

Alum Creek



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Friends of Alum Creek and
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FACT Sheets

Wetlands and Vernal Pools in the Urban Environment: Rare and Precious

By Kimberly L. Williams

In May, I attended an Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (OEPA) hearing concerning a development occurring near Polaris off of Lyra Drive and I-71 in Delaware County. Nine separate wetlands will be impacted by the proposed development by NP Limited. Unfortunately, these wetlands are regarded to be of low quality or they do not have pristine habitat. For example, a wetland choked by the already prevalent cattail is of lower quality compared to a wetland that would have a variety of plants species such as pickerelweed, duck potato, sweetflag, etc.

Regardless of whether they are pristine, these wetlands most likely still perform necessary ecological functions such as flood control. Recent OEPA documents examining the use of constructed wetlands and mitigation banks to compensate for wetland loss, indicate that neither solution is failsafe. In fact, constructed wetlands are unlikely to provide equivalent environmental benefits of the wetlands they replace and the mitigation banks do not guarantee the conservation of ecologically viable wetlands.

Currently, arguments are being made that wetlands in urban areas should be protected regardless of the quality of habitat provided. David Celebrezze, Director of Air & Water Special Projects at the Ohio Environmental Council contributed an article on current efforts to

increase the protection of wetlands at the OEPA External Advisory Group meetings. Wetlands in the lower portion of the Alum Creek Watershed are rare and a precious resource. Rarer still is the vernal pool. To find out more about vernal pools and possible changes to the Clean Water Act's wetland rules, please read the following two articles by our guest columnist.

Vernal Pools as the State of Ohio Official Wetland

From Ohio Environmental Conservation
Briefing Book 2007-2008

By David Celebrezze

Healthy wetlands are a vital component of our communities. Ohio is a water-rich state ("Ohio" means Good River after the Ohio River), and it is appropriate that the state formally designate wetlands, in particular the vernal pool, for official recognition. Having a state wetland designation acknowledges the important role wetlands play in slowing flood waters and increasing property values, and highlights the unique natural landscape of Ohio.

Vernal pools are seasonal or temporary wetlands that fill up with snow melt and rain water in the spring and usually dry out in mid to late summer. Also known as "spring-time wetlands," they are separated from other water bodies such as streams, rivers, and other wetlands. Since these wetlands dry up periodically, they do not contain fish (a top predator), making them valuable amphibian reproduction areas. Vernal pools can be as small as a few feet across or several acres; however, each has been shaped and molded over decades or even hundreds of years.



Scientists are still researching and revealing the unique ecosystem of the vernal pool. For example, the eggs (called cysts) of the fairy shrimp that inhabits vernal pools can lay dormant in the ground for more than a decade. Fairy shrimp are the fresh water cousin to brine shrimp. Also, vernal pools are home to a group of salamanders that partake in one of the rarest acts for an animal – that of nature-cloning. This group is called the unisexual Ambystoma which refers to the “mole” salamanders that burrow into the ground. Scientists are still studying these rare animals, which rely on vernal pools for their reproductive survival.

Vernal pools can be found in all 88 counties in Ohio and provide habitat for a plethora of animals including migratory birds, turtles, snakes, frogs and toads, salamanders, and hundreds of invertebrates. Some of Ohio’s rare and endangered species such as the blue spotted salamander and the spotted turtle call vernal pools home or rely on them for their habitat. Current efforts are under way by the Ohio EPA and non profit organizations to monitor and document Ohio’s vernal pools. On any given night in the spring, hundreds of animals utilize vernal pools for breeding, eating, and sleeping.

Vernal pools not only benefit wildlife, but people as well. As wetlands, vernal pools slow flood waters that would otherwise damage private property and public infrastructures such as roads and bridges. Vernal pools also filter sediment from entering streams and rivers. According to the Ohio EPA, sediment run off is the number one water pollutant in Ohio. Vernal pools support the many animals that eat mosquito larvae and mosquito adults, such as dragonflies, frogs, toads, salamanders, and various birds. In addition, vernal pools provide an excellent

teaching tool for educating our young about life cycles, geology, and hydrology

Salamander haven.

Vernal pools in Ohio provide habitat for over 20 species of salamanders, making Ohio a unique geographic location not only in the United States, but in the world. Salamanders only breed in vernal pools, so in order to preserve existing populations, vernal pools must be conserved.

For more information on vernal pools, please visit the Ohio Vernal Pool Partnership, www.ovpp.org.

Recommendation:

The General Assembly should pass a bill that recognizes the vernal pool as the official state wetland.



Ohio can be considered one of the rare epicenters of salamanders in the world. The Spotted Salamander is one of over 20 species of salamanders that call Ohio home and rely on vernal pools and streams for their survival.

Contact:

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Ohio Environmental Council
614-487-7506; David@theOEC.org

Factoid !

There is a species of salamander in Southern Ohio that can be up to three feet long!

Friends of Alum Creek & Tributaries

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www.friendsofalumcreek.org

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Mission: FACT is committed to finding ways to preserve and protect Alum Creek as a natural area while providing citizen access for environmentally responsible recreation, educational opportunities and citizen enjoyment at many levels.

Help Support the Friends of Alum Creek & Tributaries – Become a Member!

Your contribution is tax deductible and enables FACT to pursue its mission of stewardship and citizen enjoyment of Alum Creek. **Make checks payable to FACT, and return to 787 Montrose Avenue, Columbus, Ohio 43209.**

Choose a Membership Category:	Name(s)_____
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Thank You!



Westerville HS students at Cooper Park



Capital University students

Overview of Possible Changes to Clean Water Act's Wetland Rules

By David Celebrezze, Director of Air & Water Special Projects, The Ohio Environmental Council (editor: Kim Williams)

Background

Section 401 of the Clean Water Act allows the state to create a permitting program for the impacts to wetlands and to set requirements for mitigation. As a result, to impact a wetland or stream in Ohio, a permit must be issued by the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency. Every 5 years, the Ohio EPA revisits the rules that regulate impacts to wetlands. Typically, after the public comment period has ended, the Agency finalizes the proposal and sends it to the Joint Committee on Agency Rule Review (JCARR). However, after the interested party comment period, the Ohio EPA decides to convene two External Advisory Groups in the fall of 2006 to address issues raised concerning wetland and stream mitigation.

Purpose of External Advisory Groups

The purpose of the advisory groups is for the agency to explain in detail the reasons for the proposed changes to the wetland rules. The groups also serve as a vehicle for groups to comment on these proposals. Participants in the working groups include environmentalists, industry, and consultants. It should be noted that the working group does not write the rules for the Agency.

Why Are Changes to Wetland Rules Important?

The result of these rules determines whether a developer has to mitigate an impacted wetland within watershed or several counties away. They will also determine if sound science can be required to monitor the health of a mitigated wetland to ensure it is functioning as the destroyed wetland in several areas (biologic, hydrologic, etc.).

Sound Science and Mitigate within the Watershed

Environmental groups such as FACT and OEC as well as like-minded environmental consultants are at the table to voice the necessity of protecting the ecological health of our local watersheds. We are encouraging the adoption of sound science for monitoring mitigated wetlands and avoidance measures. Additionally, we are urging incentivizing mitigation within the watershed so the local community keeps the benefits of the stream/wetland.

Alum Creek Trail Over a Barrel – Construction Resuming After Drum Cleanup by EPA

By David Hohmann

The 3-mile extension project of Metro Parks' Alum Creek greenway recreational trail, between Three Creeks Park and I-70, has been on hold since last summer when a bulldozer punctured a buried 55 gallon drum full of oily old solvent, adjacent to the Alum Creek river & I-70. The old Integrity Drive landfill site is one of many historically sanctioned burial grounds of large caches. These are leftovers from the industrial brownfields that once populated the south side of Columbus. Fred Myers of Ohio EPA CDO--DERR provided FACT with an update. In mid-April, US EPA contractors excavated and removed about 260 tons of contaminated soils and debris that included up to 60 old 55-gallon drums. They had been buried for close to 50 years under about 5 feet of other fill. Contaminants included lead, PCBs, n-nitrosodiphenylamine, benzo(b)-fluoranthene, benzo(a)anthracene, chrysene, benzene, trichloroethylene, methylene chloride, and vinyl chloride (a breakdown product of the last two other items). A layer of "geonet" textile was placed in the bottom of the excavated area to mark the boundary of the hole, and clean fill soils were placed on top. Planting of trees or shrubs in this

area later should probably be feasible, Mr. Myers indicated. Construction of the trail south of Petzinger Road resumed in late April - look for the new concrete retaining wall along the west side of SR 33 near the railroad underpass. Once ODOT has signed off on the EPA work that has been done, work should progress swiftly with further grading, applying gravel, asphalt paving, and landscaping.



Hole where barrels were removed is now lined

Committee Reports

EDUCATION EVENTS

Chairperson: Jerry Holloway

Genoa Township recently completed a critical trail connection that linked the beautiful, tree-shaded Genoa Trail with the Westerville Trail System. To celebrate its opening, the Township celebrated first annual **Genoa Trail Festival** on Saturday, June 2, 2007.

The majority of events took place at the Township's McNamara Park. They included US Congressman Patrick Tiberi doing the ribbon cutting, a 5mile run, a kids 1K fun run, local artisans and craft vendors, food vendors, music and entertainment, a used bicycle collection for Pedals4Progress, a Bike Safety Rodeo for kids, and Bike Maintenance Clinics. Trail and parks related organizations including Friends of Alum Creek, The Delaware County Friends of the Trail (www.dcft.org), the Ohio-to-Erie Trail

(www.ohio-to-erie-trail.org) and the Genoa Township Park Advisory Board had information tables.

On Earth Day, FACT had a display in Goodale Park as part of the inaugural Year-In-A-Day event.

RECREATION

Chairperson: Brian Wilke

FACT will host a Canoe Float as part of Ohio RiverSweep on June 16th - 9:00am to noon. Put in at EDS office building parking lot at 3700 Corporate Dr. (SE area of SR 3/Westerville Rd. & SR E. 161 next to CHA animal shelter). We'll be leisurely floating down scenic Alum Creek to Innis Park and picking up trash as we can. To reserve a spot in a boat or for more info, call Brian 614-899-0708.

We are planning a bike ride and picnic in the fall.

WATERSHED WATCH

Chairperson: Margaret Ann Samuels

FACT has recently commented on 3 proposed developments by NP Limited in the Polaris area. The first is an office/retail development near Antares Ave. The second is an office/hotel complex called Colonial Meadows, located near I-71 and Gemini Place. The third is located north of the new Costco store north of Polaris Mall. All three impact the same tributary and the cumulative negative effect of them is unacceptable. Over a half a mile of stream and half an acre of wetlands will be filled.

NP Limited proposes to mitigate for the destruction by buying into the wetland bank in Marion County, but FACT is asking for any mitigation to happen in the same general area of the watershed. On May 15, FACT members testified at the Ohio EPA hearing on the third development.

FACT also notified the EPA of illegal filling of the creek's floodplain at a proposed condominium development at Sunbury and Innis Rd. and the developer was told to come into compliance.

COMMUNICATION

Chairperson: David Roseman

Watch for "Evites" in your email. FACT is trying a new system of notifying you of events by using Evites. They may say "Evite from Kimberly Williams". This is not spam! If the event has a cost, there will be a way to pay for it with Pay Pal if you wish. Bear with us as we experiment! Look for ongoing changes in both our newsletter and website.

FUNDRAISING AND MEMBERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Chairperson: Joe Bonnell

Welcome all new FACT members!

FACT has formed a new committee - Fundraising and Membership - to ensure that our organization continues to grow and has the financial resources we need to do good work. Raising money and attracting new members are fundamental to building a strong organization. If you have an interest or special skill in fundraising and membership development, contact Joe Bonnell (bonnell.8@osu.edu) to learn about the many ways you can get involved.

SERVICE

Chairperson: David Hohmann

FACT Service Yields Increasing Dividends. Already in 2007, FACT has sponsored 16 service events with a total of 90 participants. The investments of time and energy are really adding up. At least 208 bags of trash have been removed from sensitive watershed areas in 2007, surpassing the 2006 yearly total of 196. Some 87 oversize items have been extracted -- 53 of them recycled as scrap metal (over 500 lbs.!). 30 bags of cans and bottles have been recovered and recycled too. Only 10 tires have been recovered so far this year, but expect that number to grow.

This spring, FACT volunteers removed some 450 invasive honeysuckle shrubs, and 8 bags of garlic mustard from sensitive vernal wetland areas at Boyer Nature Preserve and Cooper Park. We planted 150 native tree and shrub seedlings to enhance the creek greenway buffer and wetland wildlife habitats. Check out the vernal pool in Cooper Park for a big improvement. Look for our native dogwood, serviceberry, spicebush and eastern red cedar seedlings planted along the bike trail just north of Main St., and south of Livingston Ave. You will also notice 250 feet of new mesh fence we put in by the Main Street Kroger parking lot to keep wind-blown trash away from the creek.

FACT appreciates the wonderful participation and support of the many volunteers and community group partners: Capital University, Otterbein, and Ohio Dominican University, St. Charles Preparatory, Westerville South High School, Rotary and Garden Club members, and the Cities of Bexley and Westerville. Together, we are making a huge difference for the good of Alum Creek! Stay with us for more fun and exciting results as the season progresses.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

In the following committees:

- Public Education and Outreach
- Communication (newsletter, website, PR)
- Service (cleanups)
- Recreation
- Watershed Watch
- Fundraising and Membership

We need everyone's help to make a difference right here where we live, work and play.

For more information or to share ideas, please contact us:

(614) 409-0511 or

kwilliams@friendsofalumcreek.org.

River Voices

Creekin' with the Duckies

By Nancy Belay

We've done lots of creek walks and a few canoe floats but the prospect of actually being "one with the river" from the vantage point of our inflatable Coleman kayaks, also called duckies, was intriguing. My husband Jeff suggested we bid on them on ebay. It would be a small investment of \$150.00 for the two sets complete with paddles and pump and \$60.00 for life jackets. Not too bad for a summers worth of potential creeking adventure. Getting up and running was surprisingly easy. Our first outing was at Hoover reservoir just to check them out. It took just a few minutes to inflate them and they were surprisingly sturdy and comfortable. Rather than keep my legs inside the kayak I discovered a relaxing position propping them up on the front of the boat leaning back on the cushy backrest. Ahhh Heaven! We got the hang of it quickly that day and soon were off to find a place to put in at the creek.

The bridge over Alum Creek, just downstream of the park at Madison Mills along "the creeks" trail was easy to access. As we were heading toward the bridge, carrying our gear, a park naturalist greeted us. I momentarily worried that we may not be permitted in the creek but he gave us his enthusiastic support, happy that we were taking advantage of the opportunity. The current of Alum Creek was so slight that we were actually able to paddle upstream. We traveled upstream lazily for more than an hour, stopping to admire the wildlife along the way. Fish darted along, minnows, suckers and bluegill mostly, and a huge snapping turtle lay almost completely camouflaged on the streambed. Portaging was required just a few times as the creek got shallow and increased in speed. The water looked incredibly clean along this stretch. In early summer the surface was covered with cottonwood fluff and dragonflies frequently hitched a ride on our duckies and paddles. Experiencing Alum Creek in this way felt so different from walking along its banks. It became abundantly clear to me how important the riparian highway is to the preservation of life that we may not even be aware of from a more removed perspective.



Cooper Park cleanup volunteers



Cooper Rd. Corporate Exchange cleanup



Westerville Trail connector planting



St. Charles students at Academy Park

FACT Events Calendar

Check www.friendsofalumcreek.org for updates or call (614)409-0511 for additional information.

June 14 - Membership Meeting at Ohio Dominican University Neighborhood Center. Starting at 6:30 pm.

June 16 - Canoe Float . 9-12am. From EDS office parking lot at 3700 Corporate Dr. (SE area of SR 3/Westerville Rd. & SR E. 161 next to CHA animal shelter) to Innis Park. Bring your own canoe and FACT will have some (members have first dibs on canoes). Phone Brian Wilke to reserve a canoe 614-899-0708.

June 21 – FACT's Cocktails for Conservation benefit.. 5 – 8pm. At the new Rusty Bucket Corner Tavern 2158 E Main St. in Bexley. Come and enjoy free non-alcoholic drinks and snacks & happy hour alcohol. Suggested donation: \$25 per person, \$40 per couple. RSVP to FACT.

June 22-24 ComFest Community Festival. Goodale Park, downtown Columbus

June 23 - Wessie Fest Nature Festival. 10am – 2pm. 60 Collegeview Rd., Westerville. Celebration of nature and family fun along the Alum Creek bikeway. Live wildlife, youth fishing contest, children's activities, nature exhibits and activities, native plants, music, and food. Admission is free. For more information or to participate, see www.otterbeinlake.org or call Lindalee Brownstein at 614-571-7342.

June 30 - River Fest. Noon – 7pm. North Bank Park. Riverfest is presented by Outdoor Source and is a fun filled opportunity to celebrate the vital role waterways play in our environment.

July 28 – Three Creeks Fest. Three Creeks Park, 3860 Bixby Rd. (Confluence Trails area). Cleanup lead by FACT from 9:30am – 12pm and festival from 12pm – 3pm.

September 16 (tentative) – FACT Bike Ride. 1pm – 3pm. More info to follow.



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