

"If You Build It, They Will Come..." by Mary Perkins

This Kirby Nature Playscape project began in 2019 with a vision to provide a fun, educational, and immersive nature experience for young children around the prairie. Our hope is that the Playscape will create a deep love and care for nature (and hopefully inspire a few future conservationists). Over the past few months, tremendous progress has been made in creating the Playscape, and we are close to realizing our vision!

Thanks to recent gifts from Duke Energy, the Elsa Heisel Sule Foundation, and individual contributors, we worked with contractors and an AmeriCorps NCCC community service team



Kirby Nature Playscape

to complete a new easy-access prairie trail, gathering terrace, gazebo, and seating areas. The prairie trail is designed for everyone, of any age and ability, to take a lovely stroll. From this path that circles around the prairie, visitors can closely observe native pollinator plants and the diverse animals and insects that benefit from this rich habitat. At the gathering terrace and gazebo, parents can watch their children play or groups can meet for nature talks, firefly watching, storytelling, musical events, and much more.

Up next, we will install fencing, educational signage about the native prairie plants and pollinators, and activity stations for children.

Activity stations will be designed to encourage free-form nature play, learning, physical activity, artistic creation, and socialization. Our Playscape committee is fortunate to consult with Dr. Leslie Kochanowski of the UC Arlitt Early Education Center on the "loose parts" nature play concept. The Playscape will utilize lots of natural "loose parts" like pinecones, leaves, acorns, sticks, and rocks, which will spark creativity and self-directed immersive play. We will provide natural materials, and the children will bring their imaginations.

At the fort building area, logs, sticks, and other building materials will be provided. A fossil dig area will give children the experience of discovering animals that lived eons ago in the vast ancient sea that once covered the area. We are also creating a willow tunnel, vernal pool, balance log, and other climbing log play structures. As much as possible, we are using nature-sourced materials gathered from our preserves, such as logs for balance beams and fossil-laden creek rocks.

Thanks to all of the amazing volunteers who have contributed to the playscape and the prairie, especially all of the dedicated board members who continue to restore, maintain, and grow the prairie habitat. We rely upon volunteers to provide free accessible educational opportunities for youth that help foster connections with nature. If you would like to learn more or help out with the playscape project or prairie restoration, please contact staff@westernwildlifecorridor.org.



The Prairie Trail at Kirby Nature Playscape

A Summer of Service By Tessa Collar and other Elm 5 members

If you've been to Bender Mountain for a hike recently, you might have noticed that there are some new trails, switchbacks, and views of the Ohio River along the ridge trail. This work was done by Elm 5, an AmeriCorps NCCC Summer of Service team who served with Western Wildlife Corridor from June 22nd to August 2nd. The team of 10 individuals ages 18-24 worked to improve trail accessibility by building culverts, installing water bars, and creating new trails. The team also removed invasive honeysuckle, clearing the way for native flora and fauna to come back.

AmeriCorps NCCC is a federal program that provides 18- to 26-year-olds from across the country the opportunity to serve a community in need in the US. The NCCC Summer of Service program focuses on addressing environmental stewardship and affordable housing issues.

Over the summer, Elm 5 helped to restore over 20 acres of forest by removing 21,825 pounds of non-native, exotic vegetation, mainly honeysuckle. They also constructed 0.44 miles of new, accessible hiking trails by mapping out routes, raking and removing vegetation, bench cutting, adding switchbacks, rock structures, and water drainage features. In total, four completed reroutes replace old trails that were less accessible due to incline and erosion. The team repaired 1.27 miles of existing trails to be more accessible, safer, and prevent further erosion of soil and tree roots by adding water bars, rock structures, water drainage features, replanting native vegetation, and resurfacing paths. They also installed 14 water bars and 19 other rock structures and water drainage features on new and existing trails. In total, Elm 5 contributed 2,694 hours of direct service this summer, with each Corps Member contributing an average of 307.4 service hours!!!



AmeriCorps NCCC Summer of Service Team Members Hard at Work

During their time in Cincinnati, the team stayed in the Clifton area, where they enjoyed close access to the zoo, library, shops, and restaurants during their down time and weekends. Elm 5 enjoyed fireworks at Ault Park on the 4th of July, as well as the Rock and Roll Carnival in Northside that weekend. The team explored the Cincinnati Art Museum, Cincinnati Zoo, Contemporary Arts Center, Newport Aquarium, and Findlay Market. The whole team was new to Cincinnati, with members originally from Puerto Rico, New York, Kansas, Idaho, Florida, Missouri, New Jersey, Louisiana, Virginia, and North Carolina. Elm 5 found Cincinnati to be a welcoming and lively city and were glad to spend the summer in Clifton, downtown, on Bender Mountain, and at the Kirby Nature Center.

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Shoveling Wood Chips



Taking a Break

A Summer of Service — *continued*



An Excellent View!

Elm 5 members were grateful for the opportunity to have an impact on the community and they learned many new things along the way. Team members gained skills including trail building, plant identification, water bar installation, patience, communication, leadership, and resilience. The team greatly benefitted from the continuous support from the Western Wildlife Corridor board members, executive director, community members, and neighbors (especially the Sisters of Charity). These experiences, skills, and personal connections will help members throughout their lives as they build confidence and enter the workforce, contributing to their sense of direction and purpose. Elm 5 would like to extend their thanks to the Western Wildlife Corridor and the city of Cincinnati for an unforgettable summer.



AmeriCorps NCCC Summer of Service team members enjoying their time at work

AmeriCorps RAP

by *Liz Maxwell*

This summer's heat, we've got it beat.
We get it done, while having fun.

AmeriCorps ELM 5 has shown
What brains and brawn and heart they own.

On Bender Mountain's wildness' home,
The flora, fauna, ground would shake
As day by day and week by week
The ten would dig and cut and spray
And lift and pull and haul away.

So — listen up and you will hear
All about these volunteers:

Nicole can ace a Rubik's cube
While Jenna's love is in the sea.
Her favorite sawfish takes great care
avoiding Garrett's dragon's lair.

With tales of Zelda, legends, so
Young Peyton knows you want to know...

When Tessa sings, like those with wings,
In perfect pitch, a joy to hear,
Jalayah dreams of fearsome schemes
As Spiderman moves far and near.

If tote bags are your greatest need,
Then Angel is the one to heed,
For Freddy, with his plants collected,
Carries more than he projected.

Fair Ryen has the right solution -
Snowboards chasing heat pollution.
That leaves Shannon, siblings many,
Envy of those who don't have any.

Oh, Team of Ten, we ask you when
We'll see the likes of you again?
Community, seek common ground,
Take action, strengthen all around.

AmeriCorps ELM 5 we send
you off with thanks and love no end!



Land Preservation

Over 400 acres of forests are protected and growing!

Since 1992, we have been working tirelessly to conserve forested hillsides along the Ohio River Valley. Our efforts have been made possible thanks to the support of passionate individuals in the community. This spring, we successfully raised over \$25,000 for our Land Preservation campaign, thanks to the generosity of dozens of supporters who share our passion for land preservation.

Thanks to their incredible support, we were able to acquire the beautiful 12-acre Muddy Creek Preserve, expanding our protected corridor to over 400 acres of forests along the Ohio River Valley. This wonderful new addition in Sayler Park is nestled alongside Muddy Creek near the Ohio River and is home to a mix of trees providing a vital habitat for various aquatic animals, waterfowl, and plants.

Spring Land Preservation Supporters

Anonymous , Marc & Barbara Alexander, Mary Jo & Fritz Bazeley, Kathleen & Henry Beekley, Jon Bender, Jack Berninger, MaryJo & Robert Berry, Kathy Born, Jim & Erika Boyle, Lawrence Brassie, Sue & Bob Breitenstein, Jennifer & Scott Brown, Louise & Gary Bruemmer, Kevin Celarek, Arlene Coffaro, Susan Cranley, Frank Davis, James Donovan, Harold & Mary Dreibelbis, James Eger, Barb & Ken Evans, Mary Finn, JoAnne & James Gibbons, Cindy & Roger Grant, Linda Graviss, Deborah Grayson, Jennifer Hofmeyer, Mary Elizabeth Huey & Dan Hadley, Incline Smoke Shack, Randy & Jan Johnson, Roland & Clare Johnson, Ed & Judy Krautter, Ron & Kim Kruse, Steve & Elaine Kruse, Debbie Lutkenhoff, Kathy McDonald & Ned Keller, Jan Metz, Sharon Morris, Barb Neumann, Mary Orloff, Don Otten, Mary & Christopher Perkins, Gary & Norma Rapien, Mark & Eileen Rechtsteiner, Ted Ridder, Lorraine Rohrmeier, Beth Ronan, Mark & Julianne Rudemiller, Ann Schlinkert, Roselyn & Stuart Schloss, Jim Scott & Donna Hartman, John & Mary Jane Scudder, Sandra Stephens, Richard & Jennifer Stoll, Mark & Karen Streicher, John & Nancy Trokan, Judy Wambaugh, Wesley Wiemann, Sandra & Herb Woosley

Thanks, everyone, for your gifts and for helping the Corridor grow. Coming up next, we are planning to establish the 19-acre Sisson Nature Preserve on a beautiful, wooded hillside near the current Buckeye Trace Preserve. It features a wide variety of plant and animal species, as well as a mature hardwood forest. This preserve is an important addition to the Corridor. Additionally, we intend to create a new 10-acre Riverside Nature Preserve by acquiring a parcel that would link our existing forests along Hillside Avenue. This area offers scenic river views and is home to a semi-mature hardwood forest where whitetail deer, wild turkeys, and red-tailed hawks can be found. We couldn't do it without the support of our members.

Upcoming Fall Events



All of our events are free, family-friendly, open to the public, and led by experts in our local environment. Space is limited, so please visit the website to RSVP and save your spot.

Bird Walk

Sunday, September 29, 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. at Kirby Nature Center

In September, we can see a wide variety of migrating songbirds such as warblers, flycatchers, and thrushes. We may also have the opportunity to spot migrating hawks. The walk will be at a slow, easy pace, and participants can leave whenever they want. Beginner Birders are welcomed!

Know Your Invasive Species Series: Tree of Heaven

Sunday, October 6, 1:30 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. at Kirby Nature Preserve

Learn about Tree of Heaven, its origins, ecology, identification, and how to control it by frilling or girdling. During the event, we will be hiking approximately 2 miles on moderate trails.

Fall Color Hike

Saturday, October 19, 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. at Kirby Nature Preserve

Join us for a day of hiking to enjoy the changing fall colors and to learn more about the trees, wildflowers, and how we are working to restore the forest. We will be hiking approximately 1.5 miles over moderate trails.

Bird Walk

Sunday, October 20, 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. at Kirby Nature Center

October is a great time of year to discover migratory birds like the Golden-Crowned and Ruby-Crowned Kinglets, Hermit Thrush, Winter Wren, American Pipit, and others. The walk will be at a slow, easy pace, and participants can leave whenever they want. Beginner Birders are welcomed!

Know Your Invasive Species Series: Winter Creeper

Sunday, October 27, 1:30 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. at Bender Mountain Nature Preserve

Learn about the invasive Winter Creeper, its origins, ecology, identification, and how to control it by pulling, cutting, and spraying. During the event, we will be hiking approximately 2 miles on easy to moderate trails.

Fossil Hunt with Jack Berninger

Saturday, November 9, 1:00 p.m. — 2:00 p.m. at Kirby Nature Center and Preserve

Get ready for a fun family adventure to discover all the interesting fossils in our dry creek bed at our Kirby Nature Center. This outdoor program will start with a short fossil overview, and each child will be given a special fossil at the start of the program!

Bird Walk

Sunday, November 24, 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. at Kirby Nature Center

Sparrows are migrating in November as well as waterfowl like ducks and geese. We may even spot a flock of wild turkeys. The walk will be at a slow, easy pace, and participants can leave whenever they want. Beginner Birders are welcomed!

Upcoming Fall Events — *continued*

Holiday Art Show & Sale

Saturday, November 30, 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. at Kirby Nature Center

Bring your friends to enjoy some early holiday shopping, support local artists, and see some great art reflecting our natural environment! Five local artists (Sally Sisson Anderson, David Garza, Mary Perkins, Jesse J. Smith, and Lori Vogel) will feature paintings, jewelry, and photography celebrating our natural world. Stop by after a hike or just drop in to enjoy drinks and light refreshments in a friendly, social atmosphere.

Holiday Party

Tuesday, December 10, 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. at Kirby Nature Center

Join us for the fun, festive annual holiday party. Just like last year, instead of a sit-down dinner, we will have a more relaxed setting—so that you may sit or move around the room to enjoy light bites, festive drinks, and one another's company! This event is for members, and you can renew your membership or join at the party.

Volunteer Events

Volunteer events are so much fun and one of the easiest ways you can give back to the Western Wildlife Corridor! If you've never attended a volunteer event with us before, we encourage you to join us for a fun event this fall to help cut invasive species, install signs, repair trails, and collect litter. We will provide the tools, and no special skills are required. Please RSVP on the website to let us know that you are coming.

Saturday, September 21 — Habitat Restoration at Kirby Nature Preserve 9:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m..
Lunch will be provided afterwards!

Saturday, October 5 — Trail Restoration at Bender Mountain Nature Preserve 9:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

Sunday October 6th — Know Your Invasive Species: Tree-Of Heaven at Kirby Nature Center 1:30 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Saturday, October 12 — Habitat Restoration at Shady Lane Preserve 9:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

Sunday October 27th — Know Your Invasive Species: Winter Creeper at Bender Mountain Nature Preserve 1:30 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Saturday, November 2 — Habitat Restoration at Whitetail Woods 9:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

Saturday, November 9 — Trail Restoration at Bender Mountain Nature Preserve 9:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m..

Saturday, November 16 — Habitat Restoration at Buckeye Trace Nature Preserve 9:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

Please RSVP and Learn More online <http://westernwildlifecorridor.org/calendar/>

Mid-week hikes

Did you know that every week, we host a habitat restoration hike? The locations and activities change week to week, but we always have a lot of fun. E-mail staff@westernwildlifecorridor.org to be added to the distribution list.



A New Bridge at Kirby Nature Preserve

by Matt Taylor



Carrying the bridge support to the site!

A new footbridge will span a large ravine at Kirby Nature Preserve, providing access to an isolated part of the preserve. The bridge has been designed by engineering students from the Miami University Student Chapter of Engineers Without Borders, a nonprofit organization. The Miami University student chapter of Engineers without Borders includes students, faculty, and professional mentors. They have local projects in Cincinnati and Dayton, and international projects in Rwanda and Uganda. Their projects have included bridges, greenhouses, and clean water.

The Kirby Nature Preserve footbridge project began in 2020 and everyone is excited that we are nearing completion and should be done by the end of the year! Thanks to all of the volunteers who have helped with the design and labor. Especially Mike Brunner, a retired engineer, who is the project mentor and leader.

The new bridge will extend over the creek that parallels the Creekside Trail, which goes from the prairie to Gallia Road. This creek also parallels South Road and is a tributary of the Muddy Creek. The creek runs through a rather deep and rocky chasm, and it is very hard to cross and go up the other side.

The new bridge will be 80 feet long and 15 feet above the creek below. The bridge will consist of two parallel steel trusses, with a wood deck and railings on top, anchored at each end by concrete abutments. The bridge is designed to hold 15 humans at a time. These young engineers checked and rechecked their calculations!

When this group completes this bridge, they will begin working on similar bridges in Hueston Woods State Park, just north of Oxford. We are so fortunate to partner with them. So far, about 50 Miami University students have helped, along with 10 University of Cincinnati students. They are strong, smart, and shovel (bridge) ready! Next time you are at Kirby Nature Preserve, be sure to follow the Creekside Trail to check out their handy work on the new footbridge.



Finished the footing for the Bridge



The Bridge Building Team

Thank You to Our Supporters



Fall Colors — Kirby Nature Preserve

Tim Sisson

Membership Gifts

Black Walnut (\$1,000+): Don & June Reynolds

Beech Tree (\$200 to \$499): JoAnne & James Gibbons, Kiwanis Club of Riverview - Delhi Hills, Mr. & Mrs. David Meyer

Paw Paw (\$100 to \$199): Margaret Atterbury & Bruce Bernard, Sydney Barnes, Patrick & Janet Kumpf, Valerie Reiss

Gifts in Memoriam

We would like to give special thanks to John Weiner in memory of Tom & Terry Wessler, Jennifer Brown in memory of Bruce Jones, Harold & Mary Dreibelbis in memory of Sara Dreibelbis, Barb Ertel in memory of Roger Ertel, Jane Howard in memory of Ed Schwegman, Liz Maxwell in memory of "Tony, a friend", Kathy McDonald & Ned Keller in memory of Toni Yarman, Richard & Jennifer Stoll in memory of Richard and Agnes Stoll and the Lou Ott & Family, Jack & Tina Utz, Gina Sellet & Mike Rodzicwicz, Jacqueline Schatz, and Jack & Penny Sellet in memory of Frank Hoh.

Grants and Scholarships

Special thanks to the foundations, governments, and organizations for their support over the summer: The Elsa Heisel Sule Foundation for their gift to support the Kirby Nature Center Playscape; The PNC Charitable Trusts, Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, the Frank J. and Jacqueline D. Kloenne Foundation, and Fifth Third Bank, Trustee for their gifts to support environmental education programs; The Ohio Public Works Commission for their gift to purchase the Muddy Creek Preserve; and to the 4Imprint Corporation and the National Land Trust Alliance for their in-kind support for marketing and outreach efforts. Finally, thank you to all of the anonymous foundations and individuals who contributed this year!





Membership Renewal

Because of membership support, we continue to grow and now protect over 400 acres of natural habitat along the Ohio River Valley! If you make a gift of \$100 or more, we'll show our gratitude by recognizing you in The Steward newsletter. And for those who donate \$500 or more, we'll proudly display your name on the Tree of Honor at the Kirby Nature Center.

SUPPORTING DONATION

- \$25 Individual Hiker
- \$35 Family Pathfinders
- \$55 Organization Trailblazer
- \$75 Mountain Climber

STEWARD RECOGNITION

- \$100—\$199 Paw Paw
- \$200—\$499 Beech

TREE OF HONOR

- \$500—\$999 Red Oak
- \$1,000 and up Black Walnut

Name: _____

Update My Contact Info:

E-mail: _____

Address: _____

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You can mail checks to Western Wildlife Corridor, P.O. Box 389077, Cincinnati, OH 45238, or make a gift online.



Your Membership Matters

We are more than just an organization; we are a community of people who are passionate about preserving the forests along the Ohio River Valley and sharing our love of nature with others. We rely on members like you for inspiration, guidance, and support.

Our membership survey showed that members wanted less honeysuckle, more trail improvements, and more educational programs. Already in 2024, we have restored 50 acres of forest by removing honeysuckle, repaired and created 2.5 miles of trails, and we have held 29 different educational and volunteer events ranging from Backyard Herping to Blue Ghost Fireflies with many more events scheduled for this fall.

Everything we have achieved has been made possible through membership gifts and volunteer support. Your membership donation makes an even bigger difference, because it is matched by volunteers who dedicate thousands of hours to restoring and protecting our nature preserves. We are on pace for our greatest year ever with over 6,000 volunteer hours, which is an in-kind value of over \$186,000!

Most importantly, your support helps preserve natural habitat, ensuring that the hundreds of plants and animals in the Corridor have a home. 12 acres of forest were added to the corridor this year, and we hope to add another 20+ acres of forest before the year's end. We hope you consider renewing your membership, because we couldn't do it without your support.





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- Mail Processing:** Roselyn Schloss, Michelle Ginter
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- Webmaster:** Jeff Doering
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Newsletter Contributors

- Artist in Residence:** Sally Sisson Anderson
- Editing, Design, and Production:** Marie Finn, Jessee J. Smith
- Photographers:** Debbie Lutkenhoff, Tom Malone, Tim Sisson, Jessee J. Smith, Joyce Richter SC