

A Watershed Year



Asbury Woods

ANNUAL REPORT 2022-2023



A Watershed Year

Asbury Woods experienced a multitude of watershed moments over the past fiscal year; moments that changed and shaped the future of Asbury Woods. From acquiring 40 acres of property that will now be perpetually conserved to introducing an innovative way of thinking about our programming, there is no doubt that Asbury Woods is growing and evolving in exciting new ways.

As Asbury Woods matures as an organization, we are guided by our strategic plan that helps us move towards our vision for Northwestern Pennsylvania to be a place where protection for and appreciation of natural places is a deeply held personal and community value. Our strategic plan pointed us towards watershed projects such as adopting a stewardship conservation plan for the 216 acres of property we own, just as it led us to take on an important environmental education program, Children's Water Festival, and to implement a year-long theme about water for our public education offerings.

I hope you'll spend a few minutes reading about a selection of these watershed moments from this past fiscal year. It's incredible how far Asbury Woods has come! It's all possible thanks to the thousands of people and organizations who support our work with charitable gifts and the hundreds of individuals who volunteer their time to assist in our efforts. I'm deeply grateful to those who give of their resources, time and expertise to propel Asbury Woods forward, ensuring we continue our mission of conservation, environmental education and outdoor recreation.

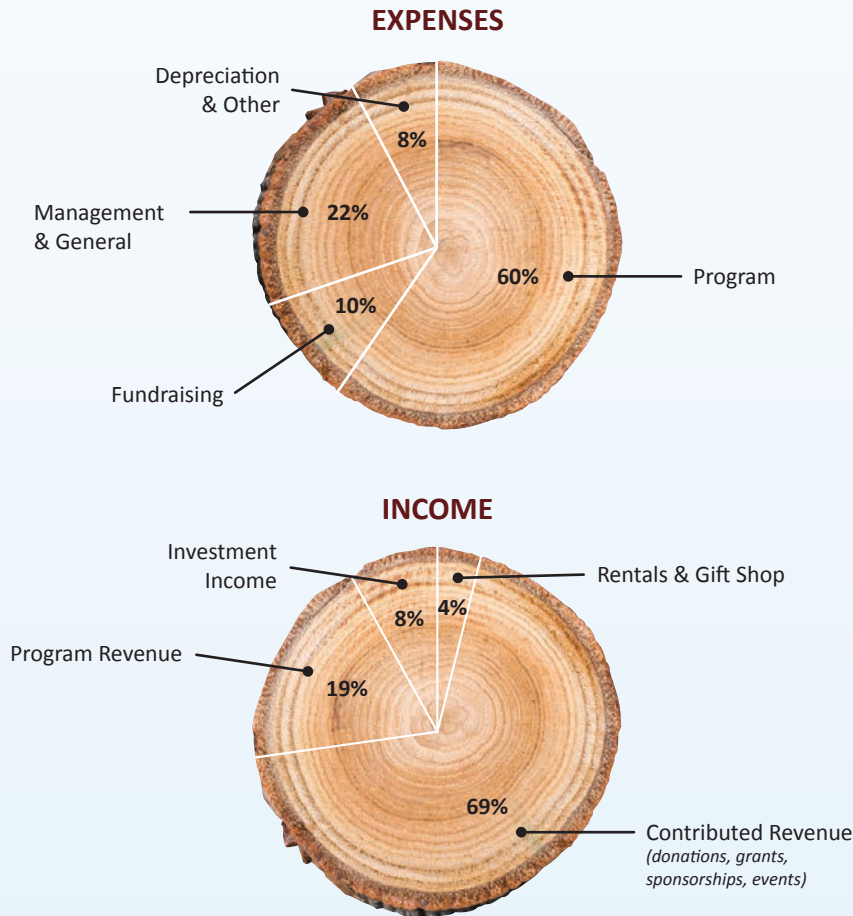
Thank you to everyone who was part of our watershed year and to those who continue to be part of the Asbury Woods story.

Sincerely,

Jennifer A. Farrar, CFRE
Executive Director

YEAR AT A *Glance*

Unaudited Financials September 1, 2022 – August 31, 2023



Gross Income \$1,391,050
Total Expenses \$1,017,838
Net Income \$373,212



Launched Trout in the Classroom

- As part of the six-month trout-raising project, Asbury Woods received over 200 trout eggs and reared them in our exhibit hall. More than half survived to the fingerling stage and were released into a local waterway.

School Programs

- Our 216 acres of wetlands, forests, fields, and creeks became the classroom for over 7,000 school students.

Community Programs

- 29 groups had a hands-on experience with nature including Mercy Center for Women, Migrant Education Program, The Sight Center of Northwest PA, Career Street, and Bethesda Lutheran Services.

Summer Camp

- Our largest camp year ever with 33 camps and 443 campers.

Permanently Protected More Land

- Asbury Woods purchased 40 acres of property from Mercyhurst University making them permanently conserved.

Adopted a Conservation Stewardship Plan

- Asbury Woods' board of directors took a monumental step forward in our mission to protect, manage and interpret our property by adopting a formal Conservation Stewardship Plan for the 216 acres owned by Asbury Woods.

THE YEAR OF *Water*

Our strategic plan challenged us to re-evaluate our traditional public program model to ensure we were investing time and energy into programs which supported our mission and vision.

As a result, during 2023, Asbury Woods explored our public education programs through the lens of The Year of Water. This new annual theme approach to our offerings allows us to delve deeper into important environmental and conservation topics.



Water is the world's most vital natural resource and our region's connection to Lake Erie makes water conservation a matter of local, regional, national, and global significance. Lake Erie and its watershed are inescapable parts of the fabric of our community. For these reasons, and with Walnut Creek, a major tributary of Lake Erie, passing through Asbury Wood property, water was a natural choice to kick off our yearly themes.

Throughout the year we provided various educational programs, forums, materials, and experiences for people of all ages to engage in conversations about water. We partnered with a host of topic experts including PA SeaGrant, Erie Conservation District, Erie Water Works, and others to present opportunities to examine water from various perspectives.

In addition, for The Year of Water, Asbury Woods hosted a Trout in the Classroom tank in our exhibit hall. Trout were raised from eggs to fingerlings in our exhibit hall and then released into Lake Pleasant by 30 summer campers. The Trout in the Classroom program demonstrates to youth and adults the everyday relevance of healthy watersheds and engages youth in active stewardship of our water resources.

As The Year of Water winds down, we are excited about new yearly themes that will allow Asbury Woods to continue expanding the understanding of various environmental and conservation topics in our community.



CHILDREN'S *Water Festival*

A watershed event, literally and figuratively, took place at Asbury Woods in October 2022. For five consecutive days more than 500 fifth grade students from around the region descended upon Asbury Woods for the Children's Water Festival, a dynamic and interactive day that immersed students in the wonderful world of water. Thanks to an incredible array of people and organizations, the students rotated through various stations to learn about the importance of water, taking care of our watersheds, conserving water and water as a vital resource. The goal was to instill a sense of how water plays an integral part in our lives on this planet and how they can have a role in taking care of our water resources.

The Erie Children's Water Festival is modeled after the Children's Groundwater Festival that was initiated in 1988 in Grand Island, Nebraska to



educate children about water and water issues. Since that time, it has become an international model that has been adapted and replicated throughout the world. Festivals are annually held in more than 40 U.S. States, plus Mexico, Canada, Australia, and India. The Erie Children's Water Festival started in 2015 and was hosted on the campus of Penn State Behrend. When the Children's Water Festival needed a new host site and organizer, Asbury Woods was the natural choice.

Thanks to the generosity of sponsors, schools do not pay a program fee to attend the Children's Water Festival. Support of this program is an investment in our children, our future, and our planet so that our youth understand how important it is to protect and conserve water. Children's Water Festival supporters for 2022 include: E.E. Austin & Sons, Erie Yacht Club Foundation, Northwest Savings Bank, Reed Manufacturing, Sheetz and W.C. Weill Company.



ADDITIONAL PROPERTY

Purchased

In December 2022, another major watershed moment for Asbury Woods happened when 40 acres of property was transferred to Asbury Woods ownership from Mercyhurst University. Nearly two years in the making, this transfer of land to Asbury Woods ensures that these 40 acres will be placed in permanent conservation status.

The 40 acres was originally gifted to then Mercyhurst College by local businessman Douglas James in 1992 for the creation of a nature preserve. Mercyhurst and Asbury Woods had a long-standing agreement that allowed for the development of a public-access trail to establish the Asbury Woods Greenway Trail which connected properties around the Nature Center on the east side of Asbury Road with Asbury Woods' Browns Farm parcel



- Asbury Woods Property
- Millcreek School District Property
- Acquired by Asbury Woods April 2021 (11.32 acres)
- Acquired by Asbury Woods December 2022 (40.67 acres)

on Sterrettania Road. Asbury Woods staff and volunteers maintained the trails and Mercyhurst students and faculty used the property for biology classes and research projects. This decades-long partnership allowed the James Preserve property to serve as an educational tool while providing broad public access to natural environments.

In recent years the administrations of Mercyhurst University and Asbury Woods began conversations on transferring ownership of the James Preserve to Asbury Woods. Asbury Woods status as a land trust makes us well-positioned to fulfill Mr. James' original vision for the property as a permanent nature preserve and space for hands-on learning for students of all ages.

The addition of the 40 acre James Preserve to Asbury Woods ownership brings the total acreage owned by Asbury Woods to 216, all of which will be permanently conserved as green space for the community.

Generations of Erie County residents will benefit from this land being conserved, and it will help ensure that plants and wildlife are protected while allowing for public outdoor recreation and creating a place for incredible environmental education.



The transfer of the land to Asbury Woods was made possible thanks to Mercyhurst University's generosity in donating half of the value of the land. The acquisition was also supported by a PA Department of Conservation & Natural Resources grant, Erie Insurance, the Erie Community Foundation, Bill & Sally DeWitt, the John M. & Gertrude E. Petersen Foundation, along with several other private donations including Amy and Jeff Brinling, Dave Uhlig and Patti Williams, Jennifer Farrar, and Brian Winslow. The 40 acres purchased is adjacent to 11 acres that Asbury Woods purchased in April 2021 that was supported through the same grant and funders.

CONSERVATION STEWARDSHIP

Plan

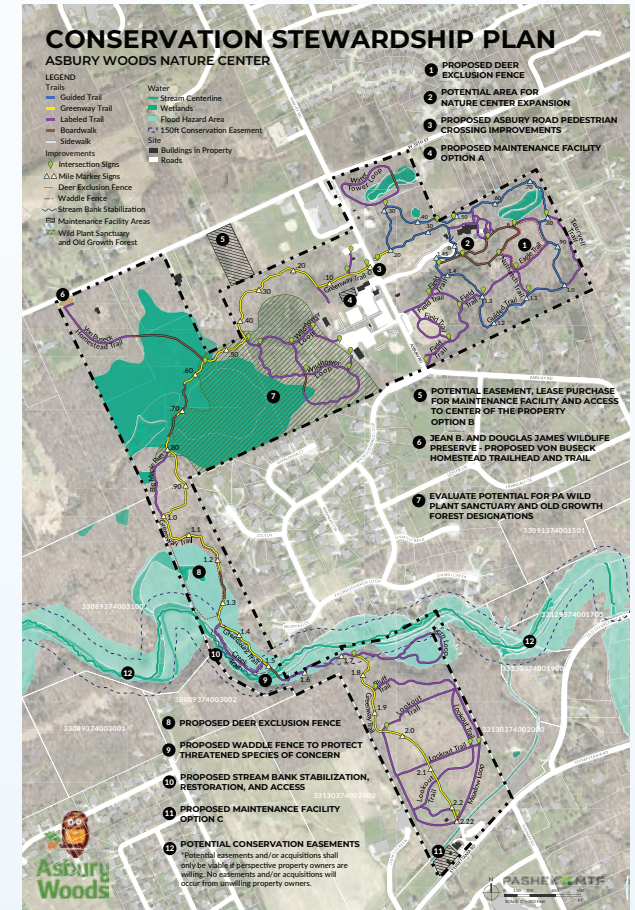
In July 2023, a watershed moment happened when the Asbury Woods board of directors took a monumental step forward in Asbury Woods' mission to protect, manage and interpret our property by adopting a formal Conservation Stewardship Plan. The adoption of the plan was the conclusion of more than 15 months of work by experts in the areas of land use, forest ecology, greenway planning, sustainable trails, stream restoration, and wildlife biology. The purpose of the plan was to inventory, analyze, evaluate, recommend, and provide implantation strategies to manage Asbury Woods for conservation stewardship. The plan covers the unique intersection of Asbury Woods' mission of conservation, outdoor recreation, and environmental education.



Asbury Woods undertook this process in recognition of our responsibility and commitment to actively manage the property in a responsible way, protecting the natural resources and environment while providing opportunities for public use.

The conservation stewardship plan is an exciting step in helping Asbury Woods identify and prioritize immediate, mid-term, long-term and ongoing activities and projects needed to protect and preserve the 216 acres that encompass our property. Examples include documentation of threatened plant species on our property that Asbury Woods can take steps to protect; inventory of invasive species and recommendations on strategies to control or eliminate them; a specialized review of the riparian zone and banks of Walnut Creek for the portion that flows through our property with steps to stabilize the banks and slow erosion; more than 150 proposed trail improvements; and suggestions for managing the built environment.

The conservation stewardship plan provides a roadmap for the next 5-10 years as Asbury Woods strives to protect the natural beauty of our property, protect the diversity of flora and fauna, manage the acreage in a way that allows native species to thrive and allows for public use for outdoor recreation and environmental education.



ASBURY WOODS

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Legacy Society Members have included Asbury Woods as part of their estate plans.

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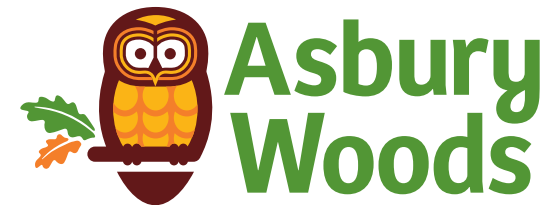
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Asbury Woods strives to realize a future for Northwestern Pennsylvania where appreciation for and protection of natural spaces is a deeply held personal and community value.

Our mission is to inspire a greater connection to the natural world by protecting, managing and interpreting our property; providing outdoor recreational opportunities; and offering environmental education experiences.



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