



FOUNDATION FOR APPALACHIAN OHIO

# Environmental Stewardship

2024 - 2025 IMPACT REPORT



FOUNDATION FOR  
APPALACHIAN OHIO

The **Foundation for Appalachian Ohio** (FAO) is a community of givers – donors and doers working together to create opportunities for the people and communities of our region. Organized as a 501(c)(3) regional community foundation, we encourage and support gifts of time, talent and treasure to advance a **F**lourishing **A**ppalachian **O**hio.

Our Pillars of Prosperity serve as a roadmap for all we do. Each pillar – arts and culture, community and economic development, education, **environmental stewardship**, and health and human services – represents an area of investment essential to flourishing people and communities.

Appalachian Ohio is home to a rich biodiversity of plants and animals supported by clean air and water, fertile soil and diverse habitats – all of which are foundational to our health, economic growth and quality of life. Our Environmental Stewardship Pillar of Prosperity supports locally led efforts to preserve and enhance these natural assets to ensure well-being across our region.

**To date, we've awarded \$2.6M+ in environmental stewardship grants, fellowships and scholarships throughout Appalachian Ohio.**

**Thanks to donor generosity and transformative partnerships** – highlighted by landmark investments from the Muskingum Watershed Conservancy District and support from American Electric Power, the AEP Foundation, Nicolozakes Trucking & Construction Inc. and Ohio CAT – we are ensuring the people of Appalachian Ohio can experience our region's natural beauty, today and for generations to come. We invite you to join us.



**In 2024 and 2025 alone, more than \$1 million was awarded across all environmental stewardship funds.**

**11 new environmental stewardship funds were created ....**

Including the Joy Valley Farm Endowment, established in 2025 to support the administration of the new Joy Valley Nature Preserve, a nearly 3,000-acre tract of forested land in Athens and Morgan counties and one of the largest private land protection initiatives by nonprofit organizations in Ohio's history.

# A \$10 million milestone for environmental stewardship

In 2025, FAO and the Muskingum Watershed Conservancy District (MWCD) deepened a partnership dedicated to safeguarding environmental health and community well-being – and took our collective commitment to maintaining our natural environment to a historic level.

MWCD's Board of Directors approved a \$3 million gift to our Environmental Stewardship Pillar of Prosperity, making it the first pillar fund to reach \$10 million – a level that will soon enable FAO to award up to \$500,000 in grants, fellowships and scholarships across the region. And because the fund is endowed, funding will be available every year.

A previous investment from MWCD and gifts from other donors have funded community projects, fellowships, scholarships, research and innovation in the areas of conservation and environmental stewardship for the past two years. That funding has supported everything from building outdoor classrooms and restoring forests and waterways to a study to determine whether dredge material from inland lakes can help restore coal mine lands.

With the latest investment, FAO and MWCD are also teaming up to launch a new statewide collaborative to advance water quality research. A fall 2025 retreat brought together Ohio's research universities and scientists to develop a shared research investment agenda for water quality.

Together, we are investing in the preservation of our region's natural assets – and empowering community members to become active stewards of them.



MWCD and FAO celebrate expanded partnership | 2025



Rising Appalachia | 2024 grant recipient



Camp Wyandot | 2025 grant recipient

**\$286,740 awarded**

through FAO's Environmental Stewardship Pillar of Prosperity Fund in 2024-2025

Applications for 2026 Environmental Stewardship fellowships and community, innovation and research grants will open **June 23**. Learn more by scanning the QR code or visiting: [www.AppalachianOhio.org/EnvironmentalStewardship](http://www.AppalachianOhio.org/EnvironmentalStewardship)



## Cultivating environmental leaders

With the support of donors, we launched our Growing Home Fellowship in 2023 to recruit and prepare the next generation of community leaders across our region.

Through this five-year pilot, 100+ early-career educators are expanding their leadership beyond the classroom – from serving dozens of local nonprofit and civic organizations to leading service projects that strengthen the Pillars of Prosperity and our communities.

The fall 2025 fellowship gathering highlighted our Environmental Stewardship Pillar and explored the role we play in preserving our natural environment and creating communities where everyone flourishes. Bill Stanley, director of The Nature Conservancy in Ohio, delivered the keynote presentation, sharing insights from his 25+ years of leadership with the organization.

### Several fellows are channeling their service toward environmental initiatives, including:



**Charli Montavon**, a board member of Friends of Scioto Brush Creek, has led fundraising and conservation efforts that helped the waterway earn its designation as Ohio's 17th State Scenic River, celebrated alongside Governor Mike DeWine in November 2025.



**Blake Smalley** serves on the review committee for the Edge of Appalachia – Adams County Fund, a partnership between The Nature Conservancy and FAO, and is a founding board member of the Peebles FFA Alumni Board.



**Hanna Vera** partners with Captina Conservancy to steward Belmont County's Dysart Woods and regional watersheds, coordinating events, planting 200+ trees, leading grant writing and helping the organization integrate a new donation management system.



Stay up to date on the many ways our Growing Home Fellows are giving boldly in service to their communities  
[www.AppalachianOhio.org/GrowingHome](http://www.AppalachianOhio.org/GrowingHome)

## Planting seeds and trees for tomorrow



*"The true meaning of life is to plant trees under whose shade you do not expect to sit."*

Karen Lines and Bill McElfresh embody this philosophy, literally.

Driven by a shared desire to leave a legacy of positive impact – and a hope to inspire others to do the same – the couple partnered with FAO to make a series of gifts through their estate plan that will benefit Marietta, their home for four decades, and Bill's native Morgan County.

One gift will support tree planting in those communities, inspired by Bill's childhood memories of tree canopies in Chesterhill, Pennsville and Stockport and the welcoming trees in their downtown Marietta neighborhood.



Read more about their legacy, which will serve as a lasting reminder of the impact we can all make on the communities we love.

[www.tinyurl.com/Lines-McElfresh](http://www.tinyurl.com/Lines-McElfresh)

### Want to help support our mission?

For more information about FAO and the Environmental Stewardship Pillar, contact us at:



740.753.1111



[info@fao.org](mailto:info@fao.org)

[www.AppalachianOhio.org](http://www.AppalachianOhio.org)



### As of 2025, the Environmental Stewardship Pillar has 36 funds partnering with FAO in service to our communities.

FAO partners with donors and nonprofit organizations to support specific environmental stewardship causes. These funds provide sustained funding and open the door to new opportunities. Several are the result of gifts made through donors' estate plans.

- Environmental Stewardship Pillar of Prosperity Fund
- AEP Environmental Stewardship Fund for Appalachian Ohio
- Arc of Appalachia Hocking Hills Forever Fund
- Arc of Appalachia Preserve Stewardship Fund for Gallia-Lawrence-Jackson Counties
- Athens Conservancy Endowment
- The Athens Conservancy Fund
- Bishop Educational Gardens Endowment
- Bison Hollow Conservation Fund
- Brian J. Blair Appalachian Forest Fund
- Broken Timbers Outdoor Education Center Endowment
- Earthtouch-Lou DeWein Conservation Stewardship Fund
- Edge of Appalachia – Adams County Fund
- Friends of the Hocking Hills State Park Educational Endowment
- Friends of the Lower Muskingum River Endowment
- Highland County Bat Stewardship Fund
- Highland County Conservation Fund
- Hocking Hills Conservation Endowment
- Joy Valley Farm Endowment
- LilyFest Fund
- Lines-McElfresh City of Marietta Tree Fund
- Lines-McElfresh Morgan County Tree Fund
- Monroe County 4-H Endowment
- Muskingum Watershed Conservancy District Fund for Environmental Stewardship
- Nelsonville Presbyterian Farm Endowment
- Nicolozakes Trucking & Construction, Inc. Environmental Stewardship Fund for Appalachian Ohio
- Ora E. Anderson Conservation Fund for Appalachian Ohio
- Ora E. Anderson Scholarship Fund
- Paul Knoop Conservation Education Fund
- Perry County Park Board Endowment
- Rural Action Fund for a Sustainable Future
- The Selinde Roosenburg Memorial Fund/ Athens Conservancy
- Somerset Emerald Necklace Endowment
- Somerset Horticultural Endowment
- Upper Rush Creek Revitalization Project Fund
- Vinton County Conservation Fund
- William L. Phillips Fund



Contact our office to create your own fund for the causes or communities closest to your heart.

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[www.AppalachianOhio.org/EnvironmentalStewardship](http://www.AppalachianOhio.org/EnvironmentalStewardship)





# ABOUT THE FOUNDATION FOR APPALACHIAN OHIO

## 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.

## OUR IMPACT



**12,000** grants, scholarships and fellowships totaling **\$49 million** awarded to date



**800+** donor-established funds



**\$165 million** in charitable assets

## STAY IN TOUCH!

Follow us on social media to learn more about our work in Appalachian Ohio.

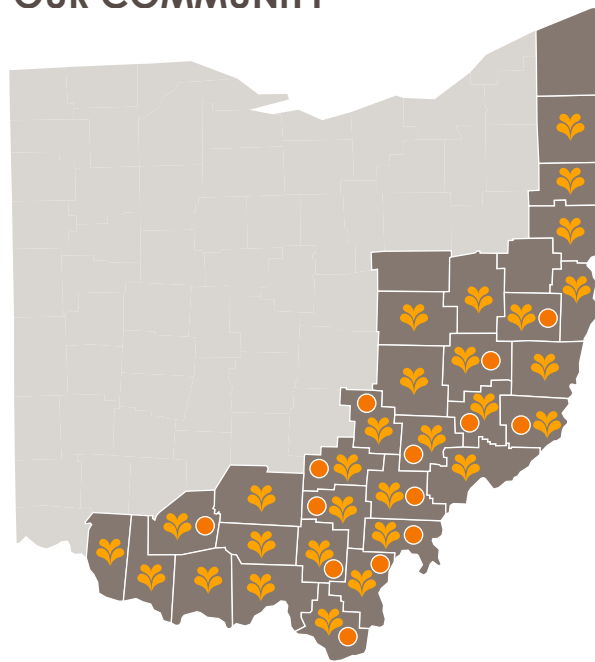
 Foundation for Appalachian Ohio

 @FDNforappalachianohio

 Foundation for Appalachian Ohio

The **Foundation for Appalachian Ohio** is a community of givers who bring together our time, talent and treasure to create opportunities and advance sustained transformations across our 32-county region. We maximize our impact by investing in local solutions, supporting transformative leaders and advancing approaches that are collaborative, holistic, evidence-based and sustainable.

## OUR COMMUNITY



**15 Affiliate Foundations**  
(Including the region-wide African American Community Fund and 14 geographic affiliates)

**100+ Growing Home Fellows**  
(Half of whom were attracted to the region and half who already lived here)

 = County with one or more Growing Home Fellow(s)  
 = Affiliate Foundation

## OUR PILLARS OF PROSPERITY

Together with our community of givers, we advance opportunities across five funding areas, known as our Pillars of Prosperity.



Arts & Culture



Community & Economic Development



Education



Health & Human Services



Environmental Stewardship

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