



# **ANNUAL REPORT 2023**

*Conserving Land in  
Knox County, Ohio since 2000*

WATSON EASEMENT



## **Our Mission**

The Owl Creek Conservancy is a private nonprofit organization of volunteers dedicated to conserving natural and agricultural lands in the Knox County Area through widespread private action. We work with landowners for the public good to maintain and to improve the quality of life now and in the future by conserving farmlands, stream corridors, aquifer- and watershed-protection areas, wildlife habitats, woodlands, scenic vistas, and ecologically sensitive areas of environmental, historic, and community importance.

Owl Creek Conservancy  
Post Office Box 291  
Mount Vernon, Ohio 43050

740-392-6952

[www.owlcreekconservancy.org](http://www.owlcreekconservancy.org)

*Photos provided by: Ray Heithaus, Pat Heithaus,  
Jeff Wells, Vicki Kauffman, & Emiley Body*

All Rights Reserved - Copyright 2023



A photograph of a stream bed with dark, layered rocks and green ferns in the foreground. The text is overlaid on the image.

**Memorial Contributions, since June 2022,  
made in memory of:**

**Richard Crise  
Margaret Hoskins  
Cheryl Kimble  
Clement E. King  
Gina Lyn Zak**



## LIFE MEMBER

Kimberly Davidson and Richard Barker  
Heather Schooler and Steven Barr  
Barbara Barry

**Curtis Bechtel+**

Marion R. Brill <sup>1</sup>

James and Maureen Buchwald \*\*

Barry Buxton +

Alan and Traci Cassell \*\*

**Laura Chatfield**

John and Abbe Cheek

William de Camp, Jr.

John and Gayle Dowalter

**Judith Fisher**

Daniel W. Galbraith \*\*\*\*\*<sup>26</sup>

**Jim and Kim Giles**

Douglas and Susan Givens

Howard and Sarah Gratz

Carolyn Hahnemann

Robert and Cornelia Hallinan

Mrs. J. Warren Healea <sup>3</sup>

Ray and Pat Heithaus

Bert and Susan Hendley

John and Donna Horn +

**Jane Huntington**

Janet L. Kohr <sup>4</sup>

Emerson and Edie Laird

Brad and Melinda Lanker \*

Bruce and Kathy Lanker \*\*\*

William Lawhon, Jr.

Mark and Pam Leonard

Norma Magers \*

Robert L. McFarland <sup>5</sup>

Robert and Elisabeth Meier

Ed and Fran Meyers

Charles and Julie Michelson

Beverly Morse and Brian Miller

Brian and Cindy Montgomery +

Jeffery L. Montgomery \*

Richard and Nancy Montgomery \*\*\*+++

Doug and Beth Morgan

Greg and Vicki Mountz

Muskingum Valley Park District

Mary McManus and L. Keith Plocki

Patricia Donohoue and C.C. Porter

Joe and Sally Nelson

Marc and Jen Odenweller

Steve Oster

Philander Chase Conservancy \*

Ken and Jan Reynolds

Harold A. Rine \*

Florence Short

W. Jerry Simpson \*

John and Rebecca Simpson

**Greg and Susan Spaid**

Ann Stallard

Richard and Joan Stallard

Dennis and Tamara Swingle

John and Debbie Urton

Ian and Charlotte Watson\*

Dianna and Richard D. Wetzel, Jr.

Peter White

Anna and Stanley Williams+

S. Bruce Williams+

Jay M. Wilson \*

John and Cyndi Woollam

Karen B. Wright

Gordon and Fran Yance

**Bold** – New Life Member in 2023

\* One Conservation Easement (CE) donated in full or in part

+ One Agricultural Easement donated in part (co-holder Ohio Department of Agriculture)

<sup>1</sup> Conservation easement donated in memory of Patty Markee Brill

<sup>2</sup> Conservation easement donated in memory of Mary Lucile Cooper Galbraith

<sup>3</sup> Two conservation easements donated in memory of J. Warren Healea

<sup>4</sup> Conservation easement donated in memory of Robert Duncan McKenzie

<sup>5</sup> Conservation easement donated in memory of Georgia Z. and Robert O. McFarland

<sup>6</sup> Conservation easement donated in memory of Howard Milton Galbraith

## Corporate Members 2022-2023

Ariel Foundation and *New Philanthropy Fund* at the Knox County Foundation

Corporate Membership: Corporate membership, a new membership category in 2022, is available to businesses or organizations that make a one-time donation of \$2,000.00, or multiple donations over four consecutive years that total \$2,000.00. Corporate Membership will continue for two years after the last donation and is granted only with the assent of the business or organization.



This January we held a board retreat during which we reviewed the past year and set goals for the coming year. I am pleased to report that we met the major goals of our last retreat with respect to adding easements, continuing collaboration with like-minded entities in Knox County, promoting awareness of the value of preserving land, and increasing our stewardship and memorial funds. We also met the goals of continuing to use sound financial management and ensuring that we have adequate funding for protecting easements. We also reviewed our policy on potential conflicts of interest, a review that the national Land Trust Alliance recommends be done annually.

All this activity involves considerable efforts from our Board members, who reported at least 1700 hours of volunteer time dedicated to our mission. The activity requiring the most time was monitoring easements, and second was preparing baseline conditions reports; these are good to be at the top of the list

because those activities directly reflect our mission.

Substantial time went to attending meetings and raising funds.

Self-education, recruiting, leading and attending events in the Explore the Nature of Knox County also were completed with volunteer time and effort.

As a member of the group establishing the Owl Creek Conservancy in 2000, I would like to take a moment to reflect on its accomplishments since its founding. By the end of the current calendar year, we may have 50 different easements (44 are currently "in the books"). To put some numbers on our efforts, I examined each easement using a Geographic Information System (GIS) with aerial photographs and measuring tools. I was able to characterize agricultural activity,



**American Goldfinch**



**WATSON WOODLAND**



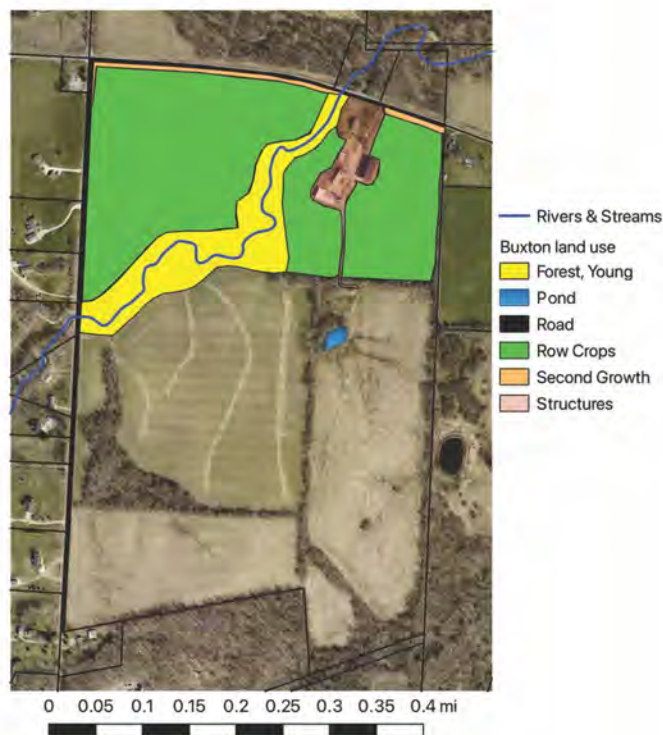
forest cover, stream length within the easements, and areas set aside for homes and agricultural buildings. Here is what I found:

Farmland is protected by most easements. Preserving land for agriculture has obvious benefits to the Knox County economy, a rural aesthetic, and local culture. This has been a core value for the Owl Creek Conservancy since its inception, and with over 4,000 acres and almost 80% of easements used for agriculture, we can check one “success so far” box.

My second point here is that we should not overlook the fact that land protected from development provides other important values.

For example, drinking water for the City of Mount Vernon and its larger service area is drawn from an underground aquifer, where water flows through ancient gravels laid down by glaciers. Many private wells also reach into this water supply. This underground flow is relatively slow, with water just south of, and under, Fredericktown taking a bit over five years to reach the water supply wells in Mount Vernon; this defines a cone called the “five-year-time of travel.” OCC is protecting eight easements and about 1200

acres of land over this cone. An additional seven easements are within a mile of the five-year-time of travel cone. Protecting surface land is important to OCC because surface water becomes ground water over time; eventually, contamination at the surface would reach our underground supply of drinking water.



**Digitizing Land Use with GIS**





Speaking of surface water, OCC has 27 easements connecting to 4.6 miles of the Kokosing River and 9.6 miles of tributary streams. These flowing waters support outstanding diversity of aquatic life, including more than 75 species of fish. The lands adjacent to the streams (“riparian habitats”) are habitats for specialized species such as the Prothonotary Warbler, and protected forests provide shade and nutrients for stream wildlife. Opportunities for fishing and floating down the river enhance tourism for Knox County. Ecological diversity also is enhanced by protecting wetlands and vernal pools; twenty-eight of our easements protect these special habitats. Some species of salamanders, butterflies and dragonflies are known in Knox County only in protected wetlands.

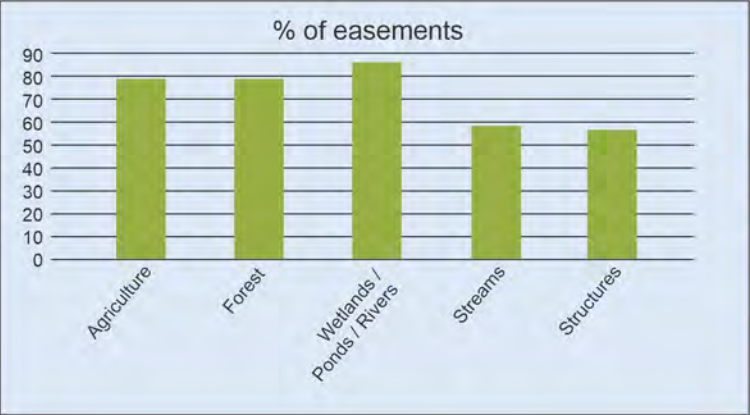
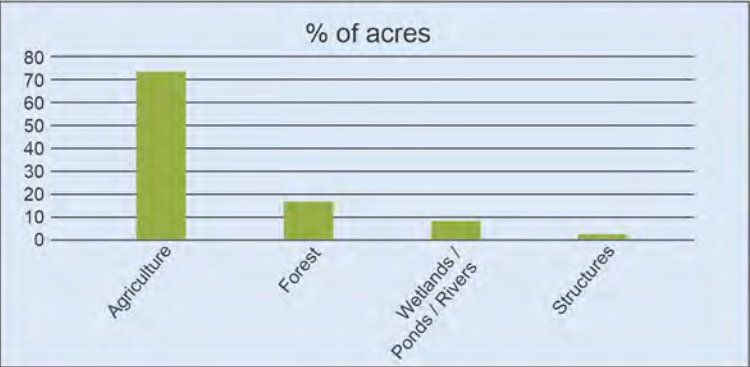
Our easements protect 930 acres of forest habitats as parts of farms and as special lands in thirty-eight easements. We protect another 300+ acres of prairie and second growth habitats. These habitats play a major role in protecting biological diversity and ecological services for Knox and surrounding counties. Our core monitoring team of Jeff Wells and Howard Gratz have been recording the presence of bird and flower species in nearly 40 protected properties. Eighty-one species of birds have been seen in one wooded property, including many that migrate from Central and South America to breed in



**Shelf Fungus**



**Rusty Blackbird**



**Orange Back Salamander**



Knox County and in Knox County's more northern areas. To highlight the value of protected properties, I quote a report by Howard Gratz, who highlighted one of our easements:

"Fifty-nine species of birds have been recorded on the Kohr II conservation easement. Kohr II, although bordered closely by noisy State Route 95, has an interesting combination of habitats which include the wooded edges of the Kokosing River, a rather substantial wetland and a grassy field which has had a few small trees recently planted. In addition to a number of the neotropical migrants, the Kohr II property has recorded some rather exciting finds. One of these was a beautiful male Rusty Blackbird seen on

March 29, 2023 in the wetland. The Rusty Blackbird's population has plunged drastically in recent years and it is on the Red List category of bird species (Considered Vulnerable). Another exciting find is to discover that the Sandhill Crane, a large 4' tall bird whose numbers have slowly been increasing in Ohio, has been using the Kohr II wetland."

Migrating salamanders, literally hundreds of species of mushrooms, trees and wildflowers, insects, not to mention vertebrate animals that are important to hunters and the general public are protected by our easements. All these individual species combine to make up healthy ecosystems that provide recreation, food and fiber, clean air and water, and green spaces to soothe our souls.

*Working to protect these lands with our Board of Trustees,  
Executive Director, advisors and consultants  
has been an honor for me. I look forward to observing  
the continuing labor of our hard-working group.*

*~ Ray*



**Kokosing River**





### EMILEY BODY

The Board of the Owl Creek Conservancy is pleased to announce the addition of Emiley Body to the Owl Creek team. Emiley started March 1, 2023 as the new consultant.

Emiley hails from Youngstown where she grew up with a younger brother, swimming, fishing and helping her dad work on cars. She holds an AD of Applied Science in Surgical Technology from Columbus State and a BA in English from the Ohio State University. Emiley has lived in Knox County since 2016.

"Emiley has become invaluable to the Conservancy in the short time that she has been with us," said Executive Director Vicki Kauffman. "Her previous professional experience and her systematic approach to problems and projects alike have worked well to solve the issues unique to a land trust. As Owl Creek grows and takes on more liability, we need more shoulders to the wheel. Emiley has moved effortlessly into her role."

"I appreciate the Conservancy's mission and what they're doing for rural areas and farmland," Emiley said. "I look forward to learning more about Knox County."



### BETH WALLER

Beth is a naturalist and a farm laborer on a local vegetable farm. She is easily distracted by birds, butterflies, native wildflowers and trees. She helped discover a rare plant in Knox County, *Phacelia dubia* (Small-flowered

Scorpionweed), only the second recording for the state.

Because land conservation is very important to her, she is a member of several land trusts. She and her husband, Jay Dorsey, have a conservation easement on their cattle farm through OCC's sister organization, Philander Chase Conservancy.

### MICHAEL O'NEILL

Michael received a BS in Math Education from OSU in 1981 and started his professional career teaching high school math and coaching wrestling in Columbus. In 1988 he completed an MA in Math with applied areas of actuarial science and education from OSU, after having joined Mercer Consulting to learn about pension actuarial analysis.



At Nationwide, he managed retirement plan investment sales, and then commercial banking operations as a VP at Huntington National Bank. He also went on to work as an Investment Advisor Representative with Great American Advisors and Lincoln Investments.

In conjunction with his professional financial activities Michael also continued to cultivate his public service interests. He was the President of the Delaware County Friends of the Trail where he successfully negotiated the purchasing and opening of the Galena Brick Trail. He was nominated for The Iron Eyes Cody Award through Keep America Beautiful for his efforts. He became a certified tree farmer in 2010 after having begun reforestation efforts at Bald Eagle Pass Tree Farm in the 90s. He has been a Master Gardner Volunteer with OSU since 2017. In 2022 Michael was awarded the Ohio Tree Farmer of the Year through the American Forest Foundation.



## Treasurer's Analysis of 2022 Results

Annual Meeting - June 25<sup>th</sup>, 2023

Owl Creek Conservancy received gifts and contributions for fiscal year 2022, totaling \$425,456.

Fixed expenses were up for 2022, due to increased number of easement acquisitions and the addition of a full time Director and expenses associated with that.

The investment markets for 2022, were not kind as Owl Creek Conservancy experienced unrealized losses on the portfolio of funds of \$378,602. And, with the planned addition of a full time Director, distributions were taken from the funds that totaled \$66,350. So, with all of these forces in play, the market value of those funds was down for the year \$48,743.

There are now 5,141.328 acres conserved via 44 easements and reserves in the Stewardship Fund are \$324,749 or \$63.16 / acre or \$7,381 / easement.

The 2023 Budget accounts for the addition of a part-time Consultant and the anticipation of several new conservation easements. Over the last twelve months there have been three additional easements and a fourth is approaching a closing. With this increased activity, additional distributions have been budgeted from the four investment funds.

Year-to-date 2023, the market has been more favorable to us and the unrealized gains in the four funds have totaled \$100,808. Additional steps have been taken to diversify our investment risk and \$100,000 has been transferred into Certificates of Deposit in efforts to capitalize on the current short-term market conditions and still maintain liquidity. Year-to-date the gains on those Certificates of Deposit amount to \$2,813.

### Board of Trustees, 2023-2024

Kim Davidson .....2023-2026 - President  
Carol Detmer.....2022-2025  
Harry Itagaki 2022-2025 - Vice President  
Mike O'Neill .....2023-2026  
Mark Phelan .....2022-2025  
Greg Spaid .....2022-2025  
Marcie Steen .....2022-2025  
Todd Vermilya.....2022-2025 - Treasurer  
Kyle Walls .....2023-2026 - Secretary  
Beth Waller.....2023-2026  
Jeff Wells.....2023-2026  
Vice President for Land Protection

#### Advisors

Guy Denny, Doug Givens,  
Howard Gratz, Ray Heithaus,  
Mark Leonard, Sally Nelson, Gordy Yance

#### Executive Director

Vicki Kauffman

#### Consultant

Emiley Body



### Special Thank You & Recognition

- + Richard Barker, *volunteer*
- + Amanda Bennett, *Ohio Department of Agriculture*
- + Rob Clendening,  
*Knox Soil and Water Conservation District*
- + John Dowalter, *Knox Consulting, LLC*
- + Doug Gifford, *Natural Resources Conservation Services*
- + Morgan Giles, *Giles Law Group*
- + Emily Heithaus, *Mountainhaus Art and Design*
- + Amy Henriksen and the *Philander Chase Conservancy*
- + Noelle Jordan and Shane McGuire,  
*Brown Family Environmental Center*
- + Jeff Kauffman, *volunteer*
- + Stan and Donna Kavy,
- + Deercreek Appraisal & Management Company
- + Walt Kelling, *volunteer*
- + Knox County Auditor's Office
- + Knox County Foundation
- + Ed Meyers, *attorney*
- + Jen Odenweller and the *Ariel Foundation*
- + Darrel Severns, *Knox County Regional Planning*
- + Justin Smith, *Knox County Maps Department*
- + Lori Totman, *Knox County Park District*
- + Pat Wells, *volunteer*
- + YMCA of Mount Vernon



# Treasurer's Report June 2022—'23

	FYE 2021	FYE 2022	YTD MAY 2023
<b>Income</b>			
Membership Dues	32,572	37,801	6,425
Gifts / Contributions	1,119,705	366,051	6,375
Grants	-	59,405	-
Card Sales	188	372	20
Investment Income	359	841	3,336
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>1,152,824</b>	<b>464,470</b>	<b>16,156</b>
<b>Cost of Goods Sold</b>			
Cards	164	193	15
<b>Gross Profit</b>	<b>1,152,660</b>	<b>464,277</b>	<b>16,141</b>
<b>Expenses</b>			
Grants	500	-	-
Salaries & Wages	-	45,320	20,000
Employee Benefits	-	5,350	2,749
Payroll Taxes	-	4,056	-
Management	11,705	4,174	2,700
Accounting	1,820	4,700	4,290
Investment Management	13,888	19,761	5,091
Other	18	30	36
Advertising	1,287	747	759
Office	1,737	6,488	3,828
Occupancy	399	873	795
Insurance	2,486	5,458	3,533
Easement Acq	-	91,449	3,869
Monitoring	482	11,073	1,954
Education	1,169	6,984	707
Membership Dues	475	1,674	150
Fundraising	9,824	-	1,190
Misc.	83	2,066	97
	45,873	210,203	51,749
<b>Net Gain (Loss) for Period</b>	<b>1,106,787</b>	<b>254,074</b>	<b>(35,608)</b>

<b>Owl Creek Conservancy Funds / Knox County Foundation</b>			
	12/31/2021	12/31/2022	Increase / (Decrease)
Conservation Easement Acquisition Endowment Fund	157,740.36	266,167.23	108,426.87
Endowment Fund	1,620,690.90	1,582,440.41	(38,250.49)
Stewardship Fund	399,911.42	340,965.13	(58,946.29)
Memorial Endowment Fund	340,900.28	280,926.72	(59,973.56)
<b>Total Funds</b>	<b>\$ 2,519,242.96</b>	<b>\$ 2,470,499.49</b>	<b>\$ (48,743.47)</b>

Source of Gains:		
Investment Returns		(378,601.57)
Contributions		240,355.09
New Philanthropy Gift Matches		175,617.00
Subtotal		\$ 37,370.52
Expenses & Contributions:		
Administrative Expenses		19,760.98
Grants Awarded		66,350.00
Other Expenses		3.01
Subtotal		\$ 86,113.99
<b>Net Gain (Loss)</b>		<b>\$ (48,743.47)</b>





### Now What Happens?

So, after a long period of consideration, you enter your property in a Conservation Easement,(CE) with the Owl Creek Conservancy. Now what happens? Once a CE has been closed, the Owl Creek Conservancy continues to work on behalf of the Grantor (landowner). The Protected Property will be marked with various signage, normally put up around the boundaries, to inform the public that it is protected by a conservation easement and identifies it as "Private Property." The landowner continues to retain all rights and privileges of land ownership. The signs also provide contact information for the Conservancy. The Protected Property will then be added to our monitoring schedule.



ries between Agricultural Areas, Woodland Areas and Riparian Areas. Our biggest source of violations observed while monitoring is trespassing. Unauthorized access observed includes ATV trails, destruction of habitat, camping, littering, and hunting. Trespass camping represents a potentially dangerous situation as you don't know what kind of activity is involved. While we find many signs and posts each year damaged by falling trees, farming activities and other accidental causes, we find many others that have been damaged deliberately.

### OCC Monitoring Responsibilities

Each Protected Property is monitored at least once annually. We accomplish this by splitting the work into two time periods: spring monitoring and fall monitoring, taking into consideration the use of the property for farming, hunting, etc. Regarding farming use, we will work around spring planting and fall harvesting activities. Drive-by visual inspection may also be done as convenient. The formal annual monitoring requires at least two trustees to be present, and we physically inspect the property looking for compliance with what is recorded in the easement. Prior to a property visit, the easement, which reflects the Grantor's specific interests, is reviewed.

### What Are We Looking For?

We are looking for compliance with the terms of the conservation easement. For example, unauthorized cutting of trees, dumping of material, inadvertent encroachment by neighbors onto a Protected Property while clearing their own property (such as along fencerows), and unauthorized improvements such as buildings, driveways, trails, etc. would all be considered violations. We also look for respect/observance of the bounda-

### Trespasser Caught via Trail Camera



**Hunting Blind Built Without Permission**



**Structure Erected by Trespassers**



### **Trespass Violation: ATV Trail Damage in Riparian Area**

These ATV trails were found on a visit to a Protected Property during the 2022 fall monitoring. The trails led to and went through the Kokosing River which is designated as a State Scenic River. The trespassers cut trees to allow their ATVs to get through the woods. Beyond the damage caused by the trails, which can lead to serious erosion, destruction of habitat, deterioration of the banks, and potentially alter the stream flow, significant damage could occur to the riverbed, affecting aquatic life.



### **ATV's Caught on Camera**

In an attempt to identify the trespassers, a trail camera was mounted along the trails and two ATVs were observed traveling in the Riparian Area multiple times.

### **Trustees Erected Banners, Additional Signage**

To help resolve the trespassing issue, Owl Creek Trustees erected additional signage, trail ribbons and banners across the entry and exit points to alert the trespassers that their activity has been recognized. Note the severity of the ruts caused by the ATVs.



### **How it Looks Today**

By legal efforts initiated by the Grantor, and physical efforts by the Owl Creek Trustees and the Grantor, the ATV trespassing has discontinued, and the land is returning to its natural state.





*Grantors, I thank all of you for your dedication to Knox County, your patience as we worked through these lengthy processes, and for putting your trust in the Owl Creek Conservancy. Since this time last year, these partnerships have resulted in the protection of another 283 acres of Knox County's rural character. I am delighted to report that we have three new easements to tell you about since June of 2022...*

### **GALBRAITH**

Dan Galbraith closed his first conservation easement with the Conservancy in 2011 and has since closed six more. This map shows all our protected properties, with Dan's easements in orange and his newest easement in red. This new easement closed in December of 2022 and was named the Howard Milton Galbraith easement, in honor of his father. This is the first easement named in memory of someone, and we think it is an excellent way to honor a loved one.

The Howard Milton Galbraith easement is slightly over 135 acres and is located on Green Valley Road. This easement covers a 120-acre Agricultural Area that has 97% soils that are either prime or locally Important and are remarkable because of their fertility. There is a 12-acre Riparian Area that encloses or borders 2,600 feet of Granny Creek, which is a major tributary of the West Branch of the Kokosing State Scenic River. There is a reserved building area on the property that currently has a barn and other agricultural structures on it, but a house could be built within that area in the future.

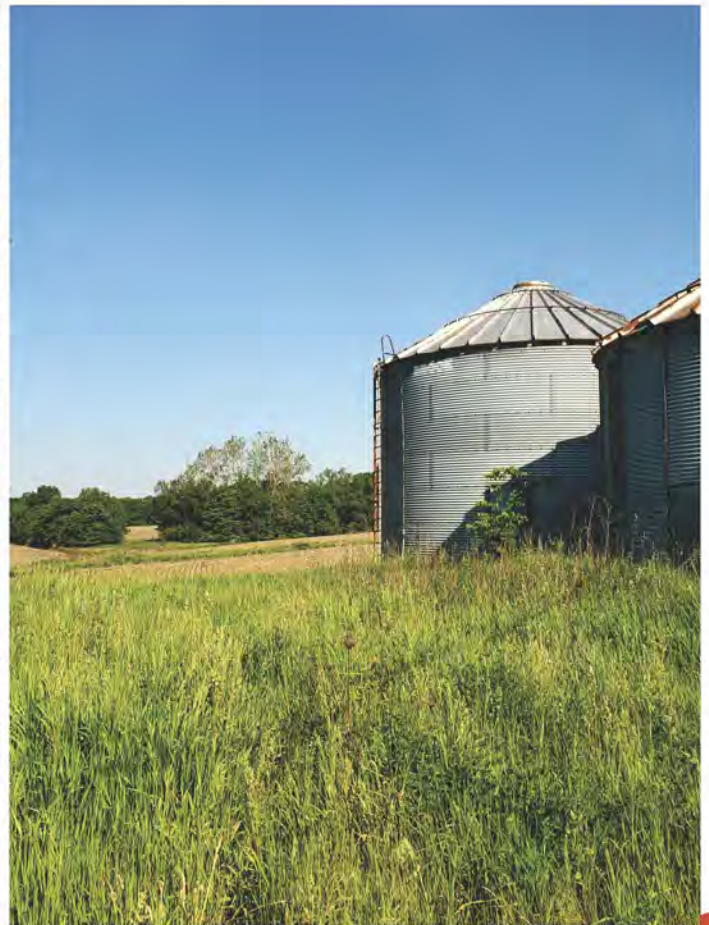
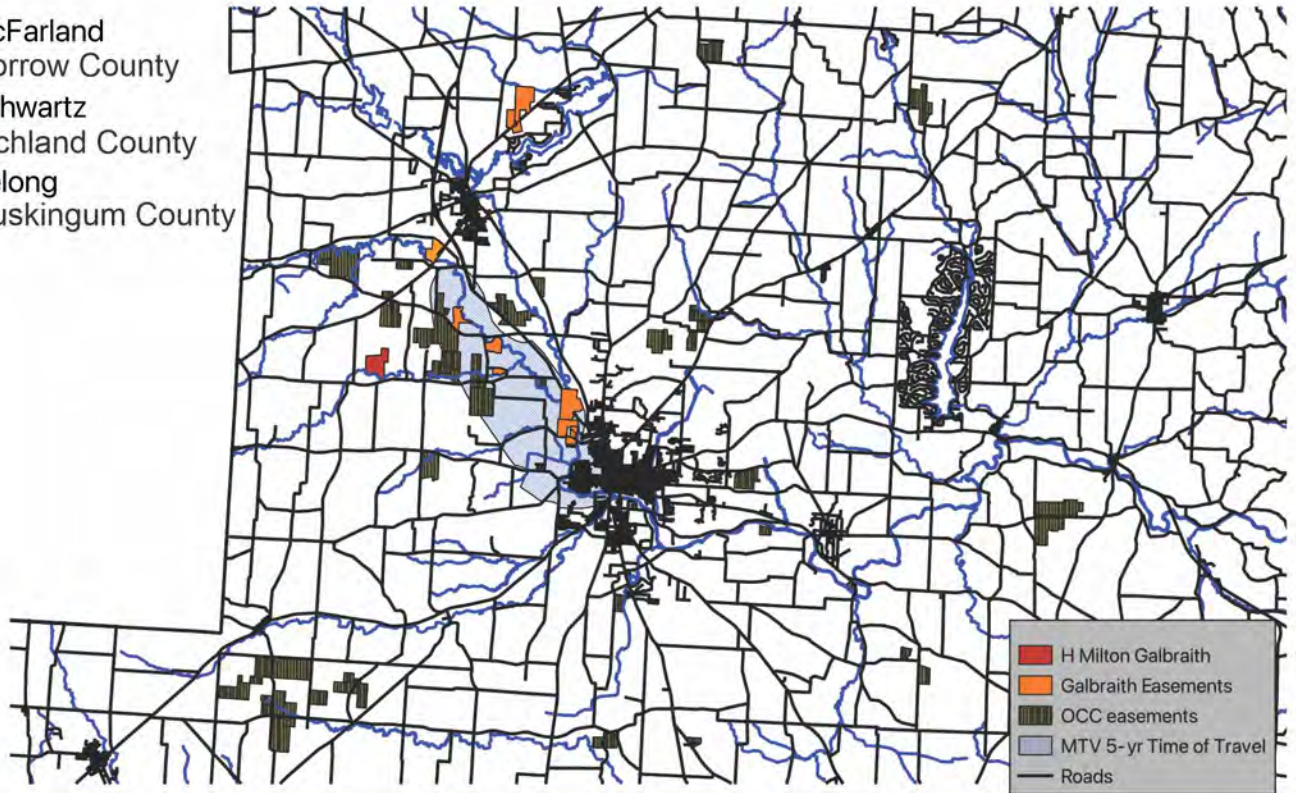
### **Howard Milton Galbraith Property (this page and next)**





## OCC Easement Locations

- McFarland  
Morrow County
- Schwartz  
Richland County
- Delong  
Muskingum County





## WATSON

Many of you know Ian and Charlotte Watson. They are long-standing supporters of the Conservancy, and Ian served as our treasurer for many years. Probably not as many years as it seemed to him, but many.

Ian's family has a long history with Knox County, which starts about 1810, and he and Charlotte live on Colville Road, which was named for Ian's family. Their Protected Property is next door to their home and is in four parcels, one of which is within the city limits. The neighboring parcel to the west, which overlooks the Kokosing Gap Trail parking lot, is where the very first pioneer in Knox County settled in 1801.

They fully donated an easement on 15.5 acres of beautiful woodland that is visible

from Mount Vernon Avenue and borders Lower Gambier Road. The property will be timbered in time, and is currently being cared for according to forestry best management practices which provide guidance on invasive plant management and promoting the overall health and value of the woodland.

About six acres of the Protected Property are gently rolling, and the rest is steeply sloped. In granting a conservation easement, the Watsons have protected over 1,000 feet of an unnamed tributary to Center Run which flows at the bottom of a ravine.

This property will remain a working woodland forever and contributes greatly to the scenic public view for the residents of Knox County and for those enjoying the Kokosing Gap Trail along Lower Gambier Road. *(cover photo)*



WATSON PROPERTY





**Curtis Bechtel**



**Bechtel Deed**



## BECHTEL

Curtis Bechtel was the 2022 applicant for the Ohio Department of Agriculture's Local Agricultural Easement Purchase Program (LAEPP), for which Owl Creek is a local sponsor. Curt's farm has gone through several iterations over the years, but he and his son Justin now run a beef operation.

The Bechtel Farm is located in Pike Township in northern Knox County and has a mostly rolling topography. It contains the headwaters of Little Schenck Creek, which is a major tributary of the Kokosing State Scenic River. Curt grows hay and grazes his

cattle on about 94 acres of his 132-acre property, and also has 31 acres of woodland.

The Bechtel Farm is truly historic. The family's original deed is written on sheepskin and is signed by President James Monroe. It is dated 1823, which makes this the bicentennial year for the Bechtel Farm.

Mr. Bechtel's nearly 4-year-old grandson, who is already planning his farming career, is the seventh generation of the family to live on the farm. Thanks to Curt's foresight, his beloved land will never be divided and will remain a farm for many generations of Bechtels to come.





**Howard Gratz,**  
*by Vicki Kauffman*

Howard taught biology and earth science at Loudonville High School and then spent 30 years at the Ohio Department of Natural

Resources, Division of Parks and Recreation, as a regional naturalist and planning section administrator. He was the regional naturalist at Malabar Farm State Park, with which most people are familiar. Howard is an avid birder, aka "bird nerd" and participates in wild bird research, including breeding bird surveys, point counts and Christmas bird counts with the U.S. Department of the Interior and the Audubon Society.

A resident of Knox County since 1980, Howard has always been interested in the conservation of farmlands, open spaces, waterways, wetlands and natural areas, which made him a perfect fit for the Conservancy. He became a board trustee in 2005 as a staunch supporter of the Conservancy and its mission. Starting in 2009, he often served as vice president.

Over the years, Howard provided invaluable assistance with monitoring which requires a deep familiarity with the many properties for which Owl Creek has responsibility, as well as a hard-core willingness to be outdoors in rain, snow, mud, deep waters, and high winds. While monitoring, Howard would put his bird identification skills to good use and catalog all the species of birds both seen and heard on Protected Properties and submit a report for the file, which is not only fun, but helpful to see which properties shelter threatened species in Knox County. Because of his influence, I now carry binoculars in my car so I can slam on the brakes and get a good look at whatever bird is in the neighborhood.

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to know Howard and to share in the good work of the Conservancy with him. Over the last six months I've tried repeatedly to bully him into staying on the board, but Howard can be stubborn. He's going to leave us. Howard, your friendly demeanor and ready smile, your admirable even temper, your high level of expertise in natural history, and your thoughtful wisdom will be sorely missed. Thank you for your service to the Conservancy.



**Citation for Ray Heithaus,**  
*by Greg Spaid*

Earl Raymond Heithaus – Ray to us – we would like to take this moment at the close of your last meeting as President of the Owl Creek Conservancy -- the

land trust you helped found and worked tirelessly to sustain -- to honor you.

We honor you for the principal role you played in this conservancy, as well as for many other initiatives you championed that made our community a healthier place in which to live, a place where the agricultural heritage of Knox County has a better chance to continue to future generations, where children -- and the rest of us -- have more places to be in nature and to learn from the natural world, a place where the beautiful Kokosing River will continue to run clean and clear into the future. Ray, you have created a legacy, and we are here to thank you for all you have done for our community.

You first arrived in Knox County in 1964 as a freshman at Kenyon College. After graduating at the top of your class, Magna cum Laude with the Highest Honors in Biology, you went on to Stanford University where you



conducted tropical ecology research in Costa Rica, then earned your Ph.D. in 1973. That rhymes, Ray, -- *Ph.D. in '73* -- and so does much of your life. Rhymes and harmonizes.

After Stanford you taught at Northwestern University before returning to Knox County in 1980 to join the Biology Department at Kenyon College, where your exceptional talents were formally recognized when, in 1995, you were awarded the Philip and Sheila Jordan Professorship in Environmental Studies and Biology. At Kenyon you dedicated yourself to teaching and research, while also applying your knowledge, collaborative spirit, and leadership talents to preserving and protecting the natural environment of Knox County.

Here are a few examples: You worked on our county's Land Use Task Force in 1996; you were a founder of the Brown Family Environmental Center in 1997; you worked to secure the designation of Ohio's State Scenic River for the Kokosing in 1997; and in 2000, you were a founder of our own Owl Creek Conservancy

I'm sure you would be the first to say you did not do these things alone. Yes, you had help from others, including many of your friends in this room. And you were supported by your family. Your wife, Pat Heithaus, also a biologist, teacher and naturalist, worked at

your side on many of these endeavors. And -- perhaps to prove your life does rhyme and harmonize -- your two sons, Mike and Dave, have built their own careers around a devotion to the natural world similar to yours and Pat's. Mike as an ecologist and filmmaker at Florida International University. Dave as the Director of Green Initiatives at Kenyon College. Celebrating, studying and preserving the natural world is a family affair.

To close, here are some of the words of gratitude and praise your friends and colleagues have offered to describe you:

*"Ray brought people together . . ."*

*" . . . inexhaustible creativity and clear vision . . ."*

*" . . . his easy-going manner as well as his always positive attitude . . ."*

*"His work at the BFEC and the OCC has been invaluable . . ."*

*"Ray has been a rock in tough times, he's a wise and patient teacher and just plain, good company."*

*" . . . he always found a way to get it done! "*

*"He . . . ensured a legacy of young people growing up knowing, loving and caring for our nature, perhaps the most important gift of all."*

And finally: **"Hats off to Ray!"**

## THE CONSERVANCY GETS A NEW LOGO

Early settlers to Knox County called the Kokosing River "Owl Creek" which is why our organization and others in and around Mount Vernon carry the name. Our original logo was taken from currency used in the area long ago. Although interesting and locally historic, the logo was not serving us well. Many people unfamiliar with us and what we do as a land trust made the assumption, based on our name and our logo, that Owl Creek Conservancy is a bird sanctuary or possibly an animal rehabilitation center. Clearly, we were inadvertently projecting the wrong message. A local talent search brought us in

contact with *Mountainhaus Art and Design* who produced the final product you see here.



The new logo is eye-catching. It draws you in and tells a story. The rays of the sun in the background are both a positive message and a nod to Ohio's state seal. We think it does a striking job of making a great first impression, and we hope you do, too.