

Winter 2026

Somebody's Story

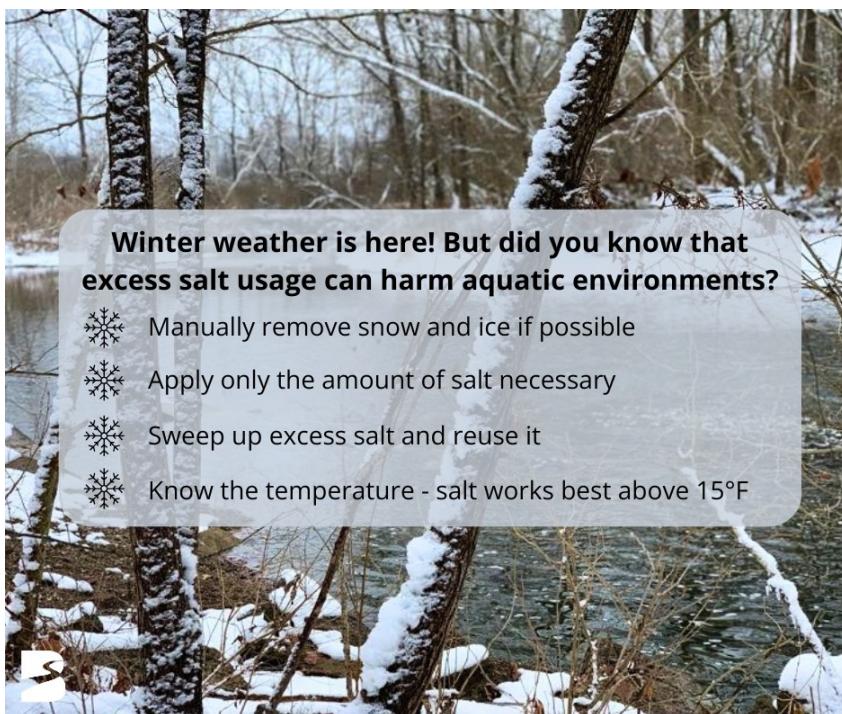
Kelly Crout, District Director

If you grew up watching the CBS Sunday Morning news show like I did, there was a segment called "Everybody Has a Story." Correspondent Steve Hartman would go all over the country talking to people who always had something interesting in their life. It was one of my favorite segments on the TV program and often left you with the knowledge that everyone does indeed have a story to tell.

In our line of work, it's not just people that have a story to tell—it's also the stream where we hold our summertime Creeking in the Park programs or the big oak tree we just measured for our contest. It's the farm field that's been in the family for 60 years and is getting a waterway installed or the couple that just installed a rain garden after taking our class. It could be an inspiring story, a heart-felt story, a story of struggle, or of frustration. It might be a story of reminiscing to simpler times. Either way, they are all important.

While we may not be able to solve all the problems when we go out to properties, sometimes it's nice to have someone listen. To be able to tell some of your story to others. In a time where so many people just want to be heard, seen, or acknowledged, Butler SWCD tries to do that.

The world is so fast-paced that maybe we should all just take the time to learn someone else's story or even share yours. Because, after all, everyone has a story.



Inside this issue:

Dams, Culverts, and Bridges, Oh My!	2
Busy As A Beaver	3
Why Big Tree	4
Ag Day Dinner	4
Native Tree & Shrub Sale	5
ArBeer Day	5
Cincinnati Master Rain Gardener	5
Garden Series	6
College Scholarship	6
Agricultural Fertilizer Certificate Training	6
Upcoming Events	8

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Dams, Culverts, and Bridges, Oh My!

Ashlee Mulrooney, Water Resource Specialist

If you have been following us for a while now, you may have seen our many articles on dams and the impact of dams on streams and rivers. We all know that dams can negatively impact our local waterways and can block fish passage. But did you know that culverts and sometimes bridges can negatively impact streams and watershed connectivity as well?

When you think about it, it makes sense for a dam to serve as a barrier that impacts stream flow and aquatic organism passage. A dam is a structure that is built across a stream or a river. Dams serve several purposes, such as generating electricity, providing flood control, or recreation by holding back water. While some dams are vital for community growth and protection, dams can do a lot of damage to streams and rivers. A dam acts as a physical barrier that impedes the flow of water, which can cause sediment build-up behind a dam, impacting important habitat for aquatic species, and blocking fish passage.

A large effort has been made to remove a lot of these dams to support fish migration, particularly for some salmon species out west so they can swim downstream to the ocean and upstream towards spawning grounds. This has resulted in an incredible improvement on stream and river ecosystems, with some locations seeing a surge in salmon returning. Even in southwest Ohio, we see collaborative efforts in place to remove lowhead dams that no longer serve a functional purpose.

But what about culverts and bridges? Isn't their purpose to allow the flow of water and not to block it? Yes, but culverts and even some bridges have been historically designed and installed to only pass water, and not sediment, aquatic animals, or other materials. Even properly designed and installed culverts can become barriers if the stream channel erodes or incises around the culvert. Streams are always changing, dynamic systems while culverts and bridges are located at a controlled point. Many culverts are also undersized, deformed, easily clogged, rusted, and in poor condition.



Stream eroded around culvert.

When you try to constrict stream flow into a small culvert, you can also end up with extremely high velocities that can cause scour and erosion at the outlet of the culvert. Culverts can end up perched as well, where access to the culvert is severely limited during low flow conditions. Even during high flow conditions, an increase in velocity can be a restricting factor for passage.



Shallow crossing on a stream reaching high velocity.

Even if a culvert is at stream grade, the flow along the bottom of the culvert may be too shallow for passage. The lack of habitat within the structure can also impact passage, as there could be large sections of the structure with no feasible shelter. While bridges tend to be slightly better, bridges that have bottoms such as concrete can be a slight barrier as they may not be level with stream flow. Some bridges in Butler County have poured concrete on the bottom to protect the bridge itself, but this can lead to a huge drop from the structure to the actual stream and can serve as a huge barrier to aquatic organism passage. Fencing, weirs, debris, sediment, and other blockages within the bridge or culvert can also impede passage.

Efforts across the state have been made to start surveying these dams, culverts, and other structures to determine if the structure itself is a barrier to aquatic passage. The Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership (SARP) put on a training in 2023 in southeast Ohio to train several agencies on how to identify and survey barriers to prioritize for potential removal. Replacement of these structures to include structures that span the entire channel or are open bottomed can help improve stream connectivity and aquatic organism passage. To learn more about this program and fish passage, visit:

<https://aquaticbarriers.org/>.



Butler SWCDs Water Resource Specialist attending the SARP Stream Crossing Survey training.

Busy As A Beaver

Lynn White, Education & Volunteer Specialist

Butler County is home to one of the most amazing wildlife engineers, the North American Beaver (*Castor canadensis*). They can be seen making their homes in wetlands, ponds, rivers, and streams around the county. For a long time, this was not the case, as beavers were extirpated (locally extinct) from the state of Ohio by 1830 due to the high demand for their pelts in the fur trade. Their return in the 1930s had a slow start, but now, nearly a century later their populations have grown tremendously. This has opened them up again to hunting/trapping, however this time it is controlled and not the free-for-all as it was over 100 years ago.

As exciting as it can be to spot a beaver in the wild, they are often unwanted closer to home. Along with felling trees, they have the potential to cause flooding upstream of their dams. However, beaver dams can also bring benefits such as easing flooding downstream.

With more of the county being covered in impervious surfaces (hard materials that do not allow water to soak into the ground) such as concrete driveways, paved roads, and roofs, this causes more precipitation to runoff the ground and into our rivers and streams. This increase in water flow can cause flooding, erosion, and other severe damage. Although beaver dams can cause flooding upstream, downstream is another story. Their dam regulates stream flow downstream by slowly releasing water. Not only does this reduce the risk of flash flooding, but the dams also act like filters holding back sediment and their action of slowing down the water reduces erosion.



The North American Beaver, *Castor canadensis*, gathering limbs to build a dam. Photograph from Grand Teton National Parks public domain.

Along with changing our human environment, think about how these changes impact other species. Beavers are a keystone species; their dams transforming streams into wetlands providing diverse habitat that play a crucial role in biodiversity. Innumerable species rely either partly or entirely on beaver-created habitat. Think of a stone arch. The center stone at the top is the keystone and if it is removed the arch will fail, just like an ecosystem if beaver are removed.

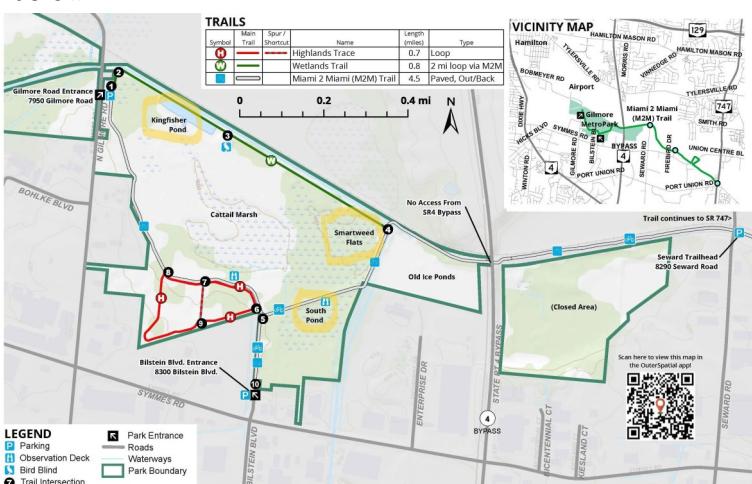
A great place to either see beavers locally, or at least their impact, is at Gilmore Ponds MetroPark. Beavers made their home for many years in a ditch leaving the airport. This beaver family has spread out through generations and has made several attempts at building both lodges (their home) and dams to hold back water within the park. Due to the seasonal variation in the water level, some of these efforts have not been successful. Instead, you can find evidence of an abandoned lodge in Smartweed Flats back in the tree line. This was abandoned as the beavers need the openings of their lodge to remain underwater to protect them from predators. This lodge sits high and dry typically in the fall and winter.



Evidence of beaver activity, notice all of the chewed up stumps remaining. Photo taken at Gilmore Ponds MetroPark, Butler County by Lynn White.

You can see a lot of evidence around Kingfisher Pond during times of low water where hundreds of stumps remain. Finally, at South Pond they dammed the adjacent channel funneling extra water into the wetland keeping it wet year-round. They built a lodge and are actively cutting trees. There is also evidence of a canal they have built to ease their transportation of woody materials back to their lodge, dam, or food cache. Look in muddy areas and you may see evidence of their footprints.

Head out on an adventure and check out our furry co-residents at Gilmore MetroPark. Visit www.yourmetroparks.net/parks/gilmore-metropark for more information on the park and to access the map below.



Gilmore MetroPark

Gilmore Road Entrance
7950 Gilmore Road
Hamilton, OH 45015

Bilstein Blvd. Entrance
8300 Bilstein Blvd.
Hamilton, OH 45015

Park open daily 8am-dark
For information call (513) 867-5835
For emergency call 911

 Metroparks
of Butler County, OH
www.YourMetroparks.net (513) 867-5835

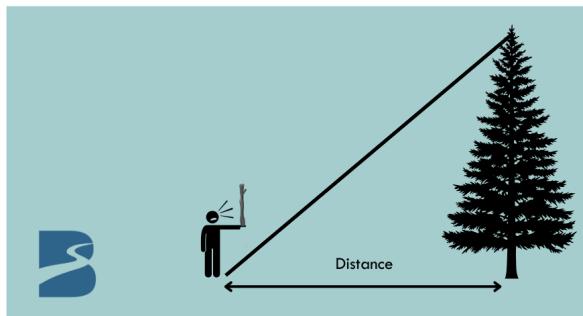
Why Big Tree

Brady Smith, Rural Specialist

In 2025, Butler SWCD decided to host its first ever Big Tree Contest. These contests have become popular in other districts across the country and are a great way to build new relationships with landowners, while also being a gateway for other topics like land preservation, invasive species, and forestry management. Over 30 landowners took advantage of this initiative and nominated their big trees for the contest.

With North America home to nearly 100 different oak species, it was easy to choose them as the species of our first contest. Furthermore, Oaks are often the most prized species famous for growing tall, composed of strong wood, and are considered a keystone species. All measurements were conducted using the official Big Tree Contest methods outlined in the national champion tree program. The formula for scoring is as follows: Trunk Circumference (1" = 1 point) + Tree Height (1' = 1 point) + [Average Crown Spread (ft) x 0.25] = Total Points. Tree Height was the most difficult to obtain, but by using a bit of trigonometry and a stick, anyone can do it.

First you need a stick the length of your arm from armpit to fingertip, and once you have this it's quite simple. Hold the stick from the bottom with your arm fully extended, carefully walk backwards until the entirety of the height of the tree from base to top of the crown is covered by the stick. Mark where you are standing and measure out to that point from the base of the tree. This distance will be the height of the tree, see graphic below. Here is an example of an actual tree we scored: Circumference—199.2", Height—101.5', Average Crown Spread—97.25'. Now let's do the math: $199.2 + 101.5 + (97.25 \times .25) = 325.01$.



The most exciting part about this project was meeting with each landowner and hearing their stories. One such landowner shared about how he would play in the woods as a kid around the tree, noting that a cavity at the base was said to be home to a troll. Other trees were spared from destruction due to their sheer size and beauty. With many of them measuring large enough to be 300 years old or more, it's hard to imagine what world events they have lived through. Many trees will outlast their owners and continue to bear fruit so that their offspring can carry on and be giants one day too.

We have had a lot of interest from the public in seeing the big trees; unfortunately, most of them are on private property. To protect the landowners, we are not explicitly stating where these trees are located. However, our 2 champion trees are absolute monsters and are both on public property.



The champion red oak is located at the Oxford Community Arts Center, coming in at a score of 325.01. And the champion white oak with an impressive score of 356.5 is located within the Miami University Natural Areas Kramer Woods. Butler SWCD is working on signage and awards to present to the winners and give these giants the recognition they deserve. Follow our social media for updates on presentation and installation of signs.



National Ag Day Dinner

Date:

Tuesday, March 24

Time:

5:30 PM

Location:

1802 Princeton Road, Hamilton, OH 45011

Registration:

Free, but requires an RSVP by calling (513) 785-6663. Space is limited, please RSVP by March 17.

Topics to be included: Cattle Market Uncertainties, New World Screw Worm, & Farm Policy Update.



2026 Native Tree & Shrub Sale

The 2026 Native Tree & Shrub Sale will be in-person only, no pre-orders will be taken. That means that the sale will be on a first-come, first-serve basis. We will have 10 species of trees and/or shrubs available to purchase.

In-Person Sale Date:

Saturday, March 28

Time:

8:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Sale Location:

Butler SWCD Building
1802 Princeton Road, Hamilton, OH 45011

Forms of Payment Accepted:

All sales must be paid for with cash or check only.

No credit card payments will be accepted.

Sales Tax:

There will be no sales tax collected during this year's sale. Since the sale is being held no more than 6 days the District is not required to collect sales tax.

Other Important Information:

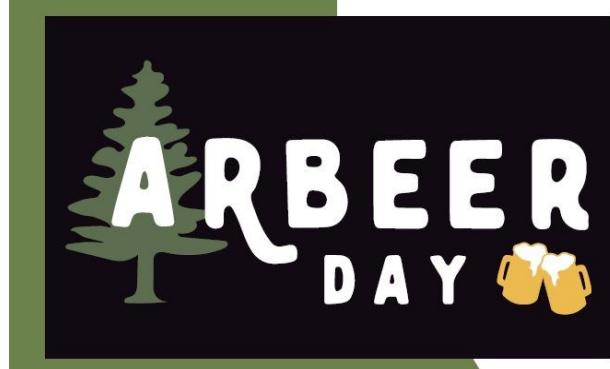
Although not guaranteed, the plants are inspected by the nursery to be disease free before shipment. Butler SWCD is **not** responsible for their survival after they have been picked up by the customer. If a species is not able to be supplied by the nursery due to disease we will replace with another species. All packs will contain 5 seedlings of the same species.

Pricing:

Trees & Shrubs - \$20 per pack (5 bare-root seedlings)

The species listed will be available to purchase at our Native Tree and Shrub Sale:

- **Shade trees** (80ft +)
 - * Tulip Poplar
 - * Swamp Chestnut Oak
- **Smaller trees** (< 40ft)
 - * American Plum
 - * White Flowering Dogwood
 - * Paw Paw
 - * Redbud
- **Shrubs** (< 20ft)
 - * American Filbert
 - * Arrowwood Viburnum
 - * Black Chokeberry
 - * Carolina Allspice



Date:

Friday, April 24

Time:

5:00 PM - 7:00 PM

Location:

Hamilton's Urban Backyard
501 Main Street, Hamilton, OH 45013

Butler Soil & Water Conservation District and Hamilton's Urban Backyard have partnered once again to combine two things our city is known for—trees and breweries. This event will be held on Arbor Day, celebrating the holiday with free trees and ArBeer Day t-shirts.

Come on out and support the community by promoting conservation and enjoying the local breweries on tap!

Looking for Sponsors:

Help us promote conservation and support the community, if you're interested in supporting this event, please email butlerswcd@bcohio.gov.

Cincinnati Master Rain Gardener: Spring 2026 Course



Dates:

February 20, 27; March 6, 13, 20;
April 3

Time:

1:00 PM - 4:00 PM

Location:

OSU Extension - Butler County
1802 Princeton Road, Hamilton, OH 45011

Registration: \$50

The Master Rain Gardener (MRG) Course is a 6-day course that takes place over 7 weeks. During the course, students are guided through the rain garden design and installation process by experienced regional professionals. The spring course will be hosted by Butler SWCD.

For additional information and registration visit:
www.cincyraingardener.org.



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
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Agricultural Fertilizer Certificate Training

Provided at Ohio State University Butler County Extension

Who needs fertilizer certification?

Fertilizer certification is required if you apply fertilizer (other than manure) to more than 50 acres of agricultural production grown primarily for sale. If you have a co-op or other custom applicator make your fertilizer applications, you do not need the certification. Please note that initial certification for fertilizer application is required in-person.

What is covered:

This training is to fulfill the three-hour requirement for all new fertilizer applicators, private and commercial, who need the Agricultural Fertilizer Applicator Certification.

Training includes:

- Best management practices
- Fertilizer application rates
- Fertilizer timing
- Fertilizer placement
- Fertilizer sources

Date:

Thursday, March 26

Time:

9 AM - 12 PM

Location:

Butler County Extension, 1802 Princeton Road, Hamilton, OH 45011

Price:

\$40

Registration:

Scan QR code or visit go.osu.edu/bcfertcert1



2026 Wildlife Garden Series

This free series is brought to you by Hamilton Conservation Corps, OSU Extension of Butler County, and Butler Soil & Water Conservation District. All sessions will begin at 6:00 PM, we hope you can join us.

Session #1

Date: **February 18**

Location: Butler SWCD/OSU Extension, 1802 Princeton Road, Hamilton 45011

Topics: Learn all about ticks & creating woody habitat.

Session #2

Date: **May 13**

Location: Cherokee Park, 4616 Watoga Drive, Liberty Township 45011

Topics: How to make gardening easier & take a tree and wildlife walk.

Session #3

Date: **September 9**

Location: West Chester Historical Society, 6670 Station Road, West Chester Township 45069

Topics: Take a bug and plant walk in the native garden.

Session #4

Date: **November 18**

Location: Butler SWCD/OSU Extension, 1802 Princeton Road, Hamilton 45011

Topics: Watch out for the invasive insects of southwest Ohio.

Registration: Free, however, we ask that you register to assist us with providing resources. Visit www.butlerswcd.org or call (513) 887-3720 to register.

Butler SWCD College Scholarship

The District 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

For a complete list of eligibility requirements and guidelines, please visit www.butlerswcd.org/grants.



Save-the-Date

Rain Barrel Workshop

Thursday, May 14

Gail Lierer Crop Ins. Agency
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 Crop Insurance Agent
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 513-615-9257 cell
 lierer.1@gmail.com



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Interested in volunteering?
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 all across the county.

Visit www.butlerswcd.org/volunteer
 for more information and to sign-up.



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Butler SWCD

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

Janae Arno

MSN, APRN-CNP

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Southwestern Ohio Beekeeper School

Saturday, February 28, 2026
 1802 Princeton Rd, Hamilton 45011

Price: \$35

Registration closes February 18th
go.osu.edu/beeschool2026



Want to Sponsor our Newsletter?
 Contact our office today (513) 887-3720



Butler SWCD
1802 Princeton Rd
Hamilton, OH 45011
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The Butler SWCD and the NRCS prohibits discrimination in its programs on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, and marital or familial status.
USDA: An Equal Opportunity Provider, Employer, and Lender.

Upcoming Events

- **Special Board Meeting:** February 9
- **Office Closed, President's Day:** February 16
- **Wildlife Garden Series, Session #1:** February 18
- **BEST Volunteer, Willow Harvest:** February 26
- **College Scholarship Applications Due:** February 28
- **Board Meeting:** March 10
- **BEST Volunteer, iNaturalist ID:** March 11
- **National Ag Day Dinner:** March 24
- **Native Tree & Shrub Sale:** March 28
- **Board Meeting:** April 14
- **ArBeer Day:** April 24

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



2026 Poster Contest Grades K-12

“Soil. Where it All Begins”

Soil is not just the ground we walk on. It is the starting point for healthy food, clean water, thriving habitats, and resilient communities. From backyard gardens to forests and city parks, everything begins with what is beneath our feet. Soil does a lot more than grow plants. It holds water, cycles nutrients, and provides homes for billions of living organisms that help keep nature in balance. It keeps roots in place, helps prevent flooding, and supports wildlife and people alike.



Butler SWCD invites all Butler County K-12 students to participate in our annual poster contest. The theme is “Soil. Where it All Begins” and we are excited to see what students create.

Entry Deadline: Monday, June 1

Please visit www.butlerswcd.org/poster for all contest rules, judging guidelines, and available resources.