

NOVEMBER 18, 2021

Grand Opening: The Fox Nature Preserve



WORKING TOGETHER TO RESTORE WILDLIFE HABITAT IN OTTAWA COUNTY

Together with Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge, Partners for Fish and Wildlife, and the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, Friends of Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge has restored the agricultural portions of the Fox Nature Preserve to native habitat types based on elevations, soils, and US Fish and Wildlife Service Habitat Management plans. The restoration involved planting 19 acres of grassland prairie habitats and planting 11 acres of trees to supplement the existing 8 acre woodlot.

The prairie habitat was planted in 2019 with additional seeding by the Partners for Fish & Wildlife Program. The seed mix created by Ohio Prairie Nursery featured plants that will thrive in a moist woodland edge habitat while providing food for pollinators and songbirds. Dominant plants included in the mix are:

- Nodding Wild Rye & Virginia Wild Rye (49%)
- Side-oats Grama (10%)
- Partridge Pea (9%)
- Purple Coneflower (4%)
- Riverbank Wild Rye (3%)

Other forbs included: Ox Eye Sunflower, Indian Blanket, Broom Sedge, Dense Blazingstar, Common Milkweed, and many more to provide diversity to support wildlife communities.

HOW THE PRESERVE CAME TO BE

Since 2013, the Friends group has managed a growing fund for land acquisition with the intention of working with refuge staff to identify and purchase land significant to the refuge from willing sellers. The Fox Nature Preserve was FONWR's very first land acquisition and restoration project.

Charles Fox, Jr. owned the 40 acre parcel for many years, allowing tenants to rent the house and fields. When Charles passed away in 2016, his wife and family wondered what they should do with the farm. Acreage owned by other family members had helped to form Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge. Barbara Ann Fox and their children worked with Friends of Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge to sell the farm in 2019, allowing the Friends to facilitate adding acreage to the refuge for the first time. They feel good knowing that the land will be conserved for generations to come.

"Our family was so excited to sell our father's farm to the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge. We were always hoping to preserve the "farm" in some way and this presented the perfect opportunity! The opportunity to leave a legacy, contribute to the Refuge, to protect wildlife and to restore the farm back to its natural state." -- Bethany Kalina

The property officially became part of the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge Complex in 2020.



Friends of Ottawa
National Wildlife Refuge

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Above: Barbara Ann Fox, daughter Bethany Kalina & son-in-law Curtis were the first to take a hike on the mowed grass trail through the prairie.
 Left: A Great Horned Owl on an oak branch in the woods
 Below: Trees ready to plant at the Fox Nature Preserve
 FONWR/A. Arent

The Friends worked with a subcontractor to plant bareroot tree seedlings in the spring of 2021 and 1-5 gallon container trees this fall. Species planted include:

- Bur Oak, White Oak & Northern Red Oak (30%)
- Bitternut Hickory & Shagbark Hickory (20%)
- Black Walnut (10%)
- American Basswood (10%)

The remainder of the trees planted included American Hornbeam, Hackberry, Slippery Elm, Pawpaw, Eastern Hophornbeam, American Beech, and Black Cherry.

The grassland restoration & reforestation project are designed to mimic pre-settlement Great Black Swamp conditions. The area was a priority project for wildlife habitat restoration because of its location in the Maumee Area of Concern. The restoration work was financed in part by the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. EPA with funding from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.



ADA Hiking Access: Coming Soon

A mowed grass hiking trail is now open at the Fox Nature Preserve. The trail is accessible from Lickert-Harder Rd just south of Route 2 across from the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center. A gravel parking lot and information kiosk are visible on the west side of the road. This section of the preserve was owned by the Genzman family, and their 37 acre parcel was acquired through Ducks Unlimited and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. It was restored in tandem with the Fox Unit, creating a 77 acre nature preserve.

The next priority of the Friends of Ottawa NWR is to increase site accessibility to provide safe access for all. The Friends will next work with the refuge to establish an ADA compliant hiking trail loop at the Fox Nature Preserve in 2022. This will feature sections of boardwalk and compacted gravel as well as ADA compliant parking spaces.

ADA compliant access will be funded by the Richard Kimple Family; Ottawa County Community Foundation; Stranahan Supporting Organization, Andersons Fund Supporting Organization, and Toledo Rotary Club Foundation Fund of the Greater Toledo Community Foundation.