

Conservator

THE NEWSLETTER OF CITIZENS' LAND CONSERVANCY OF HAMILTON COUNTY, OHIO, INC. / JAN. 2002

**You're invited to CLC's Winter Meeting: Mon., Jan. 28
7 PM at Nathanael Greene Lodge, 6394 Wesselman Rd., Green Twp.**

Directions to N. Greene Lodge: I-74 to Rybolt Rd. Exit #11. Go 1.5 mi. up Harrison Rd. to R onto Wesselman Rd.; go 1/2 mi. to R into drive

"IN PRAISE of WILDFLOWERS"

On a midwinter evening, what could be more promising than visions of wildflowers in their natural habitat.

Learn about these delightful native plants — the exquisite and the ordinary — on Mon., Jan. 28 at 7 PM at CLC's Quarterly meeting. CLC will present *In Praise of Wildflowers* by Dr. Victor Soukup, President of the Cincinnati Wild Flower Preservation Society. He will explain how wildflowers came to grow here, when to look for them, and what can be done to help protect them.

You'll get to know the abundant colors, shapes and textures of wildflowers found throughout the tristate area.

Dr. Soukup's lifelong love for his subject is evident. He has earned national and worldwide acclaim for his knowledge and many wildflower discoveries.



"Wildflowers are an enchanting resource for engaging people in nature."

— Dr. Victor Soukup

An active member of the **Cincinnati Wild Flower Preservation Society** since 1955, Dr. Soukup has served many three-year terms as President. Other dedicated local wildflower experts join him in the impressive work of the Society.

The Society, one of the oldest such organizations in the country, was founded in 1916-17. Members share their knowledge and experience to promote public awareness of wildflowers and the need for protecting them.

Taking an active role in preservation of pristine wildflower habitats, Society members rescue threatened plants from development sites.

The group also contributes financially to organizations that preserve wildflower habitat.

The Society sponsors programs, open to the public, held September through March each year. Field trips begin in March and go through December with wildflower explorations to surrounding counties and distant destinations.

Economic potential of a great river—

RESTORING THE GREAT MIAMI RIVER

By Mike Fremont

(Excerpted from his Dec. 2001 White Paper sent to the COMPASS planning effort to create a new Comprehensive Plan for Hamilton County.)

Hamilton County has a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to protect and improve one of its greatest natural assets — the Great Miami River.

Planning that doesn't recognize the value of preserving this tremendous asset will assuredly prevent the river's economic growth — and therefore the region's potential — from ever being achieved.

River has great potential

The Great Miami River is a greatly undervalued and underused natural resource. It qualifies to be a *National Wild and Scenic River*, according to the National Park Service. Parts of it qualify as an *Ohio Scenic River* — such as in the Oxbow area. The river has spectacular bird and animal life, and provides many recreational uses.

Think of the Great Miami River as a 27-mile long linear park that flows through western Hamilton County. It is potentially as valuable to western Hamilton County as Central Park is to New York City.

As it exists today, the Great Miami River is unprotected, abused and hard to access. The river's potential is much more than just a ditch for storm water, treated waste water and polluted runoff.

River brings desirable, sustainable growth

The Great Miami River should be considered as major natural infrastructure. It is a huge potential asset that could bring desirable and

sustainable growth to the area, whether it is called "smart" or just common sense, economically sound growth.

The potential for economic productivity of the river lies in the scenic beauty of its corridor, and in the quality of its water. Development along the river's corridor should respect, protect and enhance its natural qualities.

Why improve the Great Miami River?

Here are the benefits:

- ◆ real estate values will be maintained and enhanced;
- ◆ tax base increased;
- ◆ visitors attracted, if the community wishes;
- ◆ service industry employment increased;
- ◆ quality of life in the region improved;
- ◆ amount and quality of recreational offerings increased;
- ◆ natural habitat of birds, fish and wildlife protected and enhanced.

Tourism possibilities that bring ongoing economic benefits

Tourism is Ohio's second biggest business, after agriculture. Many tourism possibilities exist for western Hamilton County. And, Great Miami River improvements would much more than pay for themselves — improvements would bring ongoing economic benefits.

Scenic bikeway benefits

For example, a scenic bikeway along the Great Miami River in Hamilton County could bring in \$3 million a year, as does a 27-mile stretch of the Little Miami River through Warren County,

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About the author—

Mike Fremont is president and one of the founders of **Rivers Unlimited**, an Ohio group — the nation's oldest statewide river protection and restoration organization.

RU is the national authority on river resource economics.

Mike is active in many environmental protection efforts. He is a marathon canoe racer and also runs in marathons.

With Marilyn Wall, Mike is the founder of **Friends of the Great Miami** (1998) to protect the river as only a non-governmental organization can. Also, he is the founder of the **Mill Creek Restoration Project** (1993), and is a lifetime trustee of **Little Miami, Inc.**

Great Miami River facts:

170.3 miles

Total length of the Great Miami River, from its source at Indian Lake to mouth at Ohio River

6953 sq. miles

Total watershed of the Great Miami River (Ohio and Indiana watersheds combined)

18 dams

Total number of dams on the Great Miami River

6 major floods

1805, 1828, 1847, 1866, 1898 and 1913

Great Miami River flows through western Hamilton County:

27 miles

Length of Great Miami River flowing through western Hamilton County to the Ohio River

4 townships

Boundaries defined by the Great Miami River: Crosby, Colerain, Whitewater and Miami

5 villages & hamlets

Located on its banks: New Baltimore, Miamitown, Gieringer, Hooven and Cleves

— Update from CLC's President —

Dear Members—

When I first read **Mike Fremont's** suggestion to think about the Great Miami River as a park, it was a revelation. Mike, a CLC member, suggests restoring the Great Miami and making it a part of our lives again. Like all great ideas, when I first hear them, I always wish I had thought of it myself. Mike, we support your effort.

Jan. 12 Countywide Town Meeting

Thanks to all those who responded to CLC's post card notice to attend this history-making event. Hamilton County citizens who participated—including many CLC members and Board members as well—sent a loud and clear message to county officials that we value the land that sustains us.

Since the COMPASS effort began last year, I have been a member of the Steering Team, representing CLC. After the Town Meeting, I volunteered to be part of a Community Action Team that will meet for the next six months to refine one of the stated visions: "Balancing Development and the Environment."

Others concerned about protecting our natural resources have joined this effort. Together we will make sure that protection for the land is imperative in the county's growth plans.

Work in progress

■ As CLC enters its third year, we can report that our all-volunteer organization holds two conservation easements (CE). We are currently working with six families to complete CEs to protect their

land. Our newest CE protects a beautiful 10-acre forested hillside in the I-74 Greenway.

■ I am also pleased to report that at CLC's Annual meeting in October, we welcomed a new Board member, **Sue Ulrich**. A Colerain Township landowner and a conservationist, Sue is also one of our CE donors.

In early December, Sue and other CLC Board members attended a **Land Trust Alliance** training session for Ohio land trusts.



Land located in Winton Place that will soon be protected by a Conservation Easement.

■ More good news. In early January, CLC was contacted to help preserve a working farm, and we look forward to our first involvement with an agricultural easement.

■ And, CLC has received a very welcome **donation of \$1200** toward the purchase of scenic land in the I-74 Greenway.

■ CLC's website, which now includes back issues of *Conservator*, will soon have a new look. You'll find all about CLC at www.clchc.org

"Operation Outreach"

■ As a nonprofit conservation organization, CLC exists to offer options to landowners who wish to preserve their land or farm, or plan for limited uses that preserve the special features of the land.

Getting the word out to many thousands of landowners in Hamilton County, and giving them exactly the kind of information they need to inspire them to take action is a marketing challenge.

CLC is approaching this problem by reaching landowners individually, and also reaching them through existing groups who already have contact with landowners. In February, a campaign to reach **1500 landowners (of 5+ acres)** in western Hamilton County, where land is under intense development pressure, will begin. After an initial mailing, other mailings will follow, as CLC's budget allows.

To accomplish the second part of this effort, CLC's Board is establishing contact with dozens of organizations to encourage them to refer conservation-minded landowners to CLC.

■ Is a landowner you know interested in preserving their land? Call CLC: **574-1849** to let us know. We appreciate all referrals and requests for information about land conservation.

—**Roland Johnson, President**

Restoring the Great Miami River — continued

per a recent OKI study. (The study did not include property value enhancement.)

The OKI study also found that 150,000-175,000 visitors per year to the Warren County bikeway spent \$20 a person per visit (\$13 on food, drink, services; \$7 on equipment).

Economic returns from the 27-mile western Hamilton County stretch of the Great Miami River just from fishing activity alone could be about \$300,000 a year. Or \$11,000 per mile per year if it were an average Ohio river. (The Great Miami River water quality is far better than the average Ohio river, but because of few access points, the river remains inaccessible to most recreational uses.)

The OKI study's figures for Warren County did not include boating, camping, picnicking or bird watching — major income producers. (The Oxbow area is internationally famous for the bird life there and attracts many visitors.)

What to do to protect the Great Miami River

Planners and some natural resource agencies are familiar with what it takes to protect and restore a waterway. Some developers recognize the value of protecting and restoring a river. It increases the value of their investment, the price of their properties and the interest of buyers.

◆ First, create a forested buffer strip — at least 100 ft. wide where possible — on both sides of the river. Buffer strips absorb polluted runoff, are scenic, and provide habitat for animals, insects, birds and bats.

◆ Another necessity is enforcement of water pollution regulations and better control of the serious abuse of the gravel mining privilege. Mining as presently regulated contributes heavily to water pollution and erosion in the western Hamilton County stretch of the Great Miami River. Dumps and outdoor commercial composting threaten aquifer supplies in the valley.

The role of citizens, planners & public officials

To enhance the economic benefits of the Great Miami River, communities would:

- ◆ Reexamine zoning with the aim of protecting the river and its greenway corridor. Set aside buffer zones where possible with conservation easements or fee simple, with an eye to making the buffer continuous.
- ◆ Practice floodplain management.
- ◆ Investigate greenway / bikeway plans under way along the river.
- ◆ Plan access and rustic riverside facilities at strategic points at least

every 5 miles along the river.

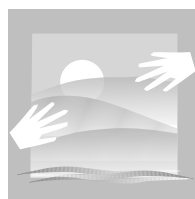
- ◆ Insist on and participate in public hearings about pollution permitting.
- ◆ Prevent highway or sewer plans from damaging the river in any way.
- ◆ Work with upstream communities and Miami Conservancy District on perviousness and other issues. (Hamilton County is at the mercy of what happens upstream and should be constantly aware of what's proposed upstream.)
- ◆ Investigate means to curb the excesses of gravel mining in and near streams on the river and main tributaries such as the Whitewater River and Indian Creek.

Discover the future with a River Resource Economics Study

The County could satisfy itself as to the costs and benefits of these suggestions by calling for a River Resource Economics Study. Essentially a study would:

1. Determine the present river-related economic income (largely gravel mining and housing at present).
2. Consider specific actions to improve the scenic river corridor and water quality of the river.
3. Determine the cost of such improvements.
4. Determine the economic income to be derived from improvements, including the creation of new jobs.

Absent such a study, it would never be known if a plan involving (or ignoring) the river would be in the public's best interests. —*Mike Fremont*



CITIZENS' LAND CONSERVANCY

OF HAMILTON COUNTY, OHIO, INC.

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CLC is a nonprofit, member-supported land conservation organization, founded in 1999 to help families preserve their lands. CLC informs the public about how land conservation protects the quality of life in Hamilton County.

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