

Alum Creek

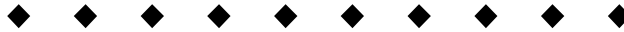


Sheets

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~ A publication of the Friends of Alum Creek and Tributaries ~



Alum Creek Action Planning Update

by Heather Doherty, FACT Watershed Coordinator

In the last edition of *Alum Creek FACT Sheets*, we introduced the launching of an **action planning** project that will build community and improve water quality in Alum Creek. What do we mean by the phrase “action planning”? With community partners, we will determine problems, priorities, and actions to improve the cleanliness and health of the creek.

The plan will focus not only on the creek corridor, but all the land that drains to Alum Creek, otherwise known as its **watershed**. FACT is now working with a steering committee of educators, natural resource professionals, and local municipalities to determine how the community can best be involved.

Current focus is on collecting the information necessary to clearly define problems, so they may be addressed cohesively within the plan. This includes data as diverse as stormwater outfalls, dam locations, geology, and zoning, and will be coalesced into a “**watershed inventory**.” Although the document will be available for public review, a brief version that will highlight physical features and water quality conditions will be coming soon to FACT’s website (see below) for those who just can’t wait!

Much more than scientific data, however, is necessary to achieve a complete vision of Alum Creek.

FACT is collecting cultural information such as local history, public perception of natural resources, and demographic data.

Why? Because we believe Alum Creek is much more than a river on its own; it’s a connecting force living among us. The decisions we collectively make affect it, as it in turn affects us through providing drinking water, recreation, and a sense of continual renewal. An action plan for Alum Creek must accordingly embody this balance.

Look within this issue for a preview of research conducted by Otterbein College intern Ben Thayer, in “Alum Creek’s Cultural Heritage and the Underground Railroad.”

Are you a local history buff, collector of family stories of early Alum Creek settlements, or just spend a lot of time on the creek? Contact Heather at 236-6455 to share your stories or volunteer. Newsletter submissions are also welcomed! To see a picture of the Alum Creek watershed or a soon-to-be posted condensed guide of Alum Creek water quality, visit our website at www.friendsofalumcreek.org.



FACT Springs into Corridor Action

by David Hohmann

It's been a very busy spring season of FACT River Corridor Committee service events, with three major projects along riverside parks and green spaces.

- ✓ Some 15-20 people participated in a cleanup on a rainy Saturday April 13, 2002, at the tributary which flows by *Ohio Dominican College* at Sunbury Road and Woodward Avenue. An ecology class led by Julie Cronk was the impetus for this effort. About 30 bags of bottles, cans and fast-food trash were removed from the ravine-like area. Some 20-year old pop cans were evidence of the long time buildup of litter. Prize find of the day was a working, fully charged fire extinguisher!
- ✓ Rain and drizzle again visited us early during our Sunday April 21, *2002 Earth Day Cleanup* in Westerville's Charrington Park. About 75 volunteers including Westerville Sunrise Rotary members and others joined in plowing through a large pile of old debris near defunct greenhouses in a corner of the park, filling two large 20 cubic yard containers. A red fox spotted in the area was respected by leaving some pallets and cover over what appeared to be its den. Evidence of the fox habitation included a mallard duck wing, probable leftovers from a recent meal. Next up was the planting of about 225 trees of various native species, in suitable natural areas of the park near the creek and a future bike path. We ended the afternoon with a fine barbecue! Thank you to the Westerville Recreation and Parks Department for all their support.
- ✓ *Columbus River Pride* came to Alum Creek on May 11th, with a "huge" Academy Park-based event. It was nice to gather in the sunshine and enjoy refreshments sponsored by Montana Mills Bakery and Kroger. About 60 participants including community members, a Boy Scout troop, Holtzman-Main Business Association volunteers, the Bexley High School Environmental Club, and many FACTers joined to clean up some 120 bags of trash from along the river and the Holtzman-Main area. The river bank along Nelson Road was much cleaner when we finished. We are considering officially adopting this segment of the creek, through Keep Columbus Beautiful- - which would give us permanent signage in the heart of the urban watershed.

We're looking for ideas for future projects and activities this year and are open to member suggestions. A canoe/kayak float trip is being planned for July (see *Calendar* page 5). For more information or to get involved with the River Corridor action committee, contact David Hohmann at 728-3885.



Bexley Initiates Planning for Southwest Quadrant

by David Hohmann

FACT has been formally advising the monthly meetings of a Southwest Bexley Master Plan Steering Committee that started up in April, 2002 and will continue through the summer. As FACT Vice-Chair and South Bexley resident, I have been attending the meetings as a FACT representative.

FACT's values for preservation and enhancement of the creek corridor were made known early, and seem to be widely shared among the stakeholders. The value of the river as a local and regional asset, as a scenic feature, as natural habitat and as a drainage system has been recognized, as well as the need for more parkland in this part of Bexley. A broad consensus seems to favor keeping a stream corridor buffer that is sensitive to the terrain and floodplain, with enhanced public open space, parkland, and greenway trail access.

The most recent meeting featured a discussion of conceptual models for possible shifting of some land uses in this part of the city to reflect current needs. Participants generally liked the city Planning Team's preferred land use reorganization strategy. In this scenario, an area along Main Street between City Hall and the Creek on both sides of the road may be marked for redevelopment. Many possibilities were presented, but the creek and river corridor features are expected to be respected in any case.

Dan Lorek, Development Director for the City of Bexley, believes the process can achieve an all-around "win" situation for all in the community (residents, the environment, city officers and schools,

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Alum Creek's Cultural Heritage and the Underground Railroad

by *Otterbein Intern Ben Thayer*

I will soon be graduating from Otterbein College, and as I look back on my four years here, I realize that Alum Creek has significantly impacted my life. My first course at Otterbein was a general biology course that used Alum Creek as its classroom, so to speak. I quickly began to appreciate the area and soon found myself taking a wide range of courses that would allow me to explore the ecology of similar environments all over Ohio. As I grew as a biologist, I also grew as an environmentalist, looking at the problems our nation's waterways are facing.

My interests eventually led me to FACT, where I am currently aiding the construction of a comprehensive watershed inventory. The primary focus of my research has been investigating the history of the Alum Creek watershed, and I quickly found out something very interesting. My fraternity house, The Zeta Phi house, located at 48 West College Avenue, played an important role in the history of the watershed area. It was once the Thomas Jefferson Alexander home, which provided shelter for many runaway slaves during the abolitionist movement. As I investigated further I realized that the Alum Creek watershed was at the time a very active area.

Ohio, the leading state in helping more than 25,000 runaways move from the South to Canada from 1830 to 1865, had hundreds of branching trails, the heart of which ran from Circleville to Columbus. Slave hunters were so confused at the ability of slaves to travel unnoticed through these trails that they began to talk about the existence of an "underground road", coining the term. With Ohio's abundance of rivers flowing in a north-south direction, it's not surprising that river corridors were often central pieces of the web.

"Central Stations" marked the starting points for the many routes, and were usually the homes of the prominent abolitionist leaders in the area. Stations were located at Ripley and Portsmouth, then leading up the Scioto River to Columbus and into Westerville, now the 3C highway. The trail then switched a half-mile west and then north over Alum Creek to the home of Samuel Patterson. Patterson is probably one of the most well known "conductors" today.

Samuel Patterson moved with his family to Ohio in 1803. He eventually settled in then-named East Orange County, where his former home still stands at 6525 Africa Road. The Methodist Church of East Orange was located within a small settlement in the area, and eventually split due to discord over the abolitionist movement. The resulting Wesleyan Methodist Church is thought to be a gift of the Patterson family.

By this time, so many slaves had traversed the area that pro-slavery men living in nearby communities started to call the area of East Orange "Africa" in derision. Africa was the first stop for runaways in Franklin County. In 1859, a group of 35 newly freed slaves moved into vacant cabins in Africa and stayed there for several years, thus supporting the area's name.

Some of the more famous conductors were Otterbein College officials. The Hanby House, named after Bishop William Hanby, is located on the corner of Main and Center Streets in Westerville and is the only site in Ohio listed as having national historic importance according to the National Park Service study. Otterbein's President Lewis Davis's house was the most frequented in Westerville and is located at the northeast corner of College and Grove. Otterbein's campus is home to Clipping Hall, and as previously mentioned the Zeta Phi house.

The story of the abolitionist movement in the Alum Creek watershed is only one of many amazing historical events and traditions held here. These stories have provided me with yet another insight into the importance of protecting our waterways, not only with respect to restoring the health of the water, but also in keeping the tradition and heritage of our lives sacred. If we look closely, we can see that all of our lives are touched by the importance of the land around us that we often take for granted. It is our responsibility to cherish it and protect its integrity. I hope FACT and similar groups can continue to show others like me how to give our waterways the respect they deserve. I thank members of FACT for allowing me to be a part of their quest.



River Watch

by Margaret Ann Samuels and Carol Elder

FACT's Watershed Watch committee follows actions in the watershed that have the potential to affect the water quality of Alum Creek and its tributaries. The Ohio EPA has just released a draft update of the Water Quality Management Plan (draft plan) for the Scioto River Basin, primarily in Franklin County and including information on Alum Creek. Over and over the draft plan emphasizes that the main causes of water contamination are runoff from construction sites and from impervious surfaces such as parking lots that prevent rainfall from penetrating the ground.

The draft plan outlines how the OEPA expects to assign responsibility for providing sewer service and stormwater management controls in new developments in central Ohio.

Large "flushes" of stormwater, such as the extraordinary rainfall in central Ohio on May 28, send torrents of water into streams, causing erosion and loss of habitat as well as increased pollution. They also increase pressure on municipalities to reduce flooding by channeling water into ever-larger stormwater culverts that produce even greater volumes of runoff.

FACT has identified several current development sites in the watershed that are likely to affect stream water quality and habitat.

Old Nazarene campground site – Morse Rd. East of Cleveland Ave. Casto Communities purchased the 27 acre property in 2001 from Columbus Urban Growth (a non-profit arm of the city) and plans to build 248 apartments. City Council approved a 75% tax break for the development. FACT has discovered a wetland on the property; unfortunately it has already been partially filled in during preliminary excavations. We have contacted the US Army Corps of Engineers to investigate action to pursue.

McCutcheon Crossing – FACT discovered that planned silt fences on this housing development on Sunbury Rd. between Agler and McCutcheon Rds. were not in place during construction, and contacted the Ohio EPA who wrote a letter to the developer requiring compliance.

Woodsvew Apartments, Schneider Park – Bexley City Council has granted a zoning variance for this 55-unit building overlooking Alum Creek next to Schneider Park on Astor Ave. The developer proposes a 170 foot wide buffer between the project and Alum Creek, which he intends to donate to the city. FACT members identified a wetland on this

Factoid!

Consider the mighty watershed. Water flows downhill, and so does the Alum Creek. Think it's hilly here? Maybe. Waterways flow along the lowest points. A tributary stream channel in the pristine upper reaches of our area falls as much as 50 feet per mile for several miles.

In comparison, the main river channel drops an average of 4 feet per mile (120 feet in elevation over its 26 miles from the Alum Creek Lake reservoir in Delaware County to its confluence with Big Walnut Creek). And yet from there to the Gulf of Mexico, in a distance of some 1500 more river miles along the Big Walnut, Scioto, Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, it falls 715 feet, averaging less than half a foot per mile.

site. FACT is suggesting ways to mitigate runoff from the parking lot, which would be next to the buffer zone. A FACT member is participating in formulation of the Southwest Bexley Master Plan at the city's invitation. FACT and others had recommended that City Council wait for the Master Plan before approving the Woodsvew proposal.

West Star and **Altair** are two planned business developments on North Cleveland Avenue between County Line Road and Polaris Parkway, along Alum Creek. The Daimler Group is building the West Star development from Cleveland Avenue west to the creek and from County Line Road north. It will contain 3 large office buildings. Jerome Solove Development is planning the Altair mixed-use project on 135 acres between West Star and Polaris Parkway. Plans include office buildings, 2 hotels, a conference center and retail facilities. Westerville Planning Commission will review Altair's master plan June 25. FACT is watching these two large sites and planning how to encourage environmentally sensitive development.

Spills into creek – At the time this report was going to press, FACT learned of two recent instances of a fuel spill on a roadway being washed into a storm sewer of the Alum Creek watershed by the Columbus Division of Fire. The diesel fuel reached the creek, and the city Sewers and Drains Division reported it to Ohio EPA. The OEPA plans to work with the Fire Division to educate them in proper spill cleanup and prevent future problems. On April 21, lime sludge in a lagoon next to the Westerville water treatment plant escaped into the small tributary next to the lagoon, about 1000 yards from Alum Creek.

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Calendar of Events

Details on all events can be found at www.friendsofalumcreek.org or by calling 236-6455.

Thursday, June 13th ~ **FACT monthly meeting** at Ohio Dominican College's Neighborhood Center, 1229 Sunbury Road, 6:30 pm. Meetings are open to the public and offer an excellent opportunity to focus in on what's new with Alum Creek. Call 236-6455 for information or directions, also listed on FACT's website.

June 28th - 30th **ComFest 2002:** Along with the performers, food, and crafts, check out FACT at Columbus's favorite summer festival in Goodale Park in the Short North District. FACT will be sharing a booth sponsored by the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission's Greenways Program with other watershed conservation groups in the area. Volunteers will be chatting with festival-goers and handing out information. If you didn't think it possible to have fun AND help Alum Creek, call 236-6455 to sign up for a short hour at our booth.

Thursday, July 11th ~ **Sharon Woods Walk:** FACT continues "Exploring Our River" bimonthly series at Sharon Woods Metro Park, 6:30 pm. See FACT's web page for a complete description of this event.

Saturday, July 20th ~ **Alum Creek Canoe Float:** Summer is here and it's time to get down to what river conservation is really about - getting on the water! Don't take our word for it, discover the beauty of Alum Creek for yourself. Time and location TBA; rain date July 21st. Space is limited to 20 people, so call David at 728-3885 to hear details and reserve your spot. The deadline for registration is July 13th.

Thursday, August 8th ~ **FACT monthly meeting** at Ohio Dominican College, 6:30 pm

Thursday, September 12th ~ **FACT monthly meeting:** Time and location TBA

Sunday, September 22nd ~ **Alum Creek River Fest 2002:** Join FACT and area residents for this year's River Fest, held in conjunction with Westerville's Symphony Orchestra "Paper Plate Pops" performance. Come picnic, enjoy the music, take a canoe float, or get in the water with Ohio EPA biologists to explore creek life. Details will be coming in the next issue of *Alum Creek FACT Sheets* and on FACT's web site.

"Bexley Planning" continued from page 2...

the university and seminary, and real estate development, banking and businesses). In future meetings the preferred strategies will be refined and presented as a Draft Master Plan, with development standards that can be codified as zoning, etc. to guide future redevelopment for Master Plan implementation.



"River Watch" continued from page 4

While the lime, used for softening water, is not toxic it settles out and covers the stream bottom. That probably prevented most of the material from reaching Alum Creek. The Westerville Water Department notified OEPA as soon as it was discovered, and used a large rented pump for 3

days to pump the material back into the lagoon. No visible lime remains in the small creek.

Anyone who sees evidence of a spill or material running into a creek can call the Ohio EPA spill hotline at 800-282-9378.

Another easement confirmed along Alum Creek! FACT's work was rewarded recently with the addition of another conservation easement along the creek south of Mock Road and parallel to Sunbury Road. The 1.5 acre easement was granted by Dominion Homes, to mitigate for potential environmental impacts of wetland filling activities the company engaged in during preparation of a housing development in the Polaris area, as mandated by the Ohio EPA. Thanks to the City of Columbus Recreation and Parks Department for officially holding the easement and for their crucial assistance in the matter.

Get Involved with the Friends of Alum Creek & Tributaries!

FACT is an organization built on the dedicated work of volunteers. Realizing how valuable volunteers' time is, we do our best to match projects with particular interests, time limitations, and skill development needs. There are many more options than we can list here, but to give you some ideas we've listed some of our immediate needs. Call Heather at 236-6455 to find out more.

- ✔ **Database Manager** – Help refine our database and mailing list by phoning to verify interest and info.
- ✔ **Alum Creek Action Plan Steering Committee Member** – See article on Page 1. Requires ability to meet at least once a month with the committee and help organize the Alum Creek action planning process.
- ✔ **Graphic Designer** – Whether you know a lot or a little about graphic designing, FACT needs your assistance in projects as various as designing flyers and newsletters to creating GIS maps. If you are not a designer but have contacts in a local firm or college, please pass it on! Formal training not necessary.
- ✔ **Researcher** – See article Page 1. Help FACT gather and compile data for an Alum Creek Inventory, covering a wide range of topics from geology to local history. Chances are that you have knowledge that can be put to use helping us write a section, or research skills to collect needed information. Volunteers are welcome to work on small sections.
- ✔ **Label Sticker!** – Looking for a way to help that doesn't require thought at the end of the day? Help with clerical work such as preparing periodic mailings.
- ✔ **Special Events Assistant** – Do the behind-the-scenes work that makes our events a success, such as publicity, donation solicitation, flyer distribution, equipment hauling, and volunteer recruitment.



FACT Membership

Your contribution is tax deductible and enables FACT to pursue its mission of stewardship and citizen enjoyment of Alum Creek. FACT is a chapter of the Columbus Recreation Council with 501(c)(3) status under terms of the IRS. Make checks payable to FACT, and return to 787 Montrose Ave, Columbus, Ohio 43209.

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Columbus, Ohio 43209