for this loan program, as described in [Ohio Administrative Code \(OAC\) 3745-150-05](#).

Ohio EPA analyzes environmental effects of proposed projects as part of its WRRSP program review and approval process. We have concluded that the proposed project should not result in significant adverse environmental impacts. This project's relatively narrow scope and lack of environmental impacts qualifies it for the LER rather than a more comprehensive Environmental Assessment, as described in [OAC 3745-150-06](#). More information can be obtained by calling or writing the person named at the end of the attached LER.

Upon issuance of this Finding of No Significant Impact (FNSI) determination, award of funds may proceed without further environmental review or public comment unless new information shows that environmental conditions of the proposed project have changed significantly.

Sincerely,



Jonathan Bernstein, Assistant Chief
Division of Environmental and Financial Assistance

Attachment

LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

Project Identification

WRRSP Project: Corby Addition to Bison Hollow Preserve Project

Applicant: Appalachia Ohio Alliance
P.O. Box 1151
Logan, Ohio 43138

WRRSP Loan No.: WR391662-0011

Project Sponsor: Akron WRF Headworks Improvements Project

WPCLF Loan No.: CS390095-0163

Project Summary

Appalachia Ohio Alliance (AOA) seeks \$854,000 in funding through Ohio EPA's Water Resource Restoration Sponsor Program (WRRSP) to purchase and protect 350 linear feet of the South Branch, East Fork Queer Creek and 3,470 linear feet of coldwater habitat streams that are situated on 191 acres of riparian and upland forest and forest buffer. The project is adjacent to the 415-acre Bison Hollow Preserve. The Bison Hollow area of Hocking and Vinton counties is located just south of Ash Cave in southern Hocking Hills region, just west of Brantner Road in Vinton and Hocking counties (Figure 1 and Figure 2).

Akron will sponsor the Corby Addition to Bison Hollow Preserve project (Corby Addition) through a Water Pollution Control Loan Fund (WPCLF) loan administered by Ohio EPA's Division of Environmental and Financial Assistance (DEFA). Funds for the Corby Addition project will be provided by advancing a portion of the interest to be paid by Akron on its \$97,101,556 Water Reclamation Facility (WRF) Headworks Improvements WPCLF project. Akron is scheduled to be awarded WPCLF funding in December 2019 and qualifies for the Standard interest rate of 1.03% (October) through the WPCLF. By voluntarily agreeing to sponsor the Corby Addition project, Akron will receive an additional 0.1% reduction on its WPCLF loan rate.

The purpose of the WRRSP is to counteract the loss of ecological function and biological diversity that jeopardizes the health of many of Ohio's water resources. In the program, entities such as park districts and land conservancies (implementers) undertake ecologically restorative and protective projects. Borrowers from the WPCLF voluntarily sponsor such projects in return for interest rate discounts. Ohio EPA foregoes a portion of the interest that borrowers would repay to the WPCLF and advances it to implementers to carry out the ecologically beneficial projects. Properties are acquired, restored and managed in perpetuity under a management plan and an environmental covenant, which establishes use restrictions on the land.

History & Existing Conditions

The Bison Hollow area of Hocking and Vinton counties is very scenic. The South Branch, East Fork Queer Creek is a coldwater stream system fed by underground springs that carved and shaped the area's scenic Black-hand Sandstone gorges. The Corby Property, and its surrounding areas that

have already been permanently protected by AOA, are accentuated by natural features such as waterfalls, steep cliffs, deep ravines, rock overhangs and shelters, slump rocks, caves, mature hardwood and hemlock forests, and wildflowers.

The Corby property was at one time a subsistence farm that likely relied on haying and grazing. New, relatively young forests have succeeded on much of the property. Mature forest along the South Branch, East Fork Queer Creek and in other parts of the property were recently logged. The logging was relatively light, although new logging roads were graded in some areas.

The surrounding watershed is mostly forested with managed timber. A growing number of residential houses and cabins have recently been constructed and fragmentation of property is a significant issue.

Project Description

The AOA's entire Bison Hollow Preserve includes eight properties, totaling over 415 acres. With this project, AOA will purchase the adjacent 191-acre Corby property, which is located on two parcels, one in Vinton County and the other in Hocking County and incorporate it into the existing Preserve. The Corby Addition project will result in the protection of approximately 350 linear feet of the mainstem of the South Branch, East Fork Queer Creek. Additionally, the project will protect 3,470 linear feet of coldwater habitat primary headwater tributary that has a Superior High-Quality Water antidegradation status and that drains into the South Branch, East Fork Queer Creek. The project will also protect 1,310 linear feet of valley floor and floodplain in the gorge adjacent to the South Branch, East Fork Queer Creek, another 1,380 linear feet of rock bluff on the edge of the gorge along the stream corridor, and hardwood and hemlock forest that buffer the stream gorge and tributaries (Figure 3).

AOA will perform invasive species management on the property and will allow the property's forestland to continue to mature. A 12-acre area of grassland on the property will be allowed to reforest through guided succession. The property will be marked with Carsonite posts with signage denoting the property as a WRRSP-sponsored project and AOA nature preserve.

Property Management and Maintenance

The property will be managed as a conservation area and access to the site will be limited to AOA employees and guests accompanying them; no public access is allowed. The property will be protected in perpetuity through use restrictions spelled out in an Environmental Covenant, which will be part of the deed on the property. Above any other competing management objectives, the protection and preservation of the water resources, as specified in the Environmental Covenant, shall rule the management of the WRRSP-acquired property. These restrictions include:

- There shall be no agricultural, industrial commercial or residential activity undertaken or allowed on the Property.
- The Property may not be divided, partitioned, subdivided or conveyed except in its current configuration.
- No buildings or other structures, including, but not limited to, billboards or advertising of any kind, camping accommodations, and mobile homes shall be erected or placed on the Property.
- There shall be no mining, drilling, exploring for or removal of minerals, oil or gas from the Subject Property.

- Except as may be necessary for reasonable preservation, management and restoration purposes, there shall be no ditching, draining diking, filling, excavating, or removal of topsoil, sand, gravel, rock or other materials.
- There shall be no manipulation or alteration of wetlands, creeks, streams, surface or subsurface springs or other bodies of water. Reasonable alternations to surface water bodies and their associated riparian zones within the Subject Property may be permitted for the purpose of protecting or improving water quality or aquatic habitat, upon the condition that prior to any such alterations, a plan for such activities shall be proposed in writing by the Owner or any Transferee and shall be approved by Ohio EPA or shall be approved as an amendment to the Plan.
- There shall be no open dumping.
- There shall be no building of new roads or other rights-of-way. Existing roads may be maintained but shall not be widened or improved.
- There shall be no operation of automobiles, trucks, snowmobiles, dune buggies, motorcycles, all-terrain vehicles or any other motorized recreational vehicles.
- In order to maintain the ecological balance of the Property or to protect human health and safety, hunting and trapping may be permitted only in accordance with State regulations and as authorized by the Owner.
- Except in areas already identified in the Plan as being disturbed, and as may be necessary for reasonable preservation, management or restoration purposes, to protect human health and safety, or to maintain a diversity of naturally occurring habitat types and control of exotic non-native and exotic species of plants, there shall be no removal, destruction, cutting, trimming or mowing of any trees or other vegetation. No non-native species shall be introduced to the Property.

Implementation

The WRRSP loan award for AOA's Corby Addition to Bison Hollow Preserve project will be made possible through Akron's WRF Headworks Improvements project WPCLF loan award, which is scheduled for December 2019.

Public Participation

AOA uses a range of materials and methods to communicate project awareness and benefits to the public. They provide informational brochures (available online), a website (www.appalachiaohioalliance.org), mail and email correspondence with members and friends, inclusion of project information in AOA materials and presentations, education and outreach programs, and hands-on volunteer activities.

As part of its State Environmental Review Process, DEFA will post this LER and Finding of No Significant Impact to its web page located at: <https://epa.ohio.gov/defa/ofa#1696310543-wrrsp-documents-for-review-and-comment>.

Conclusion

Ohio EPA conducts environmental reviews of all projects prior to awarding WPCLF financing. The proposed project meets the project type criteria for a Limited Environmental Review (LER); namely, it is a water quality protection project consisting of non-structural practices. Furthermore, the

project meets the other qualifying criteria for an LER; specifically, the proposed project:

Will have no significant environmental effect and will require no specific impact mitigation as the planning activities for the project identified no potential adverse impacts to the quality of the human environment or to sensitive resources such as floodplains, wetlands, state or federally-designated wild, scenic or recreational rivers, riparian areas, prime or unique agricultural lands, aquifer recharge zones, archaeological or historically significant sites, air quality or threatened or endangered species. In fact, the proposed project will have beneficial environmental impacts by preserving high quality stream habitat.

Will have no effect on high-value environmental resources since it will protect the quality of the South Branch, East Fork Queer Creek and its headwater tributaries by permanently protecting the streams, their floodplain and buffer.

Is cost-effective since it represents a long-term solution to an identified water quality threat currently facing the surface water from residential, cabin, and timber land development. The acquired property will be permanently protected and maintained in an area where such resources are highly scenic, geologically significant, and are critical to maintaining the existing high-quality biological communities in South Branch, East Fork Queer Creek in the East Fork Queer Creek Watershed.

Is not a controversial action as it will benefit the environment and no significant public opposition has been expressed.

Does not create a new or relocate an existing discharge to surface or ground waters since the proposed project does not involve a point source discharge.

Will not provide capacity to serve a population substantially greater than the existing population since the proposed project is not a publicly owned wastewater treatment works designed to serve a designated area. Instead, it is a protection project of high-quality aquatic resources.

Contact info

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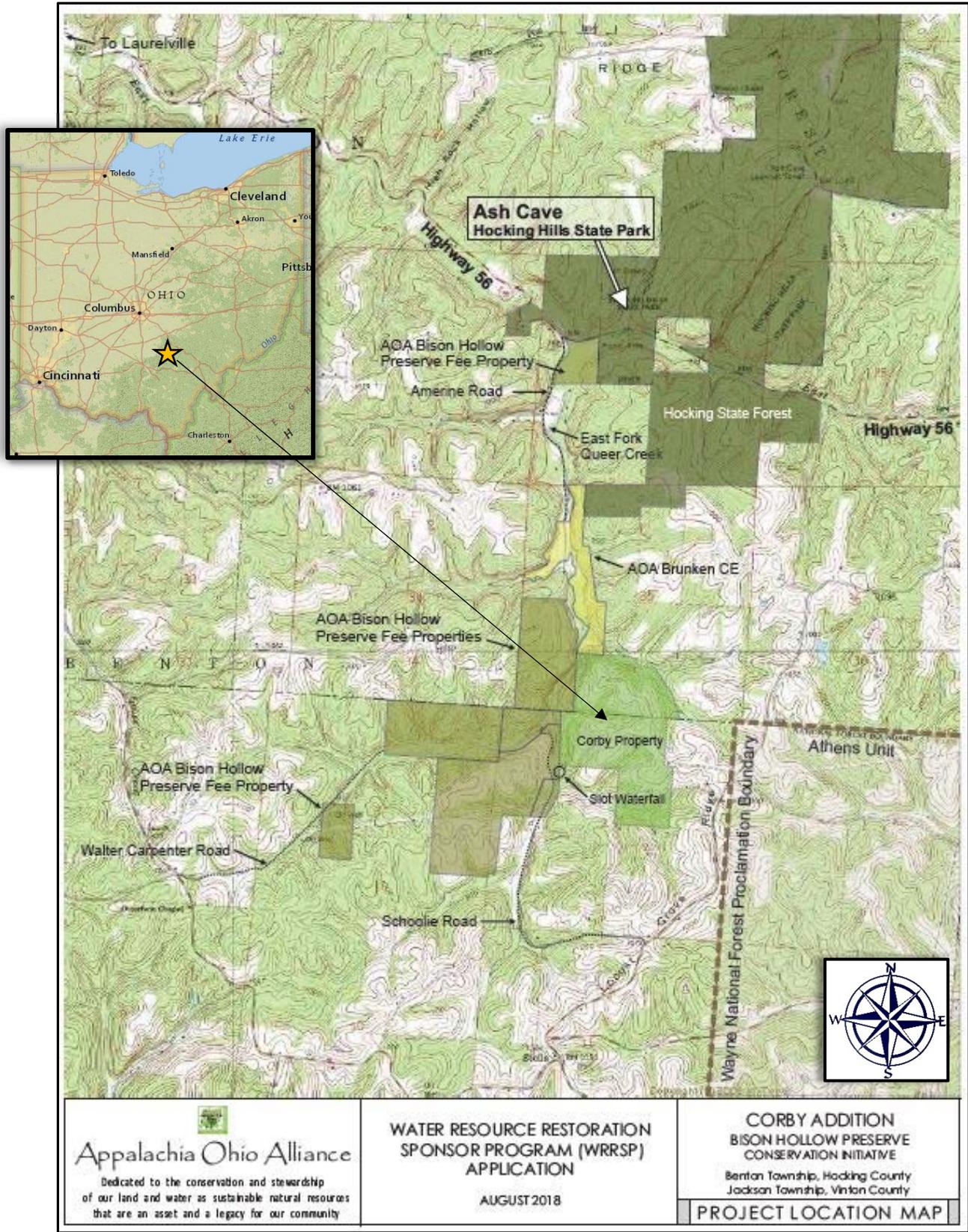


Figure 1. Corby Addition to Bison Hollow Preserve Project Location

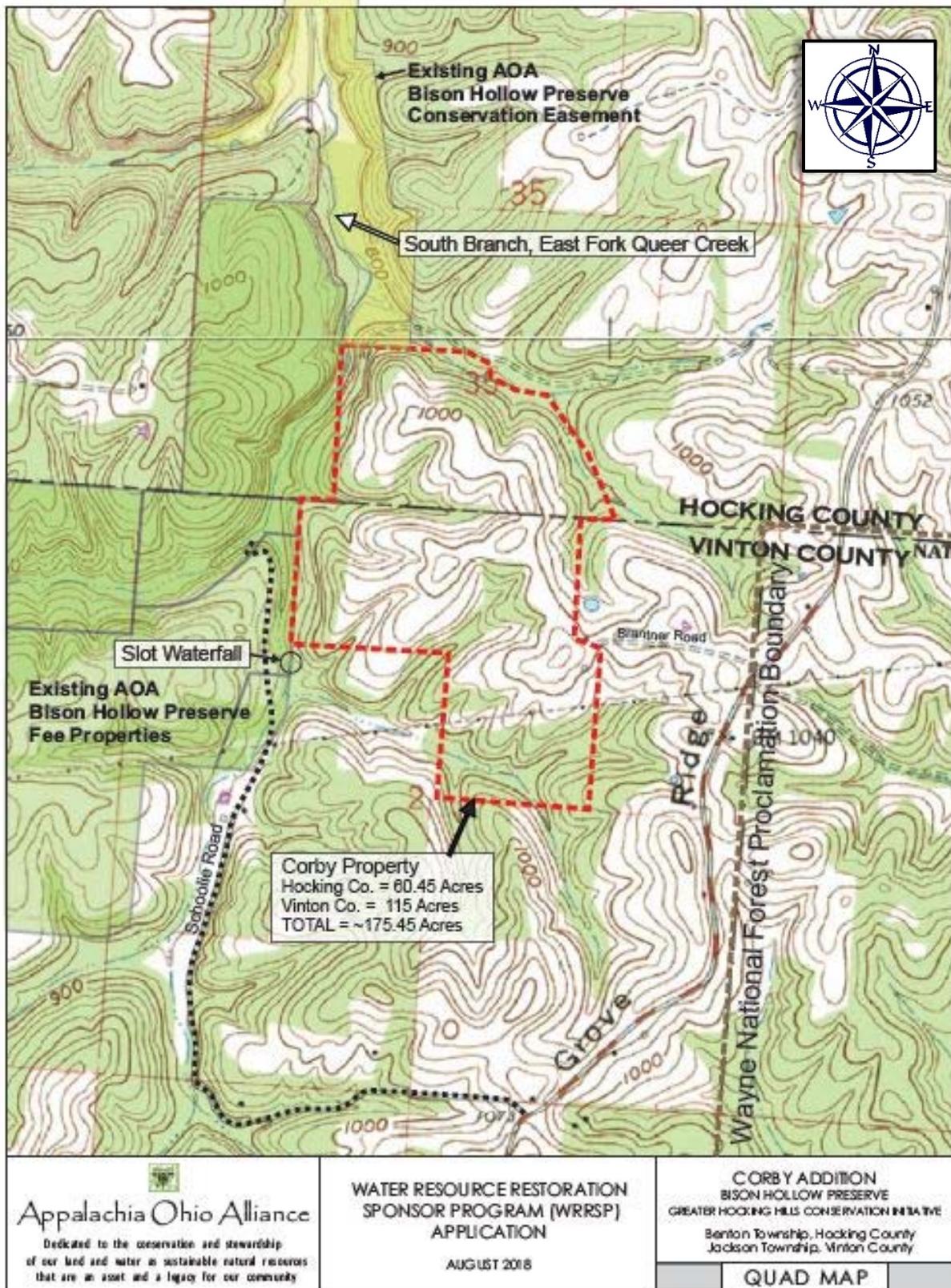


Figure 2. Corby Addition to Bison Hollow Preserve Project on Topographic Map



Figure 3. Corby Addition to Bison Hollow Preserve Water Resources