



# Conservation Connection

Winter/Spring 2021

## 2020 Butler SWCD Award Winners

### Cooperator of the Year: Andy & Rita Beiser

Andy and Rita Beiser of Wayne Township have installed various EQIP projects on their farm throughout the years, including a waste storage facility, heavy use protection area, roof structures, and drainage water management. They have completed comprehensive nutrient management plans, practice conservation crop rotation/tillage, and installed grassed waterways. Rita, has herself devoted many hours to Butler SWCD, serving as a board member from 1999 until 2016.



### Joe Dudley Outstanding Conservationist: Butch Foster

Butch Foster of Ross Township has installed grass waterways on his property, adopted the use of cover crops and no-till farming, along with conservation crop rotation. Butch has removed honeysuckle on his property to improve forest stand health, encouraged native warm season grasses, and restored bobwhite quail habitat.



### Friend of Conservation: Liberty Twp Parks Committee

The Liberty Township Parks Committee members are committed to environmental stewardship, serving as volunteers and coordinators for the Clean Sweep of the Great Miami and Butler County Stream Team. They are always working to improve their parks by increasing native habitats and removing invasive plants. The Parks Committee is also a great tool for local residents to learn about our natural resources.



### Conservation Educator of the Year: Jennifer Carroll

As a Fairfield School District educator, Jennifer has promoted conservation in her classroom by encouraging her students to compete in the annual Area IV Envirothon competition. Her enthusiasm for her Environmental Science course has even lead some of her students to pursue environmental related degrees in college.



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# A Homeowner's Guide

## Stormwater Control Structures

As more and more former farmland and open space is converted into neighborhoods, shopping centers, commercial and industrial properties, the amount of impervious surface in Butler County continues to increase. Areas which once allowed rainfall and snowmelt to infiltrate into the soil now cause significant amounts of concentrated overland flow, which is called **stormwater**. The State of Ohio recognizes that stormwater runoff is one of the greatest detriments to stream and river ecosystem health. Left unchecked, freely flowing stormwater can cause structural and environmental damage as it makes its way to streams and rivers.

Historically, stormwater was directed to ditches and swales, and then into natural waterbodies. During and after rainfall events, large amounts of water would quickly flow into streams, causing significant erosion and carrying with it pollutants picked up from streets, buildings, and parking lots. In the past, stormwater management aimed to reduce peak flows from flood events, followed by more focused attempts to control erosion and sedimentation, and water quality issues.

Older neighborhoods and commercial developments utilized a detention or dry pond stormwater control structure, which involved an excavated or dammed basin that did not hold water between storm events and instead served to store the initial pulses of stormwater and releasing it slowly; thus changing both the peak discharge from developed land as well as the duration of drainage. While these structures served to alter the timing of stormwater discharge, they often did little to improve the quality of stormwater entering a stream or river. This led to the adoption of the retention pond, or wet pond, that is a stormwater control feature that maintains a predetermined water level between storm events. By holding water for a longer period, sediments, and pollutants could settle out; thus improving the quality of stormwater entering natural waterways. (Check out the try it at home activity on page 3).

Since detention ponds contain water between storm events, they can be camouflaged as water features, often at the entrance to a neighborhood, retail area, or along a walking trail. (Being not only an environmental benefit but an aesthetic feature as well.) While stormwater control structures provide numerous benefits, this does not come without a financial cost. All stormwater infrastructure requires regular maintenance to ensure correct and safe operation. Who foots this bill is an often asked question. In Butler County, a stormwater control measure installed on private property is the responsibility of the property owner. In a residential neighborhood, the developer constructs the stormwater infrastructure. The maintenance liability is then transferred to a management company through a homeowner's association (HOA).

Each development is unique, and you will need to check with your HOA or neighborhood association. You can check your property deed, or the plat for your neighborhood on file at the county auditor's office. If you cannot find any ownership information, contact the Butler County Storm Water District ([www.stormwaterdistrict.org](http://www.stormwaterdistrict.org)), or Butler SWCD at (513) 887-3720.

Stormwater control structures should never be entered. These are not recreational structures, can often be deceptively deep or difficult to exit, and flow control structures can often create strong currents that can drown even experienced swimmers. Butler County does not have any regulations requiring fences around stormwater structures, so signage and fencing is up to the responsible party. For signage ideas contact Butler SWCD.

To help identify if stormwater infrastructure issues need attention, remember the following acronym **SWEATER**.

**Sediment:** No more than 6" of deposited sediment.

**Water:** Standing water where there shouldn't be.

**Erosion:** The sides of the structure should be well defined with no cuts or bare soil.

**Animals:** Animal burrows can cause structural failure and flooding.

**Trash:** Trash and other debris need to be removed on a regular basis.

**Environment:** Look for algae, excessive foaming, and foul odor as these signify water quality problems.

**Reduced:** Look for signs of reduced capacity or reduced efficiency and investigate the cause.

If any of the above is noticed, do not enter the stormwater structure yourself, contact the responsible party. Most management companies have a set inspection schedule. A problem that you notice just after a storm event may not be apparent in the following days or weeks. While stormwater control structures help to improve the quality of runoff from developed areas, home and business owners can help protect stormwater infrastructure. Our website has information on what residents can do to increase infiltrations on their property, thus removing some of the burden the stormwater system ([www.butlerswcd.org](http://www.butlerswcd.org)).



Retention pond inlet structure with significant vegetative growth.

# Backyard Streams and You

Do you have a creek in your backyard? If so, did you realize your gardening and landscaping practices can have a major impact on the creek? Creeks are usually the lowest elevations of our properties, so anything we do uphill can impact them. This means that any chemicals we use, rain falling on hard surfaces, and plants we plant uses can influence water quality, stream bank erosion, and flooding.



**Chemicals:** If you use chemicals such as fertilizers and pesticides, please use the recommended amount. Leave a buffer area between the application area and the creek. Consider natural alternatives such as compost instead of fertilizer, or a vinegar/salt/soap combination instead of herbicide for broadleaf and annual weeds.

**Plant Selection:** To strengthen the banks along your creek, it is best to not mow right up to the edge. Lawn grasses have very shallow roots, providing little to no strength to the stream bank. A buffer of native shrubs and trees will strengthen the stream banks with their deeper root systems. The vegetative buffer will also help to trap sediment and chemicals before they can enter the creek. Please note that native plants were mentioned. A common shrub across Butler County is honeysuckle. This non-native, invasive shrub has a shallow root system, providing little erosion protection and often does more harm than good.

**Rain Gardens & Rain Barrels:** Both of these practices can reduce runoff by retaining the water on your property. Keeping rainfall and runoff on your property can reduce stream erosion, and flooding downstream. We hear time and time again that rain barrels are illegal. This is only true in some western states, such as Colorado, where they have strict water rights laws. In Ohio where rain barrels are perfectly legal and are beneficial. Find out about rain gardens, rain barrels, and other water quality tips on our YouTube channel [www.youtube.com/user/butlerswcd](http://www.youtube.com/user/butlerswcd).

**Impervious Surfaces:** Hard areas such as roofs and driveways do not allow rain to soak into the soil. When looking at additions to your yard such as new patios or sheds, remember you are decreasing the area where rain can infiltrate into the soil, increasing runoff entering the creek. More water in the creek can lead to greater erosion and flooding. Instead of a concrete patio, you could create one with pavers. If you build a new shed or barn, you could capture the roof water in rain barrels or a cistern.

**Animal Waste:** If you own animals make sure their waste cannot be washed into the creek. From picking up and disposing of your pet's waste to managing and storing livestock and poultry manure, keeping animal waste out of the stream reduces nutrient loads and can prevent potential E. coli outbreaks in our streams. If you are a landowner or farmer with cattle, horses, or another variety of livestock, you may be able to receive assistance through NRCS (John William 513-887-3720).

## Stormwater Activity

### Try it at home:

To better understand how retention or wet ponds improve water quality the following experiment can be done at home.

### What you will need:

- Glass jars or bowls – it just needs to be see through, the more jars you can use the better.
- Soil from your yard – a hand full or so is fine. If you have multiple jars, take multiple soil samples from different areas of/in your yard.
- Water
- Something to stir with
- Stopwatch

### Methods:

Fill each jar  $\frac{3}{4}$  full of water and add some soil to each, being careful not to overflow the jar. If you have multiple locations, label each jar with where it is from.

Stir each jar to mix the soil and water together. Once it is fully mixed start the stopwatch. Record the time it takes for the majority of the soil to settle to the bottom of the jar, is the water still cloudy? How long does it take for the water to return to fully clear? **(Note this step might take a long time).**

If you had multiple jars, did some soils clear faster than others? What is still floating on the top of the jar? These results can help you to better understand the runoff from your property and where you can most improve water quality.



# Ornamental Natives

Several ornamental plants used in backyards and developments end up becoming ecological nuisances. From Honey-suckle to kudzu vine, these plants outcompete natural vegetation, upsetting the local plant and animal populations. Callery or Bradford Pear is a perfect example of a so-called safe landscaping tree becoming invasive.

## 2021 Tree Sale

**Order Deadline:** March 17, 2021

**Pickup:** Thursday, April 8th  
Friday, April 9th  
Saturday, April 10th

**Location:** The Farm Zone Building  
Butler County Fairgrounds, Hamilton

**\* Due to COVID-19 the pickup dates and location could change, please check website for any updates \***

**Online Ordering:** Butler is once again partnering with Warren and Greene SWCD's for this event. All orders will **ONLY** be taken online at the Warren SWCD website. [www.warrenswcd.com/tree-sale.html](http://www.warrenswcd.com/tree-sale.html)

**Proper Care:** The seedlings are bare root stock. Each packet is dipped into a preservation gel to keep the roots moist and then placed into a plastic bag. The seedlings should be planted as quickly as possible after pick up to assure vitality. If you intend to plant within 2 days, keep them in the package in a cool or shaded location.

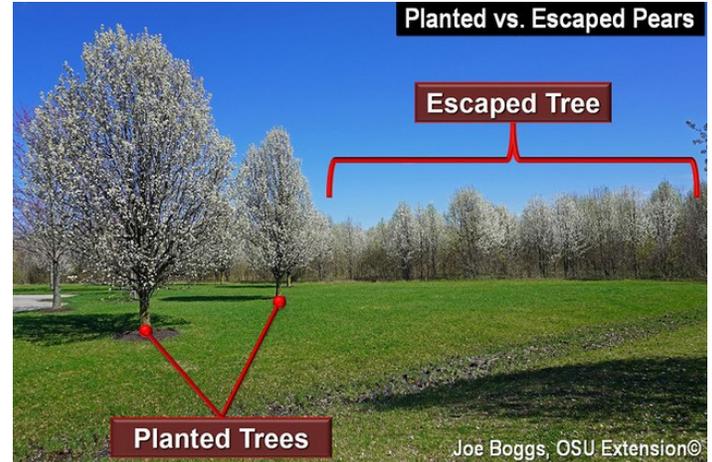
**Disclaimer:** If conditions exist beyond our control, we reserve the right to substitute species in the packets. The plants are nursery inspected to be disease free. Butler, Warren, and Greene SWCDs are not responsible for plant survival after they have been picked up by the customer. No refunds.

## Future Events

Beginning this March, OSU Extension, Butler County and Butler SWCD are teaming up to offer a five part virtual farm forum. This five-week course will offer topics such as *Effective Grain Marketing, Beef Cattle Breeding & Selection, High Tunnel Management, and Soil Health Basics.*

The workshop series will run for five consecutive Thursdays, starting on March 4th at 7:00 PM. Keep up to date with current event information by checking our website at [www.butlerswcd.org](http://www.butlerswcd.org).

**Noted:** Butler SWCD is also planning a virtual pond clinic and drive through/touch free fish sale. Stay tuned as more details come about.



Here are a few native species that can be used in landscaping:

### Ornamental Tree

- Serviceberries (*Amelanchier spp.*)
- Black tupelo (*Nyssa Sylvatica & CVs*)
- Willow oak (*Quercus phellos*)

### Flowering Shrubs

- Witch-hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*)
- Ninebark (*Physocarpus opulifolius*)
- Summersweet (*Clethra alnifolia*)

### Groundcovers

- Wild ginger (*Asarum canadensis*)
- Creeping phlox (*Phlox stolonifera*)
- Golden fleece (*Solidago sphacelata*)

### Vines

- Heartleaf ampelopsis (*Ampelopsis cordata*)
- Virgin's bower (*Clematis virginiana*)
- Trumpet Honeysuckle (*Lonicera sempervirens*)

For a more comprehensive listing of native plants, please visit the Cincinnati Zoo's plant list [cincinnati.org/horticulture](http://cincinnati.org/horticulture).



## USDA/Farm Service Agency News

The U.S. Department of Agriculture announced the signup periods for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and the CRP Grasslands in 2021. Signup for general CRP will be open from January 4 to February 12, 2021, and signup for CRP Grasslands runs from March 15 to April 23, 2021.

**CRP General** Signups close on **February 12**. Through CRP General, farmers and ranchers establish long-term, resource-conserving plant species, such as approved grasses and trees, to control soil erosion, improve water quality and enhance wildlife habitat on cropland. This is a competitive program to get into - so call Butler FSA as soon as possible to discuss ranking as well as signing up your field, (513) 642-3715.

**CRP Grasslands** Signups close on **April 23**. Through CRP Grasslands, landowners and operators protect grassland, including rangeland, pastureland, and certain other lands while maintaining the areas as grazing lands. Protecting grasslands contributes positively to the economy of many regions, provides biodiversity of plant and animal populations, and improves environmental quality.

Signed into law in 1985, CRP is one of the largest private-lands conservation programs in the United States. It was originally intended to primarily control soil erosion and potentially stabilize commodity prices by taking marginal lands out of production. The program has evolved over the years, providing many conservation and economic benefits. The program marked its 35-year anniversary this past December. Program successes include:

- Preventing more than 9 billion tons of soil from eroding, which is enough soil to fill 600 million dump trucks.
- Reducing nitrogen and phosphorous runoff relative to annually tilled cropland by 95 to 85 percent.
- Sequestering an annual average of 49 million tons of greenhouse gases, equal to taking 9 million cars off the road.

## The Do's & Don'ts of Winter Manure Spreading

Spreading manure in the winter is discouraged due to the high potential for leaching and runoff. In some areas of Ohio, like the Western Lake Erie Basin it is illegal; while our area is not regulated by these laws it could be in the future. Butler SWCD always recommends following the Ohio NRCS 590 standard for manure application and setbacks. The 590 standard was recently updated and can be found on our website at [www.butlerswcd.org/nutrient-management](http://www.butlerswcd.org/nutrient-management).

Some Key Do's & Don'ts to follow:

- **Do** use current soil tests, for the last 3 to 4 years.
- **Do** observe a minimum setback distance of 200 feet from streams and ditches on frozen or snow covered soils, and 100 feet setback distance from private wells.
- **Do** incorporate solid and liquid surface applied manure to prevent runoff.
- **Don't** apply manure where it can flow into surface tile inlets.
- **Don't** apply manure on fields with slopes greater than 15%.
- **Don't** apply manure when there is precipitation forecasted within the next 48 hours.

It is important to be diligent and mindful of our farming practices to limit downstream repercussions. Manure is a valuable resource that carries with it many dollars in potential fertilizer savings. Manure runoff can cause fish kills in the immediate local waters and leads to the hypoxic zone (dead zone) in the Gulf of Mexico. It is important to remember that even if you follow all of the recommendations in the NRCS 590 standard you can still potentially have manure runoff.

If manure runs off of your field and into waters of the state, you are breaking the law and can be fined by the Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA). At this time animal manure is the only type of fertilizer regulated by the ODA. Septic sludge and chemical fertilizers do not fall under current legal jurisdiction. Butler SWCD and NRCS have several tools to help producers make decisions on how to budget for and when to spread manure. Contact us today for more information regarding these programs.



# BEST Volunteers



Butler Environmental Stewardship Team (BEST) volunteers really are the best! We would like to thank the many volunteers that took part in our projects in 2020. For a fledgling program, during a pandemic, we still had 144 people take part in 9

projects. This doesn't even include our wonderful Butler County Stream Team and Clean Sweep of the Great Miami River volunteers.

2021 is already off to a good start. Volunteers have helped package hundreds of wildflowers seeds to give out at future events. Other projects this year will include: creating wildlife habitat, removing invasive plants, cleaning up trash, and much more. With a wide variety of volunteer activities throughout the year, checkout our website and Facebook page for continued updates and added event information.

We will be having events around the county so look for an event near you. We hope you can join us conserving Butler County's natural resources. For a complete list of projects, please visit [www.butlerswcd.org/volunteer](http://www.butlerswcd.org/volunteer). Or if you would like to receive our monthly volunteer email, please contact Lynn White at [whitelr@butlercountyohio.org](mailto:whitelr@butlercountyohio.org).

# Winging It: Backyard Birds



Together with OSU Extension, Butler County & Hamilton Conservation Corps, LLC - Butler SWCD will be hosting two virtual workshops about our fine feathered friends. Learn about the birds that visit your backyard, and find out how to attract more during these virtual workshops.

To receive the login details for Zoom, please visit the Butler SWCD homepage at [www.butlerswcd.org](http://www.butlerswcd.org).

**Tuesday, February 23rd, at 7 pm**

Meet the Birds: Common Birds of Ohio

**Tuesday, March 2nd, at 7 pm**

Creating a Bird Friendly Habitat

# 2021 Poster Contest

**Grades K-12**

**"Healthy Forests, Healthy Communities"**

Trees are vital. As the biggest plants on the planet, they absorb carbon from the atmosphere, stabilize the soil, filter water, provide healthy habitat for wildlife and offer many additional benefits – for nature, people and biodiversity. Not only is it necessary to protect existing trees and plant new ones, but it's also important to advocate and educate about trees and forest conservation within communities.

Every year, Butler SWCD works with local young artists to create posters focusing on a specific conservation message. This year's theme is all about the importance of trees and all the wonderful benefits they provide to our ecosystem. The poster contest is open to every K-12 child in Butler County. Our winners will be sent on to the state contest.

**Entry Deadline:** Friday, May 7, 2021

Please visit [www.butlerswcd.org/poster](http://www.butlerswcd.org/poster) for all contest rules, judging guidelines, and available resources. If you have any questions at all please call (513) 887-3720.



# Butler SWCD Scholarship

The Butler SWCD is offering a non-renewable \$500 college scholarship to students enrolling in classes which focus on the conservation of natural resources.



**Entry Deadline:** February 28

**Eligibility:**

- Applicants must have parents or guardians who reside in Butler County.
- Open to students of Sophomore status, who are pursuing a bachelor or associate degree at an accredited university or college.
- Applicants must have a decided major in natural resources, education, agriculture, land management, or a related field.

Please visit [www.butlerswcd.org/grants](http://www.butlerswcd.org/grants) for eligibility, requirements, and guidelines.

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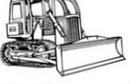
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**Mission:** To promote the conservation, restoration, and responsible use of our natural resources through technical assistance and education.

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USDA: An Equal Opportunity Provider, Employer, and Lender.

## Free Well Water Testing Event

### Testing for nitrates, arsenic, and bacteria (E. coli and total coliforms)

We will still be offering this free service, however there are some changes due to COVID-19. To have your well (not pond or stream) water tested, make sure you:

1. Set up an appointment with either Butler or Preble County Soil and Water Conservation Districts, whichever office is most convenient to you. These 15 minute appointments will be during regular office hours; leading up to the drop-off event. **\*Exact dates will be published in the next newsletter\***

Butler SWCD (513) 887-3720, located at 1802 Princeton Road, Hamilton  
Preble SWCD (937) 456-5159, located at 2789 US-35, West Alexandria

2. Attend the appointment to receive your sample bottle and receive training on collecting your water sample. It is a simple process, but must be followed correctly to make sure the sample is not contaminated.
3. The sample can be dropped off during our special drive through event at Miami University in Oxford. **Saturday, August 14 between 10am - 12 noon.** Samples will NOT be able to be dropped off at the SWCD offices.
4. You will receive your results either by mail or email, whichever you prefer.



This event is a partnership between Butler and Preble Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Miami University and Miami Conservancy District.