

Raccoon Creek News

Spring 2025

Celebrate with Us!

By Amy Mackey, Raccoon Creek Watershed Coordinator

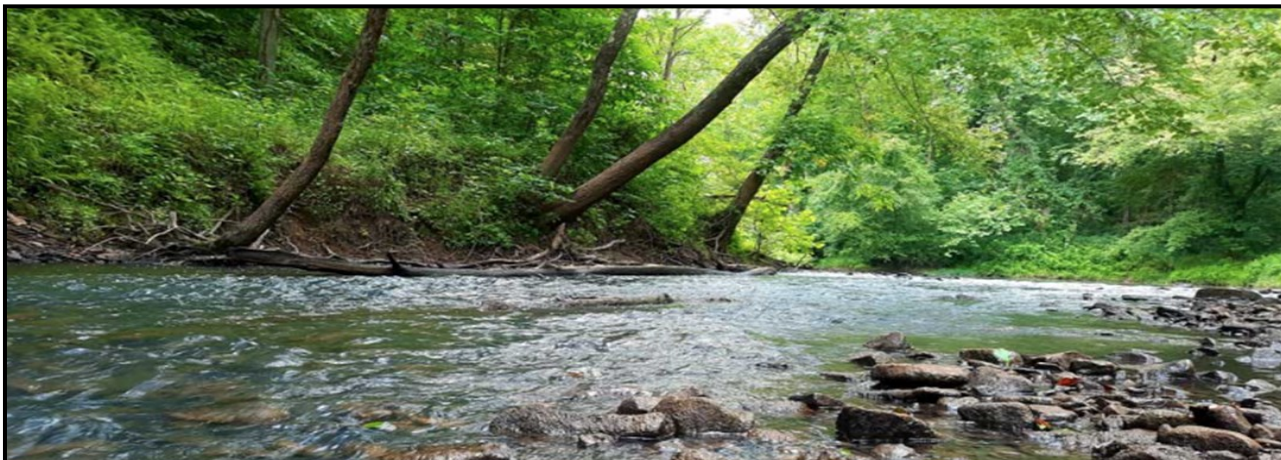
Have you heard the news?!

On November 12, 2024, Governor Mike DeWine and ODNR Director Mary Mertz officially designated Raccoon Creek the 16th Scenic River in the state of Ohio and the very first Scenic River in Southeast Ohio! Come celebrate the recovery and designation of Raccoon Creek at the 2025 Raccoon Creek Family Outdoor Day and Celebration on June 14th at Lake Hope



State Park from 1:00 – 4:00 p.m. The event is free and open to the public. Bring your family and friends and join us for canoeing, archery, crafts, activities, live music, and exploration of the inhabitants of Lake Hope! We will also be unveiling our new Raccoon Creek display kiosk located at the Lake Hope spillway, funded by the Climate Literacy Project (Ohio University and US EPA). Mark your calendars now so you don't miss this great event!

The Raccoon Creek watershed has suffered from a long history of resource extraction. Coal mining that occurred across the region through the 1970s was largely unregulated, resulting in acid mine drainage (AMD) and sedimentation throughout the watershed. These environmental stressors degraded chemical and physical water quality and severely impacted the stream's ability to sustain aquatic life. For many years, Raccoon Creek was considered "unrecoverable"... too far gone to ever rebound from the negative impacts of unregulated, pre-law coal mining. Fortunately, concerned citizens in the 1980s cared deeply about the watershed and succeeded in getting the support of agency partners. The grassroots Raccoon Creek Improvement Committee, becoming the Raccoon Creek Partnership (RCP) in 2007, has been an integral part of the recovery of Raccoon Creek.



ATHENS

GALLIA

HOCKING

JACKSON

MEIGS

VINTON

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RCP has worked with countless partners over the years (ranging from private landowners and concerned citizens, to county, state, and federal agency partners), but those responsible for most of the funding, project construction, and monitoring efforts are Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Mineral Resources Management (ODNR DMRM), Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (OEPA), Office of Surface Mining (OSM), and Ohio University Voinovich School. Combined efforts and resources of these partners have secured approximately 17 million dollars in grant funding for the successful completion of 22 restoration projects in the watershed. Projects include active treatment (calcium oxide doser), passive treatment (wetlands, limestone channels, steel slag and limestone leach beds, successive alkaline producing systems), standard reclamation/source control, and the removal of one low-head dam. These projects have greatly improved water quality and habitat in Raccoon Creek and have restored this once “unrecoverable” wasteland!

Water quality improvements are determined by conducting monitoring throughout the basin. Chemical and biological monitoring conducted by a variety of partners over the past 40 years has shown consistent improvement since watershed remediation efforts began in the 1980s. As chemical water quality improves, biological communities have rebounded. When restoration efforts began in Raccoon Creek, there were only 24 species of fish documented in the entire watershed. Currently, Raccoon Creek is home to over 90 species of fish, including the state threatened paddlefish.

In 2022, Ohio EPA officially approved upgraded Aquatic Life Uses for much of Raccoon Creek. The headwaters of Raccoon Creek, previously designated Limited Resource Water (the lowest degree of biological integrity) is now recommended and meeting Warmwater Habitat. Raccoon Creek from the low-head dam in Vinton to the backwaters of the Ohio River is now recommended and fully meeting ***Exceptional Warmwater Habitat (EWH)***. EWH designation is reserved for waters with rare and unusual species, high biodiversity, and exceptional chemical and physical water quality.

After many decades of Raccoon Creek being among the most impaired watersheds in the state from acid mine drainage, it is very exciting to share this story of recovery. Thank you to our agency partners for providing the technical expertise and grant funding to make the recovery possible, and thanks to all of our community supporters and ODNR DNAP personnel who made the Scenic River designation possible; we appreciate each and every one of you! Designation showcases the partnerships that have resulted in recovery of Raccoon Creek over the past several decades; from “dead as a bag of hammers” to meeting Warmwater and Exceptional Warmwater Habitat.



Board Member Highlights!

Raccoon Creek Partnership is able to do what it does thanks to its amazing board! This week we will be highlighting two of our board members, Kelsey Barxias and Sarah Benton!

RCP Board Members:

Kate Blyth - President

Nichole Mazzone - Vice President

Hannah "Dusty" Kopp - Secretary

Kelsey Barxias - Treasurer

Sarah Benton

Sarah Frazier

Rebekah Korenowsky

Kristen Andrews

Kelsey Barxias:

Kelsey Barxias is the Treasurer of the Raccoon Creek Partnership and is currently serving her second year as a board member. She joined RCP to connect with her community and support local conservation efforts. She enjoys collaborating with fellow board members, AmeriCorps volunteers, and the community to further RCP's mission. Passionate about environmental stewardship, Kelsey values the role people play in coexisting with and protecting nature. Outside of RCP, Kelsey embraces a do-it-yourself lifestyle, raising animals, growing gardens, anything to do with horses, and finding satisfaction through hands-on work.



Sarah Benton:

Sarah Benton moved to SE Ohio in 2021 to serve as an Appalachian Ohio Restore Corps (AORC) member with Rural Action's Watershed Program.

They have a bachelor's degree in Ecology from the University of Louisville, where they studied the relationships between habitat restoration and pollinator diversity.

Sarah brings a passion for the outdoors and a deeply held belief in community-driven restoration.

Protecting Raccoon Creek: Orphan Well Plugging Efforts

By –Sarah Frazier, Orphan Wells Environmental Specialist and Raccoon Creek Board Member

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Oil and Gas Resource Management, continues to make strides towards improving the environmental health of Ohio's watersheds through the Orphan Well Program. The Orphan Well Program focuses on plugging wells that have been abandoned by their original operators and have not been properly sealed. When left unchecked, these wells can cause problems such as methane gas leaks, groundwater contamination, and safety risks. In 2021, there were two leaking wells within the Raccoon Creek Watershed. One, in the Vinton Furnace State Forest and the other in the Vinton Furnace State Wildlife Area. These wells were named New York Coal Co. #1 and Chicago-Oreton Coal Co. #1 and they were successfully plugged and the surrounding area was remediated. These wells were discovered thanks to the report made by Raccoon Creek Partnership and ODNR's Division of Forestry. The work to plug orphan wells continues in Southeast Ohio due to the large number of abandoned wells. In the 2025-2026 timeframe, more than 50 wells will be plugged in Vinton County, with the majority in the Raccoon Creek watershed and West Branch Raccoon Creek subwatershed. These efforts are key to preserving water quality, wildlife, and public health for years to come. For more information about the Orphan Well Program or to report a well you can visit: oilandgas.ohiodnr.gov



Chicago-Oreton Coal Co. #1: Before Plugging
Photo Credit: ODNR-DOGRM



Chicago-Oreton Coal Co. #1: Post Plugging
Photo Credit: ODNR-DOGRM



New York Coal Co. #1: Before Plugging
Photo Credit: ODNR-DOGRM



New York Coal Co. #1: Post Plugging
Photo Credit: ODNR-DOGRM

Getting Ready for Spring: A Routine Rooted in Tradition

By Kelsey Barxias, Raccoon Creek Partnership Treasurer

As the weather begins to warm, I'm always excited to dig into my spring routine, starting with fertilizing the garden. We use composted manure from our farm animals, and the ducks are especially eager to join in on this task. They love rooting through the soil, digging up grubs and worms, waddling up and down the rows - it's quite the site to see. And it's a partnership between the animals and the land that feels essential to getting the garden ready for the season.

Once the soil is prepared, I turn to my favorite gardening tool—my trowel. It's about 75 years old, and I'm the third generation to use it. Just imagining how many seeds, starts, slips, and sets this trowel has helped plant over the decades makes it feel even more special. There's something deeply comforting about using it, the weight and history of it in my hands, as I prepare the garden for another season.

With my trowel in hand, next is preparing my seed potatoes. I take the potatoes I saved from last year, wait for their eyes to pop, and cut them into pieces, each with a healthy eye. It's a grounding ritual I've carried with me from my childhood, watching my dad do the same thing every year. About 12 pounds of seed potatoes usually provide more than enough to feed our household for the year, ensuring a bountiful harvest come late summer.

We plant Kennebec potatoes, a variety developed in the 1940s in Maine. Known for their high yield, smooth skin, and fluffy white flesh, they're perfect for a wide variety of dishes. The cool spring weather is ideal for planting them, and I always look forward to getting them in the ground early, as they're the first to sprout each season. Alongside my Kennebec potatoes, I'm also fascinated by heirloom varieties, which offer unique flavors and textures. Popular heirloom types like Russet Burbank, Purple Majesty, and Adirondack Blue are prized for their distinct colors and rich, earthy tastes.

Recipe Card On Back! 

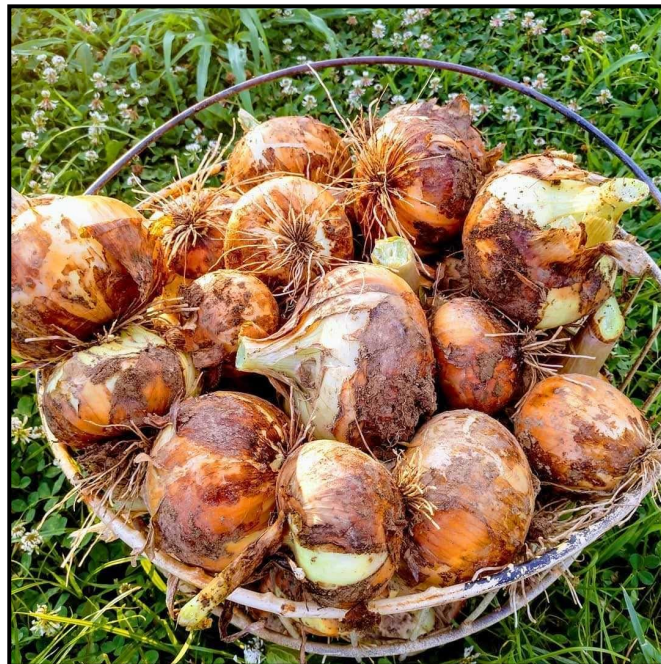


Getting Ready for Spring: A Routine Rooted in Tradition

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After the potatoes are in the ground, I turn my attention to planting onions. I grow a mix of sweet onions, which are perfect for enjoying fresh throughout the season, and storage onions, which will keep us stocked through most of the year. The sweet onions are great for salads, salsas, and all the other fresh dishes we love, while the storage onions provide the hearty flavor we rely on during the colder months.

As we move into the excitement of the growing season, I invite you to reflect on your own spring routine. What are you most excited about planting, or what special traditions do you look forward to each year? To inspire you with a bit of onion creativity, I'd love to share one of my favorite recipes for a delicious and comforting onion soup.



Recipe Card Below!



French Onion Soup

Ingredients:

- 2-3 lbs. of onions, thinly sliced
- 7-8 cups of beef broth
- 3/4 cup dry white wine
- 2 tsp Dijon mustard
- Salt, to taste
- Olive oil or butter (for sautéing)

Instructions:

1. In a large pot, melt butter (or olive oil) over medium heat. Add the sliced onions and sauté, stirring occasionally, until they become a deep brown. This step may take anywhere from 30 minutes to an hour, depending on the type of onions.
2. Once the onions are caramelized, deglaze the pot with the white wine, scraping up any browned bits from the bottom of the pot.
3. Add the beef broth, Dijon mustard, and salt to taste. Bring the mixture to a boil, then reduce the heat and let it simmer, uncovered, for about 15 minutes to allow the flavors to meld.
4. Serve hot with hearty country bread and a slice of cheese on top, if you like.



Activities and Upcoming Events

** Wildlife Wonders: Nature's Clues Crossword **

Across

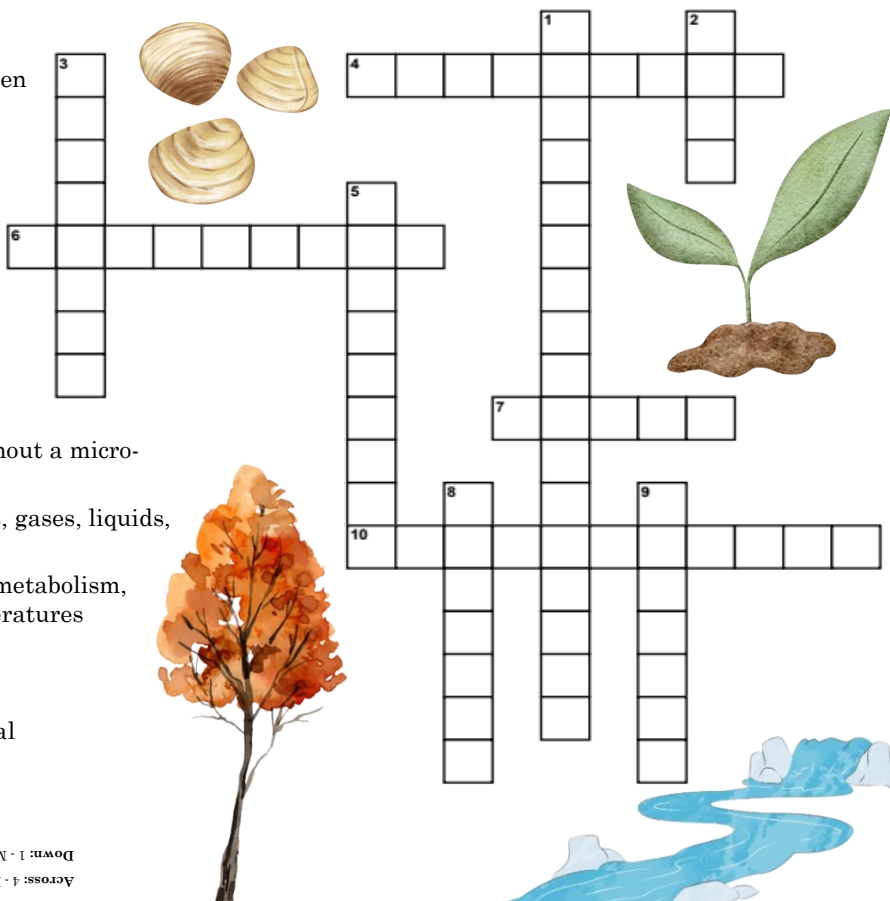
4. The movement of animals to a new place; often seasonal
6. An area of land where all water drains to a common body of water
7. A small running body of water
10. An organ many fish have that helps them control their buoyancy

Down

1. An invertebrate large enough to be seen without a microscope
2. The combination of organic matter, minerals, gases, liquids, and organisms, that plants grow in
3. Plant hibernation— where plants slow their metabolism, energy use, and growth to survive cooler temperatures
5. A tree which sheds its leaves seasonally
8. A substance that give skin or leaves color
9. The natural environment to a plant or animal

Crossword Answers

Down: 1 - Macroinvertebrate, 2 - Soil, 3 - Dormancy, 5 - Deciduous, 8 - Pigment, 9 - Habitat
Across: 4 - Migration, 6 - Watershed, 7 - Creek, 10 - Swim bladder



Upcoming Events and Opportunities

RCP Apple Grafting Workshop - April 12th, 1pm-3pm, at The Ridges, Building 22, RM 221, Athens, OH.

Join us for a lesson on how and why we graft apple trees with local expert Derek Mills from Hocking Hills Orchard. \$10 suggested donation to cover 1 rootstock, 1 scion and grafting supplies. Only 50 rootstock are available .

Scenic River Designation Celebration - Free and open to all ages! - June 14th, 1pm-4pm, at Lake Hope State Park

We will be celebrating Raccoon Creek being designated a state Scenic River and unveiling our new Raccoon Creek display kiosk, funded by the Climate Literacy Project!

Summer Day Camp - July 14th – 18th, 9am-4pm, at Raccoon Creek Outfitters- 74815 US-50 #8010, Albany, OH 45710

Registration: Closed, volunteers needed. Please contact us if you are interested!

****All events subject to change. ****

For info or directions visit our Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/raccooncreekpartnership/>

Or e-mail raccooncreekpartnership@gmail.com or mackey@ohio.edu

Raccoon Creek Partnership

c/o Amy Mackey

Voinovich School

The Ridges, Bldg 22

Athens, OH 45701

Place
Postage
Stamp
Here

Send To:



Printed on post-consumer recycled paper

Your contributions are tax deductible.
Please make checks payable to the:
Raccoon Creek Partnership
and send to:
Raccoon Creek Partnership
Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Service
c/o Amy Mackey
The Ridges, Building 22 Athens, Ohio 45701

Name
Address
Phone
E-mail

Yes, I (we) would like to help protect Raccoon Creek

Creek Chub	\$ 15	
Johnny Darter	\$ 30	
Channel Catfish	\$ 50	
Grass Pickerel	\$ 100	
Spotted Bass	\$ 500	
Paddlefish	\$ 1000	

Membership

A local partnership working towards conservation,
stewardship, and restoration of the watershed
for a healthier stream and community

RCP Membership Application