



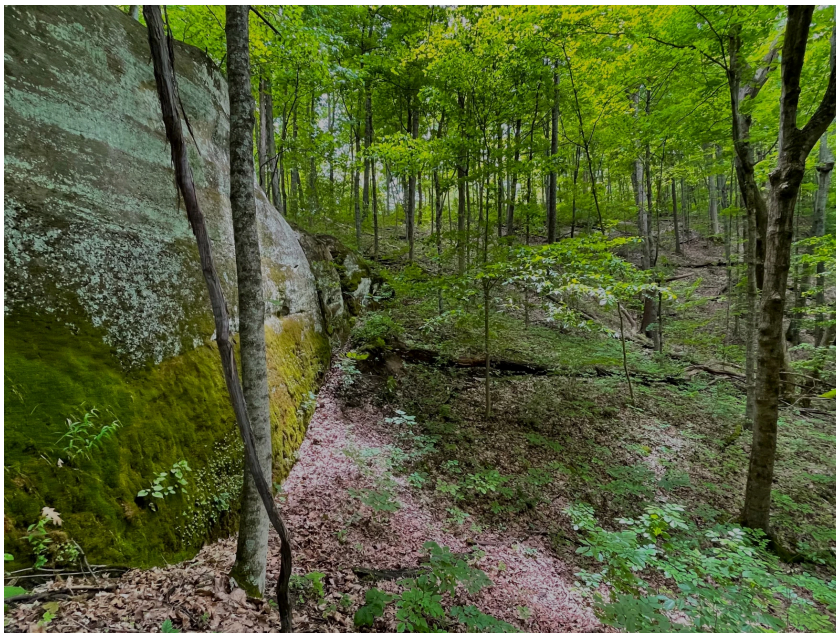
A new Ohio nature preserve protects 3,000 acres of Appalachian foothills

The Ohio Newsroom | By [Erin Gottsacker](#)

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Terry Seidel / The Nature Conservancy

The Joy Valley Nature Preserve features nearly 3,000 acres of woodlands, cliffs, mature trees and ponds in the Appalachian foothills.

Betty Lowe's family has owned nearly 3,000 acres of forested land in the foothills of Appalachian Ohio for the last century.

Now, the property is open to the public.

In one of the [largest private land protection initiatives](#) in state history, Lowe is working

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Nature Preserve for generations to come.

“Conserving a large parcel like this is very important to the type of wildlife and conservation values that need a large continuous unbroken forest, and that's what this place is,” said Brian Blair, a board member with Athens Conservancy.

Lowe donated the property to the local landbank, which will manage it as a nature preserve, protecting wildlife while simultaneously marking trails and developing parking for easier public access.

Meanwhile, the Nature Conservancy holds a conservation easement on the land. The national entity will provide oversight and ensure the property is protected long-term.



Terry Seidel / The Nature Conservancy

Sedum blooms in a bed of moss on the Joy Valley Nature Preserve.

The importance of nature preserves

Southeast Ohio already boasts some of the state's most beloved nature, from Hocking Hills to the Wayne National Forest.

But public lands are limited in Ohio compared to the rest of the country.

“Ohio, in general, is only about 4.2% public land,” Blair said. “So even though we have some beautiful state parks and wildlife areas in Ohio, and especially southeast Ohio, we

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don't have a huge amount of public land compared to some other states. And that's where nature preserves like this come in.”

Blair says nature preserves like Joy Valley help provide habitat for a wide range of animals.

“Species like bobcats, salamanders and everything in between need large protected areas like this, whether they're in the state parks or in the nature preserves,” he said.

And nature preserves also take pressure off popular destinations like Hocking Hills.

“Everybody loves the Hocking Hills, and in a way we're kind of loving it – not to death – but we're being pretty hard on the Hocking Hills with all the visitation,” Blair said.

“Nature preserves like this really help meet the public demand for conserved natural areas.”

He doesn't recommend visiting the Joy Valley Nature Preserve quite yet – cell phone reception there is limited and it's not well-marked.

But that will change in the coming months: Athens Conservancy says adding signage and trail markers is a top priority.

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Erin Gottsacker

Erin Gottsacker is a reporter for The Ohio Newsroom. She most recently reported for WXPB Public Radio in the Northwoods of Wisconsin.

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