



July 25, 2023

Limited Environmental Review and Finding of No Significant Impact

**Medina County Park District – Koontz Creek Nature Preserve
Medina County**

WRRSP number: WR391504-0005

**Sponsor: City of Akron – Northside Interceptor Tunnel
Summit County**

Loan number: CS390095-0147

The attached Limited Environmental Review (LER) is for a nonpoint source project in Medina County which the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency intends to finance through its Water Resource Restoration Sponsor Program (WRRSP). The LER describes the project, its costs, and expected environmental benefits. Making available this LER fulfills Ohio EPA's environmental review and public notice requirements for this loan program.

Ohio EPA analyzes environmental effects of proposed projects as part of its WRRSP program review and approval process. We have concluded that the proposed project should not result in significant adverse environmental impacts. This project's relatively narrow scope and lack of environmental impacts qualifies it for the LER rather than a more comprehensive Environmental Assessment. More information can be obtained by calling or writing the person named at the end of the attached LER.

Upon issuance of this Finding of No Significant Impact (FNSI) determination, award of funds may proceed without further environmental review or public comment unless new information shows that environmental conditions of the proposed project have changed significantly.

Sincerely,

**Kathleen Courtright, Assistant Chief
Division of Environmental and Financial Assistance**

Attachment

LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

Project Identification

WRRSP Project: Koontz Creek Nature Preserve
WRRSP Applicant: Medina County Park District
WRRSP Loan: WR391504-0005

Sponsoring Community: Akron
Sponsoring Project: Northside Interceptor Tunnel
Sponsoring WPCLF Loan: CS390095-0254

Project Summary

Medina County Park District (MCPD) seeks \$1,108,500 in funding through Ohio EPA's Water Resource Restoration Sponsor Program (WRRSP) to purchase and establish the Koontz Creek Nature Preserve (KCNP), a project located at approximately 450 Fixler Road, Sharon Township, Medina County (Figure 1). The project includes the purchase of 105-acres of a 111-acre property including 4,760 linear feet (LF) of Koontz Creek, approximately 4,319 LF of mostly Class III primary headwater habitat (PHWH) stream that flows into Koontz Creek, and 18 acres of existing high quality wetlands (Figure 2). The project also includes the restoration of 1,530 LF of stream/erosion gullies, and approximately 10 acres of mosaic seasonal wetland. The project will increase habitat connectivity in the Wolf Creek watershed by adding to five existing MCPD properties located both upstream and downstream of the project. It will also help protect the Wolf Creek watershed which serves as the city of Barberton's water supply.



Figure 1. Project location map

Akron will sponsor the project through a Water Pollution Control Loan Fund (WPCLF) loan administered by Ohio EPA's Division of Environmental and Financial Assistance (DEFA). Funds for the KCNP project will be provided by advancing a portion of the interest to be paid by Akron on its \$200,000,000 Northside Interceptor Tunnel project. This project is scheduled to be awarded WPCLF funding in August 2023. By voluntarily agreeing to sponsor the KCNP project, Akron is eligible for an up to 0.1% discount that will reduce its WPCLF loan rate.

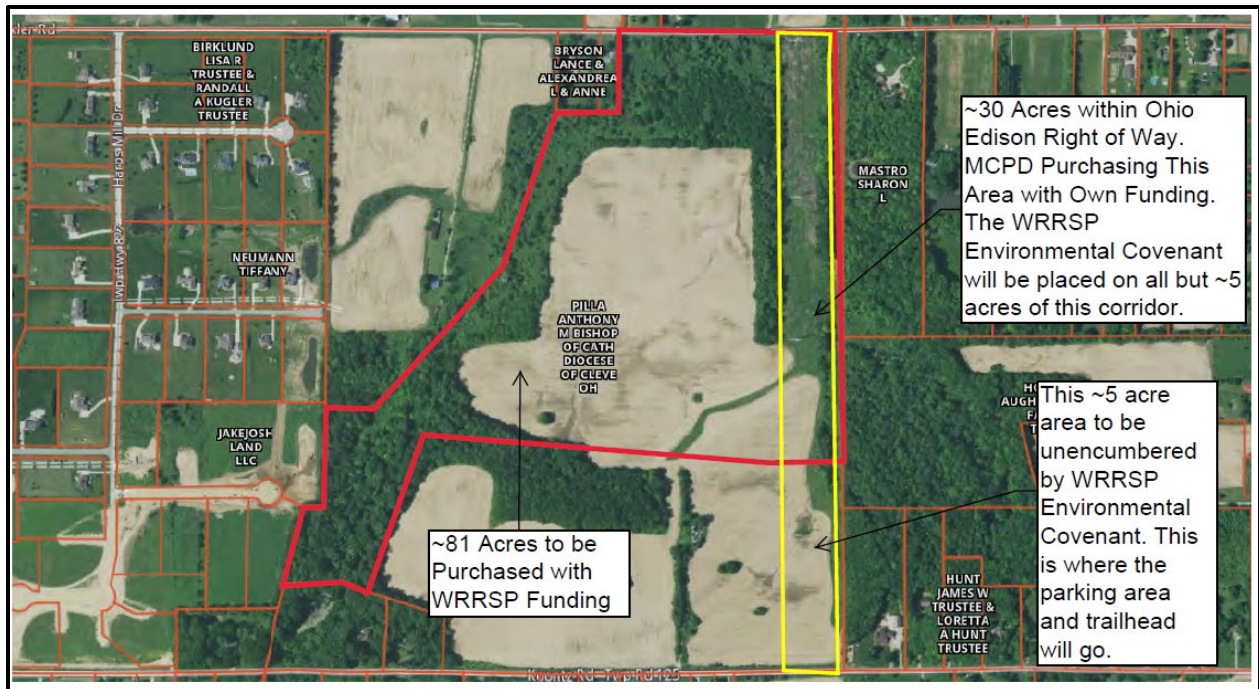


Figure 2. Project map

The purpose of the WRRSP is to counteract the loss of ecological function and biological diversity that jeopardizes the health of many of Ohio’s water resources. In the program, entities such as park districts and land conservancies (implementers) undertake ecologically restorative and protective projects. Borrowers from the WPCLF voluntarily sponsor such projects in return for interest rate discounts. Ohio EPA foregoes a portion of the interest that borrowers would repay to the WPCLF and advances it to implementers to carry out the ecologically beneficial projects. Properties are acquired, restored, and managed in perpetuity under a management plan and an environmental covenant which establishes use restrictions on the land.

History & Existing Conditions

The KCNP property is in the Wolf Creek-Tuscarawas River Watershed. Thirty-three percent of the watershed is developed, 27 percent is forested, 17 percent is grass/pastureland, 17 percent has intensive agriculture, and the other 4 percent has other uses. Medina County is one of the top 10 fastest growing counties in Ohio and development pressure is extremely high. The sub-watershed area of Koontz Creek is quickly being converted from historically agricultural use to large-lot residential and higher density subdivisions as development pressure moves northward from Wadsworth.

Koontz Creek flows along the western border of the property and into Wolf Creek approximately 1,600 LF downstream of the project. Koontz Creek is a warmwater habitat (WWH) stream that has the potential to achieve exceptional warmwater habitat (EWH) or even cold water habitat (CWH) aquatic life use designation. The KCNP property contains 4,319 LF of headwater tributaries to Koontz Creek, most of which would be classified as Class III PHWH. These PHWH tributaries, along with numerous groundwater seeps and springs that feed into Koontz Creek, are key to its cold water habitat functionality and provide groundwater hydrology to the ten depressional floodplain wetlands that border much of the stream. These floodplain wetlands include palustrine

emergent (PEM), palustrine scrub-shrub (PSS), and palustrine forest (PFO) vegetative communities.

Records indicate that extensive logging occurred along Koontz Creek sometime in the early 1990's. The most significant logging was noted in the downstream portion of the reach. Fortunately, because the eastern bank of the upstream portion is extremely steep, the ridgeline containing unique rock outcrops, groundwater seeps and associated flora and fauna were saved from this aggressive cutting and still protect water quality. Additionally, the property's riparian corridor is very high quality. The riparian area forests are comprised of sugar maple, oak, and black cherry with an understory including species such as spicebush, Christmas fern, musclewood and dogwoods.

The property also includes approximately 55 acres of sloping agricultural fields. The fields have an extensive field tile network and heavily eroded swales that are wet-weather conveyances.

Project Description

The KCNP project will permanently protect approximately 4,760 linear feet of Koontz Creek; approximately 4,319 linear feet of mostly Class III PHWH stream which flows into Koontz Creek; and approximately 18 acres of existing high Category 2 wetlands that will be enhanced to Category 3 wetlands through buffer expansion and invasive species management (Figure 3).

Additionally, this project will restore primary headwater stream habitat by daylighting two streams/erosion gullies (total 1,530 LF) currently located in agricultural field tiles. Daylighting will involve the breaking of field tiles to restore water flow that was diverted below ground to facilitate farming activities. The project will establish a permanent cover of native grasses and wildflowers on approximately 55 acres currently in agricultural row crops; it will enhance the riparian buffer to Koontz Creek by selectively planting a diversity of ~4,000 trees and live stakes (plants are inserted directly into stream banks to help protect and stabilize the stream bank) to be managed through guided succession for forested habitat; and restore approximately 10 acres of mosaic seasonal wetland habitat by breaking existing field tiles. MCPD will perform intensive invasive species management throughout the property.

MCPD will own the property in fee simple title, and it will be encumbered with a WRRSP program Environmental Covenant. The adjoining 30-acres along the eastern edge of the property, which falls within the Ohio Edison Right of Way, is to be purchased with MCPD's own funds (\$303,000) and will also be encumbered with an Environmental Covenant on all but 6 acres of this area.

Property Management and Maintenance

The property will be managed as a passive park and nature preserve by MCPD. Public access will be limited to hiking, permit-only hunting for property management purposes, guided tours and education events, volunteer activities, nature watching and scientific research. The property will be protected in perpetuity through use restrictions spelled out in an environmental covenant, which will be part of the deed. Above any other competing management objectives, the protection and preservation of the water resources, as specified in the environmental covenant, shall rule the management of the WRRSP-protected property.

These restrictions include:

- There shall be no agricultural, industrial commercial or residential activity undertaken or allowed.
- The property may not be divided, partitioned, subdivided, or conveyed except in its current configurations.
- There shall be no buildings or other structures, including, but not limited to, billboards or advertising of any kind, camping accommodations, and mobile homes shall not be erected or placed.
- There shall be no mining, drilling, exploring for or removal of minerals, oil, or gas.
- There shall be no ditching, draining diking, filling, excavating, or removal of topsoil, sand, gravel, rock, or other materials, except as may be necessary for reasonable preservation, management, and restoration purposes.
- There shall be no manipulation or alteration of wetlands, creeks, streams, surface or subsurface springs or other bodies of water. Reasonable alternations to surface water bodies and their associated riparian zones may be permitted for the purpose of protecting or improving water quality or aquatic habitat, upon the condition that prior to any such alterations, a plan for such activities shall be proposed in writing by the Owner or any Transferee and shall be approved by Ohio EPA or shall be approved as an amendment to the Project Management Plan.
- There shall be no open dumping.
- There shall be no building of new roads or other rights-of-way. Existing roads may be maintained but shall not be widened or improved.
- There shall be no operation of automobiles, trucks, snowmobiles, dune buggies, motorcycles, all-terrain vehicles, or any other motorized recreational vehicles.
- In accordance with state regulations and as approved by Ohio EPA and authorized by the Owner, hunting and trapping may be permitted to maintain ecological balance or to protect human health and safety.
- Except in areas already identified in the Plan as being disturbed, and as may be necessary for reasonable preservation, management or restoration purposes, to protect human health and safety, or to maintain a diversity of naturally occurring habitat types and control of exotic non-native and exotic species of plants, there shall be no removal, destruction, cutting, trimming or mowing of any trees or other vegetation and no non-native species shall be introduced.

Implementation

The WRRSP loan award for MCPD's Koontz Creek Nature Preserve project will be made possible through Akron's Northside Interceptor Tunnel project WPCLF loan award, which is scheduled for August 2023.

Public Participation

MCPD will provide regular project updates at their board meetings and on their website (www.medinacountyparks.com). The site will be included on the map of parks and nature preserves on their website and will be included by MCPD natural resources and educational programming staff as part of their public programming opportunities for natural resource protection and environmental education.

As part of its State Environmental Review Process, DEFA will post this LER and Finding of No Significant Impact to its web page located at:
<https://epa.ohio.gov/divisions-and-offices/environmental-financial-assistance/announcements>

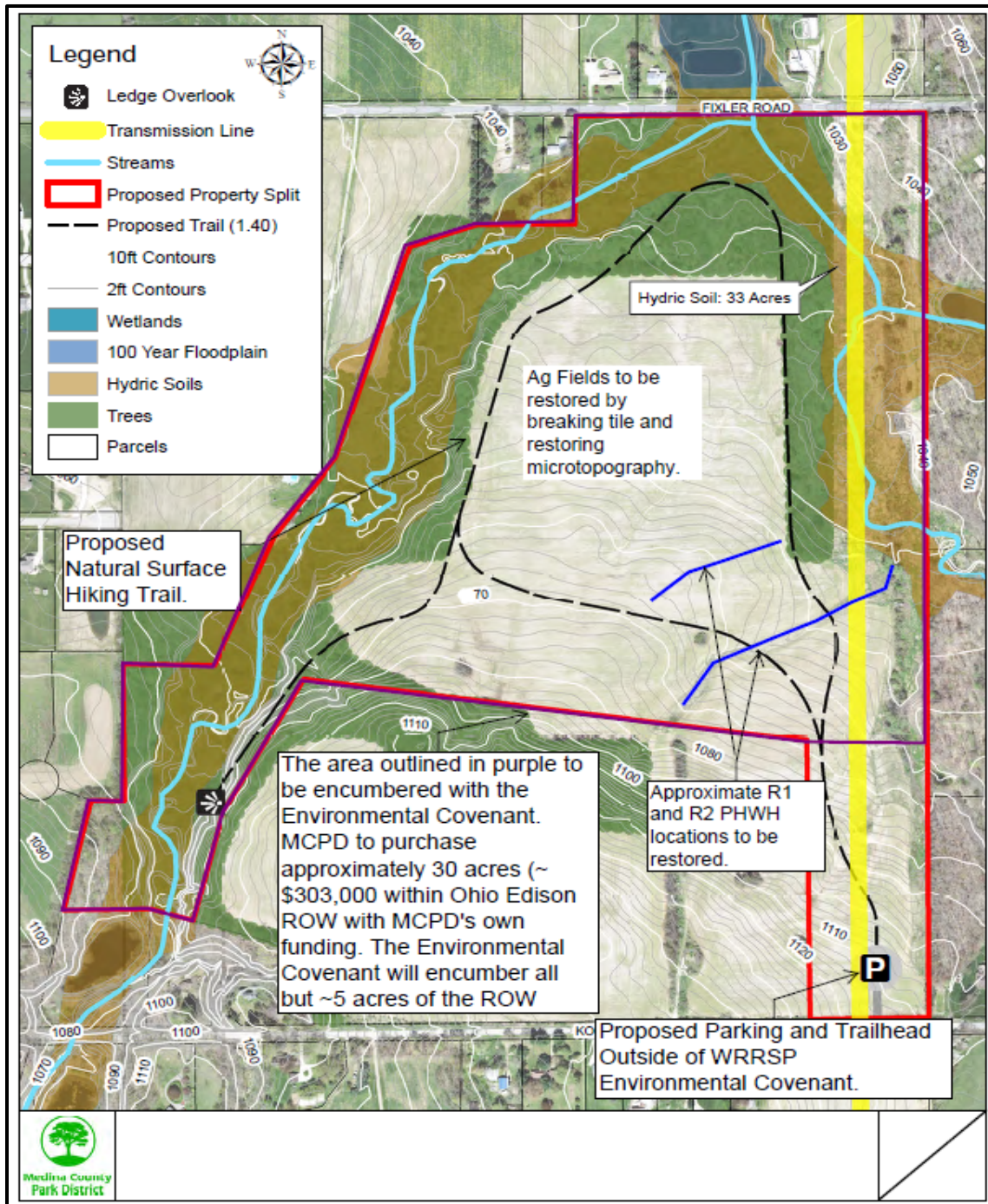


Figure 3. Water Resources

Conclusion

Ohio EPA conducts environmental reviews of all projects prior to awarding WPCLF financing. The proposed project meets the criteria for a Limited Environmental Review (LER); namely, it is a water quality protection project consisting of non-structural practices. Furthermore, the project meets the other qualifying criteria for an LER; specifically, the proposed project:

Will have no significant environmental effect and will require no specific impact mitigation as the planning activities for the project identified no potential adverse impacts to the quality of the human environment or to sensitive resources such as floodplains, wetlands, state or federally-designated wild, scenic or recreational rivers, riparian areas, prime or unique agricultural lands, aquifer recharge zones, archaeological or historically significant sites, air quality or threatened or endangered species. In fact, the proposed project will have beneficial environmental impacts by preserving and restoring high-quality streams, wetlands, and forest habitat.

Will have no effect on high-value environmental resources since it will protect the quality of the Wolf Creek-Tuscarawas River watershed by restoring and permanently protecting the streams, wetlands, and associated high-quality forested buffer.

Is not a controversial action as it will benefit the environment and no significant public opposition has been expressed.

Does not create a new or relocate an existing discharge to surface or ground waters since the proposed project does not involve a point source discharge.

Will not provide capacity to serve a population substantially greater than the existing population since the proposed project is not a publicly owned wastewater treatment works designed to serve a designated area. Instead, it is a protection project of high-quality aquatic resources.

Contact information

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