

Big Creek Watershed News & Notes

Big Creek Watershed communities support Balanced Growth initiative Plan now on way towards state endorsement

The Big Creek Balanced Growth Plan was developed between spring 2008 and spring of 2010. Soon afterwards, the Friends of Big Creek and the Cuyahoga River Community Planning Organization sought Resolutions of Support for the plan from the five community partners making up ninety-five percent of the Big Creek watershed's land area. By December, each of the communities had passed Resolutions of Support: Brooklyn, Cleveland, Parma, Parma Heights and Brook Park.

Early in 2011, FOBC and the CRCPO will submit the plan to State Agencies for any comments and then to the Ohio Lake Erie Commission for State Endorsement. State approval of the plan will enable the planning partners to become eligible for state incentives and grants for implementation of the plan.

The Balanced Growth Initiative is a "community-driven land suitability plan that will assist communities in balancing economic growth with conservation of critical and valuable natural resources of the Big Creek Watershed." The goals of the plan are to:

≈ Preserve, restore and enhance existing

watershed features

- ≈ Promote development and redevelopment that balances economic growth and watershed function
- ≈ Recommend land use practices that best avoid or minimize impacts on the watershed and stream resulting from development

Jim White, Director of the CRCPO, notes that the plan is "a great way for communities of the watershed to coordinate efforts of land use planning & redevelopment" and that we were "thrilled to have the level of community involvement throughout the process."

The plan identifies numerous priority conservation and development areas. It also contains detailed data on Big Creek's wetlands and selected sites, as well as lists of the tools and strategies the Friends of Big Creek and partners will use to implement the plan.

Considering the heavily urbanized nature of the Big Creek Watershed, Stormwater Retrofits—"structural practices installed within the stream corridor or upland areas to capture and treat stormwater before it is delivered to the stream"—were identified as the "primary restoration practice, since

they can treat non-point source pollutants, minimize channel erosion, and help restore stream hydrology."

Four specific types of retrofit sites were identified in the plan:

- ≈ 69 Large parking lots
- ≈ 35 Dry basins to convert to wet areas
- ≈ 46 New storage below outfalls
- ≈ 6 Interstate highway storage retrofits

These sites will be further evaluated through desktop and field analysis and prioritized through the Big Creek Watershed Stormwater Retrofit Ranking Project. Conceptual designs for several of the top ranking projects will also be developed to better facilitate funding for engineering and construction. All data from the project will be made available to the watershed communities. Funding is now being sought through various sources with anticipation for project implementation in the summer of 2011.

To view the full text of the Big Creek Watershed Balanced Growth Plan visit: www.friendsofbigcreek.org.

For more info about the Ohio Balanced Growth Program visit www.balancedgrowth.ohio.gov

Greater Cleveland Trails & Greenways Conference

A partnership of regional entities, led by Friends of Big Creek and West Creek Preservation Committee acting as co-chairs, held the region's first Greater Cleveland Trails & Greenways Conference on June 7, 2010. The event, which saw nearly 200 attendees, took place at Southwest General Health Center and Polaris Career Center in Middleburg Heights.

The conference offered an excellent opportunity for public, private, and non-profit professionals and trail advocates to learn about the benefits inherent to trails & greenways and the tools needed to develop them. The conference examined

model trail initiatives, as well as local goals, opportunities and experiences. The program also highlighted the health benefits of recreational trail use and showcased the Cleveland Metroparks' recently completed Lake to Lake Trail.

Due to the success of the conference and interest in continuing it on a biannual basis, Friends of Big Creek and West Creek Preservation Committee will be leading planning efforts soon for the 2nd biennial Greater Cleveland Trails & Greenways Conference planned for the spring of 2012. To learn more about the first event and details about the 2012 conference as they become available visit: www.GCtrails.org.



Conference attendees enjoyed a presentation and tour of a portion of the Cleveland Metroparks' Lake to Lake Trail which connects the two largest remaining glacial pothole wetlands in Cuyahoga County, Lake Isaac and Lake Abram. Seen here is the Fowles Marsh overlook.

Big Creek Watershed annual clean-ups – getting wet and dirty for good

On June 5th, 2010, Friends of Big Creek with the support of community stakeholders hosted the *12th Annual Big Creek Watershed Clean Up* at two locations—Brookfield Park in the Bellaire-Puritas area of Cleveland and the



Metroparks Snow Road Picnic Area, Big Creek Parkway, Parma/Parma Heights.

On August 24th FOBC volunteers joined a team of Cleveland Metroparks Zoo staff and volunteers in an annual summer evening clean-up of Big Creek where it courses through Brookside Reservation and the Zoo. Collected trash is sorted so that plastic, aluminum and steel can be recycled. This year's haul included 1,660 pounds of scrap metal!

Each May a FOBC crew also cleans in the

At left: Some of the June clean-up crew relax after collecting streamside trash along Big Creek Parkway. Standing on the right is Parma City Council's Mary Galinas. Refreshments followed and everyone received an event t-shirt courtesy of the Cleveland Division of Water Pollution Control.

lower Big Creek area as part of the broader effort of Ohio Canal Corridor's annual RiverSweep.

Volunteering at a Big Creek clean-up event helps preserve the beauty of the precious natural areas in our urban landscape. It is also an opportunity to meet new people, to get outside, and to volunteer in a stress-relieving, natural setting. Clean-ups are great community service activities for clubs and classes.

This year the 13th Annual creek clean-up will be Saturday, June 4th. Watch for more information about this next round of clean-ups and join in! If your group is looking for a community service opportunity consider participating in a watershed stewardship event.

Rain barrel workshops

Collecting rainwater in containers is an ancient, traditional practice made new again. Let's say your house has a roof area of 1,200 square feet and you have four downspouts. Can you believe that a rainfall of 0.3 inches will fill a 55-gallon rain barrel placed under each downspout?

Avid gardeners know their plants will thrive on rainwater that is naturally soft and does not contain minerals, chlorine,

fluoride, and other chemicals. They also know that using gray water for landscaping and other purposes can save money. What's more, capturing rainwater diverts it from storm drain systems thereby reducing pollutants and the velocity of water entering rivers and streams.

It's no wonder that our rain barrel workshops have been so popular. FOBC partners with the Cuyahoga Soil and

Water Conservation District to bring our residents a sturdy, reliable and inexpensive system. Shop around and compare. For the workshop cost of \$60 you get the barrel, parts, tools and downspout diverter. You will make your own barrel (help is provided if necessary) to take home to use on your home.

Check www.friendsofbigcreek.org or call 216-524-6580 for dates.

Big Creek Greenway and Trail study online

The Big Creek Greenway Trail Alignment and Neighborhood Connector Plan completed and adopted by the City of Brooklyn in 2009 is now available for viewing online at www.friendsofbigcreek.org where you can download the Master Plan Report, Development Guidelines and Proposed Routes. As reported in our last newsletter the study developed preferred alignments for a 3-mile all-purpose trail expansion through Brooklyn that would connect the Metroparks Zoo and Brookside Reservation to the Big Creek Reservation south of Brookpark Road. It examines connecting parks, neighborhoods, civic and commercial areas throughout the city while identifying opportunities for interpretive exhibits and ecological restoration.

FOBC awarded Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District operating support grant

Recognizing the value that watershed organizations contribute towards stormwater management, the NEORS D implemented a Watershed Grants program for organizations working within the District's service area. FOBC was one of eight eligible organizations that applied for and received funding for the 2009 and 2010 grant programs. The program

requires a work plan and budget, and provides operating support for the plan's implementation.

Until recently, unlike other watershed organizations, FOBC had lacked staff. The grant program has enabled FOBC to hire its former chairman, Bob Gardin, as a project manager on a part time basis to implement its work plan. The funding has

also enabled FOBC to rent office space, purchase office equipment and hire outside consulting services for land conservation. Through this year's program, which began in November 2010, \$5,000 of the \$35,000 grant award will be applied towards the Big Creek Watershed Stormwater Retrofit Ranking Project described in the cover story.

FOBC brochure available

We are pleased to offer our new brochure, a concise, informative overview of FOBC and the Big Creek watershed. On the inside you'll find a newly designed, custom map of the watershed spotlighting some (but certainly not all!) points of interest—Pearl Road (the 3-C Highway), 1934 Parma Reservoir, Puritas Wetlands, Stearns Homestead and more! Watch for feature articles on these noteworthy spots online and in future newsletters.

Drop a line to info@friendsofbigcreek.org and we'll be happy to mail a copy. You can also download the pdf map at friendsofbigcreek.org.

In a natural setting the ground absorbs a significant amount of precipitation, wetlands store much of the excess water from storms and snowmelt, and floodplains allow high water to spread out, reducing the destructive energy of floods. But in developed areas the process is much different.

Urban development drains or fills in streambank areas and constricts stream channels. Sediment from construction sites and erosion fills in a stream's pools and reduces its capacity to carry water. Roads, parking lots and rooftops reduce absorption of water into the ground, increasing the volume of runoff. The result is increased flooding. Stream channels adjust by widening and downcutting, eroding the streambank and threatening downstream property, roads, bridges and buildings.

A 1-inch rainstorm on a 1-acre meadow produces 218 cubic feet of runoff, but on a 1-acre paved parking lot it is 3,450 cubic feet. Downstream of a parking lot could be flooded with 16 times the normal flow.

Excess nutrients from fertilizers can cause vigorous growth of algae. Algal blooms can be a threat to fish, plants and animals.

Water that soaks into the soil is naturally filtered and cleaned but runoff picks up pollutants from impervious surfaces and carries them into streams, degrading water quality and threatening public health. Common pollutants include automobile fluids, road salt, fertilizers, pesticides, bacteria from pet waste.

The economic impact of urban/suburban runoff includes flooding, road and property damage, expensive flood control structures, increased drinking water treatment and a loss of recreation.

We can't control storms but we can manage runoff. We need to address stormwater related problems regionally because what happens in one community can affect another as problems typically transfer downstream. To this end the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District will develop and oversee a Regional Stormwater Management Program, which should take effect later this year. To learn more about the program visit neorsd.org.

Everyone benefits from good stormwater management—reduced property flooding and damage, reduced street flooding hazards, improved insurance rates, a more attractive natural landscape, and cleaner and healthier streams and lakes.

It is part of FOBC's mission to educate our communities about how our actions affect water quality and quantity and what techniques we can use to store and treat runoff and release it at a controlled rate. Large-scale we can advocate for low-impact development and support improvements to our stormwater infrastructure. Small-scale we can take responsibility for how our property contributes to the stormwater runoff problem, from picking up pet waste to using rain barrels and rain gardens. Stormwater matters; what we do about it matters as well.

More about stormwater and the difference you can make at www.friendsofbigcreek.org/stormwater.

Thank you to our members and community supporters.

Please consider joining or renewing.

Your membership in Friends of Big Creek will enable us to continue our mission to conserve, enhance, and bring recognition to the natural and historic resources of the Big Creek Watershed and develop a recreational trail network that joins these resources to each other and the community.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

E-mail _____

Annual dues:

___ \$ 15.00 Individual

___ \$ 25.00 Sustaining

___ \$ 25.00 Organization

___ \$ 50.00 Supporting

___ \$100.00 Business

Make checks payable to FOBC and mail to:

Friends of Big Creek

P. O. Box 609272

Cleveland, OH 44109

Secure online payment is available online at www.friendsofbigcreek.org

FOBC's fiscal agent, West Creek Preservation Committee, is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. All contributions are tax deductible.

Parkview Elementary/Parma High School Native Wildflower Restoration Project

Project partners are working to redevelop and manage a wildflower restoration project initially created on the Parkview Elementary School property. The site, adjacent to the Parma High School Auditorium parking lot, had been neglected and become overgrown with non-native, invasive plants. In addition to its restoration benefits, the project seeks to engage and educate Parma High School students, provide a demonstration project for similar practices throughout the city; and educate the public about land use best management practices. Project partners include Friends of Big Creek, the Parma Area Morning Kiwanis, Cleveland Museum of Natural History, Parma City School District and the City of Parma.

During the first phase of the project, surviving native plants will be temporarily relocated by Parma High School students under the direction of faculty in the spring

of 2011. Interpretive signage developed by project partners will be installed by students. During the summer, the invasive plants will be removed through the use of an herbicide. In September students will be involved in a sheet-mulching process to prepare the soil for a fall seeding of



Much of this Parma site has been taken over by Common Reed Grass (*Phragmites australis*) one of Ohio's top ten invasive non-native plants. It grows to 15 feet in height and spreads aggressively, choking out other plants but providing little food or shelter for wildlife.

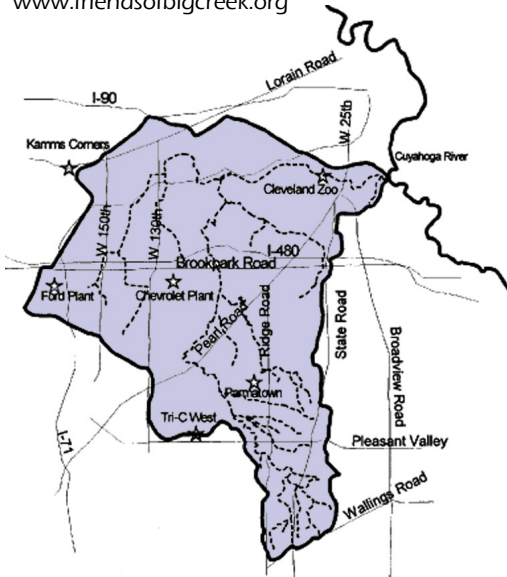
native wildflowers. In the spring of 2012 more seeding will occur, the relocated native plants will be re-planted and additional plants, including Red Twig Dogwoods provided by CMNH, will be planted.

An ongoing maintenance program, consisting primarily of the weeding out of non-native invasive plants and an annual cutting back of the perennials, will be developed with Parma High School faculty and students, Friends of Big Creek and Parma Area Morning Kiwanis.

Material donations and discounts are being offered by Kurtz Brothers Landscaping Supply, while additional funding is being provided through the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District's Watershed Operating Grants Program, and through a \$720.00 grant award from the Cleveland Metropark Zoo's Cans for Conservation Fund administered by Friends of Big Creek.

Friends of Big Creek

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Jim White, Executive Director, Cuyahoga River Remedial Action Plan

UPCOMING EVENTS

- Sun., Feb. 13 "Porcelain Berry Snap" - invasive plant removal & cookout (& cabin fever cure), Metroparks Brookside Reservation Area, 12-2 PM.
- Sun., Mar. 6 FOBC Conservation Fundraiser at Cleats Club Seat Grille, 3995 Jennings Rd. at Harvard Ave., 4-6 PM. \$20 ticket for all you can eat pizza, wings, hot dogs, pasta, beer, soft drinks, coffee. 50/50 raffle.
- Tue., Mar. 22 Watershed Mini-symposium hosted by FOBC and Brooklyn Centre Naturalists, Cleveland Metroparks Zoo Auditorium.
- Sun., Apr. 17 EarthFest 2011, Cleveland Metroparks Zoo. Visit our booth.
- Sat., May 7 RiverSweep - Ohio Canal Corridor's 22nd environmental cleanup.
- Sat., May 21 RiverDay - *Big Creek: Brooklyn "Oxbow"*. Explore forest, shale slopes and wetlands where Big Creek meandered before I-71 was constructed. 10 AM behind Brooklyn fire station, 8400 Memphis Ave. Light lunch provided.
- Sat., Jun. 4 13th Annual Big Creek Clean Up (FOBC, Cuyahoga Soil and Water Conservation District, City of Cleveland, City of Brooklyn, Bellaire-Puritas Development Corp.).
- Sat., Jul. 23 BrookStock - A Celebration of Music & Nature, Metroparks Brookside Reservation. Visit our booth.

Visit friendsofbigcreek.org for the latest information on clean-ups, hikes, meetings and more.

Big Creek is the 3rd largest tributary of the Cuyahoga River. Its watershed contains over 130 miles of streams and culverts. Together they drain nearly 39 square miles from 8 municipalities - Cleveland, Brooklyn, Linndale, Parma, Parma Heights, Brook Park, Middleburg Heights, and North Royalton. Over 90% of the watershed's area has been developed and 39% of the land surface has been made impervious, making Big Creek the most heavily urbanized watershed of any major tributary in the Cuyahoga River Watershed. This degree of urbanization provides tremendous challenge ... and opportunity.

Friends of Big Creek is a community-based greenway advocacy and watershed stewardship group. The West Creek Preservation Committee, a 501(c)(3) organization, acts as the group's fiscal agent.

Produced with financial assistance from:

