

Restoring a Wetland Restoration Project at East Fork Wildlife Area

Project: William H. Harsha Lake, Louisville District

Partners: [ODNR Division of Wildlife](http://www.ohiodnr.com/) (<http://www.ohiodnr.com/>)
[Ohio Department of Transportation](http://www.dot.state.oh.us), District 8 (<http://www.dot.state.oh.us>)
[American Heritage Girls](http://www.ahgonline.org/) (<http://www.ahgonline.org/>)

Partnership Type: Contribution

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Restored in 1995, the 15 acre wetland complex in the East Fork Wildlife Area was a joint effort between the Ohio Division of Wildlife, the Clermont County Soil and Water District, USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service and the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers. An earthen dam and control structure was built, which would fill the area seasonally with water to attract a variety of wildlife. A shallow basin covering nine acres was chock full of wetland plants, which in turn attracted muskrats, deer, turkey, turtles, frogs, and ducks.

This proved to be a great success for wildlife with one little problem, a small water loving rodent named the muskrat. Muskrat are native, aquatic rodents that feed on wetland plants. The muskrat has a tendency to construct burrows in earthen dams, creating a weak spot for water to flow and eventually undermine the entire dam. This is exactly what happened, and by 2005 the dam was breached and the wetland complex did not function as intended.

To the rescue came the Ohio Department of Transportation. With shrinking state budgets, Park Manager Jim O'Boyle and Caesar Creek Lake Park Ranger Matthew Palmer knew this was going to require 'thinking outside the box' when it came to forging local partnerships. An unlikely partner came when Ranger Palmer contacted the local ODOT office. Between road projects, the ODOT crew does 'volunteer work' to assist state, local and federal agencies. Ohio Division of Wildlife also stepped in with design plans. Given a little time for the area to dry out after a very wet spring, the project was ready to move forward. The bulldozer and backhoe plus two heavy equipment operators tore out the old dam at the point of failure, repacked, regraded and completed the project in less than two days. Next to the rescue were the American Heritage Girls. The girls helped replant the area with dozens of water loving plants collected from other locations at the project. It was a great win for wildlife and the girls had a muddy good time in the process. With an aggressive muskrat control program in place, the East Fork Wetland Area should be a haven for wildlife for many years to come.



Summer Rangers Chris Bass and Kaitlin Ruby worked with the American Heritage Girls to dig up wetland plants from an existing wetland and place them in the newly restored site.



Ohio Department of Transportation heavy equipment operators started by clearing the vegetation from the dam (left). The finished dam and wetland (right) immediately started to attract wildlife including a startled white-tailed deer (below).

