

2024 YEAR END REPORT**YEAR IN REVIEW AND LOOKING FORWARD**

Big Creek Connects is proud to have accomplished much towards our stated mission since our founding nearly 20 years ago. During that time, we have also been receptive of ways to more effectively increase our capacity to develop and implement projects related to our vision.

We are therefore pleased to announce that, after working closely with West Creek Conservancy for all these years, both organizations agreed to merge our operations. WCC has long seemed the best choice to partner with, due to the organization's shared focus on greenway and trail development, its ability to acquire and conserve property, its greater financial capacity, and that the watershed it represents is adjacent to Big Creek's.

After several years of negotiations, we plan for the merger to take effect in January 2025. BCC will become a division of WCC, and our board will become a committee with advisory and oversight

responsibilities on projects and programs related to Big Creek, including those that are currently in effect. BCC Vice Chair Garrett Ormiston, as a member of the committee, will also join WCC's Board of Directors.

The committee will monitor Big Creek trail and greenway development, ongoing conservation and restoration efforts, and community outreach and engagement programs. Bob Gardin, BCC's Executive Director, will become a Program Manager, working with WCC staff continuing to develop and implement these same efforts.

We are pleased to share with you some of this past year's accomplishments in this report and how they will continue into the new year.

Big Creek Connects' Board and staff are deeply grateful for the support we've received over the years. We encourage you to continue to support us as we merge with West Creek Conservancy and work together to fulfill our founding mission more effectively in the years ahead.

At the December Board meeting Big Creek Connects Board Chair and Treasurer were each presented by their fellow board members and staff with an award to honor their "outstanding service and dedication for nearly 20 years". Mary Ellen Stasek has served as Board Chair for the organization for a dozen years, after serving as the organization's first Vice Chair. In addition to the numerous duties required as a board chair, she has dedicated countless hours assisting its staff with outreach coordination and marketing. As the organization's Treasurer, David McBean, under the guidance of CPA Ken Moss, has diligently managed the bookkeeping for the organization since 2011. A heartfelt congratulations to the entire board for their unwavering dedication to the values and mission of BCC. They have consistently demonstrated exceptional commitment and have played an active role in the organization's endeavors, with many serving as founding members.



WESTOWN TIRE GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECT

The Westown Tire Parking Lot Green Retrofit project will create a landscaped streetscape that incorporates stormwater control measures around the Westown Tire Bros. auto shop in the historic Brooklyn Centre neighborhood. Stormwater runoff will be intercepted and treated before it migrates to the Cuyahoga River and Lake Erie, by utilizing plants in tree vaults along Pearl Road and Riverside Avenue. The plantings will demonstrate the importance of trees and the ability of vegetation and earthen depressions to aid in stormwater management.

The project area is in the northern part of the Brooklyn Centre Historic District. The property is at the border of both the National and Local Landmark Districts and acts as a visual gateway to both districts. The property has been repurposed from what was once a former gas station. The vehicular areas will be regraded and newly paved while downspouts from the two buildings will be rerouted to the tree vaults. The

northern most driveway along Pearl Road will be closed to reduce traffic conflicts and allow for a longer tree trench that will increase stormwater infiltration, provide shade, reduce heat island effect, and improve the aesthetics and pedestrian experience along the street.

Educational signage will be placed along the front of the property within tires that represent the operations of the business. (see rendering below by engineering consultant Kimley-Horn) "Hubcap flowers" are also being considered, adding to the signage a somewhat whimsical and aesthetically pleasing experience.

The \$235,232 project is being funded through the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District's Green Infrastructure Grant Program. West Creek Conservancy/Big Creek Connects will administer the grant and manage the project with its completion anticipated in November 2025.



Existing site photo of Westown Tire



Rendering of Westown Tire Green Retrofit

To conserve, enhance, and bring recognition to the natural and historic resources in and around the Big Creek Watershed and develop a recreational trail network that connects these resources to each other and the community.

SCHOOL STREAM MONITORING PROGRAM

During 2024, program partners hosted two stream monitoring events with three high schools that saw nearly 200 students participating. The events took place in Cleveland Metroparks' Memphis Picnic Area where the two main branches of Big Creek converge. The site is ideal for comparing how differences in land uses for the East Branch and West Branches of Big Creek affect water quality.

In September we hosted Lakewood and Berea High School students. In October we hosted Cleveland's John Marshall High School students. Follow-up classroom sessions by BCC and GM staff will be held in February and March 2025.

The program introduces students to watershed stewardship and the application of science, technology, and engineering with professionals in the field. It combines monitoring of the biological, chemical, and physical characteristics of the two branches of the creek with site tours

examining the natural and man-made environments within the park.

The program is funded by a General Motors Community Impact Grant, awarded annually to Big Creek Connects. The GM Parma Plant's environmental "E-Team" assists the students with studying chemical parameters of water samples, while Cuyahoga Soil & Water Conservation District staff assists with their assessing stream habitat, and Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District staff guides their identification of Macro-invertebrates.

Cleveland Metroparks, Cleveland Museum of Natural History, and West Creek Conservancy staff lead the students on the site tours. Big Creek Connects staff and board members coordinate the program and help fill in any gaps. Program partners are looking forward to another full set of outings beginning in May of 2025.



Lakewood High School students at chemical stations



John Marshall High School students on site tour



HELP PROTECT AND IMPROVE THE WATERSHED WITH YOUR DONATION

Special recognition and thanks to these 2024 supporters:

- Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District
- West Creek Conservancy
- General Motors
- Kenneth Moss
- Chris Hopkins

Only with the generosity of our community members can we continue to protect, improve, and connect with our environment.

Please consider a donation to help us make a lasting difference in our watershed communities in the coming year.

Secure credit card payment at westcreek.org/support-us or scan code. Please indicate: to be used for Big Creek.



If you prefer, mail your contribution with your name, address, phone & email to Big Creek Connects, P.O. Box 609272, Cleveland, OH 44109

Beginning in 2025 Big Creek is a division of West Creek Conservancy, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

BIG CREEK / I-71 RELOCATION & RESTORATION INITIATIVE

Big Creek Connects completed an update to the *Big Creek / I-71 Relocation & Restoration Initiative* in October of this year. The study, first published in 2015, proposes removing the Denison Access ramps of the abandoned “Parma Freeway” and opening up land in the Big Creek valley. This would allow the creek to be restored to most of its historic streambed, creating a naturalized waterway and a new greenway-trail corridor. The study also considered transportation, economic, community and land use opportunities in the surrounding area in the development of several concept plans.

In 2015 the City of Brooklyn, with the support of Cleveland City Council, applied for a planning grant to further evaluate the study’s concept plans with public input. The goal was to develop a preferred plan that would include a planning

level cost estimate, a phased implementation strategy, and identified funding sources. However, the grant was not awarded, as the Cleveland Administration had instead shown favor towards other study methods, although none had occurred.

After nearly a decade of further analysis of the land use challenges that remain, and with a new Cleveland Administration showing greater interest in the initiative, the original study has been updated. Among the additions, the revised version includes a new Concept Plan D (pictured on next page) with construction phasing plans that provide a clearer illustration of the potential construction process and funding strategy. To view the full study, including appendices and related media links, visit BigCreekConnects.org.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RECEIVES CONSERVATION AWARD

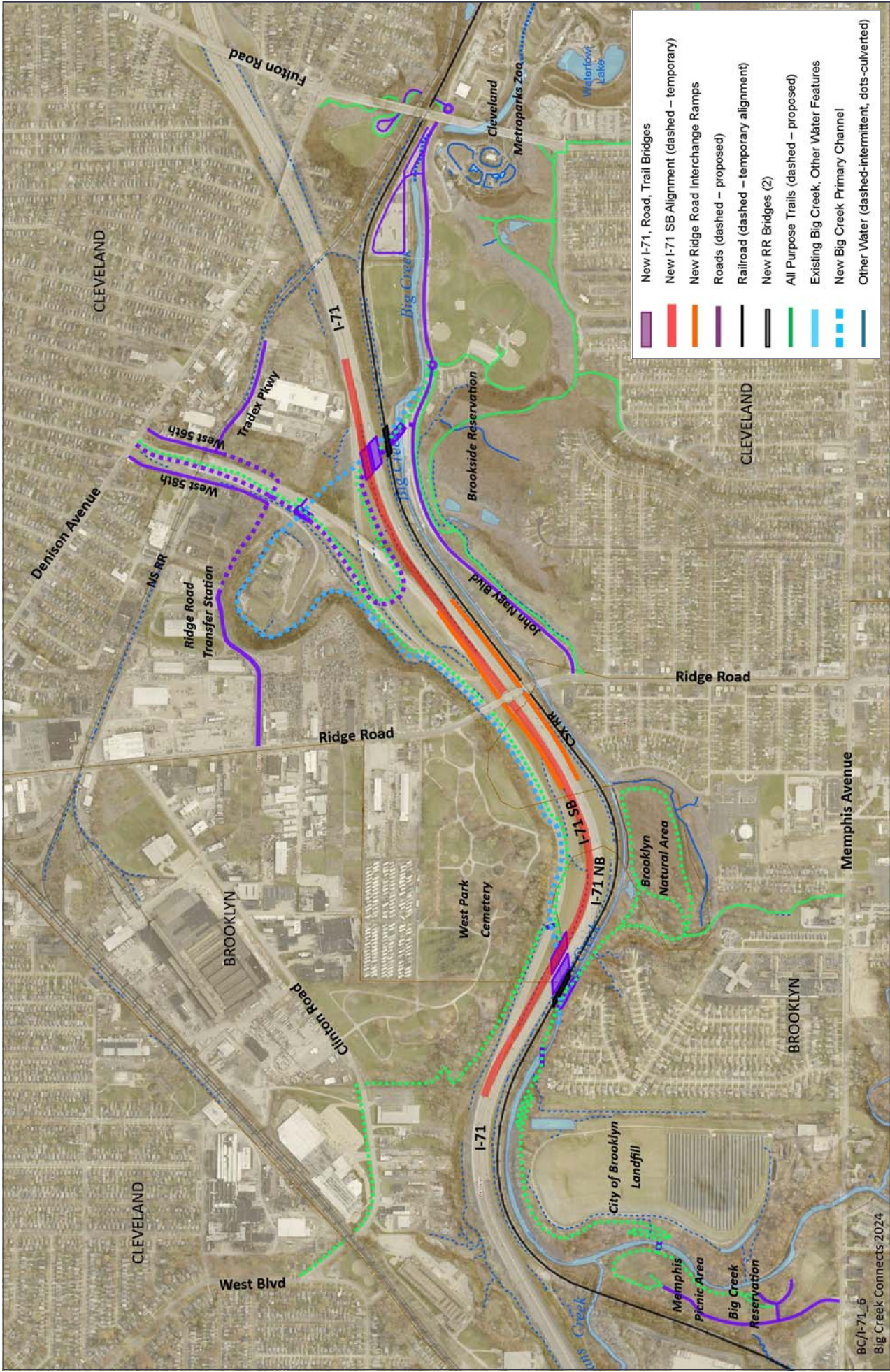
During the 75th Anniversary celebration of the Cuyahoga Soil & Water Conservation District in July, BCC Executive Director and co-founder **Bob Gardin** was one of four recipients of the “**Cuyahoga Soil & Water Legacy Conservationist Award**.” The award “recognizes an individual who has demonstrated exemplary dedication and leadership in advancing conservation efforts throughout their



career in Cuyahoga County. Individuals receiving this award have made significant and lasting contributions to the conservation and stewardship of natural resources in our region. They have shown exceptional leadership in promoting sustainable practices, advocating for environmental protection, and inspiring others to engage in conservation efforts. The work of our Legacy Conservationists has left a lasting legacy in Cuyahoga County and beyond, inspiring future generations to continue their commitment to conservation and environmental stewardship.”

Jan Rybka, retired District Administrator of Cuyahoga SWCD, was also a recipient of this award. Jan was an early champion of organizing and conservation efforts in Big Creek Watershed and is a member of BCC’s Advisory Committee. Congratulations to Bob and Jan! Well-deserved, both, for your passion, commitment and leadership.

The Cuyahoga SWCD is a local government agency that provides numerous programs to address governmental Clean Water Act mandates for communities within the county. To see more about the agency and the awards visit <https://cuyahogawcd.org/conservationawards>.



Big Creek / I-71 Relocation & Restoration Initiative
 Concept D—Overall

ANNUAL CLEANUPS & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Each year, two major cleanup events take place in the spring for Big Creek. In May, Big Creek Connects teams up with **Canalway Partners** for the annual **RiverSweep**, mobilizing over 80 volunteers at the Big Creek/Lower Harvard staging area. From this location, six teams head out along Big Creek, the Cuyahoga River, Treadway Creek Trail, and adjacent roadways to tackle cleanup efforts.

Additionally, Big Creek Connects partners with the **Cuyahoga Soil & Water Conservation District** and other organizations to coordinate a cleanup involving more than 150 volunteers across three staging areas in the upper watershed. These sites include the Cleveland Metroparks Snow Road Picnic Area (focused on the East Branch of Big Creek in Parma Heights and Parma, from Stumph Road to Brookpark Road), the Brooklyn Fire Station (covering the lower East, Upper Main, and Stickney Branches in Brooklyn, from Brookpark Road to I-71 and Ridge Road), and Cleveland's Brookfield Park (focusing on the West and Chevy Branches in the Bellaire-Puritas neighborhood).

We invite the community to participate in one or both of these annual events. Keep an eye out for dates and more details for 2025!



25th Big Creek Watershed Clean Up – June 2024. Pictured above left: Boy Scout Troop 319 volunteers unload trash at the Brooklyn Fire Station site. Right: Volunteers at Cleveland Metroparks Snow Road Picnic Area



RiverSweep Cuyahoga River Litter Clean Up – May 2024.
Pictured above: Big Creek/Lower Harvard area volunteers



Scan the code to sign up for email notifications of upcoming events.
Ours is a low-volume email list. We will never give out your information. You can opt-out at any time.

Along with our annual cleanups, Big Creek Connects offers educational tours and programs to get you involved! One program of special interest is Cleveland Metroparks' Monday Meetups, where watershed stewards come together to connect, learn, and network with other local watershed groups.

This past October, BCC hosted a special Meetup at the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo, where participants discovered restoration efforts underway in the Big Creek Watershed. The event also featured a captivating presentation by **Dr. Roy Larick**, entitled "Cuyahoga County Historical Forests: Guides for Reforesting Naturally." The presentation covered the whole county focusing on Big Creek.



The narrated slideshow can be viewed here:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=O1iVMLHp4Oc

Dr. Larick presents on restoring urban forests by replanting trees that reflect the region's historical ecology, shaped by topography and climate. He emphasizes trees as ecological infrastructure and the importance of geographic and ecological diversity. The goal is to provide accessible green spaces in underserved neighborhoods using species suited to the area's natural conditions. The presentation advocates for a region-specific approach to forest restoration, aiming to create resilient, diverse, and ecologically beneficial urban forests .

Cuyahoga County Historical Forests
Guides for reforesting naturally



MCT 46.201 red oak
North Chagrin Res

Roy Larick, PhD, Bluestone Conservation
Big Creek Monday Meetup
October 21, 2024



Want to get involved? Learn more about Monday Meetups, **Metroparks' Watershed Volunteer Program** or how to become a **Certified Watershed Steward** by visiting <https://bit.ly/3ZVvtTd>.



P.O. Box 609272
4352 Pearl Road, Suite C
Cleveland, Ohio 44109

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- Roger J. Kalbrunner, Esq., Secretary
- David McBean, RLA, Treasurer
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info@bigcreekconnects.org
www.bigcreekconnects.org

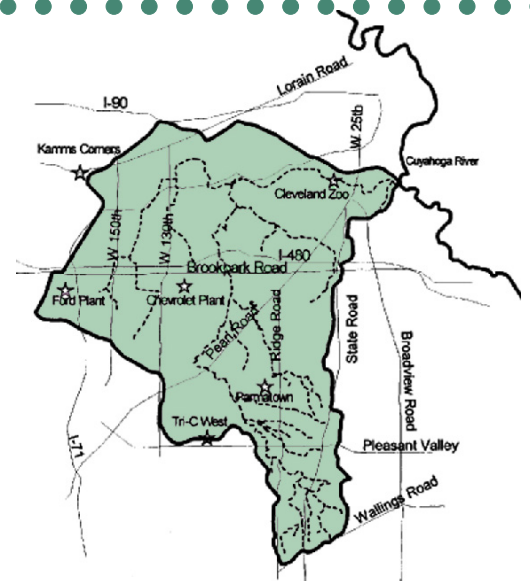


Executive Director

- Bob Gardin
- 216.269.6472 mobile
- 216.264.9780 office
- bgardin@bigcreekconnects.org

Advisory Committee

- Gayle Albers, Manager, Conservation Stewardship Specialist, Cleveland Metroparks
- Sean Brennan, Ohio House of Representatives District 14
- Donna Friedman, Manager of Community Watershed Coordination, Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District
- Jane Goodman, Director, Cuyahoga River Restoration / Area of Concern (Ret.)
- Jennifer Heard, Chief Civil Engineer, Cleveland Division of Water Pollution Control
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- Jim Rokakis, Senior Advisor, Ohio Land Bank Association
- Janine Rybka, District Administrator, Cuyahoga Soil and Water Conservation District (Ret.)
- Derek Schafer, Executive Director, West Creek Conservancy
- Melissa Miller Sedlock, Assistant Director, Bellaire-Puritas Development Corporation
- Jeffrey T. Verespej, Chief of Staff & Operations, Cleveland Neighborhood Progress



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.