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ANNUAL REPORT 2019

Green Ribbon Initiative



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A photograph of three people standing in a field of tall grass and wildflowers. The person on the left is wearing a light blue shirt, dark pants, and a green cap. The person in the middle is wearing a light blue shirt, dark pants, and a white cap. The person on the right is wearing a white shirt, blue pants, and a white cap, and is holding a white bucket. The background shows a line of trees under a cloudy sky.

OUR MISSION

To preserve, enhance, and restore critical natural areas of the globally unique Oak Openings Region and to inform residents about ways this region is important

Organizational Structure

Green Ribbon Initiative (GRI) is voluntary partnership of governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations, businesses, and individuals that accept the initiative's mission and agree to help achieve partnership goals. Four subcommittees (Science, Stewardship, Protection, and Education) and various working groups work to achieve the goals and objectives of GRI as stated in the Oak Openings Conservation Plan.

Message from the GRI Chair

I am honored and excited to be leading The Green Ribbon Initiative into the next few years of coordination and partnerships in our efforts to be effective stewards of the Oak Openings Region. My involvement with the GRI started in 2002 when The Olander Park System was approached about managing a small parcel behind Southview Highschool. This remnant oak woodland has evolved into an unexpectedly beautiful and complex site through the efforts of dedicated practitioners and a multitude of volunteers. Since its inception, GRI has followed a similar trajectory.

Thank you to everyone who has worked to protect the Oak Openings Region in any capacity. We would not be where we are today without you, and the future of this globally rare community asset relies on our continued dedication.

In appreciation,

Erika Buri
Director of The Olander Park System
January 14, 2020



GRI PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

Committee and/or Grant Participation

Bedford Township Parks
 Bowling Green State University
 Bowling Green Parks
 Huron Clinton Metroparks
 Lucas County Soil and Water
 Oak Openings Region Conservancy
 Ohio Department of Natural Resources
 Metroparks Toledo
 Michigan Department of Natural Resources
 Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy
 The Nature Conservancy
 The Olander Park System
 The Toledo Zoo
 University of Toledo
 Wayne County Parks
 WildOnes Oak Openings Chapter
 Wood County Parks

Participating Community Groups

Arkona Township
 City of Sylvania
 General Motors
 Monroe County Conservation District
 The Village of Ottawa Hills
 Toledo Memorial Park
 Tomahawk Archers Club
 TMACOG
 Partners for Clean Streams
 Private Landowners
 River Raisin Institute
 Village of Ottawa Hills
 Area Educators: Swanton Public Schools,
 Westside Montessori, Bedford Highschool,
 Northview High School, Lial Catholic
 School, Anthony Wayne High School,
 Wildwood Environmental Academy, Ottawa
 Hills Schools

A man in a bright green t-shirt stands in a sun-dappled forest, gesturing with his hands as he speaks to a group of people. The group, consisting of several older adults, is gathered around him. One woman is seated in a wheelchair, looking towards the speaker. Another woman stands nearby, looking up at the trees. The background is filled with lush green foliage and tree trunks, creating a serene natural setting.

COLLABORATIVE GRANT PROJECTS

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Partners of the Green Ribbon Initiative recognize that the most powerful tool we have in conservation is our willingness to collaborate. When each organization views their work from the broader context, taking responsibility for the needs of the region as well as the collective success of the partnership, we can make large strides towards creating a healthier landscape. This commitment to coordination resonates with funders who appreciate our comprehensive, regional approach. **2019 was a landmark year in the Oak Openings with five new collaborative projects being funded for a total of \$573,000 towards restoration and environmental education.**

Blazing Star Borer Moth

Source: Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Restoration Fund

Amount: \$200,000

Partners: Huron-Clinton Metroparks, International Transmission Company, Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy, The Nature Conservancy, Wayne County Parks, other private landowners

GOAL: *Restore 308 acres of lakeplain prairie habitats in southeast Michigan in order expand populations of the rare blazing star borer moth (MI-SC) and other rare pollinator.*

Maintain the Gain

Source: National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

Amount: \$269,000

Partners: Metroparks Toledo, Ohio Department of Natural Resources, The Nature Conservancy, The Olander Park System

GOAL: *Enhance habitat quality by revisiting previously managed sites to manage 2400 acres, on multiple ownerships including public parks, nature preserves and adjacent private lands*

Placemaking Through Restoration

Source: National Fish and Wildlife Foundation - Southeast Michigan Resilience Fund

Amount: \$225,000

Partners: Bedford Township Parks, Huron-Clinton Metroparks, Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy, The Nature Conservancy, Tomahawk Archers, and Wayne County Parks

GOAL: *Connect people and nature while restoring the globally rare species and habitats of the Oak Openings Region in southeast Michigan using habitat restoration in high use areas, interpretive programming for underserved communities, infrastructure projects to increase public access, and educational signage providing context.*



Engaging Teachers and Students in the Oak Openings

Source: Ohio Environmental Protection Agency-Environmental Education Fund

Amount: \$39,278

Partners: Lucas County Soil and Water, Metroparks Toledo, The Nature Conservancy, teachers on the GRI Education and Outreach Subcommittee

GOAL: *Train 30 primary and secondary school teachers working in the Oak Openings Region and provide materials and/or bus funding to implement existing Oak Openings lesson plans. At least 600 students will learn the value and uniqueness of their local ecosystem, i.e. one of the world's "Last Great Places".*



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Cooperative Weed Management Area (CWMA) Coordinator

Source: U.S. Fish and Wildlife- Great Lakes Restoration Initiative

Amount: \$40,000

Partners: The Nature Conservancy, GRI Stewardship Subcommittee

GOAL: *Survey and map priority invasive species on 2,000 acres of conservation lands in the region, and assess, prioritize and create best management practices for 10 invasive species.*

Meet the Oak CWMA Coordinator

Brian Yahn came to us from the Kentucky State Nature Preserves, where he served as the vegetation ecologist for 14 years. He is a trained botanist/ecologist and has a soft spot for rare plants. After years of monitoring, he is excited to help move forward restoration of our globally imperiled ecosystems. We believe that his extensive knowledge of plants and diverse skill set, he will be a true asset to the Oak Openings.





PROTECTION

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Setting aside important land in the Oak Openings Region is one of the most influential actions we can take as a group. Coordinated identification, prioritization, and planning efforts have led to an ambitious goal of protecting a total of 8.3%, or 68,383 acres, of the Oak Openings Region over the next 100 years. **This year partners collectively acquired 767 acres of land, bringing the grand total in the Oak Openings to approximately 21,000 acres.**

ACQUISITION HIGHLIGHTS

Secor Park Expansion, Lucas County

Western Reserve Land Conservancy and Metroparks Toledo partnered to conserve the 226-acre Spuyten Duyval golf course property in Sylvania Township, adjacent to Secor Metropark. The Metroparks will restore over 200 acres of Oak Openings prairie, plant 50,000 trees and restore 1,200 linear feet of stream along Prairie Ditch. Three additional miles of trails will provide access to the property.



Kitty Todd-Bettinger Restoration, Lucas County

With funding from the EPA, The Nature Conservancy purchased 305 acres of cultivated land and will restore it to wet prairie and wooded wetlands. Much of the property is bordered by The Nature Conservancy's existing Kitty Todd Preserve and Toledo Metropark holdings and is proximate to the Irwin Prairie State Nature Preserve.

ADDITIONAL OAK OPENINGS ACQUISITIONS

- Michigan Department of Natural Resources added 70 acres to Petersburg State Game Area.
- Black Swamp Conservancy & partners secured Clean Ohio Green Space Funds to protect 3 Oak Openings properties including a 20 acre expansion of Clint Mauk Memorial Prairie, a 20 acre expansion of Wintergarden/St John's Nature Preserve that Bowling Green Parks & Recreation will own & manage, and 100 acres on Maumee River including forested riparian wetland that will be owned & managed by Henry-Wood Sportsman's Alliance and protected by the Conservancy with a conservation easement.
- Wood County Parks- 4 acres at Baldwin Woods, Wood County
- Bedford Township Park Commission- 22 wooded acres in Monroe County that will be used as a public nature preserve. Located on the corner of Whiteford Center and Section Roads.



The Green Ribbon Initiative Stewardship Subcommittee allows land managers to collaborate on restoring natural habitats through the removal of invasive species, application of prescribed fire, and restoration of hydrology. By adopting shared goals and developing best management practices, managers put their efforts into broader context and create strategic, efficient management across the region. **This year stewardship teams accomplished an impressive on-the-ground numbers, partners created a new invasive species plan, the Interagency Restoration Team completed contract work, the Adopt-A-Natural Areas program continued to grow, and the Native Plant working group added new projects to their scope.**

Subcommittee Chair: LaRae Sprow, Metroparks Toledo

Native Plant Working Group Chair: Jenella Hodel, Metroparks Toledo

On-the-Ground Stewardship



328 acres of Fire



835 acres mowing



2,836 acres of
invasive species
removal



556 Acres OORAM*



~1700 lbs of native seed collected/cleaned



152 people trained
8 workshops



3290 Stewardship
Volunteer Hours

*Oak Openings Rapid Assessment Method- protocol developed by the GRI Science Subcommittee to assess restoration efforts across the region.

Interagency Restoration

Team (IRT)

The IRT is a specialized team of Oak Openings restoration experts employed by the Nature Conservancy. This team has the knowledge and tools to efficiently restore Oak Openings natural communities and is available for contract with partners and private landowners.

- Via a contract with The Olander Park System, conducted 200+ acres of restoration work at Sylvan Prairie Park and Herr Rd property.
- Completed ODNR contract restoring 60 acres of fallowed field to native prairie.
- Treated 678 acres on partner properties, successfully closing out two grant projects, the GLFWRA Irwin Wet Prairie grant and the EPA Invasive Species Grant.



New IRT Manager



Pete Blank, originally from Maryland, has a bachelor's in Earth and Planetary Science from Johns Hopkins University, a master's in Sustainable Development and Conservation Biology from the University of Maryland, and a Ph.D. in Ecology from the University of Maryland. His graduate research focused on habitat restoration for grassland bird populations in agricultural landscapes. Prior to this position, Pete was working for the North Oakland Headwaters Land Conservancy and the Springfield Township Department of Natural Resources conducting land stewardship.

New! Oak Openings Invasive Species Strategy

The Oak Openings Invasive Plant Strategy was developed by GRI partners with funding from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). This comprehensive plan provides regional land managers with the tools to strategically lessen the impacts of one of the most significant threats to protected lands in the Oak Openings. It includes an Invasive Plant Assessment Protocol, Ecological Niche Modeling, Best Management Practices, and an Invasive Species Threat Matrix. All of this information is available to partners and landowners on the GRI

website: www.oakopenings.org

Adopt-A-Natural Area (AANA)

The AANA program provides opportunities for individuals, community groups, schools, or corporations to take an active part in the stewardship of local natural areas. Enrolled volunteers are provided with training by GRI and return to 'their' site several times a year, forming a relationship with their adopted tract of land. There are a total of 10 adopted sites covering 102 acres of critical natural areas in the Oak Openings Region.

2019 HIGHLIGHTS

- 575 volunteers hours
- 4 new adoptions in 2019
- A group of residents from Ottawa Hills adopted a wooded area in their neighborhood and have held --- volunteer days putting in 145 hours this season!



AANA GROUPS

2019

Ottawa Hills Residents- The "Sled Hill"

Alan K.- Farnsworth Metropark

Jason B.- Wildwood Metropark

Debbie/Craig/Susan/Paige- Oak Openings Metropark

2018

Toledo Zoo Teens- Kitty Todd Preserve

Wildwood Academy- Kitty Todd Preserve

General Motors- Kitty Todd Preserve

OCVN Members- Oak Openings Metropark

2016

Todd P.- Kitty Todd Preserve

Native Plant Working Group

A special arm of the Stewardship subcommittee is working to reverse trend of natural community degradation and increase biodiversity and increase availability of High Diversity Local Ecotype (HDLE) native seed for practitioners and private landowners.

2019 Accomplishments

- ~1,700 lbs of seed collected and processed
- 1800+ plants sold at the Blue Week Plant Sale
- 3 Landowner applications approved for the Native Plant Materials Exchange Program.
- Distributed seed and help guide 3 new native prairie installations at Toledo Memorial Park.
- 4 species were submitted to the Chicago Botanic Garden Cryobank for permanent preservation.
- Propagation experimentations in process for two species on the list Species of Greatest Conservation Concern. Species include Queen of the prairie and Sweet Fern.





EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

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The goal of the Education and Outreach subcommittee is to promote regional identity through programming, place-making efforts, story-telling, media and marketing to advance GRI initiatives in the Oak Openings Region. In 2019, The Education and Outreach subcommittee continued to expand Blue Week audiences and is ramping up efforts to engage educators from local school districts. The Landowner working group had a successful year training and engaging Landowner Registry members.

Subcommittee Chair: Ashlee Decker, The Nature Conservancy

Oak Openings Blue Week



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Partners that sit on the GRI Education and Outreach subcommittee assemble a wide array of programs to showcase the natural wonders of the Oak Openings in a weeklong event each May called Blue Week. This event is named for the wide variety of blue plants and animals that reveal themselves each spring. Blue Week 2019 featured 4 marquee events: the “In their Footsteps” series, Oak Openings Family Day, Oak Openings Awards Banquet, and the Landowner Registry Woodlot Tour. The “In Their Footsteps” program was a series of natural history events, with each evening featuring one of the early Oak Openings naturalists and the conservation legacy that he or she inspired.

2019 BLUE WEEK HIGHLIGHTS

- 22 Events
- 10% attendance increase from 2018
- Native Plant Sale outgrew Kitty Todd and was hosted at Secor Metropark for the first year.
- First annual “Oak Openings Family Day” featuring eco-centric activities for families such as arts and crafts, games, story time, live animals, nature hikes, scavenger hunt, etc. Over 100 participants attended.



GRI In The Community

- 18 tours or presentations reaching over 200 people highlighting the unique features and importance of protecting the Oak Openings Region.
- Table presentations at several key event including Seed Swap, Wildlife Festival, Olander spring event
- Hosted a GRI internships for a University of Toledo Student who created a “story mapping” for the Oak Openings Region.
- 233 new subscribers to the Oak Openings monthly newsletter

Landowner Registry

A GRI program to recognize, encourage, and assist landowners in the Oak Openings to maintain and improve native habitats on their properties. 25 landowners received personal site visits this year.

Landowner Working Group

The Landowner Working Group was formed in 2018 with the intent to provide engagement and training opportunities for landowners. In 2019 the group organized and hosted four well-attended workshops/events reaching 98 of their peers (2 invasive species identification workshops, woodlot management workshop, and a casual fall gathering). The group also conducted a survey showing that while 81% of landowners indicated interest in improving their property, over 50% of landowners are not able to do so because of lack of knowledge, time, or physical limitations. This information will guide their 2020 objectives.

Awards

Conservation Partner

LaRae Sprow, Natural Resources Manager, Metroparks Toledo



LaRae's contagious positive attitude, collaborative spirit, and strong work ethic make her an ideal role model for a new generation of emerging leaders in Oak Openings conservation.

Landowner of the Year

Chris Link



Chris has been feverishly working to restore approximately 15 acres in the southeast Summerfield Township area. It is a lifelong dream to help restore as much as possible of the Oak Openings area to its original natural state.

Outstanding Volunteer

Angie Cole



Angie is a "super" naturalist with great devotion and love for the Oak Openings Region. She has also been a strong volunteer with WildOnes, the Nature Conservancy, and the Ohio Lepidopteras program monitoring butterflies.

A group of people, including a man in a plaid shirt and a woman in a red shirt, are standing in a field of tall grass, examining plants. The man is holding a plant up to his face, and the woman is holding a plant in her hands. Other people are visible in the background, also looking at plants. The scene is outdoors, with trees in the background.

Science Summit

SCIENCE

Land Managers, local researchers, and private industry sit on the Science subcommittee and work to bring new information and insights about species and systems in the Oak Openings so that land managers may use our resources most efficiently. **In 2019, the Science Subcommittee updated the Oak Openings Rapid Assessment Method protocol and hosted the second annual Oak Openings Science Summit.**

Subcommittee Co-chairs: Dr. Michael Weintraub, University of Toledo, and Dr. Shannon Pelini, Bowling Green State University

Science Summit

Over 100 people attended the second annual Oak Openings Science Summit. Participants visited with local researchers during two poster sessions to discuss work being conducted in the Oak Openings.

Speakers:

- Kathryn Docherty, Associate Professor at Western Michigan University, “Incorporating soil microbes into restoration efforts”,
- Matt Cross, Conservation Biologist at the Toledo Zoo, “Local turtle conservation partnerships and outreach efforts”
- Angelica Vazquez-Ortega, Assistant Professor at Bowling Green State University, discussed the use of dredge material for soil health and nutrient retention.
- Representatives from GRI subcommittees shared upcoming science initiatives and opportunities for involvement including research on the Oak Openings Species of Greatest Concern, Oak Openings Conservation Planning, and the Oak Openings Rapid Assessment Method.

Poster submissions

- Validating a Lake Erie Watershed Kirtland’s Snake (*Clonophis Kirtlandii*) Species Distribution model with non-invasive eDNA assays
- Understanding Marginal Habitat Spaces, A look at de facto Corridors
- Modeling Bat Populations in Wood County, Ohio
- Sibley Prairie: The Largest Lakeplain Prairie Remnant in Michigan
- Drivers of nectar sugar variation in Open Openings habitats
- Landscape Impacts on Seasonal Vertebrate Mortality Patterns
- Nest Site Microhabitat and Thermal Conditions in Eastern Box and Spotted Turtles in Ohio and Michigan
- De facto Corridors and the influence of marginal remnants on arthropod biodiversity in NW Ohio
- A reserve by any other name might be a ditch
- Using Long-term Citizen Science Data to Assess Trends in Bat Populations.
- Predicting Distribution Changes in Climatic Suitability for Reptiles
- Frosted Elf (Calyptornis leucurus) in the Oak Openings
- Metroparks Toledo Long-term Butterfly Monitoring in the Oak Openings Region
- Wetland Geophysics: A non-invasive toolbox for investigating wetland dynamics





2019 Steering Committee Members

Kent Becker, *Toledo Zoo*

Jon Bossenbock, *University of Toledo*

Rick Bryan, *Oak Openings Region Conservancy*

Erika Buri, *The Olander Park System*

Melanie Coulter, *Black Swamp Conservancy*

Hal Mann, *WildOnes, Oak Openings Region Chapter*

Ryan Schroeder, *Ohio Department of Natural Resources*

LaRae Sprow, *Metroparks Toledo*

Steve Woods, *The Nature Conservancy*