AOA Celebrates 10 Years of Successful Land and Water Conservation Leadership and Achievement

Appalachia Ohio Alliance celebrates the 10th anniversary of our founding this year. Formed in 2002 with startup support from singer Carole King’s White Cloud Council, AOA has evolved from a small group of passionate naturalists into a successful land conservancy with an extensive portfolio of conservation properties and a track record of effective stewardship.

To commemorate this important milestone in our organizational growth and celebrate our many conservation accomplishments and successes, we hosted **A Decade of Green!**—an evening affair at Geneva Hills Lodge, nestled in the beautiful Blue Valley woodlands near Sugar Grove.

The evening consisted of a lively mix of activities and showcased a variety of tasty seasonal foods and beverages from local farms and decorations from our farms, fields and forests. The program featured an inspirational talk by Brock Evans, AOA founding sponsor, plus an AOA awards presentation, a raptor display and native flute music.

With the sale of over 180 tickets and 46 sponsorships from our friends, community partners and supporters, **A Decade of Green!** was a big success that bodes well for our future.
Generous gifts from friends and supporters enabled the Appalachia Ohio Alliance to accomplish much in 2012. We are grateful for this support, and for continued validation of our mission to conserve and enhance Appalachian Ohio’s land and water as sustainable natural resources.

Organizational Advancement

As AOA grows we are striving to enhance our organizational capacity to better achieve our mission goals. This year we:

- Expanded our staffing and capacity by employing a new part-time office assistant and a student intern.
- Undertook the first stage of a Strategic Planning process to assess the organization after 10 years of conservation service to the community and envision a sustainable future. As part of our strategic planning we have adjusted our geographic service area to better reflect our current focus.
- Participated in several Land Trust Alliance and Coalition of Ohio Land Trusts sponsored conferences and trainings to enhance our conservation skills and knowledge.
- Received greatly expanded coverage from local media.
- Built a new more attractive and functional website.
- Received a capacity-building grant for development of a membership / constituent management program from the Clifford and Mary Ozias Conservation and Forestry Fund of The Columbus Foundation.

Lands/Stewardship

AOA works to conserve and protect our precious land and water resources as assets for our community.

- We accepted the donation of new conservation easements on five (5) properties protecting 880 new acres. Easement donors include Jerry and Eva Brunken, Reber Dunkle, Bob Etchison, Jim Savage and Don and Mary Anne Flournoy.
- We increased the lands AOA stewards to 38 conservation easements and 7 fee-owned properties totaling over 6,600 acres.
- The Board, staff and volunteers monitored all 45 of our conservation properties during the past 12 months.
- In partnership with Rural Action and other community partners we continued stewardship activities on AOA’s Trimble Township Community Forest and other properties through clean-ups and removal of invasive plants.
Earthtouch Merges with AOA

Earthtouch, a conservation-based nonprofit agreed to merge with AOA. Inspired by Capital University professor Dr. Louis DeWein, Earthtouch was founded by several Capital University students and guests at the Niches ecology-based retreat located northwest of McArthur in Vinton County. Incorporated in 1991, Earthtouch focused on protecting land and water resources and promoting healthy interaction between people and the natural world. As part of the merger Earthtouch is transferring ownership of the 380-acre Earthtouch Preserve in Vinton County to AOA for long-term stewardship. Earthtouch has honored founder Lou DeWein through the establishment of an endowed memorial fund at The Foundation for Appalachian Ohio. Proceeds from the DeWein Conservation Fund are designated for land stewardship activities.

Hocking River Conservation Corridor Initiative

AOA envisions a healthy Hocking River ecosystem which is a central feature and natural asset for adjoining communities. We recently launched a Hocking River Conservation Corridor Initiative and began the work of building a coalition of compatible groups to help create a conservation / greenway corridor along the River. Our efforts are focusing on the conservation and restoration of natural riparian qualities and functions of the river corridor as well as enhancements compatible with passive recreational use and economic benefit related to eco-tourism potentials. The proposed conservation corridor would have numerous benefits for the communities and property owners in the Hocking River valley which would include: enhanced water quality; abatement of bank and agricultural field erosion; and protection of floodplain areas and reduction in river-based flooding.

Gosnell Family Donates Riverfront Land to AOA

AOA is receiving a donation of a 42-acre Hocking River frontage property from the three Clyde Gosnell family children—Lisa Wentz, Brad Gosnell and Laurie Patterson. This gift is intended to help carry out AOA’s Hocking River Conservation Corridor Initiative and continues the Gosnell family’s remarkable legacy of conservation and stewardship. Located in the river floodplain north of Rockbridge adjacent to Highway 33, this property is a conservation demonstration site that has been enhanced through the planting of a native prairie and thousands of new trees along the river to help arrest erosion and restore the bottomland forest ecosystem. AOA is grateful to the Gosnell family for their vision and leadership in helping conserve and restore the valuable bottomland habitats along the Hocking River.
Outreach/Programs/Events

AOA provides opportunities for the public to participate in and support our mission. We emphasize nature-based education that features local lands and 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 experiences, and allow friends to visit our conservation lands—some of the most beautiful places in our region.

• Our outdoor activity program consisted of several lectures and naturalist-guided field trips including: a Prairie Walk at the Cohen-Adelman property, and a Flora Survey and Herpetofauna Study in partnership with Crane Hollow Preserve.

• Special events included The Pre-Columbian Ohio Landscape lecture and hike and the Native American Storytelling at Deffebauh Mound in partnership with Hocking Hills Adventure Trek.

• Other events were the 32nd Annual Hocking River Cleanup in conjunction with the Hocking Valley Canoe Livery and the Friends of the Hocking River; a Trimble Community Forest Cleanup in partnership with Rural Action; and a Hocking River Float Trip sponsored by the Hocking Valley Canoe Livery.

• In cooperation with the founding host Gosnell and Davidson families, we sponsored the 30th annual Trillium Festival at Mathias Grove during the Spring.

• In all, our programs and events attracted over 700 participants, inspired by the beauty of our special landscapes.

And More...

• Whole Foods Market designated AOA as the beneficiary of their “Nickels for Nonprofits” program this holiday season.

• AOA’s Holiday Card program provided opportunities to “give a gift of conservation” while supporting AOA’s mission and promoting local conservation.

• We established an endowed fund—Paul Knoop Conservation Education Fund—at The Foundation for Appalachian Ohio to honor the conservation career and achievements of former board member and founder Paul Knoop.

• We honored founder and long-time supporter Clyde Gosnell with the first annual AOA Clyde Gosnell Conservation Award in recognition of his many contributions to AOA and Ohio conservation. This annual award was established to recognize the person that best exemplifies Clyde’s dedication, commitment and achievement in the field of conservation.