

Natural Ohio

Division of Natural Areas and Preserves

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Loss at Headlands Beach is Sheldon Marsh gain

A TREMENDOUS STORM IN JULY PRODUCED A 500-YEAR FLOODING OF THE GRAND RIVER IN LAKE COUNTY. THE FLOOD WATERS CRESTED THE BANKS OF THE RIVER AND FLOWED NORTH DOWN STATE ROUTE 49 AND INTO HEADLANDS BEACH STATE PARK, WHICH LIES WEST OF HEADLANDS DUNES STATE NATURE PRESERVE. THE RESULTING FLOOD WASHED OUT PARKING AREAS, SIDEWALKS AND LEFT A DRAMATIC 50-FOOT-WIDE BY 10-FOOT-LONG GASH ACROSS THE BEACH TO THE SHORELINE.

Unbelievably, less than a half-mile away, the shoreline and unique dunes habitat of the preserve remained untouched by the receding waters. Other than some excess water in the dunes, the damage from the devastating flood waters was insignificant.

As clean up commenced, state park staff were left with a critical question—how to return the beach to its pre-flood condition so they could re-open one of Lake Erie’s most popular beaches. Park staff needed sand, a lot of it, to fill in the washed-out beach.

The solution lay just a few yards away. For years staff had piled and pushed wind-blown sand from the road and

parking lots to an area at the end of the beach. Over the years, the man-made sand pile grew to 400 feet long, 50 feet wide and 10 feet tall. However, nature had also moved in. Beach grasses colonized the dune-like structure. Some of the plant species found on the sandy hill were the same plants occurring in the state nature preserve; plants that are only found in a handful of Lake Erie sites. Park personnel needed the sand, but worried about the fate of the unique plants.

Park staff consulted with staff from the Division of Natural Areas and Preserves regarding the possibility of coordinating a plant rescue. The rescue, while giving staff a chance to move uncommon plants to safety, also presented the possibility of a solution to a challenge facing the fragile barrier beach at Sheldon Marsh State Nature Preserve in Huron County.

In the early 1900s, the Army Corps of Engineers built a riprap breakwall off of the Huron River to reduce sedimentation from Lake Erie into the shipping channel. While this greatly benefited shipping, it became a detriment to the barrier beach at Sheldon Marsh.

A barrier beach is a thin strip of land that separates the main lake from the coastal marsh or estuary wetland. The

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Grassroots support drives Mohican River designation

Ask someone to name an Ohio state scenic river and inevitably you’ll hear “the Mohican River?” It certainly is scenic, just ask the thousands of visitors who canoe, camp or hike along it each year. Yet the Mohican River, which meanders through Ashland, Coshocton, Holmes and Knox counties, isn’t a state scenic river...yet.

As early as 1973, the Ohio Scenic Rivers Program has acknowledged the integrity of this north central Ohio waterway. Thirty years ago it was reported that the entire length of the Mohican and the Clear Fork from the Pleasant Hill Dam downstream should be designated with the scenic river status.

For those unfamiliar with how an Ohio stream becomes a state scenic river, the process begins at the local level. The Division of Natural Areas and Preserves does not initiate the designation process, rather it responds to overwhelming local support for a scenic river study.

“In the past year there’s been strong support building for the designation of the Mohican and Clear Fork as a state scenic river,” said Bob Gable, the division’s acting chief. “It takes a multitude of citizens, landowners, local businesses and public agencies to make the designation of any Ohio river a reality.”

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common tern

(Headlands, continued from page 1)

barrier beach is important in the protection of the marsh from storm surges and wave action allowing a "sheltered" environment where many plant and animal species can thrive.

The weakened beach at Sheldon Marsh has been further damaged by Lake Erie's legendary northeasterly winds. Battered by endless waves, sand continues to be pushed into the marsh behind the beach. In less than 40 years, the beach has been moved back more than 1,000 feet, creating a loss of valuable and irreplaceable wetlands.

Most of the Lake Erie shoreline has been rippapped (large limestone

boulders placed along the shoreline to prevent erosion), making the beach habitat at Sheldon Marsh even more critical. The barrier beach is used by migrating shorebirds, including piping plover and common tern, as a critical nesting habitat.

Past attempts to secure funding to protect and restore the beach have not succeeded so when asked if the division would like to move the beach grass plants from Headlands, the division saw an opportunity to try a natural approach to protecting the barrier beach.

Beach grass (*Ammophila breviligulata*), a state threatened species in Ohio, is unique because it can tolerate a harsh beach environment. It grows on sand where rain water can percolate through the sand and create an almost desert-like environment. Its large rhizomes grow quickly in the sand and can have a stabilizing affect as they hold the sand together. Beach grass also traps wind-blown sand and helps create dunes that grow higher each year. Historically, beach grass was known to occur on the Cedar Point beaches near Sheldon Marsh.

North District staff, including Gary Obermiller, Charlotte McCurdy, Mike

Grote and Josh McFadden, worked tirelessly for more than 10 hours to move 210 plants from Headlands State Park to the barrier beach at Sheldon Marsh. The plant rescue was a labor intensive process as the plants were removed by hand, transported to the bed of a truck, alternately covered with water and sand and then trucked to Sheldon Marsh, where staff moved the plants more than a mile to reach the barrier beach transplanting area.

Predictions about beach grass mortality rates have ranged from 90 percent to 50 percent, depending upon sources. However, three months later, most of the plants show signs of thriving and many are sporting long, green leaves. The true test of the grasses' resilience will be how they survive the winter on their new beach. Next spring, this year's transplants will hopefully thrive and begin to help stem the erosion at Sheldon Marsh State Nature Preserve.

For more information on either preserve, please visit

www.ohiodnr.com/dnap.



Steve Harvey

North District Preserve Manager

(Mohican, continued from page 1)

There are a number of individuals who have driven the grassroots support for designating the Mohican River, including retired teacher David Greer. As a science teacher he appreciates the importance of a healthy stream and as a farmer he has implemented sustainable agricultural practices on his own land. Greer likes that the scenic river designation means

that landowners will have access to technical advice from division staff.

"Those of us who live along the Mohican know that it is already a scenic river, but the official scenic river title brings a sense of pride to all of us," said Greer. "Whether it's a landowner or public official, we're pledging to keep the Mohican River scenic by using the best methods to protect it."

Elected officials are also critical to the process. Without resolutions of support from the majority of local municipalities, townships or counties, the Ohio Scenic Rivers Program couldn't embark on the comprehensive study needed to begin the designation process.

There are many local citizens and public officials who attended meetings and worked hard to obtain resolutions of support for the Mohican River designation study. Resolutions of support have been passed by the Ashland, Coshocton, Holmes and Knox county boards of commissioners. Additionally, many township trustees have signed on as well including: Hanover, Knox, Tiverton, Newcastle, Jefferson and Union townships.



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Diversity abounds at General Electric facility



ADAMS COUNTY IS WELL-KNOWN IN BOTANICAL CIRCLES AS AN AREA RICH IN PLANT AND ANIMAL DIVERSITY. NATURE'S BEST CAN BE SEEN AT SEVERAL PROTECTED AREAS LIKE KA-MA-MA PRAIRIE, MANAGED BY THE HIGHLANDS NATURE SANCTUARY, OR CHAPARRAL PRAIRIE STATE NATURE PRESERVE. IN ADDITION, THERE ARE A NUMBER OF SIGNIFICANT NATURAL AREAS UNDER PRIVATE OWNERSHIP.

One such site is owned and managed by the General Electric (GE) Corporation. In addition to testing jet engines at its 7,000-acre facility in Adams County, the company has left a significant portion of its property in a natural state where an amazing diversity of plants and animals are thriving.

John Howard, a local naturalist and GE employee, has become an advocate for recording the diversity of the site.

"In 1997 I began inviting other naturalists and botanists to the area for field trips, so that they could see the great diversity of the property, as well as help me learn more about the plants and animals there," explained Howard. "The area had been completely closed to the public since 1954, and probably had not had any botanizing done since the 1930s when E. Lucy Braun was working in the area."

With fellow biologists, Howard has recorded hundreds of species including more than 400 species of vascular plants, 15 of which are state listed. During the past few years, GE granted permission to the Division of Natural Areas and Preserves to visit the restricted facility.

The facility has hundreds of acres of mature forest; the area has not been timbered since GE purchased the land

in the 1950s. Oak-hickory and mixed mesophytic forest are the most common forest associations.

"The birds are nearly too numerous to count, as the 7,000 acres of contiguous forest is a major stopping area for migrating neotropical birds, and the numerous ponds and wetlands draw many species of migrating waterfowl," said Howard.

Nestled within these forests are some interesting habitats, especially for the region. There are a number of broad, flat ridge tops where, amazingly, vernal pools and buttonbush swamps occur. Although these wetlands are small, they are packed with life, especially amphibians. Spotted salamanders, marbled salamanders, wood frogs and spring peepers are just a few of the amphibians found breeding in these pools.

Around the vernal pools, a number of state-listed plant species occur, including netted chain fern (*Woodwardia areolata*) and the threatened pale straw sedge (*Carex albolutescens*).

More rare plants may be found in the dry woods on the ridge tops including the Virginia ground-cherry (*Physalis virginiana*), dwarf hackberry (*Celtis tenuifolia*) and hairy wingstem (*Verbisina helianthoides*).

The GE property is located primarily on the Allegheny Plateau and most of the bedrock is Ohio shale with some dolomite and sandstone patches. One of Ohio's threatened species, Wherry's catchfly (*Silene caroliniana* ssp. *wherryi*) grows on the shale; more grow here than anywhere else in the state. This stunning spring wildflower is only known in Ohio from less than 20 sites in Adams, Highland and Pike counties. Although the population at this site has decreased since Braun reported it in 1932, the plants still number in the thousands. The flowers can be seen growing along an old railroad grade on



Beaver Pond Road, one of the few public roads through the property.

The main creek flowing through the property is Dunlap Creek, a tributary of Scioto Brush Creek. Beaver have dammed portions of the creek forming small ponds. A number of rare plants can be found in and around the ponds including short fringed sedge (*Carex crinita* var. *brevicrinis*), straw colored sedge (*Carex straminea*), round-fruited hyssop (*Gratiola virginiana*), Pursh's bulrush (*Schoenoplectus purshianus*), Tennessee pondweed (*Potamogeton tennesseensis*) and Virginia meadow-beauty (*Rhexia virginica*).

Because of Howard's strong interest in butterflies, the diversity of this group is well documented. Some of the most noteworthy species include cloudless sulfur, least sulfur, goatweed butterfly and the sleepy orange butterfly. Rare dragonflies, such as the endangered blue corporal, have also been recorded here.

Thanks to Howard and his fellow biologists and botanists, many interesting and rare species have been found at the GE site. It is likely that this significant natural area will continue to yield rare finds for years to come.



Rick Gardner
Heritage Botanist

Desonier State Nature Preserve

CHANGE IS INEVITABLE, EVEN IN NATURE. A WONDERFUL PLACE TO SEE NATURE IN TRANSITION IS DESONIER STATE NATURE PRESERVE IN ATHENS COUNTY. THE SITE WAS A GIFT FROM HENRY I. STEIN TO THE DIVISION OF NATURAL AREAS AND PRESERVES IN 1974 AS A LIVING MEMORIAL TO HIS SISTER, MARIE J. DESONIER.

The 502-acre preserve is bisected by Jordan Run, a tributary of the Hocking River and features steep topography, varying from 680 feet to 900 feet in elevation. This mixed mesophytic forested site is a landscape in transition; habitats range from old farm fields to mature forested areas. Large beech and oak trees are found in the cool, moist ravines while the drier uplands are dominated by oak-hickory trees, typical of the region.

Spring delivers a nice array of woodland wildflowers, but in summer, the rugged two-mile trail is filled with vibrant blooms, including the deep red blossoms of cardinal flower. Other late summer flowers greeting visitors along the hard-packed trail include Virginia knotweed, ironweed, goldenrods and tall bell flower, as well as the deep green fronds of sensitive ferns.

Two interesting parasitic plants occur at Desonier. Like an orange garland draped over green leaves, common dodder is easily spotted clinging to woodland plants along the trail. After dodders come in contact with a host plant, they lose their roots and survive solely on the host plant. If you take a closer look, it's hard to tell where the dodders begin and end.

The other parasitic species here is a beloved symbol of holiday cheer—mistletoe. Desonier is the only state nature preserve to host the plant.

Unfortunately for visitors, it does not grow along the trail.

Recently, thanks to donations to the Ohio Income Tax Checkoff Program, a section of the preserve's main trail was rerouted and enhanced by a boardwalk near the bridge crossing Jordan Run. Trails are occasionally moved or improved because of visitation impacts, however at Desonier, the trail change was necessary due to the impact of local inhabitants—beaver.

In recent years, a group of beaver have made Desonier their home. After seeing the handiwork of these mammals, it is easy to understand why biologists refer to them as a keystone species. Other than humans, there are few animals that can dramatically alter their environment in order to create their particular habitat. The wetland areas they create provide needed habitat for other species.

Using sticks, bark from hardwood trees, mud and logs, the beaver dammed



Jordan Run, creating a pond that stretches for several acres. The new pond is ringed by the remains of trees felled by these industrious animals.

You may think you're familiar with the building skills of beaver, but until you see it a few feet in front of you, it's hard to imagine that most of the meticulous construction work was done at night. Beaver are nocturnal animals, which is why you can spot their den from the trail, but you may never see them.

At Desonier, the struggle between man (division staff) and beaver has ended. The newly routed trail will keep visitors out of flooded areas, while still providing an incredibly up close view of the beaver's den and handiwork.



What other changes lie in store for Desonier State Nature Preserve as the size of the beaver pond grows and the plant and animal life respond to the changing landscape is hard to say. Preserve Manager Randy Beinlich already has noticed a change in visitation—from those who are seeking a rugged hike in the woods to birders armed with binoculars as the pond attracts more migratory waterfowl each year.

A visit to Desonier State Nature Preserve will bring you closer to our ever-changing natural world. 

Heidi Hetzel-Evans
Public Information

Federal grant protects rare southeast Ohio orchid

THE FUTURE OF A RARE ORCHID IN SOUTHEAST OHIO MAY BE MORE CERTAIN BECAUSE OF A \$322,910 FEDERAL GRANT THAT IS HELPING THE DIVISION OF NATURAL AREAS AND PRESERVES BETTER PROTECT THE STATE'S ONLY KNOWN POPULATION OF THE SMALL WHORLED POGONIA (*ISOTRIA MEDEOLOIDES*). THE PLANT IS CONSIDERED RARE THROUGHOUT ITS RANGE, WHICH INCLUDES THE MIDWEST AND EASTERN UNITED STATES.

A Recovery Land Acquisition grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is funding the purchase of a 160-acre conservation easement within the 617-acre Camp Oty'Okwa, which is owned by Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Ohio.

"With this grant, we can create a buffer of habitat, helping to better protect the orchid's population while hopefully providing it more room to successfully reproduce," said Melissa Moser, project coordinator and division researcher.

Moser, along with preserve management staff, is working closely with camp staff to implement a variety of protection measures. The project includes trail improvements, such as a new staircase and a fence to protect the orchid population from foot traffic, while discouraging browsing wildlife, such as deer.

The small whorled pogonia is a state endangered and federally threatened species. Scattered populations of this rare plant are known to occur in only



small whorled pogonia

14 other U.S. states. The five-leaved, white or yellow-flowered orchid—often confused with Indian cucumber root—grows up to 10 inches tall and typically blooms in late May or early June.

The federal grant is funding 65 percent of the conservation project, with the division providing a 30 percent match, using funds from Ohioans who donated a portion of their state income tax refund to the Nature Preserves, Scenic Rivers and Endangered Species Fund. The remaining 5 percent is from other sources, including Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Ohio.

Recovery Land Acquisition grants aid in protecting against loss of habitat, which is the primary threat to most rare plant and animal species. Land acquisition is the most effective means of protecting habitats essential for the recovery of these rare species. 

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When is a lake not a lake?

Most of Ohio's favorite lakes are not natural-born bodies of water

WHEN IS A LAKE NOT A LAKE? OUR QUERY MAY SOUND LIKE THE KIND OF RIDDLE PASSED AROUND IN ELEMENTARY CLASSES, BUT WE GUARANTEE THE ANSWER MAY SURPRISE YOU.

Ohio has at least 50,000 lakes and ponds worthy of those names, with more than 2,000 that cover 5 acres or more. But not all are true lakes, or at least not true “natural” lakes that were here before settlers began building farm ponds, reservoirs and canals.

In fact, aside from Lake Erie, most of the well-known recreational lakes in Ohio—the water enjoyed most for boating, swimming and fishing—are definitely man-made. Virtually all are reservoirs, held back by dams and built for water supply or flood control where no lake existed before.

Just where are the true, natural lakes in Ohio? How many are there and how can you tell the difference? That’s where the answers get tricky, for even the experts don’t always agree.

Geologists with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources say there are two types of natural lakes in Ohio. First are the glacial and kettle-hole lakes, both types were created thousands of years ago when glaciers moved out of Ohio and left behind a trail of melting ice. Think of them as large, Ice Age puddles, left behind mostly in northern Ohio where glaciers once reigned.

Lake Erie is of course Ohio’s grand champion glacial remnant, followed in size by 385-acre Chippewa Lake in Medina County. Perhaps Ohio’s best known and best preserved inland glacial lake is the 100-acre beauty at Punderson State Park in Geauga County. While so many of Ohio’s glacial lakes have disappeared over the past two centuries—filled in or drained as the state was settled—Punderson has remained an open body of “natural” water. What ancient glaciers left behind, modern-day Ohioans can enjoy today.

Other glacial lakes have been lost over time to natural processes that transformed them into something quite different: glacial bog meadows. One fascinating example, still in transition, is Triangle Lake Bog State Nature Preserve. While some of the ancient lake remains, you can clearly see how vegetation is slowly closing in on the open water. This nature preserve protects one of the finest and least disturbed kettle-hole bogs in Ohio, supporting a wide variety of unique plants. Nearby, Kent Bog State Nature Preserve is what Triangle Lake Bog will become—a completely filled-in bog meadow. Both Portage County sites feature tamarack trees, another remnant of Ohio’s Ice Age.

The second type of natural lake in Ohio is more likely to be found in southern counties, although few and far between. These are oxbow lakes, formed when a bend in a winding river becomes

separated from the main flow—either by floods or erosion—then was left on its own as a free-standing body of water. These lakes are neither large nor long lasting, therefore most of them remain unnamed.

Many would be surprised to learn that less than three dozen of Ohio’s 50,000 lakes and ponds make the Cleveland Museum of Natural History’s list of “natural” lakes. Jim Bissell, the museum’s curator of botany, places the count at 33. He’s been helping compile a list since 1988.

Bodies of water making Bissell’s list must not only have natural origins, but must also be home to certain floating and deep-water vegetation—often these plants are rare or endangered. In some cases, these plants may be found exclusively in just one specific lake.

According to Bissell, there are other naturally occurring lakes in Ohio beyond his list of 33, but they no longer support the types of vegetation he looks for as hallmarks of these unique ecosystems. Bissell fears that Ohio’s precious few natural lakes will become fewer still, as human encroachment and invasive plant species—yellow iris, purple loosestrife and others—continue to take their toll. 🌱

Laura Jones
Office of Communications

(Mohican, continued from page 2)

In the Mohican watershed, tourism is an integral component of the local economy. The designation of the Mohican River has strong support from local businesses including Mohican Adventures, Smith's Pleasant Valley Campground and Mohican Wilderness Campground. Not only have these businesses vocalized their support but they have donated the use of canoes and shuttles.

Another group of supporters are the organizations supporting improved recreational opportunities. In the Mohican area, these organizations include the Wally Road Scenic Byway Association, Mohican Area Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB), Ashland Area CVB, Holmes County CVB, Knox County CVB, and the Knox County Park District.

The Mohican River is rich in biodiversity, a fact already determined by the dozens of site visits undertaken by division staff. Accompanied by landowners, staff have already paddled the length of the proposed study area, which includes 4.8 miles of the Clear Fork of the Mohican and the entire main stem which is 27.5 miles long.

Information collected from site evaluations and dozens of sources will be synthesized into a comprehensive document. The study itself takes time as staff evaluate a number of river-related issues including water quality data.

Now comes the challenge for local supporters—waiting for a completed river study so the division may make a recommendation to the director of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources. After a 30-day public comment period, the river may be designated.

Although the Mohican River designation process isn't over yet, it's a safe bet that if you're asked to name a state scenic river next year, you'll be able to answer confidently, "the Mohican River!"

Frank DiMarco
Central Ohio Scenic Rivers Manager

Autumn Harvest

NATURE'S TIMING IS SO EXQUISITE! JUST BEFORE WINTER CLOSES IN WITH ITS DRIVING SNOW AND FREEZING TEMPERATURES, THE PRAIRIES AND WOODLANDS OF THE MIDWEST RIPEN THEIR RICHEST OFFERINGS. AUTUMN'S GLOWING COLORS SIGNAL A SEASON OF FRENZIED ACTIVITY AS RESIDENTS SCURRY TO HARVEST THE BOUNTY WHILE THEY CAN.

For some animals, autumn means eating as much as possible and converting nature's abundance to fat which their bodies will slowly use during their long winter naps. Other animals "squirrel away" their harvest in the ground or in tree cavities, intending to use it later—if they can find it!

Humans, too, enjoy Fall's abundance. For those who would like to taste Nature's harvest, a few hints follow. Of course, you will need permission before gathering anything on private property, and removing any natural feature from nature preserves is an absolute "no no." With that in mind, here are a few tips for harvesting your own bounty.

The most valuable autumn food is nuts. Acorns are usually abundant in the fall. Although all acorns are edible, those produced by the red oak family contain more tannin than do those of the white oak family, and so are more bitter. Both kinds need to be processed before eating by first hulling them and then boiling the kernels in several changes of water. Once the water stays clear, the kernels may be roasted and eaten whole or ground into flour.

Hickory nuts, black walnuts and butternuts are far less trouble. Once gathered, hulled and allowed to dry, they can be broken and the nutmeats pulled out. These can be eaten straight, ground into flour or crushed and boiled

for their oil. Butternuts are becoming rare in Ohio, so if you find a mature specimen, be sure to plant some of the nuts you gathered.

Black walnuts, on the other hand, are still quite common. Once you've hulled a few of these, you'll understand why it was such an important source of pioneer dye.

Nuts are not the only good things autumn offers. A number of fruits are available at this time, among them are wild plums, grapes and cherries. Although smaller, seedier and not as sweet as their cultivated cousins, they can be used the same and taste as good in their own way. The only caution involves wild cherry pits which contain cyanide and should not be eaten. The paw-paw, an exotic yet native small tree, bears stubby, banana-like fruits. When ripe, their soft, yellow interiors are quite edible, although the taste is said to be an acquired one.

Fall is also the time to gather and dry rose hips. Added to a steaming cup of tea, they impart a sweet taste, a rosy tint and a dose of vitamin C. The most available hips are those of multiflora rose, an aggressive, non-native species which rapidly takes over open areas to the detriment of our native flora. By removing its seed-containing hips, you can actually help protect Ohio's native diversity.

Nature also provides spices. Wild onions, leeks and garlic are all readily found. Wild ginger roots, dried and crushed, may be used in place of commercial ginger. Raw roots, cut into small pieces and simmered in sugar water, can be eaten like candy. Have a few pieces after dinner with a cup of hot sassafras tea and welcome in the snow-bound days of winter.

Tim Snyder
Retired District Preserve Manager

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