

# MILL CREEK ALLIANCE

Mill Creek Alliance Newsletter

April 2019

A Groundwork USA Trust and a Council of Communities

## Mill Creek Alliance Receives 2019 Phyllis W. Smale Award

Mill Creek Alliance is honored to be the 2019 recipient of the Cincinnati Parks Foundation's Phyllis W. Smale Award! This award is given to an organization or individual who has gone above and beyond in greening and beautifying Cincinnati. P&G is the presenting sponsor at the Foundation's May 10th Hat's Off Luncheon, where Mill Creek Alliance will be presented with the award. We are extremely proud of our partnerships with Cincinnati Park Board and the Smale Foundation and thank them for this recognition of our work! Find out more about the award and the event at: [cincinnatiiparksfoundation.org](http://cincinnatiiparksfoundation.org)!



Volunteers greening the Mill Creek Watershed

## Reading Floodplain Restoration Project Kicks Off

Work started on Phase I of the Reading Floodplain Bench project – an environmental restoration project along the Mill Creek. In August 2017, the City of Reading obtained \$387,000 in funding from a Community Development Block Grant and the OEPA Clean Water Act Section 319 program. Years of development in the floodplain left the Mill Creek cutting steep streambanks as high as 12 feet that are eroding at an alarming rate and releasing 281 tons of sediment pollution into the creek each year.

For the past year, Stantec Inc. conducted computer modeling and engineering calculations to design the project. Not only will the project create 1 million gallons of extra flood water storage, the flow of the Mill Creek will be reduced to decrease the energy of the stream that scours and erodes the streambank. By excavating and

recontouring a floodplain bench, a second area to contain water during high rain events, the banks will be stabilized, improving the water quality & stream habitat, providing flood control, and enhancing the value of the Mill Creek.

In March of 2019, The City of Reading contracted the MCA Green Corps to get a head start preparing the site. Getting started early was important in order to minimize the impact on the habit of the endangered Indiana Bat and Northern Long-eared Bat. The Green Corps cleared the streambank of vegetation and learned new skills like using large chainsaws, making cuts to safely and effectively fell trees, and operating heavy machinery like an excavator in the steep topography of the Mill Creek. In summer 2019 the streambank will be regraded to a more gradual slope and secured at the base with large rocks. In the fall of 2019, the Green Corps will return to the site to plant native trees, shrubs, and seeds, ultimately bioengineering a better functioning and more stable Mill Creek streambank and helping to bring the natural habitat back to the stream.



Sophie fells a tree next to the creek in preparation for creating a floodplain

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## Blue Team Spotlight:

### Tionna Jordan

*Tionna started  
volunteering with  
Mill Creek Alliance in  
October of 2018 and was  
hired as a Blue Team  
employee to support the Mill  
Creek Water Quality  
Monitoring (WQM)  
Program in 2019.*



Tionna Jordan on the  
Mill Creek Greenway Trail

#### **What do you like about the WQM program?**

I like that the program is really hands-on and is working to help improve the Mill Creek, which is an important part of Cincinnati. I also like that the program is majority volunteers, so it's very exciting to see so many people feeling the same way about an ongoing issue and helping to improve it.

#### **What is your favorite part about working with the Mill Creek WQM program?**

My favorite part about working with the WQM program would be working in the lab. In the lab, I've done a couple tests, but my favorite is the nitrates test. I also enjoy seeing how the water tests may vary every month and I'm excited to see how it will compare to the 2018 water tests. I also enjoy being able to share any new information I've learned with my family, friends, and even people at school.

#### **How does your work on the Blue Team help you with your future plans?**

My work on the Blue Team helps me to understand what field in Biology I am most interested in. I know I would like to enter research, but now I know I'm interested in studying water.

#### **What are some things you enjoy doing & learning about?**

I enjoy hanging out with my friends and family, volunteering, appreciating nature, and trying new things. I like learning about the environment and what could potentially help to improve it. I also enjoy learning about different cultures and religions.

***Tionna is a Freshman at Mount Saint Joseph University***

## The Mill Creek Alliance Blue Team

MCA was recently awarded a grant through the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency's Ohio Environmental Education Fund! This Grant will help support Mill Creek's Volunteer Citizen Science Water Quality Monitoring Program. The funding will be used to purchase the necessary supplies and equipment as well as support for a new initiative, the Blue Team.

This group of five students from area universities are spending the semester, and in some cases the year, training in water quality with Dr. Michael Miller, Mill Creek Alliance staff, and local experts. As part of their training they assist with running the Mill Creek Water Quality Monitoring program and are implementing new techniques to improve data quality.

Each team member will work towards achieving status as a Level II Qualified Data Collector in water chemistry with the Ohio EPA. Each Blue Team member takes on a project unique to her aptitudes and interests to support the program, such as mapping, statistical analysis, laboratory protocols, or program coordination.



Blue Team intern, Sarah, teaches volunteers  
how to use new meters to analyze  
pH and conductivity in the field



## We're Rooftop Gardening at Oyler School!

Thanks to the generous support of an Anonymous Donor and the L&L Nippert Charitable Foundation, Mill Creek Alliance has started a club at Oyler School!

The students work on projects to enhance the rooftop, like installing large planters for fruit trees and constructing raised beds. For the school, the goal is to beautify this common space and create a venue for experiential learning. For the students in the afterschool club, the goal is to enhance perseverance and problem solving skills and foster ownership.

Moreover, MCA wants these students to learn new skills and feel empowered and confident in their capabilities and their positive impact on the school!



Students install a hoophouse over a rooftop garden bed

## Green Corps Restores Little Duck Creek

Working alongside the Park Board in a project with Madisonville Community Urban Redevelopment Corporation, the Mill Creek Alliance's Green Corps are completing invasive plant removal along the Little Duck Creek Trail. The work includes using hand saws to cut and kill the large euonymus/winter creeper vines that are growing up trees and threatening their survival and using chainsaws to clear invasive honeysuckle and applying herbicides to kill those stumps. Later in the year the crews will start planting native plants such as spicebush. Much of this professional land-management work done over the winter was concentrated near the Roe Street bridge and the Settle Street bridge in order to improve the view from those elevated roads and sidewalks down to the unpaved creek-side Little Duck Creek Nature Trail. This work is being funded by a grant from Duke Energy Foundation.



Green Corps and Park Board employees on a snowy day at Little Duck Creek

## Volunteers Monitor Mill Creek Water Quality

The 2019 Mill Creek water quality monitoring season is underway! This volunteer-run citizen science program monitors the health of the creek, sampling over 50 sites along the main stem and tributaries from March through November. The program analyzes the levels of pH, turbidity, phosphate, nitrates, conductivity, coliforms, *E. coli*, optical brighteners, and chlorophyll. This data allows for a better understanding of the health of the Mill Creek. This year we are adding new sites to monitor the effect of 2018's historic mussel relocation near Caldwell Park and the Hamilton County Soil and Water Conservation District's Cooper Creek demonstration watershed. Volunteers are absolutely integral to the success of this program; there is simply no way Mill Creek Alliance staff could sample from all the sites and analyze all the samples we collect. This program is made possible by Butler County Stormwater District and Butler County Water and Sewer. Data is made public on our website and on Streambank, the regional water quality database created by Butler County with data from all four regional monitoring programs. The Mill Creek water quality monitoring program is entering its 7th year.



Volunteers analyze total coliforms, *E. coli*, turbidity, pH, and conductivity in the lab

## Upcoming Events

Contact us for more information!

- May 18** Urban Stream Adventure with MCYC  
**May 18** Go Local Volunteer Invasive Species Removal and Native Planting  
**June 1** BioBlitz on the Mill Creek with Benchmark Outfitters, Patagonia, and The Nature Conservancy  
**June 22** Urban Stream Adventure with MCYC  
**July 28** Lower Mill Creek Cleanup  
**Aug 3** Paddlefest  
**Sept 21** Upper Mill Creek Cleanup  
**Sept 28** **SAVE THE DATE:** Mill Creek Greenway 5K, Space Walk, and more!  
**Oct 19** Urban Stream Adventure with MCYC

## Contact Us

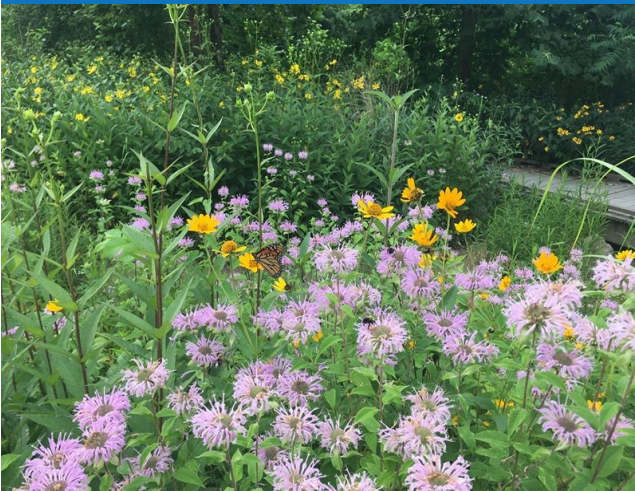
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Laughing Brook constructed wetland at Salway Park

## MCA Partners with National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

The Mill Creek valley may never be pristine wilderness, but how about an Urban Wildlife Refuge? The Mill Creek Alliance is proud to be supported by the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation via the Five Star & Urban Waters Grant Program. The Green Team and Green Corps will lead neighborhood and school groups in wetland work, invasive species removal, and native tree plantings on Mill Creek restoration sites during 2019. The Green Team has already travelled to our local refuge, Muscatatuck National Wildlife Refuge, over spring break to complete construction & native planting projects.

## The Mill Creek Yacht Club

Since its maiden voyage in April 1994, the Mill Creek Yacht Club has inducted over 1200 individual crewmates, hosted over 50 cleanup outings, and hauled an estimated 50 tons of trash from the Mill Creek and its tributaries. This dedicated group of volunteers has scoured the creek for countless tires and shopping carts and “spoils” such as a riding lawn tractor, water heaters, televisions, hundreds of feet of fire hose, a plastic tank as big as a phone booth, a truck axle, and a toilet. Some voyages have triggered corrective actions by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Ohio EPA, Metropolitan Sewer District, and Hamilton County Public Health. In 2019 the Yacht Club’s veteran paddlers will be hosting three public urban stream adventures (weather permitting), opportunities to canoe on Cincinnati’s “hidden gem” with some of the areas most skilled and knowledgeable Mill Creek paddlers. You can also join them for cleanup events (see above) and Paddlefest’s Mill Creek Mile. The Mill Creek Yacht Club is supported by a generous grant from REI.



Mill Creek Yacht Club clean-up with Green Corps members October 2018