



FOUNDATION FOR
APPALACHIAN OHIO



FOUNDATION FOR APPALACHIAN OHIO
2025 ANNUAL REPORT

Platinum
Transparency
2025

Candid.

Dear Friends of FAO,

We find ourselves at an extraordinary moment. As a nation, we are celebrating 250 years of the American experiment. As a community foundation, this year we celebrate surpassing \$50 million in grantmaking.

Though different in scale, these milestones share similar roots: people united around a shared vision and invested in a future greater than themselves. Community foundations are built on that idea.

At the Foundation for Appalachian Ohio, we merely steward our shared vision. You – our generous donors, dedicated volunteers, nonprofit partners and local leaders – are the force that drives our shared vision forward.

Because of you, our local foundations are removing barriers and creating opportunities in areas that previously lacked philanthropic resources. Our youth are connecting to new possibilities and dreaming bigger. Emerging leaders are building their lives and careers here in Appalachian Ohio while strengthening our communities. And hope is growing.

Your impact does not stop here – because strong communities are the building blocks of a strong nation.

Thank you for your generosity, your partnership and your belief in the bold vision we share.

In service to a **F**lourishing **A**ppalachian **O**hio,



Cara Dingus Brook

Cara Dingus Brook
President & CEO



Ronald Strickmaker

Ronald Strickmaker
Board Chair

On the cover: As NASA prepared for the Artemis II journey around the moon, children across Appalachia, including Azlynn Wilson of Hocking County, embarked on their own out-of-this-world adventure made possible by a partnership with our affiliate foundations and the Ohio University Performing Arts and Concert Series. See story on page 12.

\$159 million

in charitable assets
as of Dec. 31, 2025

800+ funds

in our family of funds

100+ fellows

across 29 counties

\$49 million

in grants and scholarships

7,600+ grants

awarded to date

5,500+ scholarships

awarded to date

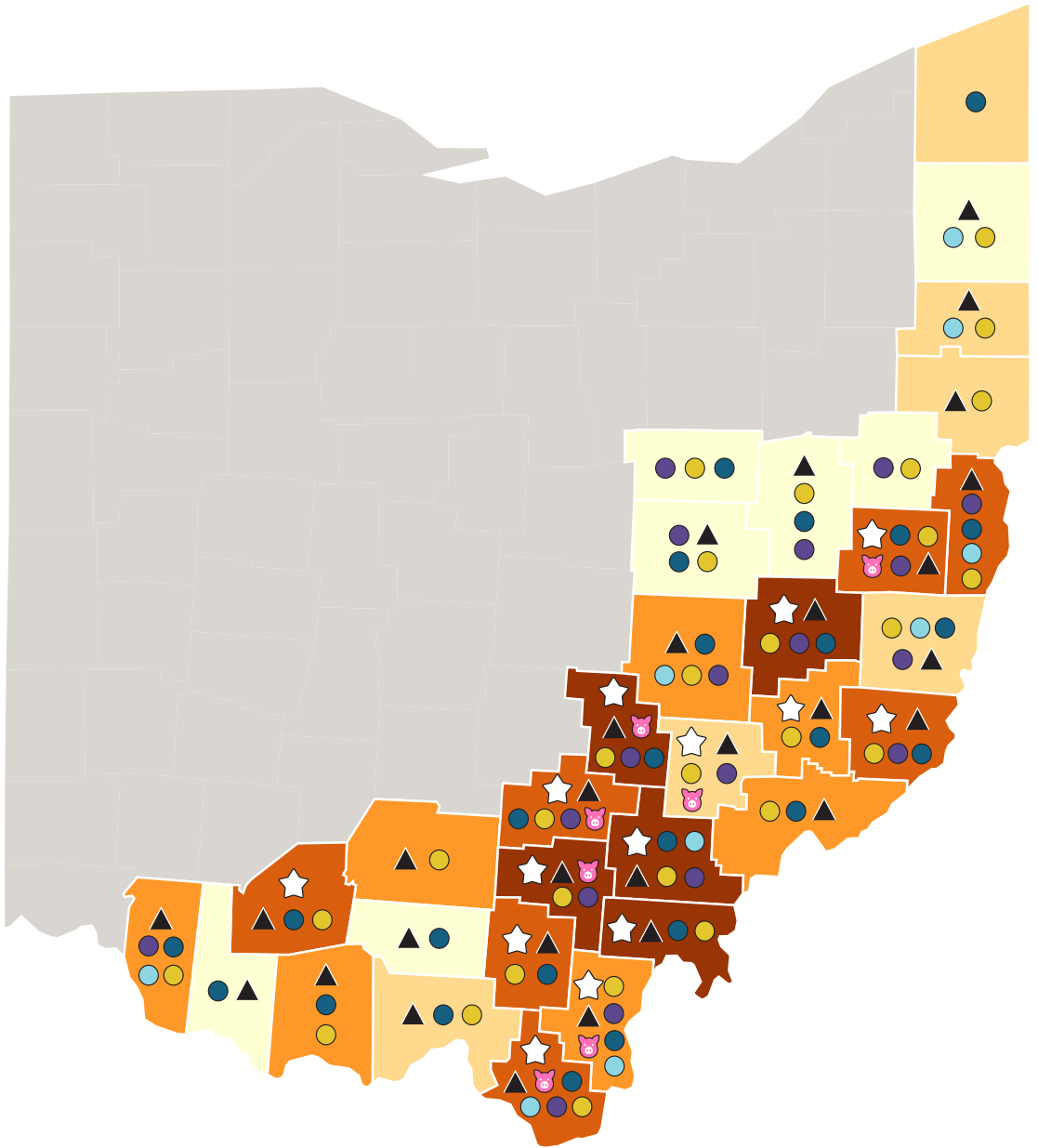
Our mission

Unleashing the collective potential within Appalachian Ohio by encouraging and supporting philanthropy.

Our vision

Flourishing people and flourishing communities, today and in perpetuity.

Mapping your generosity in 2025



KEY | Your generosity in action



Affiliate Foundations



Scholarship Recipients



Grant Recipients



AACF Grants



New Funds



Growing Home Fellows



Fill the Freezer
and similar campaigns

Grants, scholarships and fellowships awarded in 2025



\$1,500 - \$10,000



\$10,001 - \$60,000



\$60,001 - \$120,000



\$120,001 - \$250,000



>\$250,000

Our impact in 2025

927

Grants given

705

Scholarships awarded

36

New funds created

29

Counties with Growing Home Fellows

17

African American Community Fund (AACF) grants

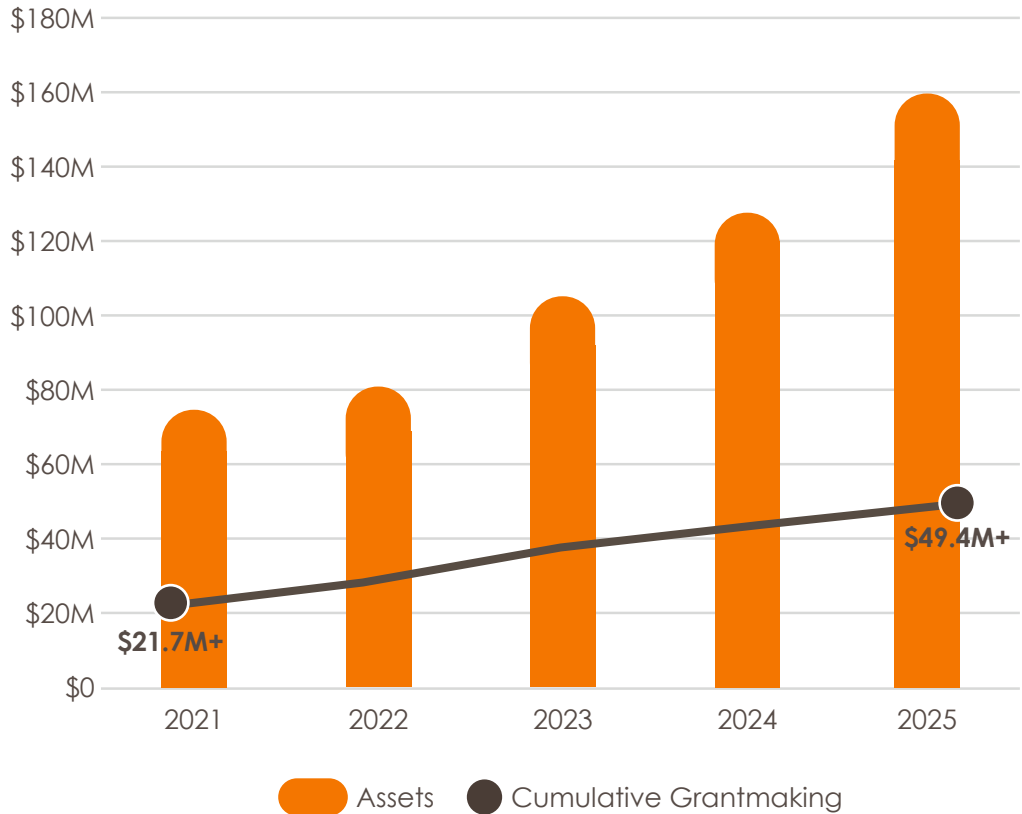
15

Affiliate foundations, including the region-wide African American Community Fund

7

Counties with Fill the Freezer or similar campaigns

Net asset and grantmaking growth



In 2025, FAO earned **Candid's Platinum Seal of Transparency**, the highest honor the organization awards to nonprofits. Achieved through the disclosure of comprehensive organizational data, the designation underscores FAO's commitment to openness, accountability and responsible stewardship.

Access FAO's audit reports and financial statements:
www.AppalachianOhio.org/financial-info

2025 grants

Our investments improve health, create educational opportunities, advance economic development and environmental stewardship, and provide access to new arts and cultural experiences.



Arts & Culture: **\$583,266**

Community & Economic Development: **\$1,043,526**

Education: **\$2,282,638**

Environmental Stewardship: **\$612,969**

Health & Human Services: **\$1,198,608**

A watershed moment

Environmental Stewardship endowment tops \$10M

In 2025, our **Environmental Stewardship Pillar of Prosperity** reached a momentous milestone, surpassing \$10 million and becoming the first of our five pillar funds to achieve its long-term grantmaking endowment goal.



WHAT DOES \$10 MILLION MEAN FOR APPALACHIAN OHIO?

It will soon mean **up to \$500,000 in annual funding** dedicated to environmental education, conservation, innovation and research for generations to come. It means sustained investment in locally led efforts to protect and strengthen our region's natural assets – and the communities, economies and livelihoods they support.

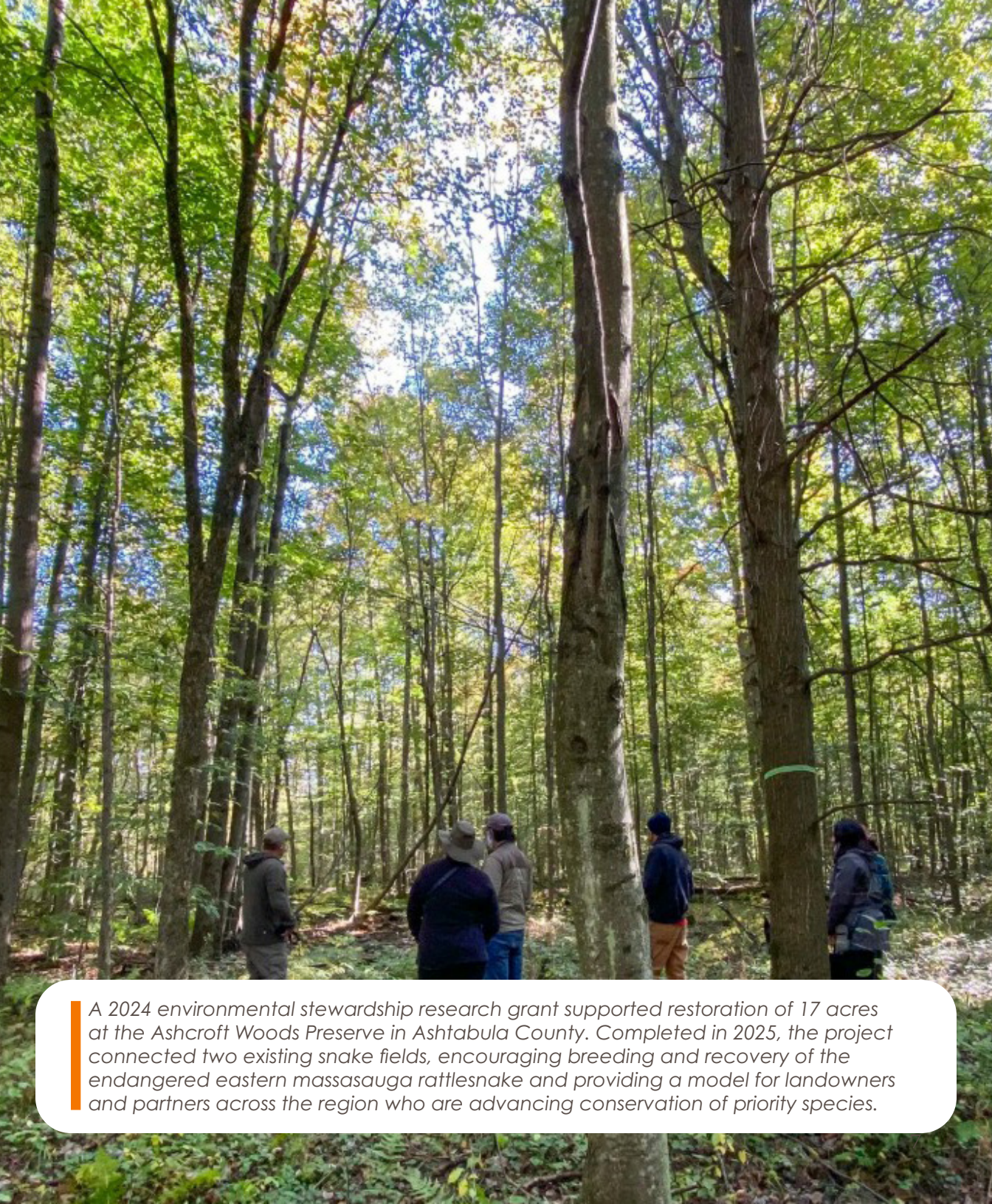
This milestone was powered by another landmark investment from the Muskingum Watershed Conservancy District (MWCD) and support from many donors, including American Electric Power, the AEP Foundation, Nicolozakes Trucking & Construction Inc., and Ohio CAT, who helped grow this fund from an ambitious vision into a lasting resource.

A \$5 million gift from MWCD's Board of Directors in 2025 propelled the Environmental Stewardship Pillar beyond the \$10 million mark, and an expansion of our partnership with MWCD is supporting a new statewide conservation research collaborative.



Check out our latest Environmental Stewardship Impact Report and see how we're working together to ensure Appalachian Ohio's natural assets – and the people and communities they sustain – continue to flourish.

www.AppalachianOhio.org/EnvironmentalStewardship



A 2024 environmental stewardship research grant supported restoration of 17 acres at the Ashcroft Woods Preserve in Ashtabula County. Completed in 2025, the project connected two existing snake fields, encouraging breeding and recovery of the endangered eastern massasauga rattlesnake and providing a model for landowners and partners across the region who are advancing conservation of priority species.

From county fairs to community impact

2025 marked a record-setting year for a growing campaign developed and spearheaded by FAO's affiliate foundations that unites communities around a shared goal: filling freezers to fight hunger.

The Community Foundation for Perry County (CFPC) piloted Fill the Freezer in 2021. The campaign invited buyers at the county fair's livestock sale to donate their hog purchases and others to donate money to cover meat processing costs to fill the freezers of local food pantries and fight hunger – one pig at a time. Similar campaigns have expanded to Gallia, Harrison, Hocking, Lawrence, Morgan and Vinton counties – delivering a cumulative 92,000+ pounds of meat to families across Appalachian Ohio and helping to meet one of the most critical and costly needs in hunger relief: access to fresh protein.

In 2025, Philanthropy Ohio presented its Philanthropy Innovation Award to Julie Paxton, a longtime CFPC committee member and the driving force behind Perry County's Fill the Freezer success, pushing this Appalachian model for addressing food insecurity into the spotlight statewide.

Fill the Freezer is growing to more counties in 2026 – and with additional support. The NiSource Charitable Foundation and Columbia Gas, through the Columbia Promise Fund, committed a total of \$100,000 over the next two years to support several Fill the Freezer campaigns across the region.

Watch our 2025 Changemaker of the Year Award video and join us in celebrating the Fill the Freezer campaign and all who support this growing tradition of neighbors helping neighbors.

www.tinyurl.com/FTF-Changemaker-2025





Launching big dreams for our region's youth

A flourishing future for the children of Appalachia is being built on opportunities today.

In 2025, donor generosity allowed us and our affiliate foundations to partner with COSI, Janet's Planet, the Ohio University Performing Arts and Concert Series, and local employers to bring hands-on science-based learning opportunities to nearly 2,000 schoolchildren in our communities.

Our goal? To inspire curiosity among the children of Appalachia, expand their horizons and empower them to believe they can be – and do – anything.

Through our partnership with COSI, middle and high school students immersed themselves in science, technology, engineering, math and medicine activities – all tied to in-demand jobs in their communities. Local employers led many of the activities, helping students see firsthand how their interests could translate into future job opportunities while strengthening the workforce pipeline for businesses.

For elementary students, our partnership with Janet's Planet and the Ohio University Performing Arts and Concert Series brought the wonder of space exploration directly into our schools. From building lunar landers to launching stomp rockets, students enjoyed a hands-on program designed to encourage creativity, spark excitement for science and inspire them to reach for the stars.



From exploring outer space to discovering career pathways close to home, see how we are helping the next generation dream bigger, embrace new possibilities and envision a future filled with opportunity.

www.tinyurl.com/COSI-JP-25



Our Growing Home Fellowship

Investing in people committed to place

Flourishing communities depend on prepared, committed and visionary leaders.

That belief inspired the 2023 launch of our Growing Home Fellowship – an initiative designed to recruit and develop our region's next generation of community leaders.

Through this pilot program, we've invested in more than 100 early-career educators who have chosen to grow their lives and their careers in Appalachian Ohio. We are providing them financial support, leadership coaching, immersive retreats, access to grant funding and a powerful network of peers who share their commitment to their communities.

Today, these fellows are serving more than 90 nonprofit and civic organizations. And a growing number of them are taking their service a step further, leaping boldly into leadership roles within those organizations, expanding their impact and helping to shape the institutions that contribute to community well-being.

In 2025, FAO received a nationally competitive grant from the Trust for Civic Life's Civic Hub initiative, a program that advances civic participation and collaboration in local communities – particularly in rural areas. FAO is using the funding we received to advance and expand our Growing Home Fellowship.



See how our Growing Home Fellows are serving and strengthening the communities they call home.
www.tinyurl.com/GHF-Vid25





2025 marked the third year of our Growing Home Fellowship – an investment in more than 100 young community leaders and the organizations and communities they'll serve throughout their lifetimes. Stay up to date on the impact the fellows are making in communities across our region: www.AppalachianOhio.org/GrowingHome.

A snapshot of fellows deepening their service through leadership



Jake Alley | Scioto County

Jake is president-elect of the Kiwanis Club of Lucasville – and will be the youngest leader in its history. Through the Growing Home Fellowship pitch competition, he secured funding to help build the town's first community park.



Caleb Bradley | Tuscarawas County

Caleb serves as an elective officer of the Newcomerstown Elks Lodge and with the Newcomerstown Firefighters Auxiliary. He secured funding for thermal imaging equipment for the fire department through the Growing Home Fellowship pitch competition.



Courtney Pepper | Coshocton County

Courtney serves on the board of Our Town Coshocton, working to revitalize the town's economy. She helped design a shopping initiative to support businesses and helped create a new partnership with the local chamber of commerce.



Kailin Reiner | Columbiana County

Kailin serves with the Tri-State Trillium Foundation and helped launch a junior chapter that engages the next generation in community service. The junior chapter now has its own board with members organizing fundraisers and volunteering.

A big commitment to small towns

In Appalachian Ohio, more than \$154 billion will be passed from one generation to the next by 2048, presenting opportunities to support all that has mattered throughout a lifetime:

The people we love. The causes and organizations we champion.
And the communities that have shaped us.

Driven by a shared desire to leave a legacy of positive impact – and a hope to inspire others to do the same – Karen Lines and Bill McElfresh designed a plan to help ensure the continued vibrancy and quality of life in their rural communities.

In 2025, they established a planned gift through FAO that will benefit the arts, the environment and career awareness/mentoring programs in Marietta, where the couple has lived for the last four decades, and in Bill's native Morgan County. Their plan will support:



Twin City Opera House in McConnelsville and People's Bank Theatre in Marietta, fueling the arts where Bill attended shows as a youth and a cultural gem in their adopted hometown



Tree planting in Morgan County and Marietta, inspired by Bill's childhood memories of tree canopies in Chesterhill, Pennsville and Stockport and the welcoming feel of trees in their downtown Marietta neighborhood



Building Bridges to Careers, a Washington County organization connecting students, businesses and community to help young people see the full range of career options available to them



Planned giving is an essential pathway to a flourishing Appalachian Ohio. For information on how FAO can help you establish a bequest or other planned gift, visit www.AppalachianOhio.org/create-a-legacy or contact Holly Shelton at hshelton@ffao.org or 740.753.1111.



Members of the Foundation for Appalachian Ohio's Board of Trustees and Craig Butler, executive director of the Muskingum Watershed Conservancy District (MWCD), celebrate an expansion of FAO and MWCD's partnership that will advance environmental health and well-being for people within our service areas for generations to come.

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Thank you to our 2025 affiliate foundation partners, each led by local leaders and visionaries who are growing charitable resources to serve their communities.

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