



In the Face of Wetlands Losses, FACT Scores a Local Win at Boyer Park

The statistics on the loss of wetlands in Ohio are bleak. According to a 1990 study published by U.S. Fish & Wildlife agency author Thomas Dahl, over 90% of Ohio's wetlands are gone, ranking Ohio 2nd in the nation for wetlands loss. FACT has been working to slow this trend, and we're proud to announce a success story. The Boyer Park Nature Preserve in Westerville is slated to become the home of some new and improved wetlands.

Partial funding for the project will come from the owner of the Columbus Auto Fair Auction, located near Alum Creek in southeastern Columbus. The company filed for a permit to fill wetlands on their property in 2004. FACT monitors such 401 permits, which requires businesses to make up for, or "mitigate," damages by creating, restoring, or preserving wetlands elsewhere.

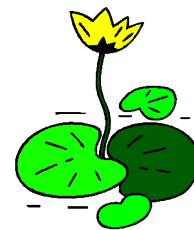
This system puts urban watersheds at an even greater loss, because although many wetlands are being destroyed to make room for roads and buildings, mitigation often occurs in other parts of the state at "wetlands banks." This policy is resulting in total loss of wetlands in urban watersheds, with serious implications for the cleanliness of our water, flooding, and quality of life for city dwellers.

For these reasons, FACT has been advocating for local mitigation of destroyed wetlands. To do so, however, FACT must also propose alternative mitigation locations within the watershed. The creation of wetlands is a relatively new science, and can't occur just anywhere. Appropriate soil types and sources of water are a must if created wetlands are to succeed.

Boyer Park emerged as a local mitigation site for this permit thanks to the willingness and previous research conducted by the City of Westerville and local wetlands scientist Mark Allen Dilley (a.k.a. the MAD Scientist).

Surrounded by residential streets, the preserve is located west of Spring Street and north of Walnut Street in Westerville, along a tributary to Spring Run. An existing wetland on the site will receive some improvements to increase the array of wetland plants and animals that can live there, and removal of non-native invasive plant species. Dilley also found three pockets of land that will support the creation of new vernal pool wetlands. Vernal pools are typically wooded wetlands that are only wet during heavy spring rains.

Please see the "FACToid" on page 3 for more on vernal wetlands and "River Voices" on page 5 to hear from Mark Dilley. Special thanks to the City of Westerville and Dilley for dedicating time and resources towards making this opportunity a reality!



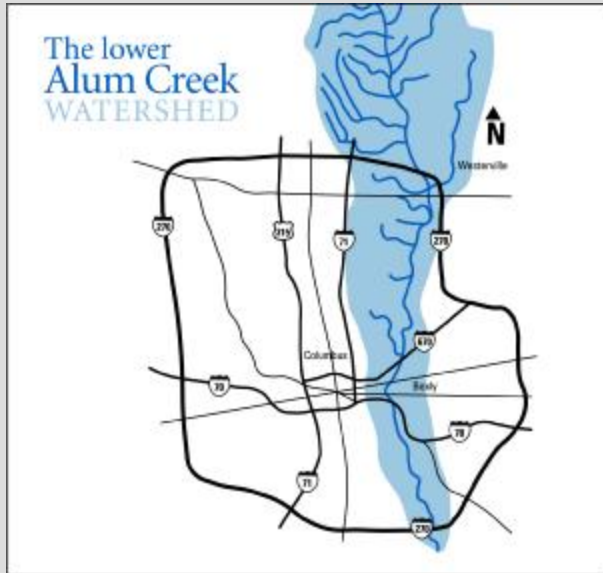
Wetland Workshop at Boyer Park on Saturday, May 7th

In lieu of FACT's regularly scheduled outing on May 12th, please join us and the Westerville Parks & Recreation Department for their 7th Annual Wetlands Workshop from 10:00AM to noon. This is a free, fun, family-oriented, hands-on event, to be led by local wetlands scientist Mark Allen Dilley. *Continued on p.3*

Friends of Alum Creek & Tributaries

2820 Watkins Road, Columbus, Ohio 43207 ~ (614) 409-0511 ~ doherty@friendsofalumcreek.org

www.friendsofalumcreek.org



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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The above list reflects current members for 2005.

Need to renew your membership or become a member? Please see page 6 for a mail-in form.

(Continued from p.1...) To get a head-start, don't miss FACT's March 10th "Wetland Wonders" Education & Outing Series presentation (see calendar on page 6).

Directions to Boyer Park: park on Orchard Lane (north of Walnut Street, east of Otterbein Avenue), and meet at park entrance across from Park Street. Wear boots or old sneakers.



A small vernal wetland in late spring

Spring Cleanups 2005

Join FACT to continue a tradition of spring cleaning! Picking up garbage not only helps remove potential pollutants, it helps show that we value our local river. For all cleanups, please wear sturdy shoes and clothes.

March 19th Alum Creek Cleanup Academy Park, 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Help in the first of three cleanups for the year at FACT's adopted area along Alum Creek and Nelson Road between Broad and Main Streets.

April 23rd Earth Day Cleanup & Greenways Trail Ribbon Cutting

Many miles of the trail along Alum Creek in northern Columbus and Westerville are now complete! To celebrate, join FACT for a cleanup and Ribbon Cutting Ceremony. Time & location TBA.* Thanks to Westerville, Columbus, and Westerville Sunrise Rotary Club for again partnering on this event.

May 14th Westerville "Green Sweep" & Spring Run Cleanup

Spring Run is a tributary to Alum Creek running through Westerville, which FACT and local Americorps volunteers will be cleaning up in May as a part of Westerville's first annual community-wide Green Sweep. Time and location TBA.*

* Please call 409-0511 or visit the FACT website at www.friendsofalumcreek.org in April/ May for more details.

FACTOID!

by David Hohmann

"Hey, Vern!"

The word "vernal" refers to springtime, and vernal pools are part of the gift that spring offers. They are small, often forested wetlands with standing water for part of the year, usually late winter to early summer (see photo to the left).

These fragile areas serve as teeming oasis for an amazing diversity of reptiles and amphibians, including many kinds of frogs, salamanders, and turtles. Take a walk in the evening near one in late spring, and you will be greeted by a chorus of singing frogs. If you time it right, you may find thousands of salamanders gathering in the moonlight to mate and lay eggs. All of these organisms depend on watery conditions to survive.

The somewhat poorly draining upland soils and floodplain areas of the Alum Creek watershed are ideal for supporting vernal pools. They can be found in Metro Parks (such as Inniswood) and many other natural areas along Alum Creek.

Unfortunately, many vernal pools in central Ohio have been filled to make room for new roads and houses; no one knows for sure how many remain. As described on page 1, Ohio is witnessing the conversion of many small, dynamic wetlands located across the state to conglomerates of large "wetland banks."

Developers often have the option to fill small wetlands and buy "credits" to satisfy mitigation requirements at large created or restored wetlands several counties away. These larger wetlands do not provide the same benefits of the generally small ones that are being replaced in terms of habitat quality and diversity or ability to protect water quality and prevent local flooding.

This is one reason why FACT is working hard to limit wetland filling in the Alum Creek watershed and find near-by mitigation opportunities. **We're proud to report that as a result of this work, Boyer Park in Westerville will be the new home of vernal wetlands (see page 1)!**

FACT is also currently working to inventory all wetlands in the watershed, including vernal pools, with the hopes that identifying them will increase the chances that they will be preserved. If you think you might have a wetland in your neighborhood, contact FACT at (614) 409-0511. To learn more, or receive training to monitor wetlands yourself, visit http://www.theoec.org/cwater_vernal.html.

Watershed Watch



by Margaret Ann Samuels

Responding to development issues and monitoring construction sites continues to absorb time and effort for FACT committee members, volunteers and staff. Our long-run goal is to see local governments adopt more environmentally-sensitive policies to govern development in the watershed.

Preserving streams and wetlands enhances the quality of a development itself as well as the whole area. Thus everyone benefits when our water resources are protected.

Public support for zoning overlays that involve riparian setbacks and limit floodplain filling is an important factor that FACT seeks to encourage. In the meantime, FACT is following specific issues that affect the Alum Creek watershed and the people in it (below). Anyone wishing to be part of this watershed watch/ advocacy committee is very welcome! Please call 409-0511.

Dominion Homes Opposes Local Wetlands Mitigation

Last November at an Ohio EPA hearing, many FACT members spoke against two proposed Dominion Home projects that would collectively destroy 500 feet of a small stream north of the Polaris Fashion Place Mall (at the Village at Polaris Green), and fill 1.76 acres of wetland along Sunbury Road north of Mock Road (at the Village at Stone Cliffs).

FACT has advocated for preserving the stream and wetlands for both projects. However, regulations allow them to make impacts as long as they mitigate, or offset, the damages. Dominion Homes has proposed to mitigate wetland impacts at a wetlands bank in Marion County. FACT representatives, watershed residents, and the Ohio EPA have called for *local* mitigation of wetlands impacts (see article on page 1 and FACToid on page 3).

However, Dominion Homes has gone to great lengths (and expense) to oppose this request, challenging the Ohio EPA's authority to require it, even though it presents the best method to compensate the local community. Please stay tuned for further developments!

Meanwhile, FACT was able to secure some improvement in proposed mitigation for Dominion Homes' Village at Polaris Green, which will destroy 500

feet of tributary stream. They had initially proposed to simply replace the stream with a stormwater pond, with added wetland features to improve stormwater runoff from the site.

While this was certainly a step in the right direction, FACT felt that this alone was inadequate. As a result of our efforts, Dominion Homes has agreed to also plant four acres of trees along the creek at their Stone Cliffs development, and make a small donation to the Columbus Recreation and Parks Department to help preserve land elsewhere along Alum Creek.

FACT May Receive Fine Money from Violations at ODOT I-270 / Route 161 Project

This massive project has been moving huge amounts of soil in areas that drain to both Alum Creek and Big Walnut Creek. The Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) has improved its construction runoff protection since FACT and the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (OEPA) noted serious problems last fall at this site. However a major source of sediment pollution remained 2 months later. FACT and Friends of Big Walnut were present at a subsequent OEPA inspection February 14, which found construction dirt washing into Spring Run near its confluence with Alum Creek. OEPA has directed ODOT to remedy the runoff, while FACT is considering ways to restore the damaged areas.

Minerva Lake Golf Course - Dominion Homes withdrew its plans to build at least 268 homes on the property that borders Alum Creek tributary Kilbourne Run. The 103 acre golf course, located in the village of Minerva Park, also contains a lake. Minerva Park officials and residents raised concerns about increased density and traffic that would have resulted. The golf course is still for sale and Minerva Park is speaking with other potential developers and the owner. Mayor Lyn Eisentrout has stated they are aware of FACT concerns regarding preserving green space along the stream and minimizing runoff and will keep us informed.

Bexley Tree Nursery site - The proposal to build 36 condominiums, some apparently planned to extend to the edge of a steep slope just above Alum Creek, is on hold again. FACT is part of a group that the City of Bexley is encouraging to reach a consensus on the future of the proposed development. Bexley Zoning Board and Planning Commission both voted to table developer L. Rider Brice's site design at a joint meeting January 31. FACT and others are encouraging better creek protection and stormwater control if the project goes forward. While Bexley's Southwest Area plan, in which FACT took part, calls for riparian protection, the city has yet to enact a zoning ordinance to require setbacks in future construction.

Residents Agree on Name for Local Creek

As we reported in the last edition of *Fact Sheets*, many small streams that flow into Alum Creek from the outer edges of the watershed do not have a name. Yet these tributary streams are very important to the health of Alum Creek and the vitality of the neighborhoods through which they run.

FACT initiated its first endeavor to help a community choose a name for a tributary stream in January. The North Central Area Commission decided on “Argyle Woodland Run,” named after two neighborhoods that the stream flows through. The stream’s headwaters are located near Joyce Avenue and Hudson Street. It flows along the edges of the Ohio Dominican University campus before reaching Alum Creek just north of I-670.

With this local support, FACT will submit the name to the U.S. Geological Survey Board of Geographic Names to make the name official. A stream cleanup and erecting stream signage are planned for later this year.

Cocktails for Conservation May 5th - Old Bag of Nails Pub

Plan on joining FACT on Thursday, May 5th from 5:00 – 7:00PM for good fun and a good cause! Celebrate Cinco de Mayo while overlooking Alum Creek at the Nelson Road Old Bag of Nails patio, and help raise funds for preserving and restoring Alum Creek. Admittance entitles you to enjoy a spring evening with free appetizers and non-alcoholic beverages, happy hour drink prices, and live music. Please RSVP at 409-0511.

Action Plan in the Print!

With four years in the making, FACT is very proud to announce that printed copies and CD’s of the action plan will be available starting in March. Over the last year, FACT has been revising the plan to meet conditions set by the Ohio EPA for final approval. With that approval in hand and final copies printed, FACT can give its full attention to putting the plan in action!

This work will pick up in late 2005 when FACT receives a significant grant from the Ohio EPA. Until then, FACT will continue quarterly meetings with planning stakeholders to help keep projects running.

To get involved or request a copy of the plan, please contact FACT at 409-0511. The action plan will also be available at www.friendsofalumcreek.org by late March.

~ River Voices ~

FACT volunteer and “MAD Scientist” Mark Allen Dilley, pictured below at the Boyer Park Nature Preserve wetland, joins us as this edition’s River Voices author. (See p.1 for more on Boyer Park)



Looking back, I have to say that my membership in FACT must have been pre-ordained. I grew up on Glenwood Drive in Westerville, and long before I even knew the word “tributary,” I knew I could follow the little creek through Hannah Mayne Park at the end of my street to reach the “big creek.”

I spent a lot of time there in those days, fishing and exploring. I’d catch small bluegill, surprisingly large creek chubs from beneath undercut banks, and the occasional smallmouth bass below a riffle. I reveled in the floodplain’s wildness: its big trees, wildflowers, and insects, most of which were new to me. I learned the network of drainages that connected Alum Creek to the surrounding landscape and would use this knowledge to navigate myself back home. I soon learned to appreciate these connections as I developed a sense of place within the watershed.

Now that I’m older, I don’t get over to the big creek as often, but I think of it more than ever. I’m proud of my affiliation with FACT and of our collective endeavors to preserve, protect and restore Alum Creek - *our* creek.

I share in the hope that FACT’s continued focus on wetland restoration, riparian corridor protection, public education, and other aspects of watershed protection will be fruitful; that Alum Creek may continue to provide opportunities for discovery and the enjoyment of nature for my family and for all whose communities, families, and hearts are connected to (and through) this resource.

FACT Events Calendar

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

- March 10th **FACT Outing and Speaker Series: Wetland Wonders**, ODU Neighborhood Center, 1229 Sunbury Road, 6:30 P.M. Join FACT for a wetlands bonanza! Learn the basics of wetlands, how FACT is working to protect them, plans for wetland creation at Boyer Park, and most importantly, how you can help. Presented by local “MAD Scientist” Mark Allen Dilley.
- March 19th **Alum Creek Cleanup at Academy Park**, Columbus. 9:00AM – 12:00PM - details inside on p.3
- April 14th **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!
- April 23rd **Earth Day Cleanup and Greenways Trail Ribbon Cutting**. Time and location TBA – details on p.3
- May 5th **Cocktails for Conservation**, Old Bag of Nails Pub, 18 North Nelson Road, Columbus, 5:00 – 7:00PM Good fun for a good cause! Celebrate Cinco de Mayo while overlooking Alum Creek at the Old Bag of Nails patio, and help raise funds for preserving and restoring Alum Creek. Details inside on p.5
- May 7th **Westerville Wetlands Workshop at Boyer Park**, Orchard Lane, Westerville, 10:00AM – 12:00PM Explore this beautiful preserve and learn about improvements to come. A free, fun, family-oriented, hands-on event led by Mark Allen Dilley. Wear boots or old sneakers. Details inside on p.1
- May 14th **Westerville “Green Sweep” and Spring Run Cleanup**. Time and location TBA – details on p.3
- May 21st **River Fest 2005**, North Bank Park, Columbus, 10AM – 5PM Located at the intersections of Neil Ave. & Long St. downtown. Call 233-4124 for more information.

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.**

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