



# MUSKINGUM WATERSHED

CONSERVANCY DISTRICT

ANNUAL REPORT OF OPERATIONS

# 2023





# MWCD 2023 Annual Report of Operations

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## Executive Director Report

For nine decades, the Muskingum Watershed Conservancy District (MWCD) has stood as a beacon of environmental stewardship and community resilience. As we commemorate this milestone, it is an opportunity to reflect on our rich history, honor the contributions of those who have come before us, and chart a strategic path forward. In doing so, we acknowledge the past while embracing the responsibility to safeguard our watershed for generations to come.

### HONORING OUR PAST:

The roots of MWCD stretch back to a time of great environmental challenges and economic hardship. Established in 1933 amidst the Great Depression, our founders envisioned a bold initiative to manage and conserve the water resources of the Muskingum River Basin. Their foresight and determination laid the foundation for an organization dedicated to safeguarding lives, property, and natural ecosystems.

Over 90 years, MWCD has navigated numerous trials and triumphs, from the construction of the groundbreaking Muskingum Watershed Conservancy Dam System to the implementation of innovative water and soil management practices. Each chapter of our history is imbued with the spirit of collaboration, perseverance, and a commitment to serving the needs of our communities. We honor the sacrifices and contributions of past leaders, employees, and stakeholders who have shaped MWCD’s mission and identity.

### PLANNING OUR FUTURE:

As we begin a new era, MWCD is poised to embark on the next phase of our journey. Strategic planning is paramount to ensure that we remain adaptive, resilient, and responsive to the evolving challenges and opportunities facing our watershed. By leveraging our 90-year legacy as a compass, we can chart a course that honors our past while propelling us toward a sustainable and prosperous future. We believe we have achieved this balance with our new 5-year strategic plan. It is our road map to ensure we maintain our important historical focus and responsibilities, but also challenges us to embrace modern ideas, technology, and perspectives to expand and improve MWCD.



As you review the 2023 Annual Report, you will learn that we celebrated our 90th anniversary in several ways, but always with reverence. We worked hard to “tell our story” so current and future generations know how the people of the watershed sustained us and prepared us for the future.

Even though we are forging new paths, looking back provides clarity. By our actions and investments across MWCD, we remain resolute in maintaining focus on our primary and original mission, flood mitigation. We proudly continue our strong partnership with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to maintain the dams and flood control infrastructure. We continue to identify other important ways to adapt and support fresh ideas and technologies to ensure we are successful in protecting the residents of the watershed from flooding.

Examples of this commitment evident in this report include our investment in targeted dredging and shoreline protection programs to counter erosion and maintain flood capacity. Additionally, through our Partners in Watershed Management (PWM) program, we invest in flood mitigation throughout the watershed. PWM provides critical funds to help communities maintain stream flow, improve wetlands, minimize erosion, and control pollutants. These wise investments keep sediment and contaminants from entering our lakes, preserving water quality, which we strongly believe is the best in Ohio. Finally, MWCD has placed a renewed focus on conservation and as that focus evolves, we anticipate having innovative programs to assist communities even more with flood mitigation and conservation priorities using new practices, as well as sponsoring critical research, and investing in conservation-based projects and programs.

As our strategic plan stresses, we are looking for new ways to “reimagine recreation,” identifying creative recreational opportunities for park guests to enjoy. We continue to make important upgrades to our existing facilities, but we are challenging ourselves to “think bigger” about recreation.

When you visit our lakes, you will notice we are still investing heavily to improve your recreation experience. Our parks and marinas are second to none and we are committed to making them even better. Through our Master Plan, we continue to upgrade our facilities and

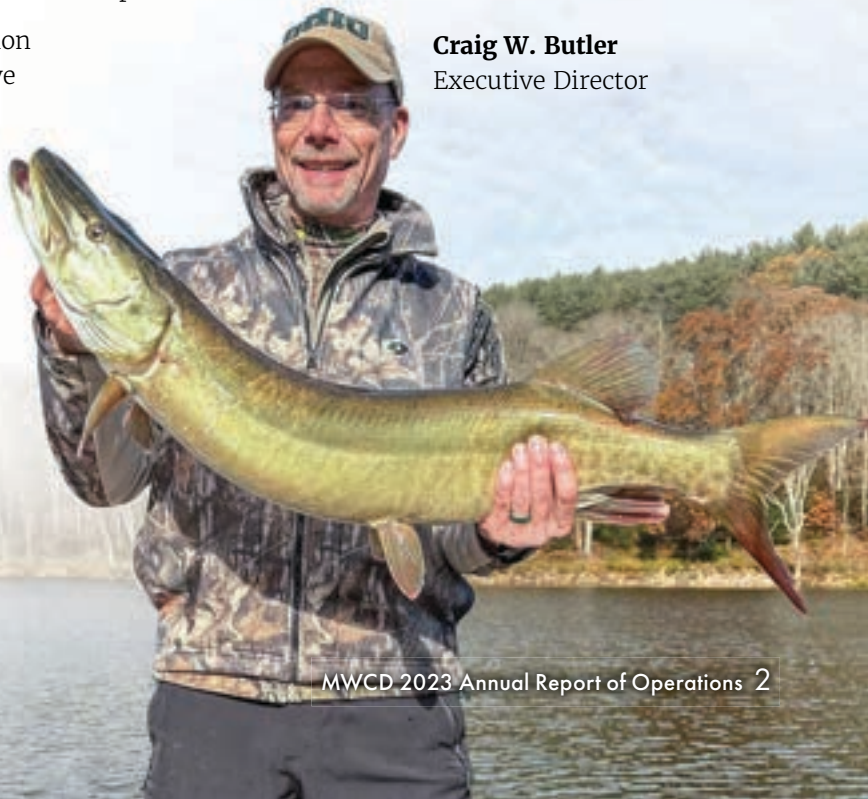
add amenities like splash pads, sports courts, and other activities. These popular features attract, maintain, and entertain our guests.

Trails remain a focal area at MWCD. We are adding new trails, maintaining existing trails, and working collaboratively with the Buckeye Trail Association to connect to the legendary Buckeye Trail, ultimately building a great trails network.

MWCD receives no state funding, and, thus we operate as any business. As a result, we closely manage our resources and revenues to ensure fiscal security. As the financial data shows, the products, programs, and activities we offer are popular with our guests, and led us to record revenues in 2023. This, combined with our oil and gas operational revenues, allows us to invest in the improvements guests see at our parks and marinas. Just as importantly, these revenues allowed us to lower the annual assessment to \$2 on personal property to maintain flood mitigation obligations and ensure safe and highly rated dams.

I am proud to present this annual report for your review. It is far more than a list of activities and accomplishments. It reflects organizational excellence, driven by our staff’s commitment to be the best. I am grateful for the privilege to stand with them as we honor the past, build the present, and plan the future of MWCD.

**Craig W. Butler**  
Executive Director



## CONSERVANCY COURT

### Ashland County

Honorable David R. Stimpert

### Belmont County

Honorable John A. Vavra

### Carroll County

Honorable Michael V. Repella, II

### Coshocton County

Honorable Robert J. Batchelor

### Guernsey County

Honorable Daniel G. Padden

### Harrison County

Honorable T. Shawn Hervey

### Holmes County

Honorable Sean M. Warner

### Knox County

Honorable Richard D. Wetzel

### Licking County

Honorable Thomas M. Marcelain

### Morgan County

Honorable John A. Wells

### Muskingum County

Honorable Mark C. Fleegle

### Noble County

Honorable Kelly A. Riddle

### Richland County

Honorable W. Steve McKinley

### Stark County

Honorable Jim D. James

### Summit County

Honorable Kathryn Michael

### Tuscarawas County

Honorable Michael J. Ernest

### Washington County

Honorable Mark Kerenyi

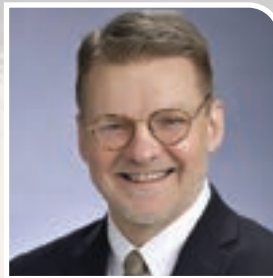
### Wayne County

Honorable Latecia E. Wiles

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS



**Ronald E. Dziejdzicki**  
Term Expires in 2025



**James M. Gresh**  
Term Expires in 2027



**Gordon T. Maupin**  
Term Expires in 2024



**Robert S. Moorehead, Jr.**  
Term Expires in 2026



**Jennifer L. Ponchak**  
Term Expires in 2028

## BOARD OF APPRAISERS



**Gary L. Barker**  
Term Expires in 2024



**John F. Ginikos**  
Term Expires in 2025



**Mark J. Waltz**  
Term Expires in 2028

## EXECUTIVE STAFF



**Craig W. Butler**  
Executive Director/Secretary



**David G. Lautenschleger**  
Chief of Engineering



**Adria L. Bergeron**  
Director of Marketing and  
Communications



**Mary C. Burley**  
Chief of  
Human Resources



**James L. Crandall, III**  
Chief Financial Officer/  
Treasurer



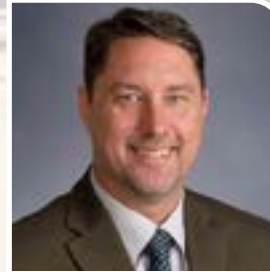
**Bradley P. Janssen**  
Chief of Natural Resources  
and Land Management



**Peter M. Novotny**  
Chief of Recreation



**Jonathan C. Mizer**  
Chief Legal Counsel



**Matt A. Thomas**  
Chief of Conservation

## DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Development Advisory Committee last year provided input, feedback and advice to the MWCD Board and Staff related to trails, conservation, development and marketing.

**Bob Alsept**  
New Philadelphia

**Tom Arbour**  
Tallmadge

**Darren Bade**  
Ravenna

**Norm Blanchard**  
Senecaville

**Paul Briggs**  
New Albany

**Chad Conrad**  
Bolivar

**Mark Davanzo**  
Senecaville

**Ron Dzedzicki**  
Medina

**Keith Fulton**  
St. Clairsville

**Karl Gebhardt**  
Westerville

**Joe Hallal**  
Brecksville

**Corianne Kocarek**  
Bolivar

**John Lofgren**  
Uniontown

**Doug McLarnan**  
Gambier

**Luke Messinger**  
Gahanna

**Jerry Nolder**  
Zanesville

**Sarah Orlando**  
Avon

**Larry Petrick**  
Strongsville

**Jackie Stewart**  
Louisville

**Steve Walker**  
Navarre

**Erica White**  
Wellington

YEAR IN REVIEW

# MWCD MARKS 90 YEARS, REAFFIRMING STEWARDSHIP THROUGH STRATEGIC PLANNING

In 2023, as MWCD celebrated its 90th year, we began plans to continue to be an active, healthy and positive influence in the region for many more years to come.

That includes a new strategic plan that will guide the District's actions, investments and direction for the next five years while also looking ahead 20 years. The plan is rooted in the benefits of our large wetland and forest complexes that provide recharge to groundwater, and natural filtration providing clean water for streams and rivers — the best long-term buffer protecting human health and ecological recovery from local disasters.

These natural systems are not without risk and require constant support and management, which is why MWCD expanded the Conservation Department in 2023 while ensuring fiscal responsibility for the entire District.

Already, the Conservation Department has several new sustainability projects underway at our facilities, parks and marinas. MWCD will continue to work with, and expand our federal, state and local agency partners to monitor and measurably improve water quality in our reservoirs and beyond. Furthermore, MWCD will always remain committed to supporting communities through our Partners in Watershed

Management grant program and supporting farmers by our close cooperation with local Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

To commemorate our 90th anniversary, a new exhibit at the Dennison Railroad Depot Museum – a National Historic Landmark — provides the public with an opportunity to move through an immersive story of the District's beginnings, its progress through the years, its highlights, a description of its future, and an interactive hands-on children's component families will enjoy. The exhibit will remain open to the public through 2024.





**Program and special event attendance during 2023 was estimated at **41,711** not including firework events.**

**Programs and Events Highlight Record-Breaking Year**

During another record-breaking year, staff planned and implemented 997 programs, including 28 kayak programs, 10 day camps for kids, 13 Ladies’ Night Crafts and eight fireworks displays. Special programs were also developed to draw visitors to the lake in the off-season, November through March.



MWCD Rangers interacted with the public during the fourth annual Ranger Day at Atwood, Charles Mill, Seneca and Tappan Lake Parks in June, and the third annual First Responders Day was held at Atwood, Pleasant Hill, Seneca and Tappan Lake Parks in August. Additionally, Rangers and certified staff led almost 150 people through Ohio Boater and Ohio Hunter Education Courses in 2023.

Almost 200 Clendening Lake campers enjoyed Spring, Summer and Halloween Celebration Weekends, as well as a Poker Paddle and Meteor Shower Kayak Tour. Clendening Lake’s Halloween Weekend was offered for the first time since MWCD began marina operations at the lake. At Piedmont, over 500 people attended Spring, Summer, and Halloween Celebration Weekends. A Poker Paddle and Camper Appreciation events were also held.

**Craig Morgan Concert Attracts More Than 4,000**

In August, MWCD partnered with WTUZ Radio to host their inaugural Country Waves Concert. With musical performances by Craig Morgan and others, this successful event attracted more than 4,000 people to the Atwood Lake Park amphitheater.

**Park, Marina Revenue Up Nearly 5 Percent**

Park and marina financial performance had another strong year in 2023 with operating revenues up nearly 5% compared to 2022 actual. Revenues increased by \$713,052 from \$14,196,165 in 2022 to \$14,909,217 in 2023. In addition, operating income (revenues minus expense) for parks and marinas increased by \$339,242 from \$6,454,946 in 2022 to \$6,794,188 in 2023 capping off another successful year.

## 2023 LAKE ATTENDANCE ESTIMATES

| MWCD Location                       | Total 2023 Attendance | Total 2022 Attendance | % Change      |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------|
| Atwood                              | 1,030,849             | 1,011,927             | 1.87%         |
| Charles Mill                        | 662,093               | 671,198               | -1.36%        |
| Pleasant Hill                       | 508,556               | 536,854               | -5.27%        |
| Tappan                              | 715,563               | 724,238               | -1.20%        |
| Seneca                              | 955,299               | 958,230               | -0.31%        |
| <b>Subtotal Parks</b>               | <b>3,872,360</b>      | <b>3,902,448</b>      | <b>-0.77%</b> |
| Piedmont                            | 197,244               | 198,991               | -0.88%        |
| Clendening                          | 31,469                | 34,898                | -9.82%        |
| <b>Subtotal Marinas</b>             | <b>233,889</b>        | <b>233,889</b>        | <b>-2.21%</b> |
| <b>Grand Total - Est Attendance</b> | <b>4,101,074</b>      | <b>4,136,336</b>      | <b>-0.85%</b> |

## PARK AND MARINA REVENUES

| MWCD Location           | 2023 Revenue       | 2022 Revenue       | % Change     |
|-------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------|
| Atwood Lake Park        | \$1,826,763        | \$1,787,808        | 2.18%        |
| Charles Mill Lake Park  | \$530,876          | \$503,358          | 5.47%        |
| Clendening Marina       | \$161,894          | \$99,930           | 62.01%       |
| Leesville Campground    | \$91,242           | \$91,582           | -0.37%       |
| Piedmont Marina         | \$241,701          | \$240,979          | 0.30%        |
| Pleasant Hill Lake Park | \$820,806          | \$870,520          | -5.71%       |
| Seneca Marina           | \$244,510          | \$185,170          | 32.05%       |
| Seneca Lake Park        | \$1,373,467        | \$1,252,485        | 9.66%        |
| Tappan Lake Park        | \$671,660          | \$720,559          | -6.79%       |
| Tappan Marina           | \$212,648          | \$186,762          | 13.86%       |
| Leased Marinas          | \$618,621          | \$515,794          | 19.94%       |
| <b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>    | <b>\$6,843,087</b> | <b>\$6,406,048</b> | <b>6.59%</b> |

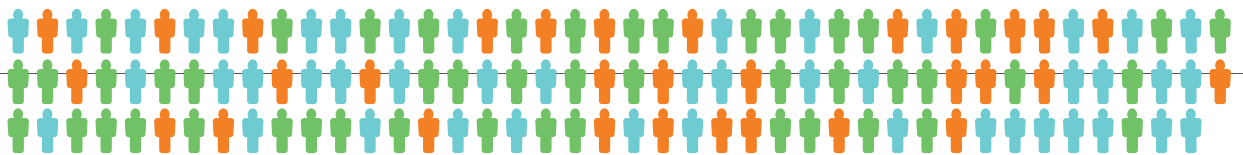




## Rangers Busy Through 2023

During 2023, MWCD Rangers issued a variety of violations and completed 57 Incident Reports. The Rangers stayed extremely busy throughout the year including these highlights:

- 9,317 Calls Entered
- 5,185 Security Checks
- 224 Vessel Safety Checks
- 4 Lives Saved by Ranger Response
- 0 Bias Based Policing Complaints
- 0 Drownings



## 125 Employed Full Time

MWCD employed 125 full-time team members at 14 different facilities in eight counties in 2023. Another 171 seasonal/variable employees worked at MWCD facilities during the recreational season. Activities included:

- 11 Full-Time Positions Filled in 2023
- 2 Health Fairs for MWCD Employees
- 2 Job Fair and Career Presentations
- 32 Staff Trained in CPR



## Conservation Strategic Plan Developed

A new five-year strategic plan was unveiled for the Conservation Department in 2023, reinforcing MWCD's core initiatives such as water quality, but also providing a path for success in several new programmatic areas. As part of that plan, two new Coordinator positions were created in the areas of sustainability and watershed management.

### Water Quality Coordinator

Accomplishments include a new regional water quality testing lab at Pleasant Hill and Charles Mill Lakes. This investment will help expand testing services and provide faster results to share with the public.

### Watershed Coordinator

Accomplishments include improvements to the MWCD agricultural lease land program, building our support for healthy habitats and sustainable agriculture. A unique partnership was formed with Rural Action, strengthening local food systems and building support for peer-to-peer education among farmers.

### Sustainability Coordinator

Identifying "sustainability" as a new area of focus, our top 2023 priority is to elevate all MWCD marinas to the highest level of certification. For example, the nine MWCD marinas (leased and owned) generate about 25,000 pounds of plastic annually to cover boats for winter storage, but we have only been able to recycle 41 percent of that material due to the quantity and quality of the plastic. Starting in 2024, new equipment at two marinas will boost our recycling capacity by 32 percent, also enabling us to bale cardboard to reduce even more landfill waste.



## Conservation Strategic Plan



Improve water quality



Protect healthy ecosystems



Catalyze collaboration



Demonstrate sustainability

## Encouraging Quality of Life

MWCD is dedicated to not only improving existing amenities but also adding new opportunities that satisfy a wide variety of interests and abilities to encourage more people to participate in outdoor recreation at MWCD parks and marinas.

Focusing on more than just updating facilities, the Master Plan has allowed MWCD to take advantage of the national rise in outdoor recreation to create a positive impact on quality of life. These facilities and amenities will become a model for outdoor recreation, and the results will leave a legacy for future generations to enjoy the benefits of recreation in the Muskingum River Watershed.



## New Leadership Appointments in 2023

### Jennifer Ponchak — MWCD Board of Directors

Conservancy Court Judges appointed Jennifer Ponchak to fill a vacancy on the five-member MWCD Board of Directors. A resident of Morgan County, Jennifer filled the seat held by Joanne Limbach of Tuscarawas County, who served on the MWCD board for 20 years.

Ponchak is the founder of Follow the River Environmental, a specialty company that performs clearing and grubbing, erosion control, seeding landscaping and environmental consulting services on private commercial, heavy highway and municipal projects.



### Peter Novotny — Chief of Recreation

The MWCD Board appointed Peter Novotny as Chief of Recreation to lead all recreation-related strategies and efforts. He is an experienced natural resources leader with a strong background in recruiting and building effective teams and managing wildlife and public engagement efforts.

Prior to MWCD, he was Assistant Chief of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Wildlife and is a recognized national advocate for the use of public lands as the chair of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Hunting and Shooting Sports Participation Committee.

In his new role, Novotny oversees parks, marinas, and docking, and works collaboratively across the MWCD to enhance and expand recreational offerings.



### David Lautenschleger — Chief of Engineering

MWCD's new Chief of Engineering, David Lautenschleger, provides supervision of all dams and reservoirs necessary for flood mitigation within the MWCD and its subdistricts. He also oversees ongoing and continued construction projects and utility operations.

Dave began working with MWCD in 2009 and has served as Deputy Chief of Surveying/GIS since 2017.



### Patrick Brockmeier — Chief Ranger

Patrick Brockmeier, Chief Ranger, oversees all MWCD Rangers whose duties range from patrolling camp areas, cottage areas and lakes as well as providing Ohio Boater and Hunter Education Courses to the community. Rangers also conduct safety checks, respond to noise complaints, criminal violations, and assist other nearby agencies.

Brockmeier has been employed by MWCD as a variable Ranger at Seneca Lake Park since 2019 while also working as a full-time probation officer for Marietta Municipal Court. He has prior Chief experience with the Matamoris Police Department and the Beverly Police Department.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

# CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN GENERATES \$1 BILLION IN IMPACT

In 2014, MWCD announced a plan to address major upgrades and deferred maintenance needs at recreational facilities and marinas. This plan was financed by Utica Shale lease revenues, enacted in 2011 and contributing nearly \$1 billion in impact on the region's economy through \$221.9 million invested by MWCD.

A Cleveland State University analysis notes MWCD investments have brought big benefits to the District's 18-county region including underscores, increases in oil and gas revenues associated with Utica Shale development have led to job creation, increased state and local tax revenue and growth in related industries such as transportation and infrastructure.

The analysis does not include nearly \$15 million in project funding in 2023 and \$30 million budgeted for 2024. In addition, MWCD leased more than 7,300 acres in Harrison County in 2022, which will produce revenues that will have further economic impact.

MWCD updated its strategic plan in 2023, calling for continuing upgrades and improvements at the parks, campgrounds and marinas. Further strategies include improving water quality across the watershed, enhancing conservation programming and assisting communities.

Finally, the plan supports the long-term financial future of the District, providing some of the highest-quality outdoor recreation opportunities in the nation, a strong commitment to protecting our lands for future generations and effecting positive economic benefits and job creation in our region.

Full-hookup RV campground developed at Atwood Lake.





## Maintenance Assessment Cut by 66%

Property owners within the MWCD are seeing their property assessments paid to MWCD reduced by 66% — from \$6 to \$2. Originally levied in 2009 at \$12 per parcel, the money is used for the operation and maintenance of MWCD’s 90-year-old system of 14 dams and reservoirs. The amount was lowered to \$6 in 2015 as the financial position of the District improved with oil and gas revenue.

The result is an estimated \$4 million reduction in the 2024 collection.

Assessment funds also support the work of other regional agencies and groups involved in conservation programs, water quality issues and flood reduction as well as mitigation projects through the Partners in Watershed Management (PWM) Project Assistance Program. The PWM program helps local communities, agencies and groups involved in projects and programs that support the conservation and flood control aspects of the Mission of MWCD. The PWM program, approved by the Board of Directors in June of 2009, has provided over \$12 million in grant funding for 190 projects. Additionally, since 2010, MWCD has spent over \$13 million on shoreline stabilization and \$15 million on dredging projects at MWCD lakes.

By law, assessment revenues cannot be used for recreational programs and facilities, and all expenditures must be covered by guidelines stipulated in an amendment to the MWCD Official Plan that was approved in 2005 by the Conservancy Court and the Board of Directors.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

# PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMS SUPPORT COMMUNITY WATERSHED INITIATIVES

The Partners in Watershed Management Project Assistance Program supports the work of agencies and groups involved in conservation programs, water quality issues and flood reduction and mitigation projects, in cooperation with the MWCD Mission.

## 2023 Partners in Watershed Management Overview

- 10 Projects Awarded
- 10 Counties Awarded
- \$1,026,736 Awarded
- County Projects Awarded:
  - › Ashland
  - › Belmont/Harrison Split Project
  - › Coshocton
  - › Harrison
  - › Muskingum
  - › Tuscarawas
  - › Licking
  - › Summit
  - › Washington
  - › Noble
- 190 total projects since 2009
- Over \$12 million awarded since 2009



## \$134,865.50 awarded to 15 debris removal projects in 8 counties:

- Ashland
- Noble
- Guernsey
- Stark
- Holmes
- Tuscarawas
- Licking
- Wayne



## 2023 Partners in Watershed Management Grants

### Stillwater Watershed Partners | Belmont & Harrison Counties

Stillwater Creek Channel Improvement Plan (\$75,000)

### Tuscarawas Soil and Water Conservation District | Tuscarawas County

Village of Baltic Streambank Stabilization (\$26,820)

### Ashland Soil & Water Conservation District | Ashland County

Small Scale No-Till Seeder (\$13,130)

### City of Barberton | Summit County

South Barberton Flood Mitigation Snyder SCM Construction (\$274,725)

### Licking Township | Muskingum County

Cranberry Lane Culvert Replacement (\$220,236)

### Noble County Engineer | Noble County

Shenandoah Flooding Corridor Mitigation Study (\$58,860)

### City of Marietta | Washington County

Nonpoint Source Implementation Strategic Plans Development Plan (\$25,000)

### The Ohio State University | Coshocton County

Pomerene Riparian Corridor Restoration (\$72,701)

### South Licking Watershed Conservancy District | Licking County

Flood Reduction Plan Study (\$200,000)

### Youngstown State University | Harrison County

Modeling of Tappan Lake for Algal Bloom Reduction Initiative (\$60,264)

## Catalyzing Future Partnerships

In 2023, the Conservation Department created the MWCD Conservation Fund in partnership with Foundation for Appalachia Ohio (FAO).

MWCD invested in a \$5 million endowment to annually support \$200,000 in projects, scholarships and fellowships. These awards are in addition to existing MWCD assistance programs for farmers through the Cover Crop Program, communities with our Partners in Watershed Management Program, and our Water Quality Monitoring Program which collects accurate and timely information for lake visitors.

This new opportunity will align with FAO's Environmental Stewardship Pillar of Prosperity while supporting MWCD's conservation strategic goals as outlined in the recent Conservation Strategic Plan. Through a network of strong partners, MWCD will be able to provide more focus on water quality issues, sustaining healthy habitats and demonstrating sustainability.



FOUNDATION FOR  
APPALACHIAN OHIO



## 25,000 Pounds of Tires Collected

MWCD's conservation team and staff at Pleasant Hill Lake Park held their first Tire Amnesty Day in October to help residents properly dispose of scrap tires. This free event was also in response to concerns of illegally dumped tires ending up in MWCD lakes or along roadways.

About 25,000 pounds of light and passenger car tires were collected in one day and transported to a facility for reuse and recycling, supporting the MWCD's sustainability mission. A second tire amnesty event will be held in 2024.





## Marketing Activity Highlights



29  
PRESS RELEASES  
SENT



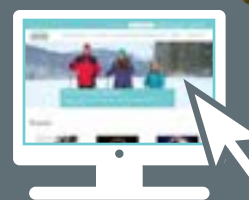
29  
COMMUNITY OUTREACH  
PRESENTATIONS



4  
LakeViews  
EDITIONS



27  
EMAIL BLASTS TO  
OVER 29,000  
CONTACTS



143,589  
WEBSITE USERS



### District Awards

MWCD was recognized for achievements in marketing and advertising at the Ohio Travel Association's RUBY Awards presentation in 2023, sponsored by Ohio Magazine and honoring promotional excellence in the state's hospitality and tourism industry. MWCD received top awards for:

- Targeted Marketing Campaign
- Radio
- Print
- Annual Report

### Other Awards for Outstanding Performance

- MWCD's Chippewa Subdistrict was recognized at the 2023 Water Management Association of Ohio Conference for Best Maintained Dam from the Ohio Dam Safety Organization for the Chippewa District Dams. This award honors dams judged to be the best cared for in their ownership category. The award is usually given to one dam that is publicly owned and one dam that is privately owned, but

this year all eight dams within the Chippewa Subdistrict were recognized.

- MWCD's recreational expansion and upgrade efforts were recognized by the Buckeye Trail Association (BTA) with the Merrill Gilfillan Award for Visionary Agency Partners. The award recognizes extraordinary efforts to partner with the BTA to support and maintain the Buckeye Trail.
- The Foundation for Appalachian Ohio awarded the Chaddock Philanthropist of the Year Award to MWCD. The award celebrates people and organizations making an outside difference in Appalachia through gifts of philanthropy.
- The Horizon Award by the Ashland Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) was presented to MWCD as a pioneer in conservation in that county. MWCD has been a long-time partner with Ashland SWCD in helping farmers and landowners implement conservation practices that make a difference in the watershed.



IMPROVEMENTS

# RECREATIONAL UPGRADE PLAN IS MOST AGGRESSIVE IN OVER 50 YEARS

The MWCD Master Plan is the road map to the most significant upgrade to the MWCD recreational facilities in a half century. Priorities were identified through public work sessions, gathering input from the customer base and benchmarking national trends in recreation.

MWCD customers determined the number one priority was to upgrade campsites and the infrastructure that serve the campers. In many instances the 50-year-old electrical, water and sewer systems in the MWCD campsites could not serve the larger and modern camping units. Modern camping units also require more space and parking for multiple vehicles and hard surfaces for leveling and ease of maintenance. The focus of engineering planning and design has been to upgrade the campsites to meet these camper-driven priorities.

Phase 2 of the Master Plan consists of an additional \$65 million with \$45 million for park improvements and \$20 million for marina improvements.

Included in these amounts is about \$11 million for improved amenities including more playgrounds, spray grounds, sports courts and fiber optic internet communication, to name a few. Using literature review, online surveys and focus groups, MWCD was able to prioritize the amenities at each of the lakes.

Phase 2 of the plan expands the program to include Clendening Marina and Campground, Leesville North Fork Marina, Leesville South Fork Campground and Tappan Marina which have all been acquired since the inception of the Master Plan. The implementation strategy for the

marinas in Phase 2 is to focus on infrastructure first, followed by camping and waterfront improvements.

Over \$195 million has been committed to this capital improvement program to upgrade the parks and campgrounds. Construction of these improvements is now well underway.

Funding for the Master Plan, capital improvements, and other major maintenance is through revenues reserved from oil and gas leases. During 2023, MWCD delivered over \$8.1 million in projects.



## Projects Constructed or Under Construction in 2023



Atwood

### Atwood

- Water Treatment Plant Raw Water Pump Building
- Activity Center Renovation
- Basketball Court – Area 3



Charles Mill

### Charles Mill

- Sites Lake Cottage Area Lift Station Generator
- Park Campground Lift Station Generator



Clendening

### Clendening

- Wastewater Treatment Plant and Pump Station



Leesville

### Leesville

- North Fork Wastewater Treatment Plant and Pump Station



Piedmont

### Piedmont

- Basketball Court



Pleasant Hill

### Pleasant Hill

- Main Lift Station Generator
- Amenity and Activity Area



Seneca

### Seneca

- Marina Point Lift Station Generator
- Seneca Lake Park Beach Amenities



Tappan

### Tappan

- Park Water Treatment Plant Valve Replacement Project
- New Beach Restroom and Concession Building Improvements
- Welcome Center

## New Solar Energy Program Launched

In 2023, MWCD announced that it would be adding solar energy projects over the next several years to District facilities. The solar power generated from these projects will save MWCD on electricity bills, help offset energy use and lower our carbon footprint.

A 2022 analysis determined that solar energy would be provided at Atwood, Clendening, Piedmont, Seneca, and Tappan Lakes, in addition to the Main Office in New Philadelphia. Considerable planning in 2023 will result in the 2024 installation of panels at Tappan.

The 24 silicon-based panels will have a tracking system and 240v inverter which will produce 17kWh annually. The electronics will be housed in a small building that is part of the Tappan Marina water distribution system. This collaboration will save building costs by combining projects and the power will help operate the building.



## It's a Dog's Life at MWCD Lakes!

All MWCD campsites are now pet friendly beginning last year, and select cabins at each lake also now allow pets.

The lakes offer hiking trails, marinas with boat rentals, and plenty of green space to allow your furry family member to enjoy nature. While Atwood Lake Park is currently the only location with a dog park, more locations are under consideration for the future.



A hiker wearing a backpack and trekking poles is walking through a lush green forest. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent green filter.

# TRAILS CORRIDOR PROJECT



## New Trail Segment Expansion Unites Organizations

MWCD, the Buckeye Trail Association (BTA), Student Conservation Association (SCA), and American Conservation Experience (ACE) joined forces in 2023 to create a new off-road trail segment of the Buckeye Trail. The new segment is part of the Trails Corridor Project that is a collaborative effort with the goal to expand the off-road segments of the Buckeye Trail in MWCD's footprint.

The Buckeye Trail, which spans over 1,400 miles, links the four corners of Ohio marked with blue blazes. The trail follows wooded footpaths, abandoned railroad corridors, historic canal towpaths, rivers, lake shores, and country roads, within both rural and urban settings. Multiple sections are located within the footprint of MWCD, as well as the Beall Farm, regional headquarters for the trail located near Tappan Lake Park.

The SCA crew from Cleveland, Ohio and ACE crew from Fletcher, North Carolina worked with MWCD and the BTA to create a new natural surface trail between the Beall Farmstead and Area 5 Campground within Tappan Lake Park located near Deersville, Ohio.

The first trail segment recently developed covers 1.2 miles and a second segment will result in a total length of 2

miles. Once complete, the new trail will be incorporated into the Buckeye Trail, providing a scenic path for hikers and outdoor enthusiasts to explore the natural beauty of the area. By moving the trail off Moravian Trail Road and through Tappan Lake Park, it will provide a safer experience for trail users. Another part of this new reroute of the Buckeye Trail through the park will incorporate the nearby Turkey Ridge Trail which was originally built by BTA volunteers to connect the BTA Beall Farmstead to the major amenities at Tappan Lake Park.

***"We are thrilled to be part of this collective effort to expand the Buckeye Trail. It showcases the power of partnerships in advancing environmental conservation while enriching the outdoor experience for all."***

Craig Butler, MWCD Executive Director

MWCD continues to work with the BTA to develop additional trail connections between MWCD parks and lakes, as well as trails within the watershed.

## Trails Maintenance, Development Continue

Trails maintenance and development efforts continued throughout the District with improvements to trailheads, interpretive signage, mapping of trails, building of structures and drainage improvements. During the 2023 trail building season, over two miles of trails were built, bringing MWCD's total trail mileage to 42 miles.

The goal continues to beautify our existing trails with maintenance, improvements and new points of interest. In 2024, MWCD plans to develop a Master Trails Plan to aid in the implementation of new trails. This document will establish themes and solidify plans for each park based on feedback from visitors, surveys and staff. MWCD strives to become a premier trail destination and the Master Trails Plan will be instrumental to achieving our goal.



MWCD has a total of  
**42 miles of trails**



# RESERVOIR MAINTENANCE PROGRAMS

*MWCD finances dredging and shoreline protection work through its maintenance assessment.*

## Dredging

Dredging the upper end of the bay in the Leesville Glens Cottage Area was completed in 2023 to provide adequate water depth for cottage site lessees to access docks. The dredging work included the removal of 2,400 cubic yards of sediment, at a cost of \$146,700. The project also included a 140-foot section of shoreline stabilization at a cost of \$26,900.



Leesville Glens Cottage Area  
Dredging and Shoreline





**Atwood Arrowhead Cottage Area  
Rock Riprap with Coir Log**



**Leesville Glens Cottage Area  
Rock Riprap**



**Tappan Lake – East Shore Cottage Area**



**Tappan Lake – West Shore Cottage Area**

## Shoreline Stabilization

In 2010, a study of 300 miles of shoreline was conducted to identify stabilization needs at 10 MWCD reservoirs. As a result, over 11.8 miles of shoreline stabilization work has now been completed at a cost of nearly \$13.7 million. Four of those projects, completed in 2023, cost about \$811,000.

**The Atwood Arrowhead Cottage Area project** included 300 feet of shoreline stabilization at a cost of \$49,400, including riprap and a strip of native vegetation above the rock to further protect against future erosion.

**The Leesville South Fork Marina project** stabilized a failing section of shoreline adjacent to the Marina access road and cluster docks. The project, constructed by MWCD's heavy equipment crew at a cost of \$27,000, was 460 feet in length and utilized riprap to protect against future erosion.

**The Tappan Lake Shoreline Stabilization project** included work in the East Shore and West Shore Cottage Areas. A combination of riprap, coir logs and native vegetation were installed to address erosion and stabilize the bank. The combined length of the project was about 6,500 linear feet, and the total cost was \$707,700.

Design work was completed in the fall of 2023 for projects planned during the 2023/2024 winter drawdown at Charles Mill South Peninsula and Atwood Pines Cottage Areas.





# SUBDISTRICTS



Ohio law provides for the creation of smaller subdistricts to be established through landowner initiative and petition. Five are located within MWCD. Three of the subdistricts — Black Fork, Clear Fork and Buffalo Creek — are currently not active.

## Duck Creek Subdistrict

Duck Creek Subdistrict contains three gages that can provide vital information for an early flood warning for residents. MWCD funds a portion of the operation and maintenance costs for the gages.

## Chippewa Subdistrict

The Chippewa Subdistrict manages a flood-control program of eight dams and 33 miles of modified channels to reduce flooding and decrease the time periods of inundation in northern Wayne and southern Medina counties. Maintenance work is funded through property owner assessment funds that can be used only in the subdistrict.

## Current Maintenance Needs

- Logjam, downed trees and brush, and debris removal to maintain channel capacity
- Slip repairs along Chippewa Creek, Little Chippewa Creek, and River Styx
- Hydraulic structure repairs and upgrades

- Monitor/remove sedimentation
- Ongoing maintenance
- Mowing and maintaining dam slopes and surfaces
- Mowing and maintaining channel berms, banks, and access points
- Maintaining spillway systems and clearing debris that clogs spillway inlets.

## Projects Completed in 2023

- Stream bank stabilization along a section of the River Styx channel
- Replacement of stem guides on the lake drain valve in the inlet structure of Dam III-A
- Replacement of a culvert on the Little Chippewa Creek
- Reestablishment of 4,000 feet of maintenance berm along the Chippewa Creek

The subdistrict was awarded the Best Maintained Dams Award by the Ohio Dam Safety Organization for all eight of its flood control dams at the 2023 Water Management Association of Ohio Conference.

RESOURCE EFFORTS

# MANAGING NATURAL RESOURCES AND ASSETS

## Orphan Oil & Gas Well at Seneca Lake Plugged

An orphaned oil and gas well in the lakebed on the eastern side of Seneca Lake was permanently plugged and abandoned in 2023. The well was classified by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources as an Orphaned Well with no registered owner.

## Unconventional Oil & Gas Operations in 2023

Unconventional (Utica) operations remained steady throughout 2023. By the end of 2023 Utica royalty revenue was generated by 116 producing wells at Tappan, Clendening, Seneca, Dover, Piedmont, Atwood and Leesville Reservoirs.

## Exploring Recreational Opportunities

In 2023, MWCD began examining potential development areas for more cottages throughout the watershed, analyzing environmental impacts, particularly to conservation efforts. Careful consideration is being given to each property. MWCD managed 1,205 cottages sites in 2023 at Atwood, Charles Mill, Leesville, Pleasant Hill, Seneca, Tappan and Wills Creek Lakes.

Focusing on more than just cottages, MWCD is also taking advantage of the national rise in outdoor recreation to examine new recreational camping and overnight opportunities in areas near the lakes. New styles of camping have grown in popularity and MWCD continued the process last year of determining how and where these trends fit into the District.





## COTTAGE SITE LOCATIONS

| LAKE          | COTTAGE SITES |
|---------------|---------------|
| Atwood        | 365           |
| Charles Mill  | 211           |
| Leesville     | 103           |
| Piedmont      | 91            |
| Pleasant Hill | 96            |
| Seneca        | 166           |
| Tappan        | 147           |
| Wills Creek   | 26            |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>1,205</b>  |

## Cottage Roads, Marina and Boat Launch Ramps Improvements

MWCD is responsible for cottage roadway maintenance, marina parking lot improvements and boat launch ramp repairs. The total cost of construction expended on the paving at cottage roads, marinas, and ramps in 2023 was almost \$650,000 and included the following projects:

- **Atwood Glens** – Lakewood Road Entrance Paving (leveraged ODOT funding)
- **Atwood Lake** – Public Launch Ramp Paving
- **Piedmont Lake Marina** – Entrance Road Paving (leveraged ODOT funding)
- **Seneca Lake** – St. Andrews and Sunset Drive Roadway Improvements
- **Pleasant Hill Lake Park** – Boat Ramp Crack and Pavement Sealing



**About 33% of lessees are full-time residents across all lakes**

*3% increase from 2022*



**74 lease orientation conferences were held with new leaseholders**

*1 lease orientation conference held with realtors*



**321 new construction permits were processed**



**Around 100 docking construction permits were initiated**



**Nearly 200 other projects/permits including:**

- **Tree permits**
- **Firewood permits**
- **Inspections**



**Over 3,700 docking decals were processed across three main user groups:**

- **Cottage lessees**
- **Docking associations**
- **Camps and club sites**

## Forestry Efforts Included Windstorm Cleanup

Two separate windstorm events occurred early in the year affecting MWCD properties and cottage areas. Extensive tree damage occurred primarily at Atwood, Leesville and Tappan, along with some damage at Charles Mill.

Timber salvage operations were mobilized quickly, focusing on the Atwood Pines cottage area at Atwood Lake and completing the work in June. Over 800 tons of pine was salvaged from the area, which will naturally transition into a hardwood forest.

Additionally, MWCD's Forestry group continued Timber Stand Improvements across the District's forested lands

in 2023. Vine control projects were completed at Beach City and Wills Creek, targeting more than 150-acres of grapevines and invasive oriental bittersweet. Removing vines will aid in tree growth, vigor and development.

A mid-story removal project was completed at Mohawk. This procedure cuts understory overtopped and intermediate trees to aid in enhancing growing conditions for oak regeneration. A shelterwood harvest will be initiated in the stand within five to 10 years.

Foresters continued work on invasive species control projects to reduce the abundance of invasive species from spreading in woodlands that are to be harvested or managed in the future. The primary focus of control was on Tree of Heaven, autumn olive, bush honeysuckle, and barberry.



**Evan Ryan, MWCD Forest Technician,**  
evaluates storm damage.

## Pleasant Hill Lake Park Area Water and Sewer Utilities

### Surveying/GIS Collaborating With MWCD Departments

2023 was a year of substantial growth for the Surveying and Geographic Information System (GIS) Department. MWCD's Natural Resources and Land Management (NRLM), Conservation, and Recreation departments all began creating and editing their own Web Mapping data through a field mapping app provided by the GIS team.

The Forestry group within the NRLM Department continued to utilize the resources in 2023, but NRLM's Leasing group started using the mapping for asset management. Farm leases, invasive species control and water quality are all areas benefiting from the technology within the Conservation Department. The Recreation Department's Trails group uses Field Maps to locate maintenance issues, existing trails, identify trail connections with other regional trail systems, and plan future trails.

MWCD Rangers are also using it to determine property boundaries and no-hunting areas. MWCD owns nearly 60,000 acres and this tool reduces the amount of time

Rangers need to become familiar with landholdings. Overall, this technology has become a vital part of MWCD's efficiency across several departments and has improved departmental communications and collaboration.

**Law Enforcement:  
Field Maps version at  
Atwood. Property line  
in green – Red shaded  
area is No Hunting**



**Forestry Maps: Mobile phone Field Maps version  
at Leesville (above) Desktop web version (below)**





# FINANCIALS

This financial report is designed to provide our citizens, investors, and creditors with a general overview of MWCD's finances and to show MWCD's accountability for the money it receives. To see the complete financial statements, visit [www.mwcd.org](http://www.mwcd.org) or the State Auditor's website at [www.ohioauditor.gov](http://www.ohioauditor.gov).

| 2023 YTD Cash And Investment Balance - By Fund | Balance            |
|--|--------------------|
| 001 IMPROVEMENT FUND                           | 1,901,650          |
| 002 MAINTENANCE FUND                           | 100,597,655        |
| 003 RECREATION IMPROVEMENT FUND                | 7,781,565          |
| 004 BOND FUND                                  | 100                |
| 009 MAINTENANCE ASSESSMENT FUND                | 15,796,575         |
| <b>Grand Total</b>                             | <b>126,077,545</b> |

| 2023 YTD Actual Revenue - By Fund | YTD Actual Revenue 2023 |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 001 IMPROVEMENT FUND              | 39,239                  |
| 002 MAINTENANCE FUND              | 51,401,639              |
| 003 RECREATION IMPROVEMENT FUND   | 528,473                 |
| 009 MAINTENANCE ASSESSMENT FUND   | 6,108,994               |
| <b>Grand Total</b>                | <b>58,078,344</b>       |

| 2023 YTD Revenue - By Department | YTD Actual Revenue 2023 |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 10 ADMINISTRATIVE                | 5,807,968               |
| 15 FINANCE                       | 2,863,865               |
| 20 ENGINEERING                   | 271,653                 |
| 50 CONSERVATION                  | 14,510                  |
| 60 LEASING                       | 3,743,970               |
| 65 NATURAL RESOURCES             | 30,357,894              |
| 80 PARKS & RECREATION            | 11,464,972              |
| 85 MARINAS                       | 3,515,864               |
| 89 RANGERS                       | 37,650                  |
| <b>Grand Total</b>               | <b>58,078,344</b>       |

| 2023 YTD Revenue - By Activity         | YTD Actual Revenue 2023 |
|--|-------------------------|
| 13000 PURCHASE & SALE LAND/BUILDING    | 22,039                  |
| 15000 EASEMENTS & RIGHT OF WAYS        | 17,200                  |
| 21000 USE OF WATER ASSETS              | 655,357                 |
| 21002 USE OF WATER ASSETS              | 51,726                  |
| 23000 LAND & BUILDING RENTAL           | 31,410                  |
| 24000 FARM OPERATIONS - SHARECROP      | 178,039                 |
| 27000 ASSESSMENT                       | 5,650,418               |
| 29100 MINERAL OPERATIONS - OIL AND GAS | 28,636,495              |
| 33000 TIMBER HARVESTING                | 586,910                 |
| 36000 PINE PULPWOOD OPERATIONS         | 212,078                 |
| 44000 WATER AND SEWER SYSTEMS          | 200,000                 |
| 44001 SITES LAKE WATER SYSTEM          | (3,186)                 |
| 44002 SITES LAKE SEWER SYSTEM          | (3,233)                 |
| 48000 GENERAL PARK FACILITIES          | 64,649                  |
| 48200 TRAILS                           | 6,070                   |
| 50000 WATER SYSTEMS                    | 33,940                  |
| 51000 FISHING RIGHTS                   | 62,647                  |
| 51600 LAKE PATROL OPERATIONS           | 37,650                  |
| 52000 MARINA OPERATIONS                | 2,946,883               |
| 52100 MARINA OPERATIONS - CAMPING      | 568,981                 |
| 53000 COTTAGE SITES                    | 3,030,143               |
| 53100 CLUB SITES                       | 88,161                  |
| 53200 MULTIPLE DOCKS                   | 565,576                 |
| 54002 SITES LAKE SEWER SYSTEM          | 48,195                  |
| 54003 MIFFLIN WATER SYSTEM             | 2,100                   |
| 54009 SENECA CHESTNUT GROVE SEWER      | 24,591                  |
| 54012 PARK SEWER SYSTEM                | 1,105                   |
| 55000 VACATION CABINS                  | 874,082                 |
| 56000 BEACH FACILITIES                 | 4,385                   |
| 56100 PARK REFRESHMENT STANDS          | 38,189                  |
| 56300 BOAT RENTALS                     | 41,059                  |
| 56500 ACTIVITY CENTERS                 | 101,252                 |
| 56700 VENDING MACHINES                 | 25,439                  |
| 57000 PARK CAMPING                     | 9,467,266               |
| 57100 TRAILER PUMP OUT                 | 31,800                  |
| 57200 CAMPER TRAILER STORAGE           | 271,981                 |
| 57500 FIREWOOD                         | 30,429                  |
| 58000 GENERAL PARK FACILITIES          | 198,183                 |
| 58100 PARK SHELTERS                    | 24,592                  |
| 58800 SPECIAL EVENTS                   | 125,457                 |
| 58801 ALIVE                            | 159,031                 |
| 75000 NOT DEFINED                      | 14,510                  |
| 80000 INTEREST ON INVESTMENTS          | 2,863,555               |
| 81000 MISCELLANEOUS INCOME             | 997                     |
| 81100 BAD CHECK CHARGES                | 310                     |
| 81500 CONSTRUCTION PERMITS             | 12,425                  |
| 84700 CAPITAL CREDIT REFUNDS           | 6,924                   |
| 86200 MISC REVENUE - TAXES             | 70,531                  |
| <b>Grand Total</b>                     | <b>58,078,344</b>       |

| 2023 YTD Actual Expenditures -By Fund | YTD Actual        |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|
| 001 IMPROVEMENT FUND                  | 1,169,845         |
| 002 MAINTENANCE FUND                  | 24,248,861        |
| 003 RECREATION IMPROVEMENT FUND       | 10,172,611        |
| 009 MAINTENANCE ASSESSMENT FUND       | 4,450,355         |
| <b>Grand Total</b>                    | <b>40,041,671</b> |

| 2023 YTD Expenditures - By Department | YTD Actual        |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------|
| 10 ADMINISTRATIVE                     | 1,859,764         |
| 11 INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY             | 946,086           |
| 12 PUBLIC INFORMATION                 | 317,794           |
| 13 HUMAN RESOURCES/SAFETY             | 647,385           |
| 14 LEGAL                              | 430,176           |
| 15 FINANCE                            | 617,316           |
| 20 ENGINEERING                        | 12,735,024        |
| 50 CONSERVATION                       | 6,375,467         |
| 60 LEASING                            | 1,105,863         |
| 65 NATURAL RESOURCES                  | 1,764,716         |
| 80 PARKS & RECREATION                 | 9,363,955         |
| 85 MARINAS                            | 2,549,460         |
| 89 RANGERS                            | 1,328,665         |
| <b>Grand Total</b>                    | <b>40,041,671</b> |

| 2023 YTD Expenditures - By Appropriation Grouping | YTD Actual        |
|---|-------------------|
| PERSONNEL   | 12,320,608        |
| MATERIALS & SUPPLIES                              | 1,851,602         |
| PUBLICITY & ADVERTISING                           | 265,761           |
| UTILITIES   | 1,784,290         |
| HEALTH INSURANCE LASER                            | 490,112           |
| GAS & OIL AND SERVICE                             | 471,494           |
| CONTRACTS   | 19,737,073        |
| RESALE  | 523,785           |
| OPERATING EQUIPMENT                               | 808,758           |
| REAL ESTATE TAXES                                 | 400,322           |
| OTHER   | 1,387,868         |
| <b>Grand Total</b>                                | <b>40,041,671</b> |





**MAIN OFFICE**  
1319 Third Street NW  
New Philadelphia, OH 44663

**MAIN OFFICE ANNEX** (Engineering and Recreation)  
2050 Reiser Avenue SE  
New Philadelphia, OH 44663

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## OUR MISSION

Responsible stewards  
dedicated to providing  
the benefits of flood reduction,  
conservation and recreation  
to the Muskingum River Watershed

## OUR VISION

Respected and Valued Leader,  
Employer and Partner  
in Flood Reduction,  
Conservation and Recreation



Muskingum Watershed Conservancy District wishes to honor Joanne Limbach who served on our board for 20 years. Thank you for your work and dedication on the board and we wish you all the best in your retirement.