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Lake Views

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MWCD's Forest Restoration Efforts Aim to Secure the Future of White Oak Trees

By Clayton Rico, Forest Operations Coordinator

Without a dedicated effort, there could be trouble ahead for one of the most beloved tree species on MWCD lands. White oak, a keystone species found throughout a large range, is extremely important for various reasons including habitat, wildlife food, aesthetics, and its cultural significance as a wood prized for its strength, durability, and rot resistance. However, historical shifts in forest management approaches have created conditions that are not favorable for the recruitment of new oak seedlings, which are essential to replace the maturing oaks seen on MWCD and surrounding lands. A focused effort on restoring these forests will be crucial to sustaining oak species into the future.

Many wildlife species depend on oak as an essential part of their diets, with white oaks being particularly favored due to their lower tannic acid content, making their acorns less bitter and more palatable than those of other oak species. Whitetail deer, turkey, grouse, and many other species rely on the acorns as a critical part of their diet to increase fat levels needed for winter. Not only are they a great food resource but oaks can live for hundreds of years, often developing cavities as they age, which provide homes for owls, raccoons, and various other creatures.

There are two families of oak trees: white and red. A unique characteristic of the white oak family is that its wood cells are clogged with a sticky substance called tyloses. This feature allows the wood to hold liquid for long periods, making white oak essential for producing barrels for the spirits industry. Additionally, the wood is highly valued for veneer and furniture, which often leads to a high demand for this species in the products industry.

Despite its many great qualities, white oak has some undesirable features, particularly when it comes to recruiting young trees to replace mature ones. One challenge is that white oaks are extremely slow-growing, often focusing more on root development than top growth. This characteristic makes it difficult for white oak to compete with faster-growing species like yellow poplar and maple. Additionally, white oaks can go long periods without producing large quantities of acorns, leading to most acorns being consumed by wildlife before they can take root. Finally, for an acorn to successfully become a tree, it requires adequate sunlight at the right stage of its life.

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MWCD Celebrates Two New Facilities



Atwood Lake Park Showcases Activity Center Renovation

MWCD held a ribbon-cutting ceremony on July 13 at the newly renovated Atwood Lake Park Activity Center marking a significant milestone for the park's ongoing development. Attendees had the opportunity to tour the new facility and enjoyed light refreshments.

The Activity Center, located in the heart of Atwood Lake Park, is a state-of-the-art facility designed to enhance the recreational experiences of both residents and visitors. This \$1.6 million project includes a larger inside gathering space, covered outdoor gathering space, expanded nature center with storage, an ADA-accessible restroom, expanded food prep and concession area with an eat-in dining area, and a larger retail store. Additionally, the HVAC, electrical, and plumbing systems have been upgraded, along with a new standing-seam metal roof and backup generator. The center section of the activity center, aptly named "Community Hub" can accommodate up to 158 people and will be available for parties and events by reservation.

"The opening of the Atwood Lake Park Activity Center represents our commitment to providing exceptional recreational facilities and amenities for our community," said Craig Butler, MWCD Executive Director. "We are excited to see this center become a hub for learning, activities, and social gatherings for people of all ages."

The ceremony also highlighted recent park improvements, including upgrades to the trail system and the addition of Wi-Fi. A total of 4,100 feet of gravel trails have been paved with asphalt, enhancing accessibility across the park. The new paved trail connects the Activity Center to the Amphitheater, Area H, and the Beach Area special event parking lot. Additionally, complimentary Wi-Fi is now offered as part of

camping reservations, providing wireless access to all camping areas.



Tappan Lake's New Welcome Center Opens, Providing Enhanced Visitor Experience

MWCD officially opened the new Tappan Lake Welcome Center on August 23. The 3,900-square foot, \$3.6 million facility enhances visitors' experience at Tappan Lake with state-of-the-art facilities and a warm and inviting space to gather information and plan their visits.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony was held to celebrate the occasion and included remarks from MWCD officials, local dignitaries, and community leaders. Guests toured the new facility, enjoyed light refreshments, and participated in various family-friendly activities.

"We are excited to open the Tappan Lake Welcome Center and are pleased with this new, modern addition to the lake's many resources," said Craig Butler, MWCD Executive Director.

"This new center will serve as a hub for information and activities and help visitors make the most of their time at Tappan Lake. It represents our ongoing commitment to improving the visitor experience and fostering a deeper connection with eastern Ohio's beautiful natural resources."

The new modern facility features interactive exhibits, a retail shop, an ADA-accessible restroom and comfortable lounge areas. The project was designed by Woolpert, Inc. and constructed by Colaiani Construction, Inc. Tappan Lake was MWCD's first lake and offers 2,350 acres of surface water surrounded by 5,000 acres of parkland. It provides excellent fishing, boating, hiking, picnicking, rental cabins, RV and tent camping, and other activities.

The new Tappan Lake Welcome Center is part of MWCD's broader initiative as laid out in its new five-year strategic plan to further enhance recreational facilities across its lakes and parks. Following the success of the opening of the new Atwood Lake Activity Center earlier this year, the Tappan Lake Welcome Center is expected to help attract more visitors, contributing to MWCD's important role as an economic pillar of the region.



Atwood Lake Park Activity Center





MWCD: Stewards of Flood Mitigation and Water Resources

By Dave Lautenschleger, Chief of Engineering

The Great Flood of 1913 was a pivotal event that highlighted the need for better flood control measures. The Muskingum River and its tributaries overflowed, causing widespread destruction, loss of life, and economic damage in the region. The flood particularly devastated communities like Zanesville and Marietta, Ohio.

In the aftermath of the 1913 flood, there was a growing demand for a comprehensive approach to flood control. The State of Ohio responded by passing the Conservancy Act in 1914, which allowed for the creation of conservancy districts to manage water resources and implement flood control measures. As we all know, MWCD was officially established in 1933 under the authority of the Conservancy Act as a political subdivision to develop and implement a comprehensive plan for flood control, water conservation, and water resource management in the Muskingum River basin.

One of MWCD's primary functions was constructing dams and reservoirs throughout the watershed. These structures were designed to control flooding by managing water levels and storing excess water during periods of heavy rainfall. The construction of these facilities, funded in part by the federal government, was a significant undertaking and has been credited with preventing further catastrophic floods in the region, saving billions of dollars in damage.

However, did you know these dams were initially designed to be "dry dams?" A dry dam is a type of dam intended primarily to control or mitigate flooding rather than to create a permanent reservoir. Unlike traditional dams that hold back water to form a lake or reservoir for purposes such as water supply or recreation, a dry dam mostly remains empty or nearly empty. The MWCD flood mitigation system has four dry dams — Bolivar, Dover, Mohawk, and Mohicanville.

The Muskingum dam system design changed from dry dams to wet dams – dams that purposely hold water at all times of the year – because of the Dust Bowl of the 1930s. The Dust Bowl resulted from severe dust storms that significantly damaged the agriculture of the Midwest during the 1930s. The region also experienced an extended drought during the 1930s, exacerbating the problem. With little rainfall and poor agricultural practices, crops failed, and the topsoil, now loose and dry, became easily lifted by the high winds that were common in the region. The U.S. government implemented several measures to address the crisis. One was the creation of the Soil Conservation Service (now the Natural Resources Conservation Service) to promote better farming practices to reduce soil erosion.

After the design change, it was determined that the dams should be used to impound water for agriculture and as a public water source if needed. Today, Tappan Lake is used as a supplemental water supply to the Village of Cadiz.

In the summer edition we discussed Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI). GSI can significantly reduce the need for dredging waterways by managing and filtering stormwater before it reaches rivers, lakes, and other bodies of water. Dredging is often necessary to remove accumulated sediment from streams, which can impede navigation, reduce water quality, and harm aquatic ecosystems. By controlling stormwater runoff and reducing sedimentation at the source, GSI can minimize the amount of sediment that enters these waterways, thereby reducing the frequency and extent of dredging required.

Several benefits of incorporating GSI to reduce dredging are Sediment Reduction, Cost Savings, Water Quality, and Ecosystem Protection

Sediment Reduction: GSI practices prevent a significant amount of sediment from reaching waterways in the first place, addressing the root cause of sediment accumulation that often necessitates dredging.

Cost Savings: By reducing the amount of sediment that needs to be dredged, GSI can lead to significant cost savings for municipalities and other stakeholders responsible for maintaining waterways such as MWCD. Dredging is extremely expensive. MWCD has invested over \$14 million in Tappan and Seneca dredging programs alone.

Water Quality: By filtering out pollutants along with sediment, GSI reduces the need for dredging and improves overall water quality, benefiting aquatic life and reducing treatment costs for drinking water.

Ecosystem Protection: Less frequent dredging means less disturbance to aquatic ecosystems. GSI helps maintain more natural waterway conditions, supporting healthier habitats for fish and other wildlife.

In rural areas, practices like cover cropping, riparian buffers, and constructed wetlands can reduce sediment runoff from fields, protecting downstream rivers and reservoirs from excessive sedimentation. These are several practices we encourage in our Partners in Watershed Management program.

By integrating GSI into stormwater management plans, communities can significantly reduce sedimentation in waterways, decreasing the frequency and scope of dredging operations. This not only preserves these water bodies' natural and economic value but also supports broader environmental goals.

Pictured above (L-R): Bolivar, Dover, Mohawk, and Mohicanville Dams

Fall Fun at MWCD Lake Parks

Stay outside this fall and enjoy events at a MWCD Lake near you. The parks and lakes are the perfect place to enjoy time with family and friends snuggled beside a warm campfire, exploring the trails, and enjoying the fall colors! Programs and special events are offered throughout the season and are open to campers, community members, and daily visitors.



Princess in the Park

This perennial favorite returns in September to Atwood and Charles Mill Lake Parks. Princesses and princes, ages 3 and up, are invited to dress in their royal finest and enjoy an enchanted day at the park! Everyone will participate in a craft, royal tea party and snack, face painting, and horse-drawn carriage ride through the park. Make all your dreams come true at the lake! Registration is required at MWCD.org/tickets.

Atwood Lake Park: September 7 | Afternoon Party: 3:00-5:00pm & Twilight Party: 5:30-7:30pm
Charles Mill Lake Park: September 29 | Afternoon Party: 3:00-5:00pm & Twilight Party: 5:30-7:30pm



Halloween Weekends at the Lake

Pack your decorations and costumes for spooky, fun-filled weekends! Bring the family out to the park for trick-or-treating, crafts, games, hikes, and a Halloween-themed movie on the BIG screen. Visit MWCD.org for dates and details at each lake location.



Bounty on the Bridge

Experience an exclusive fine-dining opportunity on the pedestrian bridge near the Welcome Center at Atwood Lake Park. Tickets may be purchased at MWCD.org/bounty.
Thursday, October 10



Hunter Education Courses

Prepare for deer and turkey seasons by completing the ODN required Hunter Education Course at Atwood and Seneca Lake Parks. Each course is a two-day, hands-on experience covering a wide range of topics including conservation, safety, ethics, firearm handling, and more. Registration will open close to the event dates at MWCD.org.



Go Hiking

MWCD Lakes offer a variety of hiking trails perfect for beginners and experienced hikers. Spend time outside and enjoy the crisp autumn air and fall colors around the lake. Hike on your own or join guided hikes scheduled throughout the fall. Make it a weekend and reserve a cozy cabin or campsite and end your day around a warm campfire. Visit MWCD.org/trails for hiking maps.

Some programs require pre-registration.
Program details can be found online at www.MWCD.org/events



Country Waves 2024: A Celebration of Music, Community, and Sustainability

Country Waves 2024 returned to Atwood Lake Park August 17 and featured country music award winner Joe Nichols, along with rising stars, Travis Denning and Catie Offerman! An awesome crowd gathered to enjoy great music, food trucks, and a beer garden that supported SAVE22, a Carroll County based non-profit with a mission to raise awareness about veteran suicide. In addition, Rural Action was on hand to create a zero-waste event to help reduce landfill waste through sorting out recycling and compost material. The concert was made possible by our partnership with WTUZ Radio and many sponsors.

Zero-Waste Results



Recycling 159.1 lbs.



Aluminum Cans 117.8 lbs.



Compost Material 117.3 lbs.



Landfill 193.4 lbs.



Total waste diverted from the landfill was **448.2 pounds, or almost 70% of the total waste.**

Forest Restoration Cont.

Increases of sunlight at the wrong time may also promote sun-loving trees to outcompete the slow-growing oak, while at the same time, too little sunlight will cause it to not grow at all.

Given these challenges, how do we have the large oak trees we see today? Historically, the land was managed much differently than it is today. White oak is strongly adapted to fire, which Native Americans used to increase hunting success, lighting fires across the landscape to drive out game. Regular use of fire removed much of the competition of less fire-adapted species, leaving behind an abundance of young oak seedlings. During the industrial revolution, much of the land was clearcut to utilize the larger trees, creating ideal conditions for these developed seedlings to grow.

Forest management practices have changed significantly since those days of intensive harvesting. The heavy disturbances that once promoted young oak growth have been mostly halted. Fire suppression campaigns, like Smokey the Bear, have reduced the use

of fire as an inadvertent forest management tool. Additionally, selective harvesting or no harvesting at all has become common, limiting the amount of sunlight reaching the forest floor.

Given the challenges of growing oak, MWCD has started and will continue to explore various management options. Creating small forest disturbances by removing young competing trees and invasive species has proven beneficial for oak regeneration. In more challenging areas, supplemental tree planting of oak seedlings has also shown some success. In areas where an abundance of seedlings are already present, group openings are created to enhance sunlight conditions to the levels needed to sustain oak. Forest inventories across MWCD lands give foresters the data needed to understand where to begin these oak enhancement strategies.

We strongly encourage hunting across MWCD lands to promote sustainable wildlife population management. By

effectively managing the deer population, acorn crops and desirable seedlings will be less browsed, enhancing growing conditions for trees that are needed to sustain future wildlife populations.

The future of white oak on MWCD lands hinges on our ability to manage these forests effectively, using a blend of management practices. By understanding the unique challenges white oak faces and implementing targeted management strategies, we can ensure that these keystone trees continue to thrive, supporting wildlife, ecosystems, and industries for generations to come. The dedication to restoring and maintaining white oak populations is not just an investment in the trees themselves but in the health and vitality of the entire ecosystem.





MWCD Forms Partnership With The Foundation for Appalachian Ohio

By Matt Thomas, Chief of Conservation

The Foundation for Appalachian Ohio (FAO), through its Environmental Stewardship Pillar of Prosperity, announces new funding opportunities to advance conservation, environmental stewardship and the greater well-being of Appalachian Ohio.

Thanks to a transformative \$5 million investment from MWCD, funding is available to support community projects, scholarships, fellowships, research and innovation in the areas of conservation and environmental stewardship.

"We're grateful to the Muskingum Watershed Conservancy District for its game-changing investment in our region's permanent capacity to advance conservation and environmental stewardship," said Cara Dingus Brook, FAO president and CEO. "MWCD's gift is the largest environmental stewardship endowment the Foundation has received to date, and it represents a significant investment in the well-being of our people and communities."

In addition to giving financially, MWCD will also lend its deep expertise in the areas of environmental stewardship and conservation.

"We believe that partnerships between groups are crucial to advancing sustainability and environmental stewardship in Appalachia," said Craig

Butler, MWCD Executive Director. "By working together, we can leverage our collective resources and expertise to create a more significant impact and support a diverse range of projects and initiatives, from local community efforts to large-scale research and innovation."

A total of \$125,000 in grant funding is available within the 32 counties of Appalachian Ohio and seven additional counties served by MWCD. It's possible because of MWCD's gift – and gifts from other generous donors who helped establish FAO's Environmental Stewardship Pillar of Prosperity Fund, including Nicolozakes Trucking & Construction Inc., Ohio CAT and American Electric Power.

Available opportunities:

- Community grants supporting local projects that preserve and enhance our natural environment
- Scholarships supporting individuals seeking degrees in ecology, forestry, or related fields, as well as skilled trades, vocational, and technical training in fields that integrate green energy technology and sustainable agriculture
- Fellowships providing two years of support for individuals who pioneer positive change through projects that address environmental challenges and promote biodiversity conservation

- Innovation grants investing in new and creative approaches that result in environmental good while encouraging environmental stewardship
- Research grants supporting studies that address critical gaps in the understanding of our diverse ecosystems

FAO's Environmental Stewardship Pillar of Prosperity brings donors and doers together to ensure the people of Appalachian Ohio can experience our region's natural beauty, both today and for generations to come. To date, the Environmental Stewardship Pillar has invested more than \$1.6 million in grants and scholarships throughout Appalachian Ohio.

Top left: MWCD Representatives (Craig Butler, Adria Bergeron, Matt Thomas, and Ethan Zucal) with Board Members of the Foundation for Appalachian Ohio (FAO) at the Hocking Hills State Park Lodge & Conference Center.

Karl Gebhardt Appointed to Board of Directors

Ohio environment, agriculture, and natural resources leader Karl Gebhardt has been appointed to the MWCD Board of Directors by the Conservancy Court. The Court is the 18-judge body that oversees MWCD operations and makes appointments to its board. The Court appointed Gebhardt at its recent annual meeting at the Tuscarawas County Courthouse.

"I applaud the Court for selecting Karl for the MWCD board. Time and again he has demonstrated not only his deep knowledge of the natural resources issues in Ohio but also his commitment to public service, having served as a township trustee, senior leader at cabinet agencies, and on international committees for the Great Lakes. We are lucky to have his knowledge and experience at work for the MWCD and are deeply grateful for his willingness to serve," said Craig Butler, MWCD Executive Director.

Gebhardt's service to Ohio includes leading farmland preservation efforts at the Department of Agriculture, as well as his roles as deputy director of Water Resources and chief of the Division of Surface Water for the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency. He also held the position of deputy director at the Department of Natural Resources, overseeing its Division of Soil and Water Resources and leading the Ohio Lake Erie Commission.

Additionally, he has served as a township trustee and as a member of the International Joint Commission's Water Quality Board, a U.S.-Canada body that works on shared issues impacting the Great Lakes. He has a master's in public policy from The Ohio State University and bachelor's in business from Franklin University.

"Among Ohio's many natural gems are the Muskingum River's watershed and the conservancy district that was created 90 years ago to both help control its flooding and also steward its natural beauty for future generations. There are very few places in the country where public lands are managed responsibly and where people can so fully enjoy them. I am honored to have the chance to contribute to this work and look forward to partnering with my fellow board members and the talented MWCD staff in continuing this strong legacy," said Gebhardt.

Members of the Board of Directors are appointed by the Conservancy Court to oversee the operations and business affairs of the MWCD, which manages more than 60,000 acres of land and water dedicated to public use. Board members meet once a month in an open, public session.

Pictured (L-R), Craig Butler, MWCD Executive Director and Karl Gebhardt, newly appointed member of the MWCD Board of Directors.



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CATCH A LINE ON MWCD EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The Muskingum Watershed Conservancy District has a variety of full-time and seasonal employment opportunities. Whether you are in high school, college, or advancing your career, we have opportunities for everyone.

Types of positions include: park and marina staff, law enforcement and security services, engineering, maintenance/grounds keeping, gate attendant, cleaning staff, and beach attendant.

For more information, please visit www.MWCD.org.