June, 2023
Volume 6 Issue 13

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Wild Ones Oak Openings Region Chapter

Wild Ones
NATIVE PLANTS, NATURAL LANDSCAPES
OAK OPENINGS REGION


photo by Diane DeYonker

A Frogtastic Night

Tuesday, June 13th

7:30 - 9:00 pm , Sylvan Prairie Park, 8601 Brint Rd, Sylvania, OH 43560

Hop on over to Sylvan Prairie Park to learn fascinating frog facts and how to recognize frogs and toads based on their calls. Discover why frogs are so vital to our ecosystems and how you can protect them at home with the Green Ribbon Initiative Partnership Specialist during our twilight stroll. Meet in the second parking lot (past the playground). Attendees should plan to walk 1.5 miles on a path. Closed -toe shoes and long pants are recommended.

President's Column

by Kate Mason-Wolf

Last year I wrote about May being the busiest month and this year was no different. Between the Biggest Week in American Birding hosted by Black Swamp Bird Observatory and Green Ribbon Initiative's Blue Week, the first two weeks of May are packed with activities.

Along with the many great opportunities planned by GRI, Blue Week 2023 brought a wonderful Wild Ones/GRI presentation by Chris Helzer, The Prairie Ecologist. His talk on the importance of maintaining diversity in prairie restoration efforts and how to share your stories about nature with those who may be uninterested or even fearful of the natural world was

inspiring and informative. If you missed the presentation or would like to see it again, you can find it on our YouTube channel. We tried a new presentation format where our speaker and some of our audience was virtual, but we also had an in-person audience at Secor Metropark and after the talk we went on a walk at Secor led by a Metroparks Toledo naturalist. It took a little extra planning, but everything went smoothly and I know our members appreciate the flexibility offered by a hybrid presentation.

As always, Blue Week ends with the Blue Week Native plant sale, which was once again a huge success. We had an amazing selection of plants this year

Customer choosing plants for his specific growing conditions
(photo by Diane DeYonker)

provided by Toledo Metroparks, Greening UT Through Service Learning (GUTS), The 577 Foundation, The Wild Lupine, and Bradford Blooms and Bees. All of our growers are so wonderful to work with and their plants all looked amazing.

The sale was held at the historic barn at Blue Creek Metropark and it was once again packed with volunteers and customers, especially on Saturday when we opened to the public. It can feel a little hectic with that first rush of customers, but all of our volunteers are cheerful and helpful no matter how big the crowds get. This year we added presale hours for Wild Ones members which everyone seemed to appreciate; and we even got some new Wild Ones members.

I'd like to thank my fellow 2023 native plant sale committee members, Jess Wilbarger, Bennett Dowling, Brittani Furlong, and Helen Michaels for their help in planning and organizing. Thank-you to all of the wonderful volunteers; without you, the plant sale would definitely not happen. And thanks also to Kerri Whiteman and Penny Niday of Metroparks Toledo along with the wonderful seed nursery staff for their assistance with plant tags, species signs, setup, and last minute details. It truly is a group effort.

We had another record-breaking sale this year, with nearly 600 customers and about 5,500 plants sold. This is almost 200 more customers and over 2,000 more plants than we sold last year. The interest in native plants grows year after year and I'm so thankful we are able to provide such a great source for the community.

We have a couple of great in-person, outdoor programs coming up in June and July. A frog walk led by Brittani Furlong on June 13 and a tour of the University of Toledo gardens on July 11. You can find details on these two programs on our website and in the sidebar of the newsletter.

Saturday, June 10, 2023

Stewardship Event

10:00 am - 1:00 pm, Petersburg, Michigan

Please join us for our June stewardship event at Chris Link's property. Chris is a Wild Ones board member and also helped to grow many of the native plants at our plant sale. We'll be removing invasive woody shrubs and trees. Please feel free to bring a pair of your favorite loppers or hand saws.

The address will be provided when you RSVP at the following link: **https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0E4CAAA82BAAFBCF8-chris**

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Tuesday, July 11, 2023

Campus Garden Tour - University of Toledo

7:00 pm = University of Toledo Campus

Details coming soon.

Farmland to Marsh: Restored Wetlands Cropping up in Northwest Ohio

by Kevin Grieser, CERP

Great Lakes Bioregion Team Leader & Senior Landscape Ecologist
Biohabitats
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One could say that the groundwork for Ohio's legendary agricultural history began 12,000 years ago, when glaciers retreating out of the Lake Erie basin left behind rich, fertile soil. By 800 BCE, Indigenous peoples were domesticating native crops like sunflower, tobacco, and squash in that soil. Several hundred years later, in the late 1700s, early pioneers hungry for farmable land in the Northwest Territory found plenty in what ultimately became Ohio. By the mid-1800s, with the ditching and draining of the Great Black Swamp, the amount of agriculturally viable land in Western Ohio and eastern Indiana expanded by nearly 1,500 square miles, and farmers moved right in.

To this day, agriculture remains an integral component of the culture and economy of Western Ohio, occupying a large percentage of the region's land and employing tens of thousands—if not more—of its residents. It remains a major contributor to the American breadbasket. But when it comes to water quality, Western Ohio's agricultural contributions have not been so positive, as excess nutrients from fertilizer and animal manure frequently runoff into waterways that flow into streams and rivers that ultimately feed the western basin of Lake Erie.

The most glaring evidence of this appeared in the summer of 2014, when phosphorous from fertilized farms and cattle feedlots flowed into Lake Erie and caused a toxic algal bloom that contaminated drinking water for more than 400,000 people. This was by no means the first toxic algal bloom in the western basin of Lake Erie. In fact, they have been common since the 1990s (to the tune of $82 million in economic losses each year from the impact on regional fishing and tourism, according to NOAA). The 2014 toxic bloom was severe enough, however, to prompt then Governor John Kasich to declare a state of emergency. But as devastating a moment this was for the watershed, it turned out to be a watershed moment for generating action toward improving water quality in the region.

Momentum generated by the 2014 incident ultimately propelled the state of Ohio to take bold action. In 2019, Governor Mike Dewine launched a program called "H2Ohio," a comprehensive, data-driven water quality plan to reduce harmful algal blooms, improve wastewater infrastructure, and address lead contamination. To date, this collaboration involving Ohio's Departments of Natural Resources (ODNR), Agriculture, and Environmental Protection, has directed more than $100 million toward strategies to achieve these goals. One such strategy is the conversion of marginal, riverside farmlands into functioning wetlands.

In a natural river landscape, there is floodplain beyond the riverbanks, where water can thread through side channels or overflow during heavy rains. That water then slowly flows and percolates through the landscape, nourishing plants and helping to create diverse wetland habitat. Plants, soil, and microorganisms naturally filter the water along the way. H2Ohio's strategy to transform former cropland into wetlands helps slow down, hold, and naturally filter runoff before it has a chance to flow into and pollute waterways.

It is a strategy that not only improves water quality, but in some cases, locally addresses global issues like biodiversity loss, climate resilience, and

Large wetland pools separated by seepage berms along the Sandusky River at Redhorse Bend Preserve.
©David Ike Photography

environmental justice. Restoring natural wetland systems that once existed along the region's rivers is bringing diverse, native vegetation back to the landscape and providing habitat for birds, fish, amphibians, reptiles, and mammals. It is often creating new ways for people to access and experience the rivers of Western Ohio, offering them a glimpse of what the land may have looked like before settlement and providing new opportunities to learn and play, and enjoy nature.

It is a strategy that is working in the Western Lake Erie Basin. I know this because over the last three years, I had the honor of working with communities, state and municipal agencies, and nonprofit organizations to implement several H2Ohio-funded transformations in the region.

While many landscape ecologists choose to pursue a career in research, I chose to apply my knowledge to protect and restore degraded ecosystems. For the past several years, I've been leading the Great Lakes Bioregion office of the ecological design and construction firm, Biohabitats, in doing just that. Ecological restoration is rarely an instant gratification kind of thing. Most often, it is a process that changes a trajectory of degradation and sets the stage for nature to take over and regenerate itself over many years. But the H2Ohio restoration work has been both instantly gratifying and increasingly rewarding over time as I visit project sites season after season and enjoy nature's ongoing embellishments.

My first opportunity to work on an H2Ohio-funded project was a collaboration with the Black Swamp Conservancy (BSC), a land trust dedicated to preserving and protecting natural habitats and family farms in northwest Ohio. In the spring of 2020, we transformed 54 acres of frequently flooded farmland along the Sandusky River into Redhorse Bend Preserve, a functioning floodplain that enhances habitat, water quality, and river access. Biohabitats

Redhorse: Standing snags provide habitat at Redhorse Bend Nature Preserve
©David Ike Photography

implemented this project, and eleven of the twenty-one H2Ohio projects with which we've been involved, in a design-build capacity, which is an ideal way to execute ecological restoration. It not only expedites the project by eliminating the construction procurement process; it also helps ensure that the contractor truly understands how to build these unique systems. The contractor's knowledge is integrated into the design process and vice versa, which helps avoid mistakes, delays, and change orders.

In 2021, we teamed with BSC again in Napoleon, Ohio, where we converted seasonally flooded farmland along the Maumee River into a 57-acre landscape of forest and floodplain wetlands that slow down and naturally filter excess sediment and nutrients from polluted stormwater while providing habitat for species like the pirate perch, one of the rarest fish in Ohio. Our most recent collaboration with BSC is happening less than a half hour from Toledo, where public drinking water was contaminated by the 2014 toxic algal bloom in Lake Erie. Sixteen acres of former agricultural land along Tontogany Creek, a tributary to the Maumee, is being transformed into a living laboratory where public school students will have new opportunities to learn about and enjoy native wetland ecology. 7th graders from the Otsego School District even helped us develop the restoration design, create interpretive signage to educate students and visitors about the importance of wetlands, and plant over 700 native trees and shrubs.

Otsego School District students share their ideas for the restoration site during a design charrette at the school.
© Otsego School District

In 2021, we partnered with the Village of Ottawa, Maumee Watershed Conservancy District on a project along a degraded reach of the Blanchard River. The river channel had been so altered to support agriculture over the last century that it had become choked with silt, excess nutrients, and ammonia, and depleted of the oxygen it needed to support aquatic life. With funding from H2Ohio, we transformed 74 acres of former

cropland along the degraded reach into a mosaic of seasonally inundated floodplain wetlands, forested riparian habitat, and native prairie. In addition to storing and naturally treating runoff, the restored landscape reconnected with the channel with its floodplain and helped return ecological function and natural flow to the river.

A little over five river miles downstream from the restoration in the Village of Ottawa, owners of land along the Blanchard that had been used for agriculture for decades were looking for a solution to address to address the property's degradation and return it to a more natural state. In addition to erosion and lost ecological function, the site had drain tiles buried beneath much of its surface. In what became the first H2Ohio project to be implemented on private lands, we helped the landowners daylight the tiled drainageway into a new emergent wetland and transform the degraded land into an eight-acre wetland-forest complex. ODNR also helped them protect the restored landscape in perpetuity by establishing it as a permanent conservation easement.

How, exactly, do these transformations happen? How did these communities and nonprofits tap into H2Ohio dollars and bring these projects to life?

A learning lab overlooking the Blanchard River is integrated into an ecological restoration project in the Village of Ottawa.
© Biohabitats

The first step is to identify a viable site. For a conservation or stewardship organization, this may be a recently acquired parcel of former cropland near a stream. For a private landowner, it might be a portion of their property that borders a river and suffers from seasonal flooding. To determine if ecosystem function can be restored to the site - specifically the functions of slowing down, retaining, and naturally filtering water - an assessment should be conducted to examine the site's hydrology, soils, and FEMA mapping. It is also important to know if there are things like drain tiles, utilities, or cultural resources present at the site, or if there is any existing habitat for species that may be of specific concern to a federal,

Diverse, native vegetation at Redhorse Bend Nature Preserve.
©David Ike Photography

state, or municipal agency. Speaking of species, it is also worth checking to see if there are any invasive plant and animal species on the landscape or any other factors that might impact the restoration approach or limit the ability to restore it.

Once we can confirm that ecological restoration is feasible, the next step is to develop a restoration concept and cost estimate and then apply for the grant.

Organizations hoping to implement the restoration can often handle the assessment, concept development, and grant application themselves, as they may have ecologists, engineers, and other experts on staff with deep, local knowledge. When that is not the case, organizations can turn to firms like Biohabitats for assistance.

Then comes the fun part: design.

Imagine if you had to design a community, but instead of brick, asphalt, steel, and concrete, your primary construction materials consisted of natural objects, many of them living, moving, and constantly evolving and interacting with one another. Now imagine that your community must be subject to the elements of nature, the actions of wildlife, and the whims and decisions of humans living nearby. If it sounds challenging, that's because it is. It requires technical knowledge in ecology, engineering, and landscape architecture, as well as creativity and adaptability. But it is incredibly rewarding.

Just as there are certain methods an architect may employ in designing a sustainable home, there are proven design techniques that we use in restoring floodplain wetlands. The specific technique or combination of techniques we use depends on the site, and they will always need to be customized to the specific conditions of the site. All of these techniques are nature-based, meaning they are inspired by

Membership

as of May 31

189

4/30/23 Bank Balance: $13,202

features and functions of natural floodplain wetlands.

- A common technique is to create wetland "pools." Excavated into the soil and ranging in size from as small as 0.1 acres to almost two acres, wetland pools can help store and filter stormwater while also providing habitat for waterfowl, aquatic insects, amphibians, and reptiles. They can also serve as wet stepping stones that can connect existing wetlands to each other and to nearby waterbodies.
- In between wetland pools, we often construct "seepage berms." These are low mounds, usually around 12 inches high, which help the site hold more water. They can be constructed with mulch, sand, soil that was excavated to create the wetland pools, or a combination of all of these materials.
- In a mature forest, we often see mounds and depressions that have been naturally created by fallen trees. When a large tree becomes uprooted and falls, a pit is created where the roots once were. As the tree trunk decomposes, it forms a mound. We refer to these lumps and bumps as "hummocks and hollows." Recreating a hummock and hollow landscape is a fantastic wetland restoration technique for sites that don't have hydric (wet) or frequently inundated soil. Hollows act like small, temporary wetlands which not only hold water, but also provide habitat for amphibians. As with seepage berms, humps can be created with soil that is excavated to create hollows.

Restored hummock and hollow topography along the Maumee River at Rotary Riverside Preserve
©David Ike Photography

Restored hummock and hollow topography along the Maumee River at Rotary Riverside Preserve
©David Ike Photography

- Native plants are critically important parts of almost any ecological restoration project, especially in areas that have become dominated by invasive species. By revegetating large, open areas like these former agricultural fields, we have had great success jumpstarting natural succession. We install scattered "pods" densely planted with woody trees and shrubs. Each pod is like a dense, vegetated island. As the pods attract wildlife (and believe me…they do!) seeds begin to get dispersed throughout the site. Over time, the space between the pods fills in naturally with native vegetation.
- A fantastic natural material can often be found right on site: large pieces of wood. "Large woody debris" can be used in many ways and serve many functions with rippling positive effects. A dead, but rooted tree can serve as a standing snag that provides perching habitat for raptors. Raptors keep rodent populations in check, which in turn helps protect newly establishing vegetation. The bottom portion of downed trees can be used as "root wads" that can help stabilize soil and add habitat diversity to restored streams and wetlands. Along with brush piles and large pieces of wood, they can also be submerged in water to help control flow and add habitat for fish and other aquatic life. Wood can even be used to protect other wood. We often install posts of white pine-a favorite wood among mating bucks eager to rub their antlers–to draw the bucks away from newly establishing native vegetation during the rut.
- Regardless of which techniques we use when we are restoring floodplain wetlands, we do everything we can to minimize our own impact on the landscape. In addition to using materials we

Wetland pools at Redhorse Bend Nature Preserve attract wildlife… and wildlife enthusiasts.
©David Ike Photography

find on site, we also work collaboratively with project partners to identify any local sources of large woody debris and mulch could be utilized in the project to not only provide cost savings, but to add more habitat.

In only three years, H2Ohio-funded projects have restored nearly 15,000 acres of wetlands, and these wetlands are already at work filtering more than 110,000 acres of watershed. In addition to the restored wetlands, H2Ohio has led to the voluntary enrollment of nearly 35% of West Lake Erie Basin cropland in best management practices to reduce harmful runoff.

Agriculture is deeply and literally woven into the landscape and culture of Northwest Ohio, and with its latest crop of H2Ohio-funded restored floodplain wetlands, it is changing the trajectory of its legacy on the region's land and water.

Just imagine if every state in the Great Lakes Basin–or in any part of the world where agricultural practices threaten and degrade water–had programs like H2Ohio. If everyone could see what I am seeing through my work on H2Ohio projects: the beauty, function, and promise of restored ecosystems for protecting life-sustaining resources and enriching the lives of people and wildlife, perhaps we will no longer need states of emergencies to inspire us to create more.

Materials found on site are repurposed to create a campsite at Rotary Riverside Preserve in Napoleon, OH.
©David Ike Photography

Native Plant of the Month: **Sawtooth Sunflower (*Helianthus grosseserratus*)**

by Olivia Onago, owner Liv's Native Nursery

Photo by Olivia Onago

Hearing the soft buzz of bumblebees and watching the swift flight of butterflies is the joy of many gardeners throughout the summer, finding peace and a sense of accomplishment in the many resources our gardens supply local wildlife. This sentiment bears even more weight when native plants are used, providing nectar, seeds, and shelter in excess for a variety of native insects, birds, and mammals.

One such native plant species that is known to become a hotspot for our beloved wildlife is the Sawtooth Sunflower. As with most flowering plants, the Sawtooth Sunflower plays an important role in supporting

various insects and wildlife. The bright yellow flowers produce nectar, attracting a wide range of pollinators, including bees, butterflies, and other insects. These pollinators feed on the nectar while inadvertently transferring pollen from one flower to another, enabling the sunflower to reproduce. Blooming from July to October, the Sawtooth Sunflower serves as a host plant for several species of insects. For example, the caterpillars of the Silvery Checkerspot butterfly (*Chlosyne nycteis*) feed on the leaves of this mighty plant. Further, insects such as beetles and bugs may utilize the native for feeding or shelter, alongside a wide variety of other insects who feed on the plant juices, foliage, pith of stems, and developing seeds.

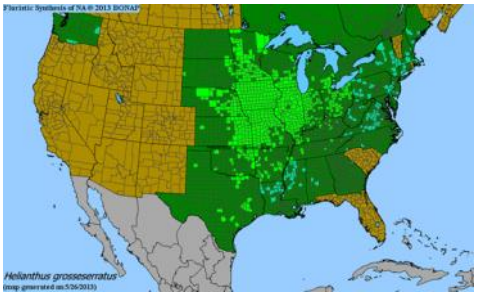
The Sawtooth Sunflower is known for its tall stature, reaching heights of 3 to 8 feet during its peak season, and it gets its name from the distinctive serrated or saw-like edges of its leaves. These leaves are generally lance-shaped or ovate, with a pointed tip and a narrow base. Reaching lengths of 3 to 7 inches, the long leaves are paired opposite to each other. The Sawtooth's 4 1/2" flower heads can be found at the end of branching stems near the top of the plant, characterized with 10 to 20 sterile rays with fertile yellow disk florets. These disks form a head of dry seed, each with two somewhat bristly seeds at the top—these seeds are actually a favorite snack of goldfinches!

Sawtooth Sunflower stands tall (courtesy Prairiemoon.com)

Lance-shaped leaves of Sawtooth Sunflower
(photo courtesy Wildflower.org R. W Smith)

Sawtooth Sunflowers can grow in various soil types, including sandy, loamy, or clay soils (which is beneficial if you live in tough clay like me!). While this native plant can tolerate drought conditions, they really prefer consistently moist soil that is well-drained—excessive moisture or waterlogging can lead to root rot. Further, these sunflowers thrive in full sun (hence their name), preferring six to eight hours of direct sunlight per day in order for optimal growth and flowering to occur.

Overall, if you're looking for a showstopper that will not only highlight your garden, but will also provide for countless wildlife species, the Sawtooth Sunflower is a great choice. Give it plenty of room since it commonly grows in large clonal colonies coming from rhizomes of a single plant. You can take in the absolutely breathtaking beauty of the towering native, all while attracting bees and butterflies to your yard, and keeping the deer away. Even after the sunflower's blooming period is over, the thick, tall stems make a great over-wintering spot for a variety of insects.



Range map of Sawtooth Sunflower
(courtesy Minnesotawildflowers.info)

Native Landscape Awards

It's that time again! After a break for a couple of years, we are bringing back the Native Landscape Awards. If you are a Wild Ones member, it is time to nominate your own native garden, or the native garden of an individual / residence, non-profit (such as a school), business or a public agency for a 2023 Wild Ones Oak Openings Region Native Landscape Award. Awards will be presented at the annual December potluck. The garden being nominated must be at least 2 years old. See the attached entry form for more criteria. Be sure to fill it out soon! Deadline for entry forms is July 15, 2023.

TIDBITS

- **New Members** - Make sure you register on the national website (www.WildOnes.org) for exclusive member content. Once registered you can join the national Facebook group, and will have access to the New Member Handbook, and other information exclusive for members.

- **Facebook** – While our Chapter Facebook page is open to the public, our Facebook group is only open to members. To access the group, you just have to be a Wild Ones member.

- **Reminder to Current Members:** If you have moved or changed your email address since you joined Wild Ones, please email to let us know your new address and we will forward to the national office

- **video about burning bush** puts a fun story-telling spin on invasive species education : https://youtube/Beauty is the Beast

Events of Interest

Saturday, June 10th

So Wild a Place - Black Swamp Conservancy

5:30 - 9:30 pm, Westside Montessori Campus, 7115 W Bancroft St, Toledo, OH 43615

Calling all early birds, nature lovers and party animals! Get your tickets now for the annual Black Swamp Conservancy celebration of conservation!

So Wild a Place is a fun backyard gathering of people who care about clean air and water, healthy soil, and family farms, and who like to eat and dance. Early bird tickets are available for $75 through June 1.

This year's party and fundraiser is June 10, 2023 at West Side Montessori in Toledo, starting at 5:30 pm. We're welcoming back our food friends from Fremont, Jimmy G's barbeque. They'll have lots of choices for a variety of diets, including vegan and vegetarian.

We always have great music, and this year we have Miss Tess: a Nashville-based singer and her 4-piece band. They bring the swing with a groove that nods to the traditions of saloon jazz, country swing, and early rockabilly while maintaining a unique sound.

While you're dancing and enjoying local beers and wines from the open bar, don't miss the live auction! Be ready to bid on items including exclusive excursions on Black Swamp Conservancy-protected properties, flying lessons, a suite at a Mud Hens game, a hand-crafted cedar herb planter, Toledo Metropark adventures, and many more unique items.

Get tickets: **https://events.humanitix.com/so-wild-a-place-b4h61eco**

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All articles should be submitted to
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Wild Ones: Native Plants, Natural Landscapes promotes environmentally sound landscaping practices to preserve biodiversity through the preservation, restoration and establishment of native plant communities. Wild Ones is a national not-for-profit environmental education and advocacy organization

Healing the Earth – One Yard at a Time