



# Conservation Connection

*Spring 2023*

## In Memoriam, David R. Brate

**Kelly Crout, District Director**

After publishing the last article about former board member Etta Reed, I set my sights on interviewing current board member Dave Brate. Affectionately known around the office as the "Business Man", Dave always brought a business-minded perspective whether the District was planning a new event, drafting a new policy, or working on our budget for the county. However, that's not all Dave was; in fact, that was probably the least important aspect of his life. Unfortunately, Dave passed away on February 26<sup>th</sup> before he was able to tell his story about being on the board.



One of the main reasons we wanted Dave to tell his board story is that while he served recently on our board from 2018-2023, he actually was on the board before, serving from 1978-1990. From my conversations over the past few years, Dave mentioned that he was asked to be a "body" on the election ballot the first time he served. While he had said yes to running, he didn't campaign and didn't really think he would get elected. However, as luck would have it, Dave did get elected, and went on to serve 4 terms.

It seems a little crazy to think that Dave got on the board when he wasn't expecting it. What is crazier still is that after almost 30 years, Dave came back to the District. This time, however, it was his choice and he asked to be on the ballot and run for the Butler SWCD board again. I don't know about you, but coming back to something after being away for 28 years seems like a little bit of a challenge. But, if you knew Dave, I think he looked forward to the challenge. Perhaps he looked forward to seeing how the District had changed, how conservation had changed since he first sat on the board.

When Dave was elected in 2018, I hadn't been in my position that many years. That didn't matter to Dave, right off the bat he kept me on my toes – pushing me to do better and be better for the District. Dave was always looking at things analytically and asking questions I hadn't thought of. This often had me thinking to myself "how can I be a better administrator?"

One of the many things I respected about Dave is that he never once said "we used to do it this way" or "back when I was on the board we did it this way." Even when I would ask questions about when he was on the board the first time, he never would really give an answer. See, as a business man, Dave knew that in order to survive and thrive, you have to adapt and make changes. You can't stay in the past – change is a good thing.

Dave's obituary sums up what he was all about: "Even during his final weeks in the hospital, he made an impact on the lives of those who cared for him by ensuring they were seen, thanked and knew that they were special to the Lord. Dave was a man of deep gratitude who believed in loving others and forming deep relationships as he served. His relational commitments brought life to so many. Dave loved agriculture and saw himself as a steward of the physical land. He professionally and personally spent many years of dedicated service to its efforts. " **continued on page 6**

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# Backyard Stream Maintenance

## Ashlee Widener, Water Resource Specialist

Streams in Butler County are always changing and moving. Natural streams and connected floodplains perform many beneficial functions like transporting water, sediment, nutrients, storing flood water, filtering pollutants, recharging groundwater, and providing habitat for diverse plant and animal species. Streams will gradually move on the landscape overtime. However, streams today have changed drastically during the past few hundred years due to human activity. Streams today have been heavily modified due to urban development, channel straightening, damming, pollution, and placement of stream crossings.

Heavy urbanization has resulted in an increase in impervious surfaces that leads to heavy runoff into streams. We are also seeing an increase in extreme rain events, resulting in more water entering our streams. Streams that are not accustomed to the increase in flows will erode and incise, or widen and deepen, to try and accommodate for the excess water. This is especially concerning when the stream is adjacent to residential or commercial properties. It is important to understand signs of potential erosion and pollution and learn how to mitigate the impacts.



Exposed banks and erosion on a Butler County stream.

### Erosion Control

If you live near a stream or have a stream running through your backyard, it may be a good idea to understand the signs to look for that indicate the stream may be impacted. Regularly inspect your stream for signs of erosion, particularly after heavy rains that may have potential to wash away some of the bank. Are there exposed roots or bare banks with no vegetation? Are there trees along the bank that have recently fallen? Is the bank undercut or sloughing off? These are all signs that the stream is adjusting and erosion is occurring. There are several methods homeowners can take to address erosion issues. The first is to create a “no-mow” zone of several feet adjacent to the stream. This is called a riparian buffer.

Establishing vegetation along a stream bank is one of the most inexpensive and least invasive approaches to take. Planting vegetation can help stabilize the soils and keep them intact during high flows. Vegetation in the water can also help provide habitat for fish and bug communities and help provide shade, cooling off the water during high temperatures. Removing invasive species like honeysuckle and planting natives like buttonbush, ninebark, arrow wood, black willow, and other water loving plants can help stabilize the streambank. Live stakes are a great method to use during the dormant season before growth occurs. Cuttings can be taken from dogwoods and willow trees and installed in the bank where water is plentiful. This works well on a graded slope where immediate stabilization isn't needed.

Other methods that can involve vegetation or bioengineering with vegetation are brush mattresses, live fascines, and live cribwalls. There are also several redirective methods to divert water away from the eroding stream bank. These include j-hooks, vanes, and bendway weirs. These methods may be a little trickier to implement and may involve design from a qualified engineer, one that specializes in streambank erosion.

If your bank is undercut, it may be a good idea to also stabilize the toe of the bank (where the bank meets the bed of the stream) with boulders like rip-rap, or woody debris like rootwads. These methods can be paired with vegetative techniques for the best type of approach. Sloping back the streambank to a 3:1 slope is also recommended. Other methods, although not the best choice, would be to install rip-rap along the eroding banks. This is the most common route taken when there is not quite enough room to slope back banks. It is also not as costly as a large scale restoration project or a bioengineered design. It is recommended to use globular sized, large rock that can withstand heavy flows. Large slabs of concrete are not ideal as they can easily be carried away during heavy flows. Log jams can also cause erosion and back ups, but are great habitat for aquatic species. They can be removed if necessary to reduce erosion and allow water to flow. As always, it is best to consult with a qualified professional before choosing which option to implement.



Toe Wood streambank stabilization.



## **Permitting**

In Ohio, depending on the type of work you are planning on doing in the stream, you may need a permit. If you are planning on doing streambank plantings or live staking, you will most likely not need a permit. Any other activities, such as log jam removal, bank stabilization projects, or minor dredging, may require a permit depending on the activity and span of the activity. The U.S. Army Corp of Engineers (USACE) issues permits for discharging dredged or fill material into water of the United States. These are called Section 404 permits. Minor projects may fall under the General Nationwide Permits (NWP) and may not require a pre-construction notification to USACE. If projects will exceed minor environmental impacts, they may require an USACE Individual Permit as well as an Ohio EPA 401 water quality certification. It is always recommended to reach out to the local USACE office as well as the Ohio EPA Section 401 office before starting any project you feel may trip up some of the permit limitations. Always feel free to reach out to your local conservation district for technical assistance on any streambank project before starting.

## **Illegal Dumping**

When it rains, stormwater that flows off hard surfaces makes its way to storm drains and into nearby streams. Dumping any kind of pollutant down the storm drain other than stormwater is not only harmful to stream ecosystems, but is also against the law and can lead to criminal prosecution. This includes trash, automotive fluids, hazardous household products, fertilizers, pesticides, and soaps. There are also pollutants that might not have crossed your mind as harmful, but can still impair waters, including pool water that has not been dechlorinated, yard waste, and pet waste. All of these can cause issues in aquatic ecosystems. While you may not see any direct evidence of storm drain dumping, you may notice indirect signs that illegal dumping may have occurred. For instance, signs can include strange odors, odd residues, discoloration of waters, and materials present such as toilet paper or sanitary products. All are indications that there may be storm drain dumping occurring illegally and needs to be reported.

Do keep in mind though that if you do see discolored or foamy water, sometimes it is a natural process that occurs in freshwater ecosystems. For example, sometimes orange water consistent with an oily sheen can be iron-oxidizing bacteria, which are not harmful and occur naturally in streams, lakes, and other water bodies. If you experience any illegal storm drain dumping, please don't hesitate



to contact the Butler County Storm Water District to report at 513-785-4120.

## **Other Steps**

There are a few other actions you can take to help maintain your backyard stream. One is to help reduce the amount of water that the stream receives. You could connect a rain barrel to your downspout. This can help reduce the amount of runoff coming from the roof. The water in the rain barrel can be used to help water plants or wash a car. You could also install a rain garden and route a downspout or a driveway drain into the garden. Rain gardens can be very beneficial in helping collect rainwater and filter pollutants. They can also be aesthetically pleasing and can be filled with bright colored, water-loving plants. Another option would be to install permeable pavement where water can soak into the ground instead of running off into a drain and a nearby stream.



Example of rain garden.

Reducing the volume of water that the stream receives can help reduce erosion potential. It would also be advised to watch the amount and types of chemicals you use on your lawn or plants. Pesticides and fertilizers should be used in a timely manner and not applied if rain is forecasted within the next 24 hours. They should also be used in small amounts and not immediately next to a stream.

Wash your car at a carwash and not on your driveway where soapy wastewater can enter the drains and then the stream. Also routinely check your car for leaks. Picking up pet waste in your yard can also help reduce nutrient pollution and possible bacterial contamination in nearby streams as well.

Maintaining and taking care of your backyard stream helps prevent erosion and other negative impacts. When streams are healthy, they can support diverse aquatic animal communities. Maintaining the stream on your property also helps reduce impacts to downstream neighbors and larger streams and rivers. If you are experiencing stream issues or have questions on maintenance, don't hesitate to reach out to us at 513-887-3720.



# Expansion of Aerial Conservation Program

## Brady Smith, Rural Specialist

This is your captain speaking...

Since 2019, Butler SWCD has employed the use of drones as a tool for conservation. Our first drone, a DJI Phantom 4 Pro was paid for through a grant from the Ohio EPA Environmental Education Fund. Originally purchased to conduct invasive species surveys and identify populations of Amur honeysuckle through the use of the onboard Near Infrared sensor, we soon learned that the applications of drone technology were endless. The creation of promotional videos to help improve the quality of the District's YouTube videos, determining crop stress, and stream surveys are just a few of the additional uses we discovered.



DJI Phantom 4 Pro

Through a drone training course offered by Purdue Extension, SWCD staff were able to gain the knowledge necessary in preparation of taking the Federal Aviation Administration exam and obtaining their license to operate a drone. Thanks to this educational opportunity, Butler SWCD now has two licensed pilots on staff, with goals to add at least one more. Multiple pilots are important due to an increasing workload and a new exciting partnership with the Ohio Federation of Soil and Water Districts and the USDA. Soon SWCD pilots will be traversing the state conducting aerial surveys on conservation projects.



Aerial photograph of waterway with DJI Phantom 4 Pro.

Due to this partnership and the increased workload, the Butler SWCD board of supervisors approved the purchase of a new DJI Mavic3 equipped with sub inch accuracy photographic survey equipment. This means topographic surveys can be done faster and more efficiently without sacrificing accuracy. In the past, it was necessary to lug heavy equipment into the field, sometimes requiring the use of an off-road vehicle. With the drone we can operate in most weather and field conditions without having to enter a field.



DJI Mavic3

Butler SWCD is excited about the new possibilities of drones as we explore how they can improve our day to day tasks as well as deliver new educational and promotional videos. Our new drone proved its usefulness when preparing for the 2023 Ag Day Breakfast and Nutrient Management Workshop. Due to inclement weather, the breakfast had to be moved 100% indoors. Days ahead of time, SWCD staff filmed manure calibration videos and farm tour videos in advance so that attendees wouldn't have to go outside in the wind and snow squalls. Video capture and processing went great; both videos are online via YouTube and can now be viewed all over the world!



Aerial photograph of 2023 Ag Day Breakfast venue, Beiser Farms, taken with DJI Mavic3.

The future of drone technology is bright and Butler SWCD looks forward to exploring the possibilities of this new addition to our toolbox.



# New Staff Member

## Grace Behrman, Natural Resource Technician

I have lived in Butler County my whole life and have a strong passion for conserving the local environment. I am graduating this spring from the University of Cincinnati with a Bachelor of Science in Environmental Studies as well as a minor in Geography and a certificate in Geographic Information Sciences. I have an academic background in courses that have allowed me to gain skills in technical and scientific writing, ecology, biology, and chemistry.



Outside of classes, I also volunteer as a science writer and editor for Cincinnati Children's Hospital Drug & Poison Information Center and as a water quality monitoring sampler with the Mill Creek Alliance. Beyond my academic and professional interests, I also love reading, going to concerts, spending time in nature, and playing with my two Boston Terriers. I am excited to join the Butler Soil and Water Conservation District team in May!

# Welcome Summer Interns

## Samantha Riggan, Media & Communications Intern

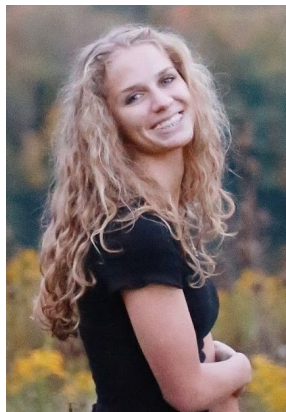
Hello, everyone! I am Samantha Riggan and I am graduating from Wilmington College in May with my bachelor's degree in Animal Science. This fall, I am starting my Doctor of Veterinary Medicine Degree at the Ohio State University. I am excited for this internship to meet new people and expand my knowledge beyond animal-related



topics!

## Maddy Miner, Education Intern

My name is Maddy Miner, I am a sophomore focusing on a Biology and Environmental Science major at Miami University. I was born in Minnesota and moved to Cincinnati when I was three years old. I love hiking, hammocking, biking, and running. I'm very passionate about the outdoors overall! I am excited to work for Butler SWCD and for the great opportunity to help with education and outreach this summer.



# Butler SWCD Scholarship

The Butler SWCD board of supervisors was so impressed with this year's scholarship applications that they awarded two students; Anna Moeller & Anna Abbitt.

## Anna Moeller

Anna is a senior at Talawanda. She will be attending Wilmington College in the fall majoring in Agricultural Education and Agriculture Business. Her "goal as an agricultural educator is to instill this drive to conserve natural resources into her students. Because there is no better way to ensure the protection of natural resources than by teaching the future of our world the importance of agriculture."



## Anna Abbitt

Anna is a senior at Talawanda. She has been accepted to Miami University, Indiana University, and Boston University. She plans on majoring in International Affairs, with a concentration in Global Environmental Policy. With her degree, Anna hopes to "combine agriculture and environmental policy to address conservation and sustainability in order to ensure that future generations have the opportunity and resources available to efficiently feed the growing



population."

We congratulate both on their accomplishments thus far, and wish them good luck as they continue their educations.

## LandownHER Series: Women in Ag

More and more women are either purchasing farmland, managing land, or are now having to figure out what is needed on their families' land.

This series is aimed to not only empower you with information and guidance, but will also serve as a way to build a community and make connections so that you don't feel alone or overwhelmed.

The program will run from May to October, meeting once a month. A variety of locations & topics including CSA's, soil health, small engines, rental agreements, farm bill programs, and much more. Registration is limited.

To register and for complete program information go to [www.butlerswcd.org](http://www.butlerswcd.org).

## In Memoriam, David R. Brate continued...

Every month, we would expect a call from Dave. He would ask how we were doing, and ask about our families. Then he would usually share a new bit of information he had read or learned about. Sometimes it was about new cover crop techniques, other times it was commenting on our programs. He would always say “sounds like you’re busy. Keep up the good work.” Yes, Dave, we will continue to keep up the good work. Conservation never stops.

Dave’s family said the following quote reminded them of how Dave lived his professional and personal life as a steward of the physical land:

*“The soil is the great connector of our lives, the source and destination of all. It is the healer and restorer and resurrector, by which disease passes into health, age into youth, death into life. Without proper care for it we can have no community, because without proper care for it we can have no life.” - Wendell Berry*

Dave was more than just a businessman, he was a conservationist at heart, he was a family man, and he was a man of faith. We were lucky to have Dave on our board not once, but twice. We knew he cared because he called, emailed, and he encouraged us to think outside the box. I personally am thankful for his insight and support, and he undoubtedly left an impression on all of our staff.

So, to the business man, family man, and man of faith – we will miss you Dave.

## Creeking in the Parks

Learn about the animals and fossils found in creeks, ponds, and wetlands around the county. All ages are welcome! Appropriate footwear required, no flip flops please.

**When:** Every Thursday, June 1 through July 20  
10 am - 12 pm

Visit [www.butlerswcd.org/kids](http://www.butlerswcd.org/kids) for a complete list of locations visited throughout the summer, along with information on all kids summertime programs. Butler Soil and Water Conservation District and MetroParks of Butler County will be your hosts for this series.



## BioBlitz

Do you enjoy walks in nature? If so, grab your phone and take photos of the various plants and animals you see while hiking at Riverside Natural Area. Your observations will be part of a BioBlitz.



This is a communal citizen-science effort that focuses on finding and identifying as many species as possible in a specific area over a short period of time. During a BioBlitz, community members work together to get a snapshot of an area’s biodiversity. No experience necessary, anyone can take part. Last fall, 212 identifications were made totaling 79 different species of plants, mammals, insects, reptiles, and more.

**How:** Observations can be taken through the free iNaturalist app, or taken with a camera and submitted to iNaturalist online. More information about how to take part, and how to use the app can be found by visiting [www.butlerswcd.org/bioblitz](http://www.butlerswcd.org/bioblitz).

**Location:** Riverside Natural Area, 111 Conservation Way, Hamilton, 45015. It stretches from the Hamilton Waste Water Treatment Facility to Joyce Park.

## 2023 Poster Contest

### Grades K-12

#### “One Water”

Have you ever watched it rain? The raindrops fall on the ground and flow through the soil. Water soaks through the soil until it reaches groundwater, which is water that moves through spaces in the soil and rock underground. As it rains and water runs off, it collects in rivers, lakes, and oceans, and then returns to the atmosphere to fall as rain somewhere else. All land across the entire earth is made up of watersheds. We all live in a watershed. We share the water in our watershed with other people, with animals, and with plants because... it is all *one water*.

Butler SWCD invites all Butler County K - 12 students to participate in our annual poster contest. The theme is **One Water** and we are excited to see what students create.

**Entry Deadline:** Friday, June 30, 2023

Please visit [www.butlerswcd.org/poster](http://www.butlerswcd.org/poster) for all contest rules, judging guidelines, and available resources.





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Rob Rich

**Save the Date:**  
**Annual Meeting**  
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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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 www.butlercountyohfair.org  
 2023 Fair Week: July 23 - 29



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## Upcoming Events

- **BioBlitz:** Month of May
- **Board Meeting:** May 11
- **Garden Series:** May 24
- **Office Closed, Memorial Day:** May 29
- **Creeking in the Parks:** June 1
- **Creeking in the Parks:** June 8
- **Board Meeting:** June 8
- **Creeking in the Parks:** June 15
- **Office Closed, Juneteenth:** June 19
- **BEST Volunteer, Macroinvertebrates:** June 22
- **Creeking in the Parks:** June 22
- **Creeking in the Parks:** June 29
- **BEST Volunteer, Stream Habitat:** June 29
- **Office Closed, Independence Day:** July 4
- **Creeking in the Parks:** July 6

- **BEST Volunteer, Hopewell Raingarden :** July 12
- **Board Meeting:** July 13
- **Creeking in the Parks:** July 13
- **Passport to Fishing:** July 15
- **Creeking in the Parks:** July 20
- **Butler County Fair:** July 23 - 29

To find out more information on any upcoming events, please visit [www.butlerswcd.org](http://www.butlerswcd.org) or call our office at (513) 887-3720.

Save the dates

