

## The Friends of Big Creek take a hike and explore the Oxbow area



Big Creek has been channelized as it flows alongside I-71, and its concrete embankments are crumbling. (*Mark Holan/Special to Sun News*)



By [Mark Holan, Special to the Sun News](#)

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BROOKLYN, Ohio – Big Creek has always been a part of the city’s identity, and like blood flowing through an artery, its watershed is an important part of the community’s environment.

On March 15, a group of hikers got a firsthand look at the Oxbow area of the city with the Friends of Big Creek executive director Bob Gardin and Metroparks wetlands ecologist John Reinier.

"Wetlands are nature's kidneys." -- Bob Gardin

The Oxbow, or "The Kingdom" as some call it, lies just to the north of the fire station, and it's a heavily wooded area that once was the firing range for the Cleveland police department. After the area was sold to the city, it was designated as a recreational area since it was just to the west of the Brookside Valley.

From the Memphis Picnic Area to the east, Big Creek was "channelized" as it flows alongside Interstate 71. This changed the whole ecology of the area. Or has it?



Brooklyn Council President Katie Gallagher and her husband, Matt O'Brien, brought daughter Quinn along for the hike.  
*Mark Holan/Special to Sun News*

Last year Reinier conducted an assessment of the Oxbow area and was pleasantly surprised by his findings. His checklist included: the size of the area, buffers, land use, water source, signs of habitat disturbance, plant communities and structural intrusions.

His conclusion is the Oxbow is a good wetland with mature woods and animal habitat. "The wetland has adjusted and recovered from the disturbance," Reinier said.

Why is it so important to protect wetlands? Reinier said it filters storm water and slow it down before it gets to the stream. "It really helps to improve water quality," he said.

"Wetlands are nature's kidneys," Gardin said.



Friends of Big Creek executive director Bob Gardin makes a point during the hike March 15. *Mark Holan/Special to Sun News*

The Friends of Big Creek organization sponsors walks and educates the public about the importance of preserving areas like the Oxbow. Gardin, a grass roots activist who has been working in the organization since its beginning, knows the challenges that lie ahead: political and environmental.

The long-range plan is for the Oxbow to part of the Greenway Connector Trail, with an all-purpose trail and more public access.

On March 15, the group included Katie Gallagher, president of city council, and her husband, Matt O'Brien, who is a member of the school board, and their 11-month-old daughter, Quinn. The two newest members of council, Mary Balbier and Andy Chelcherts, were also part of the group.

The Friends of Big Creek will be sponsoring a general clean-up of the area May 31. For more information about the Friends of Big Creek and the clean-up, visit [friendsofbigcreek.org](http://friendsofbigcreek.org).

[http://www.cleveland.com/brooklyn/index.ssf/2014/03/the\\_friends\\_of\\_big\\_creek\\_take.html](http://www.cleveland.com/brooklyn/index.ssf/2014/03/the_friends_of_big_creek_take.html)