

Alum Creek



Volume VI, Issue II

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Fact Sheets

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

New Section of Alum Creek Greenways Trail Open



Bridge over Alum Creek at Strawberry Farms

The span bridge pictured above is part of the six miles of trail now open from Main Street in Westerville south to Morse Road in Columbus. The two cities celebrated the accomplishment together with a ribbon cutting event on June 2nd.

When fully completed, the trail will stretch 22 miles along Alum Creek and comprise a portion of the state-wide Erie-to-Ohio Trail! Thirteen miles are completed now, including the northern Columbus corridor, I-670 to Livingston Avenue, and at the very southern end of the watershed, Three Creeks Park.

The trail winds through the previously seldom seen woods-lined corridor, offering glimpses of birds, wildflowers, and occasionally even a red-tailed fox.

Two major sections are now left to be completed. The section from Morse Road (Easton) to I-670 is scheduled for 2006-2007. Metro Parks will build the other remaining section, from Three Creeks Park to Livingston

Avenue along Route 33 and under I-70. Livingston Avenue to I-70 is currently underway, with the rest slated for completion late this year or early 2006. The City of Columbus will also begin work in August on a connection to Alum Creek Dr. at S.R. 104.

Visit Columbus (recparcs.columbus.gov) or Westerville (www.westerville.org/bikeways.asp) web sites for maps, and join FACT on July 14th at Strawberry Farms Park (pictured to the left) for a creek walk along this new section of trail. See the calendar on page 6 for details.



Creek-Side Land Protection Aided by Grants & Research

Protecting natural areas along the creek is one of FACT's major goals for a number of reasons: it's essential for maintaining the scenic quality and health of Alum Creek, provides prime habitat for wildlife, and absorbs floodwaters during heavy rain events. In essence, it provides free stormwater and flood control and protection of human life and property.

That's why we're excited that it's also a shared goal of our community partners, who continued to take giant steps towards it in May. The Cities of Columbus and Bexley applied to the Clean Ohio Conservation Fund, which was established by a state bond initiative several years ago to fund preservation and restoration of natural areas in Ohio.

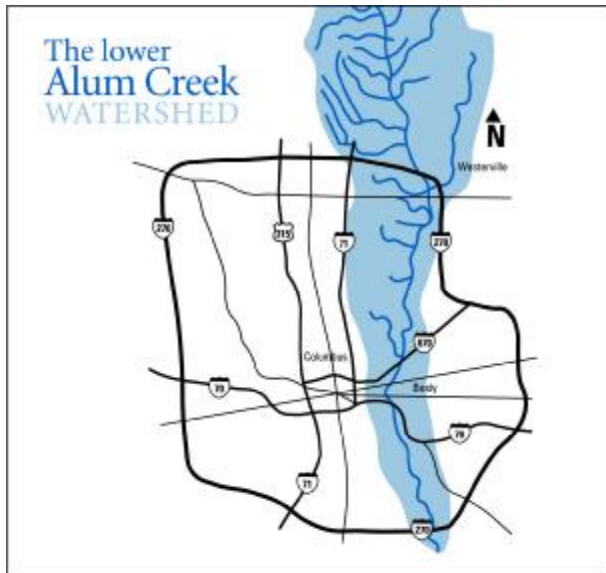
Luckily for Alum Creek area residents, the cities of Columbus and Westerville have already taken advantage of the fund, having been awarded over \$2 million in the last three years for use in the Alum Creek watershed.

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Friends of Alum Creek & Tributaries

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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.

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Watershed Protection Partners (\$1000 or more)

City of Bexley Jared R. Nodelman Foundation City of Westerville

The above list reflects current members for 2005. Are you a FACT Member? See page 6 for a mail-in form.

Volunteers Complete First Year of Stream Study

by Jerry Iles, OSU South Centers

Volunteers throughout Ohio recently completed their first year of field sampling local streams and rivers. The volunteers are participating in a three year study focusing on E.coli bacteria levels in rivers of six Midwestern states. Ohio State University Extension Watershed Educator, Jerry Iles, coordinates the project in Ohio, while Mike Gosnell serves as program assistant. The Alum Creek watershed is included in the study, thanks to the help of FACT volunteers Roberta Cook (see "River Voices" on page 5), Harold Highland, and Duncan Campbell.

The three year project titled, "Building Capacity of E.coli Monitoring by Volunteer Networks," was funded in October of 2003 by the USDA's Cooperative State Research Extension & Education Service (CSREES). Ohio volunteers collected samples over five months in 2004, which were analyzed for E.coli at a certified laboratory.

Over the *next* two years, volunteers will not only collect samples for lab analysis, but will also be trained on how to analyze their own samples and interpret the results using a commercially available test kit. The lab and volunteer derived results will then be compared to determine if volunteer-based analysis is a viable option.

Can volunteers do it?

Using volunteers to monitor their local streams can be a controversial subject. Many agencies are skeptical of volunteer generated data, while some argue that properly trained volunteers *can* collect valuable data. Iles states, "By promoting local volunteer monitoring you are not only increasing local knowledge of the resource, you are also promoting local stewardship. People may take better care of rivers after they have developed a greater understanding through their monitoring experiences."

This study will help determine how to best use volunteers by answering questions such as: Are volunteers only valuable when collecting "grab samples" for lab analysis, which are fairly expensive at \$20 - \$30 per sample, or can they accurately analyze data as well? If so, how much training is required? Which test kits are best used by volunteers and how reliable are the results when compared with laboratory analysis? Results from this study will be important to all states seeking to use volunteer generated data.

The study also benefits FACT by providing additional information about bacteria levels in Alum Creek. FACT

is happy to report that levels in 2004 were lower than expected! For more information contact Jerry Iles at (740) 289-2071 or via e-mail at iles.9@osu.edu

FACTOID: Tired Tires

by David Hohmann

The wheels on the bus go round and round... and the tires on those wheels do wear out. Some 14 million used tires were generated in Ohio in a recent year. Consumers can help reduce this number by buying tires rated for higher mileage, and then keeping them properly inflated, balanced and rotated. Old tires can be recycled locally at a shredding plant on Jackson Pike in Columbus. (Most reputable auto repair shops will send tires to such a facility.) But too often it seems that that old tires end up someplace that they don't belong.



In the past four years, FACT-sponsored cleanups have removed over 128 tires from creek areas. But about 200 tires remain in the riverbed between Westerville and I-670, and more elsewhere. With no action, they may remain there for decades as an unsightly signs of urban neglect of the river. FACT wants to deal with Alum Creek's pollution now, starting with the obvious visible tires, through the **ALUM CREEK TIRE ROUNDUP 2005!**

FACT River Corridor cleanups will collect as many tires as possible from the waterway during low summer flow. The **DiPietro Tyre Centre** at 5700 Westerville Road has committed to provide a per-tire pledge of support for the effort. We invite all members and friends, especially those with boats, to join in the fun. Canoe floats in July will be a prime opportunity, so "Let's Roll!"

Related websites: SWACO - swaco.org/what.htm, & ODNR - dnr.state.oh.us/recycling/awareness/facts/

Watershed Watch



Stealth “Bulldozer Amendment” Tacked to State Budget Bill

Text from an Ohio Environmental Council fact sheet

At the request of the Ohio Homebuilders Association, the Ohio House of Representatives quietly amended the state budget bill to include a destructive amendment that severely weakens protections of Ohio’s waterways. The “Bulldozer Amendment” takes away basic protections for Ohio’s wetlands, streams, rivers and lakes that are currently enforced by the Ohio EPA.

The amendment would reduce public comment, allow more distant mitigation, set arbitrary thresholds for size of waterway that would require a more in-depth permit, stifle information that the agency could use to consider impacts of a permit, and deny a real debate on the issue.

These changes, in turn, would create an atmosphere of easy permits and wetland and stream destruction. It is also an end-run around the Ohio EPA’s plans for stronger protections based on the latest field research. This research shows that the current system is nowhere near compensating Ohio for the lost values of the destroyed wetlands, lakes, streams and rivers.

At the time of publication, the Ohio House and Senate Conference Committee are considering the final budget bill, which must be delivered to Governor Taft by June 30th. Please contact FACT for up-to-date information on how you can help oppose this destructive amendment.

Three New Fill Projects for Alum Creek

Three development projects that will destroy small tributary streams or wetlands, and therefore require “401” permits from the Ohio EPA, were recently proposed in the Alum Creek watershed:

Germain Auto Dealers – The company has proposed to build a store at Morse Rd. and Morse Crossing (in the Easton shopping center) that would place an Alum Creek tributary stream in a pipe under a parking lot. The Ohio EPA has already issued a Notice of Violation (NOV) for damage that construction work on the site has caused before a permit has been issued. FACT will advocate for avoiding the destruction of the stream, or seeking appropriate mitigation (compensation). Germain has proposed to fulfill mitigation requirements by purchasing a creek-side easement south of Route 104.

Performance Land Development – Thanks to volunteer Roberta Cook, FACT learned of a small wetland that had been filled by Performance Land Development Company on Sunbury Road without a permit. The Ohio EPA is now requiring the company to file for an “after-the-fact” permit and conduct local mitigation of the damages. FACT was asked to propose an opportunity for this mitigation in the watershed – a good outcome from less-than-optimal circumstances!

Due to FACT’s ongoing field research, we can choose from a list of suitable locations in the watershed for restoration, enhancement, or creation of wetlands. Otherwise, mitigation would likely occur several counties away at a wetlands bank.

Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) – ODOT has proposed to impact 932 linear feet of tributary stream during renovation of the I-71/ I-270 interchange, and mitigate damages with easements along Darby Creek. FACT will propose strong local mitigation for the project.



Other new projects include:

Columbia Gas Pipeline – Columbia Gas of Ohio has plans to construct a natural gas pipeline in northern Franklin and southern Delaware Counties, extending from Central College Road in Plain Township to Powell. While the company plans to tunnel under major rivers (such as Big Walnut and Alum Creek), they will “open trench” across several Alum Creek tributary streams. FACT will work with the company to minimize impacts and potentially build stream restoration into the project. A public meeting is scheduled for June 20th – please call FACT for more information.

Medical complex on creek-side land in Westerville – FACT submitted a written recommendation to the City of Westerville to protect creek-side land on a parcel that is being considered for a medical complex. The parcel is located on the west bank of Alum Creek south of Polaris Parkway.



Other old projects include:

Two Dominion Homes Permits Granted – FACT would again like to thank FACT members who spoke up during OEPA consideration of two Dominion Homes proposals to destroy wetlands and a tributary stream (at “Stone Cliffs” and “Polaris Green”). Although both permits were issued, our efforts resulted in a few positives. These include modestly improved mitigation

“Watershed Watch”, continued from page 4

of the Stone Cliffs project, and hard lessons learned about the extent of Ohio EPA’s authority to regulate these activities. It’s less than we had hoped, especially when the company involved is opposed to making the best decisions to benefit local communities.

So what’s next? Listen for upcoming opportunities to strengthen the laws that govern stream and wetlands destruction, despite the Homebuilders Association’s “Bulldozer Amendment” (see page 4). In addition, research continues to protect creek-side land and wetlands before they are destroyed.

ODOT violation at I-270/ S.R. 161 interchange – FACT continues to monitor the outcomes of this project, which caused considerable damage to Alum and Big Walnut Creeks this spring due to inadequate controls of sediment runoff. The Ohio EPA is negotiating a fine, some of which will be used by FACT and the City of Westerville to protect creek-side land or wetlands in the watershed of tributary stream Spring Run.



“Creek Side Land,” continued from page 1

This year Bexley is also throwing their hat in for funds to preserve and restore the creek corridor between Main Street and Livingston Avenue, including enhancement of wetlands and construction of a boardwalk for educational access. The City of Columbus has requested funds to purchase seven parcels along Alum Creek in arguably its most scenic section between Mock and Innis Roads.

FACT supported the applications with letters of recommendation. For the future of creek-side land preservation, FACT has also completed a database of remaining high quality lands along the creek to target for conservation with funding sources such as grants, donations, and mitigation.

FACT Says Thank-You!

So many entities contributed to events this spring, it’s difficult to thank everyone, but we’ll try: Old Bag Of Nails Pub (Nelson Road), Matt Sullivan, Kevin Spain, and Matt Hubbard (May 5th musicians), Mark Dilley, Westerville Sunrise Rotary, Capital Square Rotary, City of Westerville, Capital University Earth Day volunteers, Stauff’s Cup of Joe, Kroger (Main Street & Schrock Road), DiPietro Tyre Centre, the Westerville Bike Shop, and Keep Columbus Beautiful. Also, FACT would like to say thank you and farewell to intern Amanda Houston.

~ River Voices ~



FACT member and volunteer Roberta Cook joins us as this edition’s River Voices author.



I initially joined FACT when I smelled odors coming from Alum Creek in 2003. There had been a sewage leak to the river, and I said to myself, this is not acceptable. I am a Pisces and I absolutely love water in any fashion. It is easy to get overwhelmed by the number of problems that surround us and do nothing about them. Thus, I decided to make the creek one of my pet projects.

Last summer, I got involved with the E.coli water monitoring project that is sponsored by OSU Extension (see “Volunteers” p.3). I took samples from the creek and sent it to a lab every two weeks. While I wasn’t sure that the E.coli research would contribute towards the most dire threats, I knew that I wanted to be a player in future projects about more serious water quality issues and living creatures that depend on the Alum Creek.

The biggest threat to Alum Creek is the on-going development near the river. People who do not live close by may not realize that the creek has been experiencing quicker and higher levels of flood waters in the last few years because of the increased paving-over of tributary streams. Natural tributaries help filter pollution and slow water down on its way to the main artery of the creek.

I have some goals - I would like us to plant more appropriate plants and restore the banks of our river. We need the living creatures to come back and I would like to see some part of the Alum Creek be changed into a nature preserve. It could allow the river to recover and allow animal and plant diversity to thrive and continue without harm or disruption. I want local Columbus citizens to enjoy the river as well. I plan to stay on the Alum Creek issues as long as I can and I am excited about what I can contribute to FACT.

FACT Events Calendar

Contact the Friends of Alum Creek & Tributaries at (614) 409-0511 for more information on all events

- June 9th **FACT monthly meeting**, Ohio Dominican University Neighborhood Center (ODU), 6:30 – 8:30PM
1229 Sunbury Road. Park in the large lot just north of the center. Open to the public!
- July 8th **BYOB Canoe Float!** Location TBA, 6:00PM
That's "Bring Your Own BOAT!" Please call Jim Lunde at 428-2802 to let us know you'll be joining us, or to be placed on a list for a few spots that may be available for those without a boat. Boaters are responsible for arranging their own equipment and shuttles.
- July 14th **FACT Outing and Speaker Series: Creek Walk at Strawberry Farms**, Marden Court, Columbus, 6:30 – 8:30PM. When the temperatures soar, cool off exploring Alum Creek! A Metro Parks Naturalist will lead us on an adventure catching and identifying the fish and insects that call the creek home. Bring the whole family and wear water shoes if you want to get your feet wet. Feel free to also bring your bike and explore this new section of the Alum Creek Greenways Trail.
- August 6th **Three Creeks Fest**, Three Creeks Park, 3860 Bixby Road, Columbus, 10:00 – 4:00PM
Join Metro Parks, Columbus Rec & Parks Dept., and FACT for a celebration of the three creeks that converge in this park (Alum, Big Walnut, and Blacklick)! Help with a creek cleanup from 10-12, then enjoy exhibits, nature walks, canoeing, kid's arts, and live animals from the Ohio Wildlife Center.
- August 11th **FACT monthly meeting**, Ohio Dominican University Neighborhood Center, 6:30 – 8:30PM
- August 15th **Argyle Park Neighborhood Pride Week**, including an Argyle-Woodland Run Cleanup. details TBA.

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) _____

() Student/Senior \$10 Organization/Business _____

() Individual/Family \$15-50 Address _____

() Organization \$50-200 Phone _____ Email* _____

() Business Sponsor \$100-500

() River Steward \$500-900

() Watershed Protection Partner \$1000+ ** Please provide your email address to help FACT save resources.*

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Anyone can become a supporting member with a donation of \$100 or more

Thank You!



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