

ANNUAL REPORT 2022





We exist because...

Fresh water is a finite resource. We are working to protect it. The Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge Complex is located along the southern shore of Lake Erie, the 11th largest lake in the world. The Great Lakes contain about 20% of the world's fresh water but they are in jeopardy. The wetlands of Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge play a critical role in the Lake Erie ecosystem, acting as the kidneys of the landscape; working to protect NW Ohio's drinking water, work, and leisure. They also provide important nesting and stopover habitat for birds, fish and wildlife. Friends of Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge works to support Ohio's only national wildlife refuge complex through fundraising and volunteerism so that we can be the change that our wildlife and community deserve.

My name is Jeff Vogelpohl. I'm a machinist by trade but my passion is wildlife photography. I was born in Curtice, Ohio which is not far from Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge. I fell in love with photography at an early age. My first camera was a Polaroid Big Swinger. After high school I bought a Minolta SRT 201 35mm camera. I used it for sporting events, astrophotography, and wildlife. In around 2007 I enrolled in some photography classes at Owens Community College. I learned a lot about exposure, lighting, and processing film (which is fun) and I made my transition from film to digital.

When I was in my early teens my mom would take me and my siblings to Crane Creek to go swimming. We might see some muskrats, maybe a raccoon or opossum, but always lots of geese. This is where I would go sometimes to take photos. I never saw anything close to what is observed today.

Younger people today take it for granted that most of the animals around today were not always here. I never saw a bald eagle until I was 16. I was outside with my dad and we happened to see a pair flying overhead. I didn't see another one until the mid 1970s at what is now Maumee Bay State Park. Today, if you go to the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge, I can almost guarantee you will see a bald eagle. Deer were just starting to make an appearance in the area in the 1970s. I saw my first coyote in the early 1980s and I saw my first turkey in the early 2010s.

Today because of early and ongoing conservation efforts, I can go to Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge and see animals today that were not around in my youth. I've seen six types of owls, several types of heron, swans, egrets, ducks, pelicans and many types of songbirds. I've seen mink, coyotes, fox, beavers and my favorite, seemingly increasing in numbers: the river otters.

If you've never been to Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge, I encourage you to do so. Some people prefer the Wildlife Drive when it's open. I like the walking trails. Sometimes it's hot and buggy, sometimes it's rainy, sometimes it's very cold, but that's all part of the experience.

— Jeff Vogelpohl, 2022 Annual Report Cover Photographer



Letter from the President

As we come to the end of another incredible year at Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge, I want to personally thank all our members and donors. **Friends of Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge could not have accomplished all that we have without you.** Through the support of the Innovation Fund over the winter we were able to purchase a trailer that will be used by the refuge as a mobile education & contact station. I'm excited for this incredible purchase to help educate more people about all the wonders of Ottawa Refuge. We were also able to fulfill one of your wishes in the summer by purchasing an electric shuttle that we can drive on the

trails. This has opened doors for people to explore and experience Ottawa Refuge in new ways. With your support the Friends were also able to cover the cost of a shelter house that was built at the Nehls Memorial Nature Preserve on Catawba Island for all to enjoy.

You have helped us accomplish so much this year. Whether it was a few dollars tossed in the donation box on our counter or thousands of dollars out of your brokerage account, everything helped to make Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge more inclusive. Your support has not gone unnoticed.

It has been a privilege to be the board president this year especially for a group that supports a place that I hold close to my heart. I grew up with the refuge literally right in my backyard, interned here during college and just celebrated 10 years of volunteer work at the refuge this year. I have gained a lot of experiences, sharpened skills and have learned a lot about myself while working with this very driven and hard-working group of individuals.

Thank you for helping us create a great year for Ottawa Refuge. I look forward to seeing what we can accomplish with you in 2023.



Kendra Foust

2022 Friends Board President

2022 BOARD MEMBERS

Kendra Foust, *President*
Carol Fingerhut, *Vice President*
Tom Romito, *Secretary*
Michael House, *Treasurer*
Melanie Bowen-Greenwald
Shirley Haar
Mary Willoughby
Kris Johnston
Jim Krieger
Michael House
Justin Woldt
Ron Overmyer
Tajinder Singh
Carolyn McClintock
Jan McDermott

FRIENDS STAFF

Aimee Arent, *Executive Director*
Julia Hince, *Nature Store Manager*



From the Manager's Desk



A Conservation Legacy

"Here is your country. Cherish these natural wonders, cherish the natural resources, cherish the history and romance as a sacred heritage, for your children and your children's children. Do not let selfish men or greedy interests skin your country of its beauty, its riches or its romance."

~ Theodore Roosevelt

The 1800s saw many species of birds hunted to the brink of extinction for no other purpose than for the appeal of adorning one's hat and clothes with decorative bird feathers. President Theodore Roosevelt heard the calls of scientists, conservation groups, and concerned citizens and used his presidential powers on March 14th, 1903 to protect Pelican Island on the Florida coast. His actions created the first national wildlife refuge. 120 years later, the National Wildlife Refuge System has grown to more than 568 refuges, 38 wetland management districts, and 5 marine national monuments protecting 855 million acres of land and water.



Bob Clark

Wildlife conservation is the overall purpose of the national wildlife refuge system. The national wildlife refuge system is a national network of lands and water intended for conservation, protection and management of species and habitats while also providing a recreational conduit by which people can connect and appreciate our natural heritage. Public uses such as wildlife observation, hunting, fishing, environmental education, and interpretation programs create a host of outdoor experiences for visitors. The National Wildlife Refuge System hosts more than 67 million visits annually illustrating that refuges benefit people and the communities they serve.

Photo: Morning by Jeff Voogelpohl



Jason P. Lewis

Refuge Manager

Today, Ottawa Refuge staff are emboldened by the conservation legacy of Theodore Roosevelt to protect land, water, and species for future generations. As Ohio's only national wildlife refuge, we are inspired to build on the foundation laid by President Roosevelt over a century ago. The synergy between Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge and our conservation partners amplified our successes in 2022 and helped to build on our collective conservation legacy and fulfill our promise to the American people.

As I reflect on 2022, I am humbled by what we were able to accomplish working together with our partners. It is hard to pick one accomplishment from 2022 that I can say unequivocally was the highlight of the year. How does one compare the conservation value of growing the refuge to developing public recreation opportunities to securing additional habitat restoration funding? The layers of our conservation work overlap and are so intertwined; success in one area nourishes success in other programmatic areas. There is synergy in our successes. The agency mission is like a vascular system that connects to all the vital organs that keep our conservation programs connected, alive and thriving.

I guess if I had to pick, I would have to say growing the core conservation footprint of the refuge; adding lands to the refuge complex was the highlight for me. Over the years our land protection program has brought me the most excitement and human energy. Without the land, we cannot provide healthy ecosystems, wildlife habitats or blissful walks among nature for our visitors. At the end of the day when I am driving home in deep self-reflection, I am grateful to have played a part in protecting more land for future generations, restoring fields of wildflowers for dwindling pollinators, planting shrubs and trees providing habitat for birds and other wildlife, and restoring wetlands for the benefits of water quality, fish, wildlife and people.

I think Teddy Roosevelt would be proud that we have continued to “cherish our natural heritage for our children and our children’s children”. In the end, we are all only borrowing the land. While we live, we can decide to either exploit nature for our own interests or leave behind a legacy, a foundation, that will make life a little better for those who inherit it.

The refuge saw important conservation success and several sad departures in 2022. The refuge added an additional 323.4 acres, protecting habitats for fish and wildlife and helping to restore the health of Lake Erie. The Fox Unit project resulted in the completion of a 1400’ accessible hiking trail that was made possible by the Friends of Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge and our community through donations and grants. The refuge also received more than \$1 million dollars in Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) grants that will be used over the next several years to restore and enhance ecosystem services benefiting water quality, wildlife, and people.

We added a familiar face to our conservation team hiring Courtney Lopez in October, but we also saw the departure of Wildlife Officer Clayton Hamilton, seasonal Biological Technician Alex Cherpes and Administrative Assistant Scott Bryant. The refuge welcomed back the Biggest Week in American Birding which contributed to the 355,172 visits we saw in 2022.

I want to thank you for all your support of the refuge in 2022. Together, we are all greater than the sum of our individual parts. The hope of our shared conservation legacy is knowing we were not the first and, equally important, we will not be the last to champion the legacy of Teddy Roosevelt.



REFUGE STAFF

Jason Lewis, *Refuge Manager*
Karl Fleming, *Assistant Refuge Manager*
Ron Huffman, *Refuge Biologist*
Jeff Finn, *Private Lands Biologist*
Rebecca Lewis, *Visitor Services Specialist*
Clayton Hamilton, *Federal Wildlife Officer*
(through July)
Scott Bryant, *Administrative Assistant*
(through November)
Chuck Shier, *Maintenance Mechanic*
Alex Baginski, *Maintenance Mechanic*
(starting in June)
Ramsay Houze, *Maintenance Worker*
Brandon Giesler, *Maintenance Worker*
Keith (Troy) Atkinson, *Maintenance Worker*
Keith Findlay, *Maintenance Worker*
Kenneth Millerschone, *Maintenance Worker*
Alex Cherpes, *Biological Technician*
(through June)
Courtney Lopez, *Wildlife Refuge Specialist*
(starting in October)
Buck Buchanan, *Laborer*



Tony Everhardt

Your National Wildlife Refuge



The Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge Complex consists of three National Wildlife Refuges:

Ottawa NWR:

Located between Toledo and Port Clinton, this 8,266 acre refuge is managed for waterfowl, shorebirds, neo-tropical migrant songbirds, and a variety of plant and animal species. The three story Visitor Center and hiking trails are located here. A number of satellite properties are also part of this refuge.

Cedar Point NWR:

Cedar Point NWR's 2,675 acres comprise the largest contiguous marsh on Lake Erie (US). Aside from a designated fishing and kayaking area, access is by guided tour or permit only.

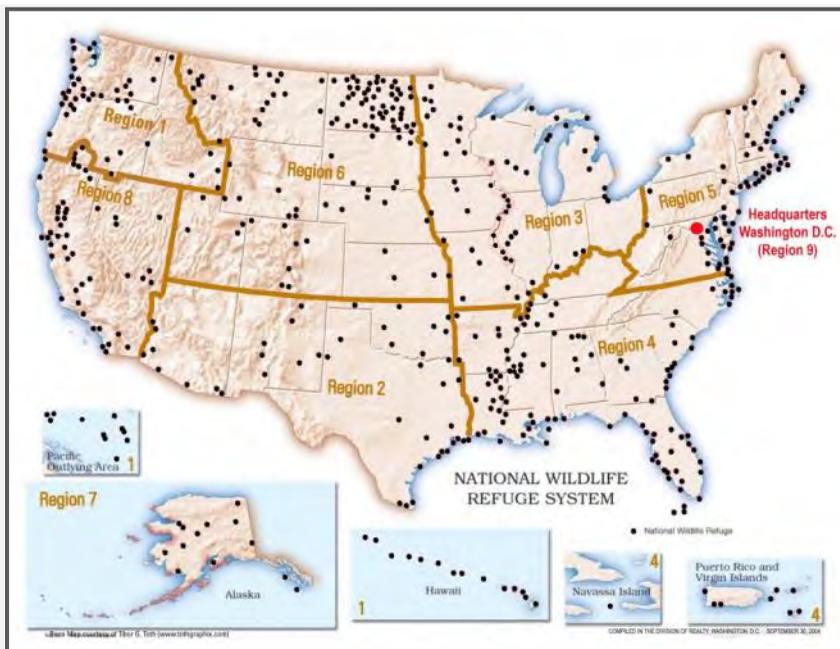
West Sister Island NWR:

This 82 acre island is situated in Lake Erie, about 9 miles from shore. It is the largest Great Blue Heron and Great Egret rookery in the U.S. Great Lakes. Access is by permit only.



Photo: Winter Refuge by Lori Morska

Part of a Larger System



Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge is part of a much larger National Wildlife Refuge System. Known as one of America's greatest conservation success stories, the system has protected and restored habitats for hundreds of species including fish, plants, animals, and migratory birds.

Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge is part of Region 3 of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. Also known as the Midwest Region, Region 3 encompasses eight states and four out of five U.S. Great Lakes.

For more information about the National Wildlife Refuge System, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and conservation priorities, visit www.fws.gov.

Carrying on a Legacy



Family's Gift Reflects Their Shared Appreciation of Nature and Honors Loved Ones

When the refuge was thinking about adding a mural to the landscape at the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge trailhead, Friends Executive Director Aimee Arent immediately thought of the Ferguson Family as a potential sponsor for the project. She knew several family members were into birding as well as visual arts, and when asked the family was pleased to offer their full support of the project in honor of the family members they have lost over the years, all of whom have had a connection to nature.

As children growing up, the younger Ferguson siblings explored the woods and creeks near their home. Gregg especially loved to study snakes and other living creatures, while Keith enjoyed fishing. As an adult in California, Gregg turned his scientific curiosity to mushrooms, learning which are edible and the best locations to find them. He honed his skills as a photographer to record his finds, always being respectful of the natural world. Although not formally educated, he was a leading expert in the Santa Cruz area and maintained a newsletter for enthusiasts.

Fishing had also been a past time of their oldest brother, Dan, who continued passing on that skill to the younger members of his family. He made many fishing trips to Canada with his sons as his father had done for him when he was a child. He took his sons, grandsons, and nephews on a yearly fishing trip to Pymatuning Reservoir.



The Ferguson Family, 1970. From left to right pictured are Paula Reich, Keith Ferguson, Mary Ferguson Reich, Letha Ferguson, Gregg Ferguson.

The oldest sibling, Linda, was not as devoted to fishing and camping, but she loved flowers and hummingbirds, a love passed on through the matriarch of the family, Mary. These four siblings, father, mother and step-father have all passed, sadly. But their surviving family members have a love for nature as well.

Surviving siblings, Marsha (Ferguson) Penner, Letha Ferguson, step-sister Connie Faddis, and half-sister Paula Reich, along with Linda's daughter Tammi Ventura are all avid birders and members of the Friends of Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge. They have been enjoying the refuge and surrounding natural places for more than a decade. Dan's oldest daughter Lydia Horvath is an art teacher and painted a mural image on an entrance of the Visitor Center. When Aimee asked Letha whether her family would be interested

in supporting a mural on the property, the family did not hesitate, and decided to honor Linda, Dan, Keith, Gregg and their parents through the project. After seeing local artist Chilly Rodriguez's vision for the murals, the family simply requested the following be added to the planned images: a bee on a thistle – the Ferguson Scottish crest (for Dan), a mushroom (for Gregg), and a fish jumping (for Keith). The sunflower already was perfect to represent Linda and Mary. And the birds, butterfly, Blanding's turtle and scenes of the marshes were what drew the family to the region in the first place.



"The mural represents nature, and it was our pleasure to take our whole family's love for nature and put that into our support of the beautiful project." — Letha Ferguson



Above: Photos of the nature inspired mural by artist Chilly Rodriguez on the trailhead restrooms | Jessica Duez

Below: Paula Reich enjoys the 8' monarch on the west wall.



Refuge Financials



Ottawa NWR received approximately \$1.2 million in Congressional budget allocations in fiscal year 2022, a 27% decrease over the previous year.

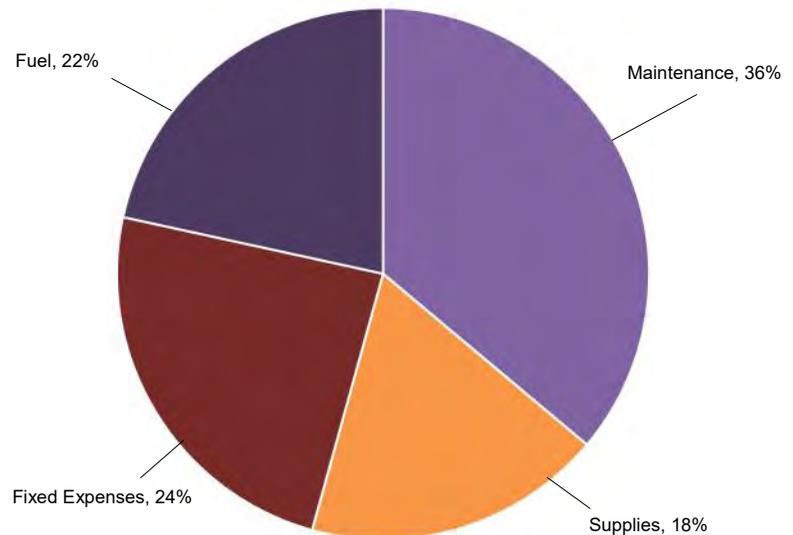
This year has been especially challenging to the refuge staff. Overall, the FY22 budget allocations were down from last year by over \$80,000. We've been able to perform the most necessary maintenance work, all while keeping safe. We were able to implement some changes that would keep our visitors safe. We know that some of our changes have been an inconvenience. We can only extend our sincerest thanks with the patience that you have had during this trying year. Refuge maintenance funds go to the highest priority repairs as we only have a small percentage of funding to use. Fortunately, we were able to use some special funding provided by the regional office to offset some of these repairs and modifications. Special project funding for habitat restoration and other non-agency funding allocations were critical to ensuring our operational sustainability in 2022.

Our largest utilities expenditure is electricity. Most of our water control pump structures are electrically operated. **60% of our total electricity usage was spent on water management alone.** As you know, we have a solar array on our property. This wonderful addition supplies 2/3 of our electricity needs for the Visitor Center. The solar array actively pushes some energy back to the "grid" giving us some savings on this electric bill. Fuel costs were exceptionally high this year because of the dramatic increases in the price of diesel fuel.

New refuge pump station at Cedar Point NWR, Pool 2. Once completed, this station will allow full water level management for the first time in over 30 years. | USFWS Ron Huffman

Background photo: A summer wetland scene by USFWS

The Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge Complex had an operating budget of \$251,968 for 2022, a 27% decrease over 2021.



Here is the breakdown of the expenditures for 2022:

- **Maintenance:** \$90,995, including repairs to properties, structures, vehicles, and equipment
- **Supplies:** \$45,822, including office and field supplies, visitor/volunteer services supplies for all programs
- **Fixed Expenses:** \$60,768, including utilities, phones, water, propane, trash removal, etc.
- **Fuel:** \$54,383 to fuel vehicles and equipment for all programs



Friends Financials



2022 Revenue & Expenditures

Government funding does not cover all that is necessary to manage a refuge. As a result, wildlife refuges depend on “Friends” groups like Friends of Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge (FONWR) to fill in the gaps, providing financial and volunteer support. In 2022, support of Friends of Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge through all revenue streams totaled \$593,816.

About \$378,616 of FONWR expenditures went directly to helping the Refuge Complex and community in the areas of conservation, wildlife protection, research, law enforcement, and education. Refuge support includes items such as visitor access and maintenance projects, intern stipends, and field trip transportation. This year refuge support included \$274,569 from grants and cooperative agreements for new projects such as the Career Pathways Program, an H2Ohio project and restoration agreement through the Partners for Fish & Wildlife Program.

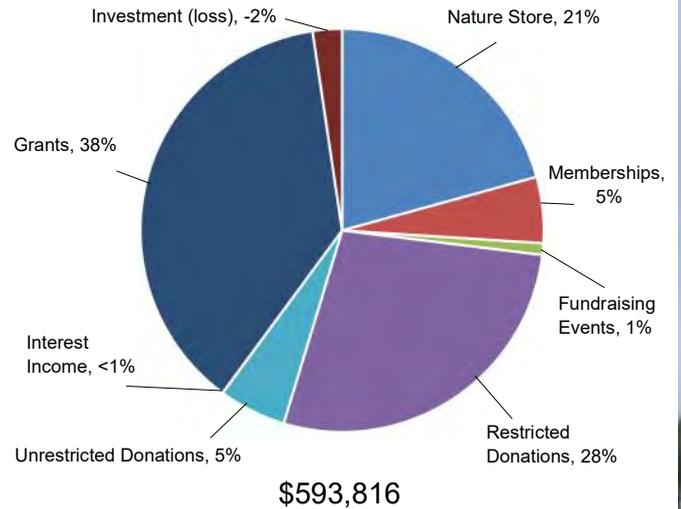
About 36% of assets are set aside for restricted refuge projects that will further our impact on the refuge & our community.



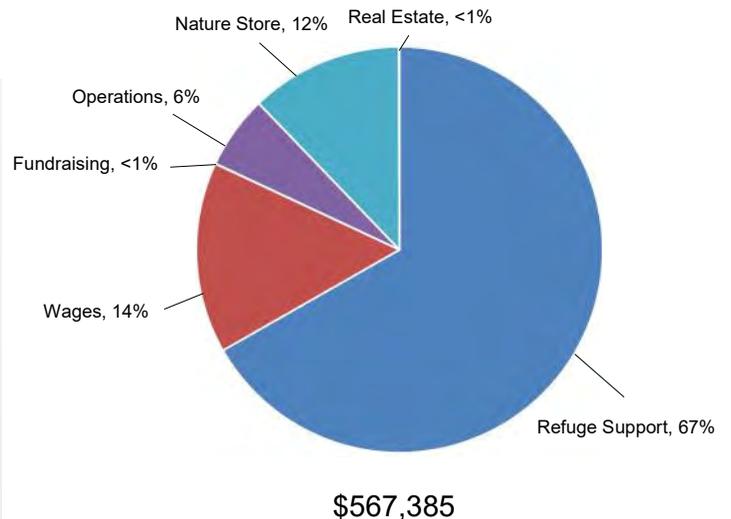
Summary of Friends Accomplishments in 2022

- ◆ Funded 7 internships that assisted refuge staff with a combined total of 3,196 hours of work
- ◆ Established Career Pathways Program to advance interns and selected our first Level 2 and Level 3 participants
- ◆ Worked with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, US Fish & Wildlife Service and local vendors to execute an H2Ohio project at Cedar Point National Wildlife Refuge
- ◆ Purchased 11.9 acre addition to the Turkey Run Unit
- ◆ Worked with Partners for Fish and Wildlife and vendors to treat 846 acres for invasive species on private lands
- ◆ Hosted an environmental education teacher’s workshop made possible by an Ohio Environmental Education Fund grant
- ◆ Purchased an interpretive trailer to connect with audiences on the refuge and in the community
- ◆ Through community support, purchased 15 passenger electric shuttle and led 25 tours through the refuge
- ◆ Supported Bird Friendly Facility project through volunteer support and purchasing interpretive displays
- ◆ Built 1,400’ ADA compliant crushed gravel and boardwalk trail at Fox Unit with benches
- ◆ Constructed a pavilion at Nehls Memorial Nature Preserve cooperatively managed by the USFWS & Black Swamp Conservancy
- ◆ Served as the fiscal sponsor for the Portage River Water Trail project and purchased brochures & signs for partners

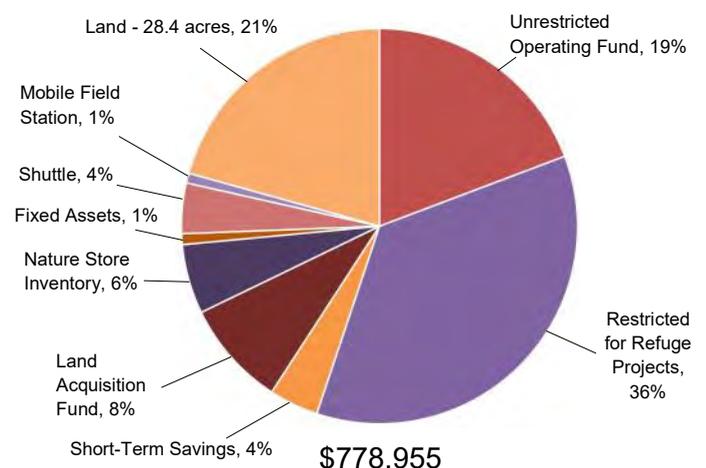
2022 FRIENDS REVENUE



2022 FRIENDS EXPENSES



2022 FRIENDS ASSETS



Public Use Projects



Friends of Ottawa NWR is committed to helping the refuge improve access for its six public uses: Wildlife Observation, Environmental Education, Interpretation, Photography, Fishing and Hunting. We help to install access points with trails, observation decks, provide equipment to maintain these areas, and help to keep the public updated and connected with what's happening at the refuge.

The Friends made an impact in 2022 through four public use projects: the Nehls pavilion, Fox ADA trail, the 'Puddles the Blue Goose' Shuttle and the Portage River Water Trail.

Nehls Memorial Nature Preserve Pavilion

Because of the support of a generous anonymous donor, Friends of Ottawa NWR was able to construct a pavilion at the Nehls Memorial Nature Preserve on Catawba Island. This addition further increased accessibility to the site by providing an ADA compliant picnic shelter complete with wheelchair accessible tables right next to the EZ Dock kayak access.

This site is owned by Black Swamp Conservancy and cooperatively managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service team at Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge. Friends of Ottawa NWR has provided nearly \$120,000 to develop ADA compliant public access at this site since 2020.



The new picnic pavilion at Nehls Memorial Nature Preserve | FONWR



Fox Preserve Boardwalk & Trail

Through the generous support of partners and members of our local community, we created a crushed stone and boardwalk



trail loop at the Fox Nature Preserve located across State Route 2 from the Visitor Center. Increasing accessibility to this site will open doors for more visitors to be able to experience prairie and woodland habitats and wildlife that live here.

Above: Nectaring monarchs | Kellie Kenniston; monarch caterpillar | Glenda Whittern; Boardwalk trail through wet prairie | FONWR

Background photo from the Fox Nature Preserve woodland trail | FONWR



Blue Goose Shuttle

In a survey of Friends, one of the most requested improvements was a way to help visitors access the furthest points of the refuge's lengthy dike and woodland trails. With the generous donations from many donors and members, Friends of Ottawa NWR was able to purchase an electric vehicle (EV) shuttle in the summer of 2022. The 15 passenger MotoEV Electro Transit Shuttle will allow Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge and Friends group to continue expanding the mission of providing public access of the refuge without harming the wildlife or habitats.

Our first couple of shuttle rides were by invitation only to project donors and first responders before expanding it to the public in general. The shuttle is driven by volunteers who have run more than 25 trips since the first ride in September of 2022.

I was lucky enough to be the designated driver for our first ride on the shuttle and was so grateful to meet some of our donors and members who love and enjoy everything that the refuge provides. On a personal note, I was so humbled by Mrs. Barbara Fox who was on our first ride and talked about the beauty of the refuge and how it has grown since she used to walk here as a little girl.

Please check our website or follow us on Facebook to find out dates for upcoming trips in 2023. We have so many ideas for next year to make the refuge more accessible to our visitors while keeping the conservation efforts intact. I would like to thank all of our members, visitors and donors who have made this EV shuttle possible for future generations.

Tajinder (TJ) Singh, Board Member

Photos (l-r) Mrs Fox with TJ on the first EV ride; Donors who rode with us on the first trip; Pelicans on Crane Creek Estuary | Tajinder Singh

Portage River Water Trail

Friends of Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge served as the fiscal sponsor for the launch of the Portage River Water Trail project. The Friends advanced the efforts of many community partners to complete the trail by securing an Ohio Department of Natural Resources grant to purchase brochures and signs for sites owned by parks and municipalities along the river.



The Portage River Water Trail begins at William Henry Harrison Park in Pemberville and ends at the Lake Erie Beach in Port Clinton - approximately 36 river miles of paddling!

The refuge's Marinewood & Little Portage Units are part of the water trail.



Photos (l-r) Mrs Fox with TJ on the first EV ride; Donors who rode with us on the first trip; Pelicans on Crane Creek Estuary | Tajinder Singh

Land Acquisition & Restoration



Since 2013 the Friends have managed a growing fund for Land Acquisition and Restoration. One of our long-term goals is to establish a \$500,000 revolving fund that will allow us to aid the refuge with the purchase of land from willing property owners and restoration of existing refuge parcels from Toledo to the Sandusky Bay. In 2022 we purchased an 11.9 acre addition to the Turkey Run Unit southeast of Oak Harbor. **To date, we have purchased & conserved 69 acres.** We also expanded our restoration reach in 2022 to include two new projects.

Coastal Restoration Project



Friends of Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge served as a fiscal sponsor for an H2Ohio project and worked with local contractors, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources and Refuge staff to reconnect 155 acres of coastal wetland habitat to Lake Erie hydrology. This project removed excess nutrients, improved water quality and allowed for bidirectional movement of fish in and out of the wetland in the largest contiguous marsh in Ohio's Lake Erie marshes.



The helicopter set up we used to treat the invasive phragmites in 2022. Thank you to Helicopter Applicators out of Gettysburg, PA.

Habitat Restoration Program

Friends of Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge strengthened its relationship with the Partners for Fish & Wildlife Program this year by entering into a cooperative agreement to assist in wetland habitat management in NW Ohio. Jeff Finn, Private Lands Biologist will work with landowners to complete individual agreements and provide copies to the Friends who will assist with outreach to private landowners through social media, in person gatherings, and handouts with administrative portions of the projects. In 2022, Friends support went to aerial spraying 846 acres of private lands for invasive phragmites.

Interpretation



This year the refuge was excited once again to host bus tours to Cedar Point (3) and Navarre Marsh during spring migration on the refuge's Blue Goose Bus. We also held tram tours, caravan tours, and guided hikes made possible by our incredible volunteers and visiting detailees including Visitor Services Specialist (and former Friends intern) Logan Sauer (5) of Minnesota Valley NWR & Visitor Services Manager Lionel Grant of Shiawassee NWR and RV Volunteers Judith Sniderman and Mark Houser (1). During that same time we also used our mobile field station purchased through the Innovation Fund for the first time for our native plant sale (pictured, board member Jim Krieger) at the refuge (2 & 4).



355,172 visits
 **53,043**
Wildlife Drive Explorers
9,176 volunteer hours

2,584 program participants




Education & Youth Development



While doing activities on the refuge, workshop participants encountered researchers taking DNA samples from northern water snakes. They were kind enough to explain their research and lots of interesting facts about the snakes.

Investing in the Future: Conservationists of Tomorrow Educator Workshops

Through an Ohio Environmental Education Fund grant, the Friends worked with Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge and the Lucas Soil and Water Conservation District to provide 3 days of educator workshops for 12 educators each day. Activities were done both in the classroom and out in the field by utilizing the refuge's open-air tram and bus. We offered one day workshops for each Getting Little Feet Wet, Project WET, and Healthy Water, Healthy People curriculum in order to reach a broader range of educators and eventually students. These workshops allowed for the refuge to engage with local educators on a personal level, sharing not only the workshop materials but also the refuge resources and opportunities available for field trips. The time on the refuge allowed the attendees to see firsthand the work being done to manage nutrients in the water flowing into Lake Erie and gain a better understanding of the wetland/lake connection.



Tori Coffman and Linda Rose read through the steps to test the pH of a water sample taken from Lake Erie.



Jamie Kochensparger with Lucas SWCD leads an activity to build a stream in a classroom, fabric and other every day items represent storm drains, rocky stream bottoms, boulders, and clean or dirty water.

Internship Program

Making sure that the next generation cares about conservation as much as we do is a priority for our group. Therefore Friends of Ottawa NWR provides life-changing career opportunities by offering living stipends for interns. **Read more about the lasting impact of these internships on the next page.**



Career Pathways

The Friends have had so many exceptional interns that we decided to explore ways to keep them longer. In 2022 we developed an agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to begin a program that provides a career ladder and opportunities for intern advancement. This program will allow the Friends to advance 1-2 outstanding interns to a role with more responsibility and provide overextended refuge staff with much needed long-term assistance. Meet our first Career Pathways participant on the next page!

Mentoring Future Leaders



My name is Trevor Zook, and I am from Mansfield, Ohio. I graduated from Hocking Technical College in the spring of 2020 with an associate degree in Natural Resource and Wildlife Management. I have always been deeply passionate about nature, especially birds, but in the past few years I have developed a love of plants and field botany as well. I have been visiting Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge since I was very young, and over the years I have accrued many hours of volunteer service through monitoring the nest boxes all over the refuge with my parents. Once I graduated



Trevor Zook & Biology Intern Phoebe Jackson discuss their plan of action for treating invasives on the refuge | USFWS Ron Huffman

college I began working at Ottawa Refuge as a seasonal intern. I started in the hunt coordinator position in 2020 and went through two other internships in 2021. These positions allowed me to work with many different programs and people, but what I loved most was working with invasive species. There is something about improving the habitat quality and helping native species thrive through a very noticeable and tangible way that has truly spoken to me. Even though it can often be rather disheartening, **I can always tell that I am making a difference.**

After a couple years working in seasonal positions, I was offered a position in the new Career Pathways program established for refuge interns by our amazing Friends group. This would allow me to advance one tier to a more “supervisory” role to the seasonal positions that I had been filling, and I would now be considered a contractor

with a one-year employment. While I am not a direct supervisor to anyone, this new position gives me the freedom to teach and direct new interns in assisting with invasive species management and other duties such as hunt management. It also allows me to continue my work at the refuge through an entire year rather than being broken up into smaller pieces. I am incredibly grateful for this opportunity to advance my career, and I have already taken full advantage of this new position. **Since the start of my pathways position, I have worked with more state-endangered plant species, forged new partnerships with other conservation organizations, and developed studies that I can carry out over longer periods of time.**

In late summer of this past year, I found two new populations of a state-endangered arrowhead species that I had been searching for all over the refuge. I was beyond ecstatic, especially since I was able to collect seeds from one of the plants. It was incredibly rewarding to find an endangered species that was seeming to thrive, as it was fairly widespread in both areas. Rick Gardner, the chief botanist for the Department of Natural Areas and Preserves, then put me in touch with the Dawes Arboretum in Newark, Ohio, in order to collaborate with them to grow and propagate the seeds I had collected. Another refuge intern Phoebe Jackson and I have since made multiple trips to the arboretum to deliver and pick up seeds. We were given a tour of the facility by Greg Payton, the Director of Living Collections, and Holly Latteman, Conservation Project Manager, and we have now collaborated on the conservation of three rare plant species.

I have also had the opportunity to develop a long-term moth study in order to hopefully fill a data gap in the refuge species list. Unfortunately, there have not been too many in-depth insect studies carried out on Ottawa Refuge so we are lacking information on the presence of many groups. Since I have years of experience with “mothing,” I thought I would try to partially fix this issue. I put together an informal study to piece together a moth species assemblage for Ottawa Refuge that I will continue to carry out through 2023. I put out a white sheet with lights (one black light and one mercury vapor lamp) shining on it and record what I find. So far I have recorded 169 species over 16 survey nights, and I am very excited to see what I find in 2023.



Trevor Zook

Career Pathways
Wetland & Invasive
Species Coordinator

My name is Brooke Billock and I had an internship at the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge this summer! I gained a lot of experience and knowledge in my time at the refuge. I learned how to identify some birds, how to use a mower and weed eater, how to execute bird surveys, and so many other things that will help me later on down the road. **Oh, and I got to drive an airboat which was awesome!** Most importantly though, I learned how to be sufficiently independent and be confident in my work ethic. My favorite thing to do was definitely mowing; it was something I could do at my own pace and take my time with.

In the future I hope to get a bachelor's degree in Environmental Science and pursue a more environmental-based career. Without the Friends group, I wouldn't have been able to have the opportunity to partake in the internship. Thank you!

Brooke Billock

2022 Operations Intern

Photo: Brooke driving the airboat by USFWS | Karl Kleming



Maintaining Your Refuge



Thank You, Interns...

2022 was another great year for accomplishments at Ottawa Refuge and a lot of it was due to the support from the Friends group. We attempted to hire a Youth Conservation Corps crew in 2022 but we did not have a crew leader because former YCC Coordinator Alex Cherpes was able to accept a position at another refuge. Fortunately, Ottawa Refuge was able to have one YCC applicant, Brooke Billock, work as an intern.

Brooke attended Horizon Science Academy in Toledo and was interested in a career in science. She was able to accomplish numerous activities though while working as an intern. She sealed the bridge by the clubhouse residence, helped with mowing at the Visitor Center and other areas, helped trim portions of the walking trails, assisted with visitor service activities, and was able to participate in a survey via airboat at Cedar Point. Upon leaving us, she accepted a position at the University of Toledo and plans to pursue an Environmental Science degree.

Christopher Buchanan Jr. (CJ) who had worked as a Youth Conservation Corps member previously returned this year as an intern. We were able to utilize the new Career Pathways cooperative agreement between Ottawa Refuge and the Friends group for CJ's position. CJ was able to help with the invasive species control work, assist Trevor with the preparation on the refuge for the hunts this fall, repair the boardwalk at the Visitor Center, mowing, re-sealing the floating dock in front of the clubhouse, trimming shrubs on the walking trails and trimming around signs and pull offs on the Wildlife Drive. The hard work by Brooke and CJ provided the public with numerous opportunities to use and enjoy Ottawa Refuge.

...And Maintenance Volunteers!

Karl Kuenzer and Dave Howell continued mowing during the summer months and we added Brad Hemminger and Jim Krieger as new volunteers in 2022. Karl came in on the weekends and Brad came in during the week to mow at the Visitor Center, trails, RV area, and all the other

areas that the refuge owns and manages. Jim

volunteered to do the mowing at the Fox Preserve and he also assisted with mowing around the Visitor Center. Dave Howell continued to keep the Nehls Memorial Nature Preserve looking beautiful. Greg Sanderson returned as a volunteer this year and helped with the dike repair activities. Greg also took the lead on numerous electrical repairs and continued converting the lights in the Visitor Center from traditional fluorescent lights to LED lights. The hours and work contributed by our volunteers resulted in the lawns and trails being maintained for visitors and allowed staff members of Ottawa Refuge to be able to focus on other activities related to habitat management and facilities maintenance.



Karl Fleming

Assistant Refuge Manager

Right: Refuge maintenance crew pictured top to bottom Troy Atkinson, Keith Findlay, and Kenneth Millerschone



Below: GAOA Crew meets Interior Secretary Haaland at Ottawa Refuge in March | USFWS



Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) Crew

In June, we added GAOA Maintenance Mechanic Alex Baginski (pictured left) to the crew. Alex transferred to Ottawa Refuge from Detroit Lakes Wetland Management District in Minnesota. Alex, Keith, Kenny and Troy, all members of the Great American Outdoors Act crew stationed at Ottawa Refuge traveled to other refuges approximately 50% of the time this year to assist them with maintenance work. While at Ottawa Refuge they spent considerable time working on the boardwalk replacing rotted and failing lumber. They also helped with dike maintenance, dike construction, equipment maintenance and habitat enhancement activities on the refuge.



Vehicle Updates

Two vehicles were replaced this year at the refuge. The 2003 Ford Excursion used by Visitor Services was replaced with a Ford Econoline van and the 2011 Service truck used by the maintenance staff was replaced with a new service truck.

Behind the Scenes

Buck Buchanan (pictured right) continued his fantastic work and kept the Visitor Center, outdoor restroom, and pit toilets clean. Buck is the unseen employee often coming very early in the morning to clean. His work is the reason visitors and staff have such clean facilities to use.



Youth in Conservation: Crane Creek Estuary Eagle Scout Project

Sometimes the maintenance team receives some young help. In May, scouts from Troop 370 out of Carroll Township assisted Xak Britt with his Eagle Scout project: building a new information kiosk on the Crane Creek Estuary Trail. This half mile long trail is located along Lake Erie between Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge & Magee Marsh Wildlife Area and features wetland, woodland, and lake ecosystems. *Photo: l-r Bill Reynolds, Silas Shufelt, Daemon Britt, Billy Reynolds, Dean Kitzler, Xak Britt, Lyle McDonald, and Danny Kitzler in front of the new kiosk | USFWS*



Photo: Stange Prairie observation deck by Becky Ann

9,575 miles
IN EQUIPMENT THAT
REQUIRES A CDL

&

LOGGED 1,875
equipment hours



Dike Repairs for Wetland Restoration

In 2022 a lot of time and effort was dedicated to dike repairs on the Dellinger tract of the Turkey Run unit, the Smith tract of the Two Rivers Unit and Hunt Unit 6 on Ottawa Refuge. These three projects were the primary focus habitat improvement efforts by the staff this year. Numerous members of the staff pitched in to help but the majority of the work in the field was accomplished by Chuck, Ramsay, and Brandon (pictured above).

The original dikes had eroded a lot so a specialized tracked truck (left) was borrowed from another refuge and used to haul the material to rebuild the dikes. **The repair of 1.1 miles of dikes, the removal of 0.3 miles of dikes, and the installation of 5 new water control structures was a great accomplishment that will allow continued wetland management on these areas for decades to come.** The refuge was able to utilize Great Lakes Restoration Funds for the projects in addition to refuge funds. The GLRI funds were used to purchase approximately 3,300 tons of stone to protect the repaired dikes on the Smith and Dellinger tracts. Learn more about the wetland restoration on the next page.



Wetland Restoration



Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Goals

The Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) is a **federal program that provides unprecedented funding for protection and restoration efforts on the five Great Lakes**. Goals at Ottawa Refuge are:

- Restore coastal Great Lakes wetlands
- Reconnect wetlands to more natural hydrology to Lake Erie or river systems. Benefits include achieving a more natural water level cycle for connected wetland, water quality benefits to Lake Erie through water exchange and wetland filtration of nutrients and sediments, and allowing access to fish for life cycle events such as spawning.
- Restore native ground cover such as lake plain prairie and grasslands
- Restore forested areas in higher elevations adjacent to wetlands
- Restore forested riparian corridors
- Monitor, prevent, and control invasive species
- Wetland filtration of agricultural runoff before it enters Lake Erie

Several of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative projects the refuge worked on in 2022 are highlighted here.



Hageman Highlights

- Acquisition and restoration of 40-acre property in partnership with Duck's Unlimited
- Repair of damaged dike sections along the south side of Rusha Creek
- Replaced pipe for improved water exchange and floodplain restoration between wetlands and Rusha Creek
- Planting of ground cover and trees on 5 acres of farm fields
- Invasive plant species control, primarily phragmites
- Site improvements for trail loop to facilitate recreational access
- Planned installation of parking area for public access



Cedar Point NWR Pool 2 Highlights

- Partnership with Gradel Farms to grant easement and access to USFWS, including relocation of farm access crossover to permit installation of Refuge water control structures allowing access to Wolf Creek (Includes partnership funds from Ohio DNR H2Ohio program)
- For the first time in over 30 years, restore full wetland management capabilities to 155-acre Pool 2 as well as 59 acres under management agreement with the City of Toledo
- Restore wetland connectivity to Lake Erie hydrology by installation of a fish passage structure
- Restore wetland water level management through installation of Refuge electrical pump station
- Significant water quality benefits as the new Gradel Farm pump station is able to divert water from 177 acres of agricultural land through Pool 2 for wetland filtration before entering Lake Erie

The Dellinger tract (part of the Turkey Run Unit) and Smith tract (part of the Two Rivers Unit) are properties that sit at very low elevations in the landscape, adjacent to river systems. Much of these areas were in agricultural production, but during high lake cycles the areas become flooded and cannot be farmed. These properties are ideal for meeting GLRI goals of restoring and enhancing coastal wetland areas, and providing water quality benefits to Lake Erie.

Turkey Run – Dellinger Highlights

- 98 acres acquired along the Little Portage River
- Reconnection of 6.5 acres of riverine wetland/floodplain by removal of 900 feet of dike
- Installation of two Agri Drain stop log structures for improved wetland management
- Installation of two water control structures for flood mitigation
- Repair of 4,800 feet of dike for improved wetland management and flood mitigation for private property and township road
- Restoration of 37 acres of farmland to wet prairie and forested wetland habitats by planting of native ground cover and trees in 2023-2024
- Invasive species control
- Property open to all public uses

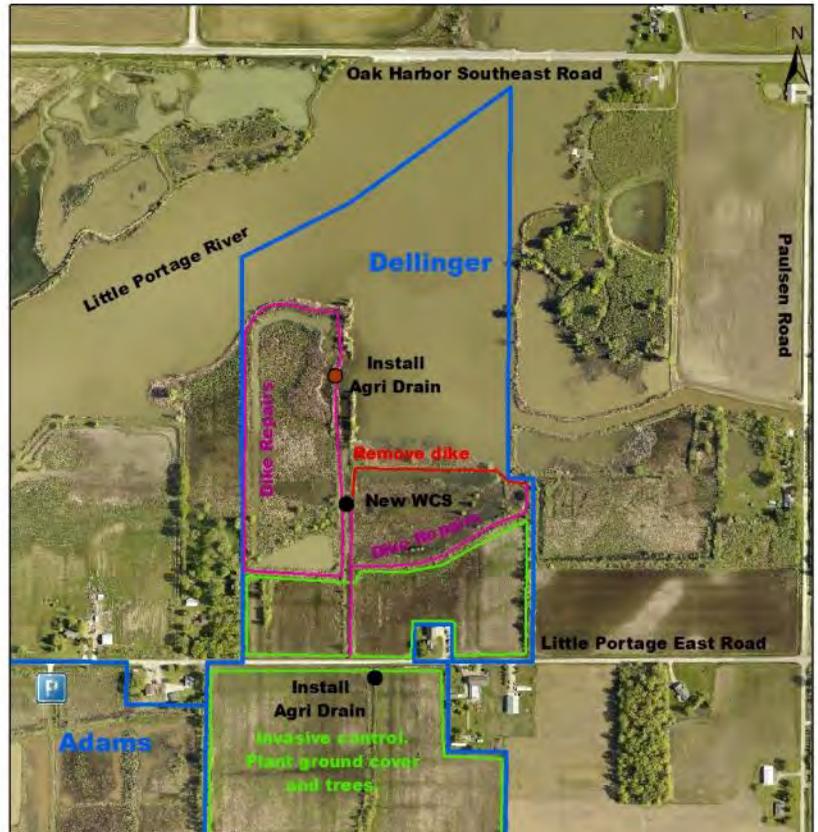
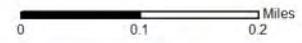
Photo: Forested wetland by Lori Monska



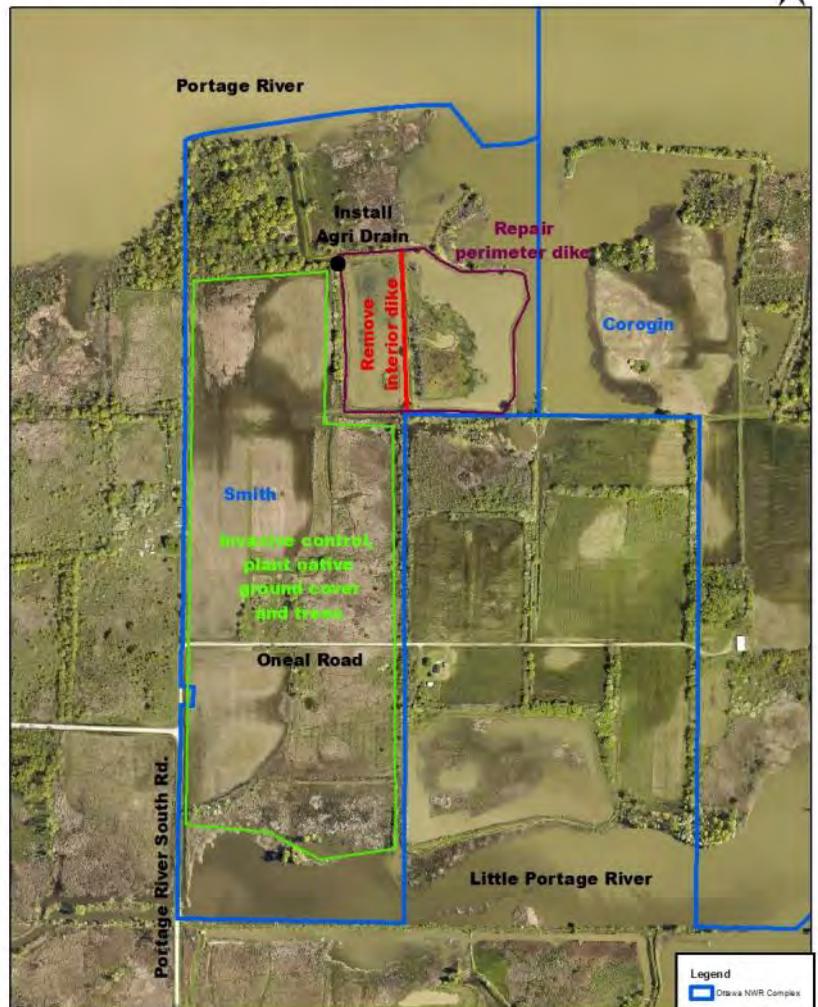
Two Rivers – Smith Highlights

- 138 acres acquired along the Portage and Little Portage Rivers
- Restore and enhance 17-acre wetland through removal of 870 feet of interior dike, repair of 3,500 feet of exterior dike
- Installation of an Agri Drain stop log structure for wetland management and reconnection to the Portage River during high lake levels
- Restoration of 37 acres of farmland to wet prairie and forested wetland habitats by planting of native ground cover and trees in 2022-2024
- Invasives species control
- Planned to open to all public uses

Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge Complex
Turkey Run-Dellinger GLRI Restoration



Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge Complex
Two Rivers - Smith GLRI Restoration



Acquisition & Restoration Process



What does all this take? A lot of work! Start to finish, restoring land can take 3-5 years depending on project complexity.

- Property acquisition process: meeting with landowners, property appraisal, purchase agreement (fair market value), level 1 contaminants inspections, boundary surveys
- Site visits and planning meetings with project partners, assessment of site restoration potential and infrastructure (dikes, pumps, water control structures, etc.)
- Concept plan development, application for restoration funds, receipt of funding, budget management, reporting requirements
- Project design: RTK GPS elevation surveys, engineering and design of planned infrastructure, review, modification, and approval of engineering plans
- US Army Corp of Engineers wetland permit application
- Environmental compliance: USFWS Section 7 endangered species consultation, National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance, National Historical Preservation Act (NHPA) assessment and consultation for cultural resources
- For refuge projects, contracting for materials, installation by Refuge staff
- For contracted or partner run projects, hiring of contractors, construction monitoring, compliance and final inspections



Ron Huffman

Refuge Biologist



Above: Migrating tundra swans and other waterfowl take advantage of open water in the Crane Creek Estuary | Lori Monska

Left: The newly constructed water control system at Cedar Point NWR allows for water management capabilities, provides water quality benefits for Lake Erie, and provides fish with an area for spawning and protection | USFWS Courtney Lopez

Wildlife Refuge Specialist



Hello! My name is Courtney Lopez, and I am (sort of) the newest member of the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge crew. I am originally from Springfield, Ohio, so it is great to be back close to family and friends. From 2017 to 2020 I hopped around the Midwest as a pathways intern for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. In the spring of 2019, I was an intern at Ottawa NWR and, like most migratory birds, I found my way back!

I received my Bachelor's of Science in Environmental Science from Wittenberg University and my Master's of Science in Environmental Science from Miami University in Ohio. After graduating from Miami, I accepted a permanent position as the Wildlife Refuge Specialist at Illinois River National Wildlife & Fish Refuge Complex in April of 2021. I worked in Illinois for a year and a half and had an amazing time living on the Mississippi flyway. During that time, I got experience in moist soil management, duck identification, water level management, invasive species control, running heavy equipment, outreach, and meeting with incredible partners.

In October of 2022, I accepted the position of Wildlife Refuge Specialist at Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge Complex! Seeing how much Ottawa NWR has grown since my internship back in 2019 is nothing short of incredible. **Seeing the improved infrastructure, the restoration/reconnection of coastal wetlands, management capabilities increased, and new land acquisitions are just a few of the things to be extremely proud of.** The opportunities for learning new skills, building relationships, and making a difference for generations to come are endless here at Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge Complex. I am looking forward to being a part of this wonderful team and seeing what progress we can make in 2023!

Courtney Lopez

Wildlife Refuge Specialist



People always ask me “what does a Wildlife Refuge Specialist do?” and its sometimes difficult to answer. I like to start by explaining that, in this position, you are a jack of all trades. Your day-to-day activities change based on the priorities of the refuge, your goals, and the goals of your peers. Having a broad position allows me to be a part of many different aspects of the refuge.

My focus here is mainly coordinating habitat restoration projects through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI). I continually track and report the progress made on each project, complete site visits weekly, assist with the planning of the restorations, coordinate with partners, assist with heavy equipment operation, and complete any paperwork necessary to keep projects moving forward. Other parts of my duties include invasive species control, water level monitoring, outreach, prescribed burning, basic refuge operations and budgeting.

October 27, 2022



Photos: Refuge maintenance staff completed over a half-mile of dike repairs in the fall at the Smith Property by placing approximately 1,900 tons of rock along the interior and exterior of the dikes to protect from erosion and washout | USFWS Courtney Lopez

January 9, 2023



Partners for Fish and Wildlife



The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program is the USFWS program that assists private landowners with habitat restoration projects. 2022 was a great year for private lands restorations in Northwest Ohio. This part of the country is receiving a lot of attention due to the tremendous natural resources we have in the area. That attention has brought a considerable amount of funding to NW Ohio. Funding sources such as the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, the Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Restoration Act, the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, and H2Ohio are

all working together to change the landscape. **In 2022, the USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife program was able to restore over 500 acres of wetland habitat and 40 acres of upland habitat on 16 different projects in 5 different counties.** We spent approximately \$115,000 in USFWS funding, but partnered with other organizations and agencies to leverage another \$960,000 for those same projects. A majority of these projects were completed in Ottawa, Erie, and Sandusky Counties. Working with our partners such as Ducks Unlimited, Ottawa County Soil and Water Conservation District, USDA, and Ohio Division of Wildlife, makes everyone's funding go further, accomplishing more together.

As the Private Lands Biologist, I assist with a wide array of activities both on and off refuge. I trained people from various refuges on UTV/ATVs throughout the year and assisted with some of the ongoing restorations we have on the refuge. I assisted with prescribed fires at Ottawa NWR, Big Oaks NWR, and also spent a couple weeks in Minnesota assisting refuges with prescribed fire needs. We formed a USFWS fire module to assist with wildfires in the west, helping out in Northern California.



Jeff Finn

Private Lands Biologist

One of the more exciting projects on the refuge is the enhancement of Grimm Prairie. Grimm Prairie has become void of forbs and wildflowers, which are desperately needed by pollinators. In an attempt to reverse this, we killed off some of the grass component in the prairie and interseeded a diverse mix of forbs and wildflowers into the prairie. We had good success for the first year of establishment and we have another treatment to set back the grasses in 2023, which should help create a more diverse prairie that benefits pollinators throughout the year.

PFW & Friends Habitat Restoration Agreement

One major accomplishment that happened this year was the cooperative agreement that we formed with Friends of Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge. FONWR and I worked together to establish a cooperative agreement that would enable the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program to assist private landowners more efficiently. This cooperative agreement allowed us to reimburse landowners and contractors directly for the restoration work they complete. This has streamlined our purchasing and reimbursement process, allowing us to better serve landowners. We were able to complete a large scale invasive species treatment during the month of September, treating 846 acres of invasive species in Lucas, Erie, Sandusky, and Ottawa counties. This would never have been possible without the cooperative agreement being in place and the willingness of the FONWR to assist us with all the extra administrative process.

I can't say enough about the FONWR's commitment to help Ottawa NWR and the USFWS PFW program achieve their goals. They have raised awareness about the refuge and its importance which has resulted in the community coming together to support FOWNR and the refuge. FONWR is active helping with land acquisition, habitat restoration, trail improvements, equipment needs, and anything else that they can do to help. This is greatly appreciated.

Our treatment in Grimm Prairie. You can see one area that was missed by the herbicide treatment and thus has a lot thicker grass component. This is early in the enhancement process. We're excited to see how Grimm Prairie looks after the 2023 growing season.

Controlling Invasive Species



with Trevor Zook, Career Pathways Wetland and Invasive Species Coordinator

One of the most crucial aspects of restoring these properties and their ecosystems, as well as preserving the function of the habitats, is invasive species management and removal. Most of this is done through herbicide application, and constant monitoring. Unfortunately, not every species or population can be targeted in a given year, so we must pick and choose our battles. New invasive species that have recently been discovered on refuge property typically take priority for treatment, as it is best to try to ensure they do not firmly establish themselves and become larger issues in the future. This can be difficult when certain invasive species are already established on nearby or neighboring property. We can only manage the land that we own of course, so these instances can require extremely diligent maintenance and monitoring. Here are some examples of common landscape or gardening plants that are invasive and treated at Ottawa NWR.



Callery and Bradford Pear are a very popular landscape tree, often used to line parking lots or as an ornamental tree planted along roadsides. The white flowers that bloom in early spring are what draw most people to these trees, but beyond aesthetics they have little to no wildlife value. The seeds can be spread by birds, allowing this species to move into natural areas quite easily, where it then invades forests and shrublands, outcompeting native vegetation and forming dense thickets. Native alternatives for pear trees include serviceberries, hawthorns, and crabapple.



Princess Tree (empress tree or paulownia) produces large purple flowers that are very desirable in landscaping. The leaves can be up to a foot long and almost as wide, creating a lot of shade wherever they are planted. The seed pods of this tree can hold up to 2,000 seeds each, meaning that a mature tree can produce as many as 20 million seeds per year. This of course means that princess tree can become highly invasive very quickly, and it can be difficult to eliminate once established due to its efficient root sprouting behavior. It was recorded on refuge property for the first time in 2022. Native alternatives for princess tree are eastern redbud, northern catalpa, and Kentucky coffeetree.



Burning Bush has bright red fall foliage that gives this species its name and makes it a very popular ornamental garden plant. Once again, the seeds are spread by birds, and once established, burning bush can form dense thickets that prevent native vegetation from growing. This plant not only thrives in disturbed areas, but also can invade undisturbed habitat like forests or meadows. Native alternatives for burning bush are winterberry, silky dogwood, and eastern wahoo.

These species and many more can easily invade natural parks and preserves even if they are not directly bordering the property. Fortunately, this can be prevented by public awareness of invasive and noxious plant species, and by researching plants before using them in landscaping or gardening. Ohio is a beautiful and ecologically diverse state, and there are many native alternatives to these species and others that are just as, if not more, visually stunning.

Conservation Corner



2022 Federal Public Lands Photo Contest

"Some years ago I felt something missing in me and so I decided to check out a National Park because of pictures I had seen and stories I had read. When I got to my first one, for the first time, I will never forget what I felt there. I felt a connection to nature, to the earth and to my ancestors who had to have sat here generations before and just enjoyed the beauty in front of them as I was. It was a happiness and connection completely unknown to me until that perfect moment. A completely human moment that just doesn't change no matter the time period. I knew that no matter what happens in life, I have to always make time throughout the year to spend time to get to National Parks to truly spend time outdoors. I



have to challenge myself to a hike somewhere that isn't easy, to see mountains, forests, canyons, water

falls and everything in between and once there, to sit, take it in and recreate that moment. The outdoors for me are many things, but mostly it's a form of the purest of joyous peace, a way to feel connected to this beautiful planet to something larger than myself and will feel forever grateful for the outdoors. We are lucky to live in a country that decided to set aside large, beautiful and unique swaths of land for just such things and I hope you all take advantage of it." —Ryan Smith



Ryan Smith, 2022 Federal Public Lands Photo Contest
Best of Show Winner
Where the Rockies Meet the Great Plains



Volunteer Spotlight: Lori Monska



Volunteer Lori Monska is passionate about many things, and most of them center around wildlife and the environment. That is why she responded to an online Friends of Ottawa NWR request for help with our Facebook content in late 2021. She wants to share her love of nature with everyone! A Central Ohio native, Lori discovered our area many years ago in her desire to see and photograph ducks. One time when she was unable to get a good photo of some goldeneyes in the distance, she immediately upgraded her zoom lens so she wouldn't miss the shot the next time. Over the years, she has broadened her view to include other birds and all types of wildlife. Her beautiful photos can frequently

be seen on the Friends of Ottawa NWR Photo Club Facebook page. For 32 years, she was employed by the Columbus Zoo, most recently caring for North American native wildlife. Her work included raising orphaned moose calves that otherwise would not survive in the wild, which has led to her deep fondness for all things "moose". After retiring in 2015, Lori found that she was traveling to Northwest Ohio multiple times a month to be here in what she calls her "Ohio Happy Place". So in early 2022, she packed up her cameras and her two cats and moved here to be closer to the area that gives her so much joy. In addition to having a half-dozen ideas for social-media posts floating around her mind at any one time, Lori also spends time kayaking, gardening, and baking cookies, brownies, and other goodies that she generously shares with others, including the staff at the Refuge. Last fall, she raised 21 monarch butterfly caterpillars on her property and released the butterflies into the wild at Ottawa NWR.

Asked what is important to her in what she does, Lori says "I want to help others to connect with the environment, including both wildlife and habitat". She admits to being 'addicted' to nature and although she prefers to stay behind the scenes, we want to recognize Lori for her work and thank her for all she does for the Friends of Ottawa NWR. The next time you learn something new about nature through our Facebook page, you can thank Lori Monska!

Citizen Science



Global Bird Rescue with Intern Jessica Duez

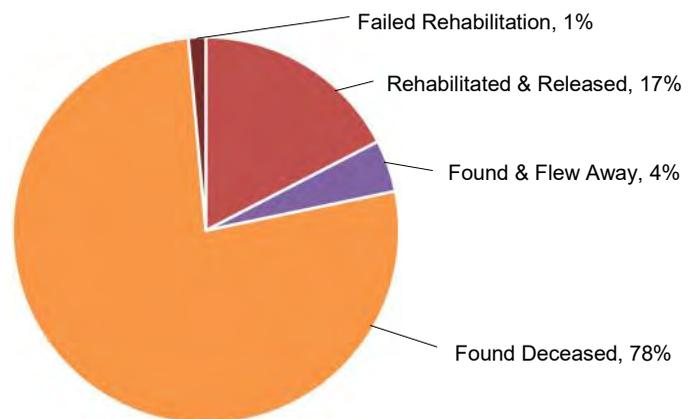
So many exciting things happened at Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge in 2022. My favorite event of 2022 was Global Bird Rescue that took place from October 3-9th. **Global Bird Rescue is an annual citizen science event run by Fatal Light Awareness Program (FLAP) Canada where teams and individuals around the world get outside to search for and rescue birds that have collided with buildings.** The collisions are documented on a global database called Global Bird Collision Mapper, where the data is available to scientists and the public alike. The goal of this event is to further our understanding of and bring awareness to the conservation issue of bird-window collisions and encourage communities across the globe to make their windows bird-safe. Together with the Toledo Zoo, we created a team of volunteers to participate in this event in the downtown Toledo area. Our team name is the Glass City Bird Crew, and we were the first team ever to participate in this event in Toledo!



Jessica Duez
Visitor Services Intern

We met each morning, from 7 - 9 a.m., in downtown Toledo and searched along buildings and sidewalks for injured or deceased birds. Injured birds were transported to a local wildlife rehabilitation center to be evaluated and treated for their injuries. Deceased birds that were in good shape were taken by the Toledo Zoo to be used for educational displays. **In just seven days, our team found 68 birds and one eastern red bat.** Of those 68 birds, 15 were alive and 53 were deceased. Of the 15 live birds, 12 were rescued (the other three flew away when we attempted to capture them), and 11 recovered and

Bird Window Strikes Discovered in Toledo



11 recovered and were released, along with the bat. Across the globe, teams and individuals from ten countries participated in this event, and 3,382 birds (28.2% alive and 71.79% dead) were reported. The numbers are alarming for just seven days of surveying. Imagine the number of birds that likely go unfound the rest of the 358 days of the year. **It is estimated that one billion birds are killed each year from bird-window collisions in the United States and Canada alone.** By looking for these birds, we are saving lives and gathering more data to better understand the impact of windows on the avian population. Though Global Bird Rescue is just one week in October, bird collisions can still be reported every day of the year at <https://birdmapper.org/app/>. I am proud that we participated in this event in 2022, and I am eager to see what more we can do in 2023!

Nest Box Monitoring

Species	Total # eggs	Total # nestlings	Total # fledglings
Purple Martin	449	407	400
Tree Swallow	202	169	165
American Kestrel	4	3	3

2022 Nest Counts on West Sister Island NWR

Species	# Nests in 2022	# Nests in 2021
Great Blue Heron	562	1,037
Great Egret	1,170	913
Black-Crowned Night Heron	382	338
Double-Crested Cormorant	2,458	2,602

25 Years of Memories



Rebecca Lewis, Chris Crofts and the late Mike Crofts making plans to change the world at an International Migratory Bird Day open house.

A Look Back with Visitor Services Specialist Rebecca Lewis

Thinking about the formation of the Friends 25 years ago brings me so many good memories. In my early days of working at Ottawa NWR (I was clearly about 4 years old) I remember then Refuge Manager Larry Martin discussing the idea of a non-profit 'Friends' group. He reached out to long-time volunteers Mike and Chris Crofts and things moved quickly from there. The first step was to have an informational meeting. At that meeting I met some amazing people who helped build the organization into what it is today. (It was also the only meeting of my career that had angry protestors, but once they found out what we were trying to do they didn't stay.)

A joke that continued for at least 10 years was that they jumped right to having a defense attorney involved in filing their non-profit paperwork. In reality, it was long-time volunteer and attorney Ed Pierce who took that on for them. Ed led the monthly bird count for many years on the refuge.

Many of those that gathered in that room that day became board members, the rest became members, volunteers, supporters and Friends, both mine and the refuge's. They were responsible for the start of the bookstore, then a small space under the counter in our old office. They wrote grants that funded public programs, purchased books and even our original mascot costume, Puddles the Blue Goose. They came together and built structures like the ramp to the hiking trails and the observation deck on Stange Road. They bought a tent because that was our only option for holding events that wouldn't fit in the tiny office space. The original "Puddles Shuttle" was a golf cart that board member Bill Dailey raised funds to purchase. They came together and built support for our Visitor Center and then helped to staff it after it became a reality.

Every time I see an old photo of someone who helped this refuge grow into what it is, I smile because these people are some of the best things about my career here. I also get a little sad because we have lost so many of these dear people over time. So that is why I chose this photo to go along with this story. The smile on my face in this photo shows how I feel about the Friends of Ottawa NWR but there is also an ache in my heart.



In Memory of Tom Furry

August 21, 1940 - February 4, 2022

In 2022 we lost longtime refuge volunteer Tom Furry. He touched many lives as a leader of Blue Goose Bus Tours and Eagle Tours and he inspired all that visited with his humble nature and vast knowledge of refuge wildlife, especially the eagles. He even had a few of the eagles named - specifically Big Fitz and Little Jo who nested in the North Woods. He also was our Friday front desk volunteer for years and enjoyed it almost as much as his tours. He even served a couple of years on the Friends board and took the lead as board president. He was an incredible volunteer and Friend and we will think of him fondly every time we see an eagle.



Fox Nature Preserve



Jason Lewis with Barbara Fox and Bethany & Curtis Kalina as they explore the new trail.

In my time here at Ottawa NWR there have been many projects and events that I look back on fondly. For 2022 the project at the Fox Preserve is going on that list. It did of course start well before 2022, but great things can take a little time.

Rebecca Lewis

Visitor Services Specialist

If you haven't explored the Fox Unit yet, it is just across the highway from our refuge entrance and the parking lot is on Lickert-Harder Road. It has a kiosk with a map to help you get oriented and a lovely gravel trail loop with a raised boardwalk extension over a wet area in the prairie grasses. There is a rough mowed trail that goes through the woods (which I love). Improving the woods trail will be a project for the coming year.

It is what you cannot see that makes this such a special project to me. Two wonderful local families owned these properties and there is history there; wonderful stories to be told of families, farming, and hunting. The next chapter in this story is about partnerships. If you have been following the story for a while you know that the Fox property was the first property purchased by the Friends of Ottawa NWR and then sold to the refuge. The Genzman property which makes up the east half of the unit was purchased by Ducks Unlimited and then donated to the refuge, another great partnership. All the work to build the trail, parking lot, and boardwalk along with the restoration of native plants was funded through grants and donations to the Friends. The property is mowed by a volunteer and board member.

There are new partnerships forming that involve improvements to this property. We are working with the Oak Harbor Public Library and hope to install a story trail. We are discussing surveys to investigate the wildlife and plants that are present on this unit. And of course, there are the visitors that enjoy the birds and other wildlife they see in the restored habitat. The visitors are just as important in this story as anyone else because the pleasure they gain from visiting these areas is what makes us keep doing it. It encourages us to look at a property and ask ourselves what we can do to share it with people. It makes us ask how we can honor the history of the area and share it with people who are enjoying it for the first time.

Every project I think of fondly involves some amazing people and partnerships. Most of those would not be possible without the Friends of Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge or the amazing volunteers that we have helping us every day. There are many habitat restoration projects that involve partnerships and you would never have a reason to think about the people behind the project, and that's okay. Just know that they are all here working for the refuge, for wildlife, and for you.

Bethany (Fox) Kalina and family enjoying the new boardwalk



THANK YOU for making it possible to restore this site, create an accessible trail, and open it for all to experience the wonder of nature!

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25 Years of Friends



1996-97

Initial meeting at the refuge headquarters. A board of directors was elected, and the name Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge Association was chosen. Opened a small bookstore to raise funds for the refuge. Began to advocate for a Visitor Center.



2007

Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center opens on May 11, 2007, International Migratory Bird Day. Center included a nice space for a store.



2015-16

Hired first salaried staff member who worked towards our strategic goals. Re-branded as Friends of Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge. Built the Joan Kimple Wildlife Window.



2021

Visitor Center closed due to pandemic but work continued. Recognized for refuge partnership through two awards: Public Lands Partner Award & Nonprofit Excellence Award through the Greater Toledo Community Foundation.



2003

On March 14, 2003 a centennial ceremony was held to honor the 100th year of the National Wildlife Refuge System. A groundbreaking ceremony for the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center was held. The Friends received a check for \$1.35 million from First Energy to restore Farm Unit 2 and to build an accessible boardwalk and restrooms.



2013

Received an Ohio Environmental Education Foundation grant to equip the Bob Hines Refuge Ranger Station with educational materials and provide staffing to update curriculum on wetlands, native species and migratory birds. Hired consultant to help the board with strategic planning and budgeting.



2019

Strong refuge support for interns, field trip grants, maintenance and public access projects. Friends purchased first two tracts of land totaling 40.56 acres.



2022

Expanding conservation impact to new levels by entering into cooperative agreements supporting refuge goals and supporting refuge and community priorities.

Photo: Blooming Meadow by Lari Manska

From the Friends Director



Because of you, Friends of Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge completed some incredible projects in 2022. For me the best part is always seeing the excitement as our community rallies for the refuge.

Some of my favorite days this year have been spent having conversations with visitors, volunteers, board members and donors about why they support our work. One of my favorite conversations this year was with a donor who gave a generous gift to launch our Career Pathways Program. They said, **“There is nothing else I can do that means more than this. When else could I have the opportunity to provide jobs for young people trying to make their way in the world?”**

In this report you read about the Ferguson Family and the mural they sponsored, how property owned by the Fox and Genzman families became part of the refuge and is now open to the public, and how the refuge’s maintenance, visitor services, and biology programs worked together to protect the refuge. All of us are pieces of the refuge puzzle, and I am thankful that you are part of it.

In addition to being our 25th Anniversary, 2022 will always be a special year for me personally. In January I was elected to the Coalition of Refuge Friends and Advocates Board of Directors to work together with groups across the refuge & hatchery systems to provide Friends with resources and uplift our work on a national scale. In March, Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge and the Friends welcomed Interior Secretary Deb Haaland for a tour of our land and an opportunity to share the story of Ottawa Refuge. In May board members and I welcomed our county commissioners to tour the refuge, meet some of our interns and enjoy a tram ride. In July, I had the opportunity to share the importance of Refuge Friends groups with incoming Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Martha Williams. Then September came and so did my daughter, who I know will grow up surrounded by people who care about wildlife and habitat conservation and who will help me teach her to take the time to do something to protect it.

Looking back at how Friends of Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge has grown

over the past 25 years makes me feel a dozen emotions but the most prominent of them is pride. In my 11 years at Ottawa Refuge, first as a marsh monitoring volunteer and since 2016 as the Executive Director of the nonprofit Friends group, I have seen our group grow both as a standout organization among Friends groups across the country and as a team focused on values of transparency, passion for the great outdoors and on building strong relationships. Our accomplishments over the years demonstrate our dedication to Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge but also to our community. Your feedback frequently influences the next steps that our Friends group takes to advance the refuge’s mission. (It’s truly because of you that this year we purchased a shuttle, built a pavilion and created an expanded program for interns!)



Aimee Arent

Friends Executive Director

Thank you for being part of our rich history and we look forward to connecting with you as we craft the future of the Friends together.

Established in 1997, the Friends of Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge works to support conservation of the Lake Erie marshes at Ottawa Refuge.

Contact Us

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Oak Harbor, OH 43449
www.friendsofottawanwr.org

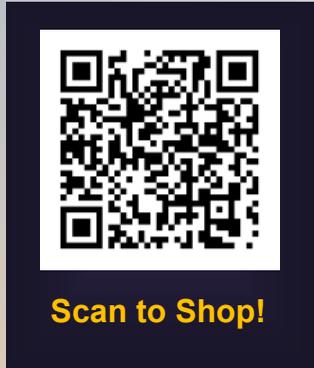
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Facebook: @FriendsofOttawaNWR
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YouTube: @friendsofottawarefuge

Join the **Friends of Ottawa NWR Photo Club** Group on Facebook to get the most up to date wildlife sightings, share refuge photos, get tips, and chat with Friends.



Volunteer Linda Patterson, Intern Jessica Duez, Congresswoman Kaptur, Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, and Executive Director Aimee Arent



Scan to Shop!

**Capture a Moment at Ottawa NWR with Items from
The Rookery Nature Store**

The challenges of the past few years have pushed The Rookery Nature Store to take some chances & evolve. We've continued to grow The Rookery Online as well as bring our visitors new & exciting products. Reopening in 2022 pushed us in a new direction. The Rookery is proud to offer an increasing amount of items that are made from local artists, small businesses & fair trade partners. Our membership includes many talented artists & it's been exciting to form partnerships with them to sell their products in the Rookery. We know how much visitors enjoy learning that products in our store not only support conservation at Ottawa NWR, but the local community, too! There is something very special when you pick up an item & know that what you are holding is one-of-a-kind! Unique, handmade gifts like painted ornaments, carved wooden signs, embroidered tea towels, crocheted owl hats, stained glass artwork or delicate pieces of jewelry are just a taste of what you can find in the store. These unique items are able to give our visitors something tangible to remember their special time spent here at Ottawa Refuge.

Also new in 2022 were snacks from local businesses! Bird friendly coffee roasted in Toledo returned as well as candy, popcorn, granola & locally sourced jams & honey! Grab an energizing snack for the trail or stop in after your time outdoors to grab our very own "Blue Goose Juice" specialty soda from the cooler or bring home a walleye-shaped chocolate bar! The Rookery invites you to **stop in, year round and shop to help support conservation at Ohio's only national wildlife refuge complex!**

The Rookery Nature Store is still the best place around to find books on local history as well as for all your field guide & nature-related literature needs. New releases are sneaking on the shelves weekly! And we have you covered if you need a new shirt, jacket or hat to show off your favorite refuge. Our very own Ottawa NWR apparel designs can only be found in the Rookery Nature Store. Check out our website to shop online: www.friendsofottawanwr.org/shop and select shipping or free pickup. If you have questions or need assistance, call or text The Rookery Nature Store at 419-960-5222.



Founded in 1975, the Refuge Association's mission is to conserve America's wildlife heritage for future generations through strategic programs that protect and enhance the National Wildlife Refuge System and the landscapes beyond its boundaries.

The Refuge Association works to build a strong constituency for wildlife, gives wildlife a voice on Capitol Hill, and protects the integrity of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

NWRA's leadership has resulted in an incredible impact on the Refuge System. Learn more online.

www.refugeassociation.org



Friends of Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge
14000 W State Route 2 Oak Harbor, OH 43449
www.friendsofottawanwr.org