



Asbury Woods

Seasons of Change

Annual Report
2024-2025



OVER THE PAST YEAR,



Asbury Woods has embraced a season of meaningful change –welcoming new leadership, revitalizing our exhibit hall, introducing a brand-new fundraising event, and celebrating the contributions of retiring staff members. Through it all, the organization continues to thrive due to strong community and donor support, a committed Board of Directors, and dedicated staff. We emerge from this season of change, bolstered by Asbury Woods’ rich past, invigorated by new ideas, and ready to steward the organization into the future.

The demand for Asbury Woods’ hands-on environmental education programs has increased steadily over the past few years and the 2024-2025 fiscal year was no exception. Our education team engaged over 9,500 students through field trips to the Woods and visits to schools, including 2,000 students from United Way of Erie County’s Community Schools program. We anticipate this demand will grow further as new academic standards, including environmental literacy & sustainability, are implemented statewide.

The Year of Wildlife, sponsored by National Fuel, has been our most successful themed year yet! Not only have our wildlife-themed programs been well attended, but several new partnerships have developed. We have welcomed educators from the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and the Game Commission to share their expertise about native wildlife; Presque Isle Audubon Society generously supported the addition of a new “Measure Your Wingspan” display in the exhibit hall, a video bird feeder, and a backyard birding program; and well known friends sponsored several of the taxidermy on display in our new exhibit, Wild About Wildlife! Discovering Pennsylvania’s Native Species. The exhibit has been an exciting addition to the Nature Center.

We introduced a new family-friendly fundraiser, Winnie the Pooh’s Asbury Adventure, to the community in September 2024. A creative and dedicated volunteer committee spent a full year creating and planning this magical event that included visits with Winnie the Pooh and his friends, exciting stations themed around each character, and lots of whimsical fun! As always, this event would not have been such a success without dedicated board members, volunteers, and sponsors to make it come to life.

Finally, the organization took a major leap forward in our conservation efforts by hiring Conservation & Stewardship Coordinator, Greg Ritson. In 6 short months Greg has learned all the twists and turns of our trail system and come up with several plans for improving the property and its management to ensure that it is healthy for generations to come.

As the new Executive, it is my privilege to lead Asbury Woods into its next chapter while continuing to fulfill our mission to connect people to nature through environmental education, outdoor recreation, and conservation.



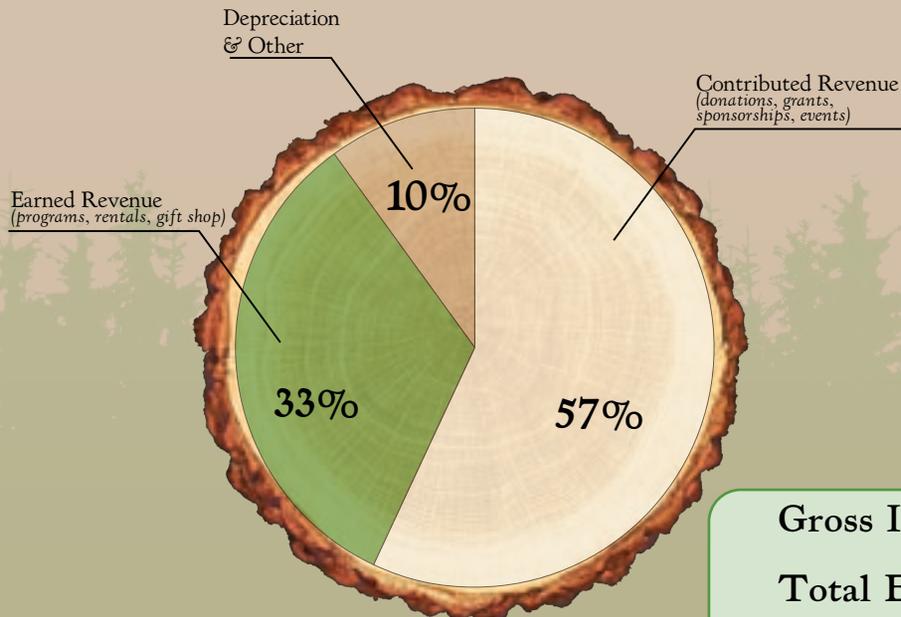
YEAR AT A GLANCE

- Over **9,500** school children participated in environmental education
- Over **15,000** people participated in Asbury Woods' community programs
- **203** volunteers contributed **5,794** hours

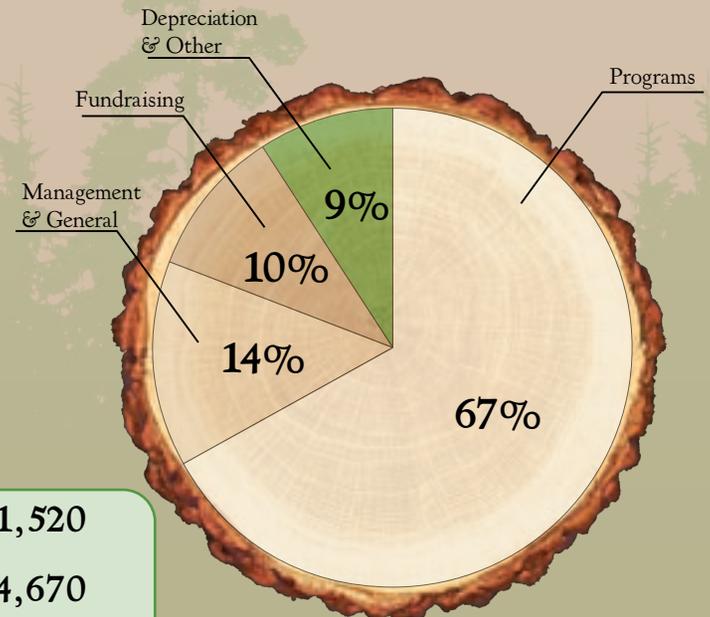
- **440** children attended summer camp
- **1876** people attended Monday Music in the Woods
- Tens of **thousands** of people used the trails
- **358** people gave **\$73,700** on Erie Gives Day, a **19%** increase!

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

INCOME



EXPENSES



Gross Income: \$1,091,520

Total Expenses: \$994,670

Net Income: \$96,850

NEW LEADERSHIP

Sarah Bennett, Executive Director

I am thrilled to be the new Executive Director at Asbury Woods! My experiences in leadership, ecology, and environmental studies give me a unique perspective on leading Asbury Woods into its next chapter. I deeply value the interconnectedness of humans and nature and love working for an organization that seeks to deepen that connection for others. Not only have I spent the last four years as Asbury Woods' Director of Education, but my background in education, sustainability, and environmental advocacy allow me to connect with the community in important ways. In my new role as Executive Director, I plan to build upon the strong legacy of community connection to launch the organization forward into its next chapter. We will take a fresh look at programs, facilities, and natural resources to ensure that they meet the needs of our community and work toward fulfilling our mission to instill a greater connection to nature.



Patrick Miller, Director of Development & Marketing

As Director of Development & Marketing at Asbury Woods, I'm guided by a deep belief that nature isn't just a place we visit — it's something we carry with us. My passion for backpacking, hiking with my daughters, and kayaking fuels my commitment to protecting and sharing spaces like Asbury Woods. I'm driven to build meaningful connections and inspire community investment that ensures these trails, forests, and streams remain vibrant for generations to come. At the heart of my work is a simple motivation: to help others fall in love with the outdoors the way I have, and to make sure they always have a place to explore.

Emma Mader, Director of Education

I am passionate about inspiring curiosity and a love of nature through fun and meaningful, hands-on learning experiences. My journey with Asbury Woods began as a camp counselor in 2021, followed by roles as an educator and Schools Programs Coordinator, before stepping into my current position in 2025. With a background in environmental science and science education, and teaching certifications in biology, general science, and environmental education, I'm committed to advancing our mission through excellence in environmental education. This year, my goals include enhancing our exhibits with more interactive elements, partnering with state and community organizations to lead Pennsylvania's first-ever Trout in the Classroom curriculum, and continuing to grow and refine our educational programs, from school visits to after-school initiatives and public programs.



Jami Manafo, Operations Manager

At Asbury Woods, daily operations are always exciting new adventures. Being part of a team that values the natural world as much as I do is deeply rewarding. Whether I am coming up with new ideas for the Squeaky Frog Gift Shop or supporting staff and volunteers in their daily needs, there is no greater joy than ensuring Asbury Woods is the most efficient in all departments. I am honored to contribute to the mission of Asbury Woods and look forward to continuing to support our team, volunteers, and community.

RENEWED FOCUS ON CONSERVATION

Asbury Woods' comprehensive Conservation Stewardship Plan was approved by the Board of Directors in 2023. It was important to us that this not become just a report sitting on a shelf, but a living document that would guide us in our land management decisions. Last year, we acquired and conserved an additional 17 acres and continued to address invasive species on the property. This year we took the important step of hiring a Conservation Stewardship Coordinator to lead our conservation efforts. Since he began in April 2025, our Conservation Stewardship Coordinator, Greg Ritson, has been taking a wholistic approach to our land management with special attention to long-term sustainability both economically and ecologically. Solutions like these tend to be slow, systematic actions instead of quick, fast-acting ones.

Greg's initial focus is on our trails. Sustainable trails are the ultimate expression of appreciation and protection of natural places. They provide recreational opportunities for visitors to experience the natural wonders around them while protecting the areas they traverse. He has been working to make our trails more sustainable and enjoyable for our visitors. For example, he completed a trail project in August at the beginning of the Greenway Trail near the Nature Center. Like many areas of our property, this section of trail was perpetually muddy and riddled with exposed tree roots. The structure that was built improves the durability and drainage of the trail surface. This means no more muddy feet, healthier trees, and a longer-lasting trail!

We are formulating a plan to improve all our trail structures in the coming years and have been working to secure funding to implement these projects. We are currently working on the Greenway Trail using funds from Department of Community and Economic Development and will continue to seek private and public funds as they become available. Another grant from Erie County Gaming Revenue Authority has allowed us to update our property maps and guideline signs which will allow easier navigation through our property and effectively educate our visitors about the special places throughout Asbury Woods and how to protect them.

We have also collaborated with our Education Department to focus more of our public programs on conservation. This past year we offered opportunities to participate in a deer survey, had engaging, conservation-focused conversations with our staff while walking trails, and completed hands-on conservation projects with volunteer groups.

We look forward to continuously improving our conservation stewardship efforts, while engaging our visitors in these efforts. Be sure to look for more training in conservation skills and meaningful projects to engage in these efforts.



STRENGTHENING CONNECTIONS

This year at Asbury Woods has been filled with discovery, learning, and connection. Over 25,000 students, campers, and community members participated in our programs, each experience reminding us of the power of nature to spark curiosity, build confidence, and bring people together. Thanks to our generous donors, dedicated staff, and enthusiastic community, our Education Department has continued to inspire curiosity and foster a lifelong love of nature in people of all ages.

One of our most magical moments came with “Winnie the Pooh’s Asbury Adventure,” which welcomed visitors for a day of fun and learning. Families wandered through the woods alongside life-sized characters, danced with Tigger, crafted friendship bracelets with Piglet, explored cloud science in Eeyore’s Cloud Room, and dissected owl pellets with Owl. This joyful event brought childhood stories to life while uniting our community in playful discovery and learning.

Our programming continued to grow with exciting new camps and initiatives. Animal Mania (Grades 1–2) introduced campers to ambassador animals, wildlife tracking, and nature-inspired crafts, while Go Fish! (Grades 6–8) immersed campers in aquatic life,



Lincoln Elementary School

water conservation, and hands-on fishing experiences. Thanks to partnerships with NWPA Trout Unlimited, S.O.N.S. of Lake Erie, Raise the Barr Guide Service, FishUSA, and the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission, every Go Fish! camper received their own fishing rod, participated in fly fishing, and visited the Fairview Hatchery. Our EcoExplorers after-school club also explored and fished local waters and built skills that will last a lifetime. Inclusivity and community connection remained central to our mission. Our new Nature Exploration for Adults with Disabilities provided accessible, hands-on learning for adults and caregivers, creating friendships and lasting memories. The Year of Wildlife theme brought new exhibits, animal-themed camps, and monthly programs supported by local sponsors, engaging hundreds more in the wonder of our natural world.

As we look ahead, we are filled with gratitude for our generous support, and excited for another year of inspiring wonder, nurturing curiosity, and strengthening connections with nature.



LOOKING FORWARD

At Asbury Woods, we welcome the unique opportunities and challenges that each season brings. Every fall, we get to see the wonder on students' faces as they walk into the Nature Center for the first time; we enjoy visits with families during Winnie the Pooh's Asbury Adventure and Scary Creature Feature; and we appreciate the grit that our trail runners show during the Into the Woods 6 Miler Trail Run. Heading into the winter we prepare for the excitement of Winter Wonderland and introducing people of all ages to cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. As winter begins to melt into spring, we tap maple trees and share the joy of making this natural product with the community. During late spring we ramp up our school visits, and summer brings our beloved summer campers, Monday Music, our beautiful Wine & Dine in the Woods, and many visitors to the trails.

While each season brings new events and experiences, our mission to inspire a greater connection to nature and our commitment to conserving our property for future generations remain steadfast.



In 2023, Asbury Woods purchased 17 acres contiguous with our Brown's Farm property. This wooded acreage includes a tributary to Walnut Creek that ends at Buttermilk Falls. Several funding sources were used to purchase the property, including a 2-year 0% interest loan from Western Pennsylvania Conservancy. We are proud to share that this loan, and with it the entire property, was paid in full this fall before any interest was accrued! We are so grateful to the dozens of generous donors who helped us over the finish line. Over the next couple of years, we will develop trails and implement projects to protect the land and water in this new corner of our property.

Through every season, we are proud to be a place where so many generations have fallen in love with the natural world. We are incredibly grateful to the community for their support, and we look forward to working with all of you to create a sustainable future.

ANNUAL FUND

Gifts received September 1, 2024 - August 31, 2025

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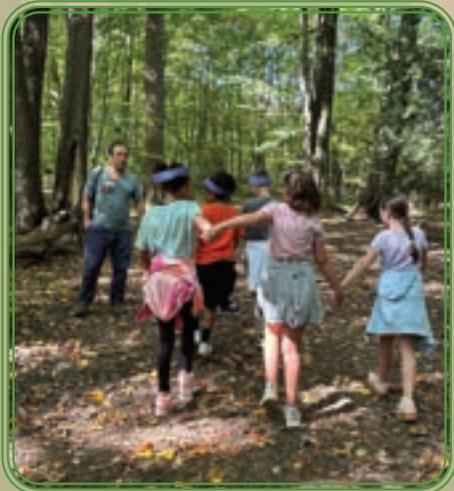
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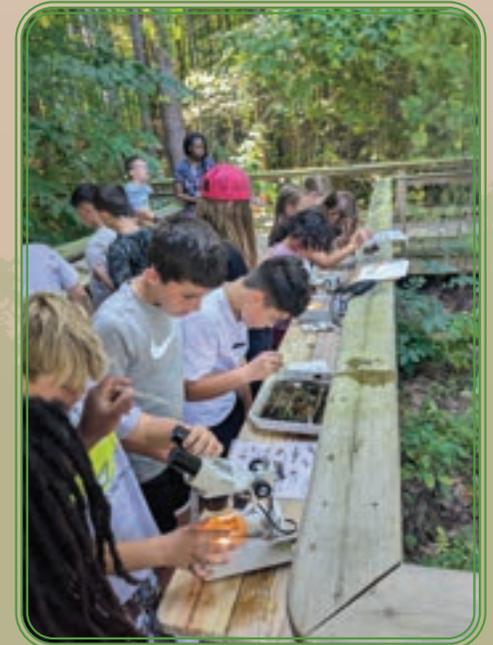
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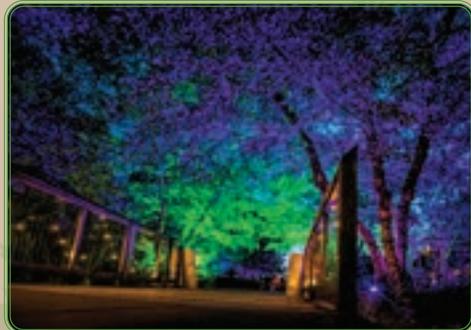
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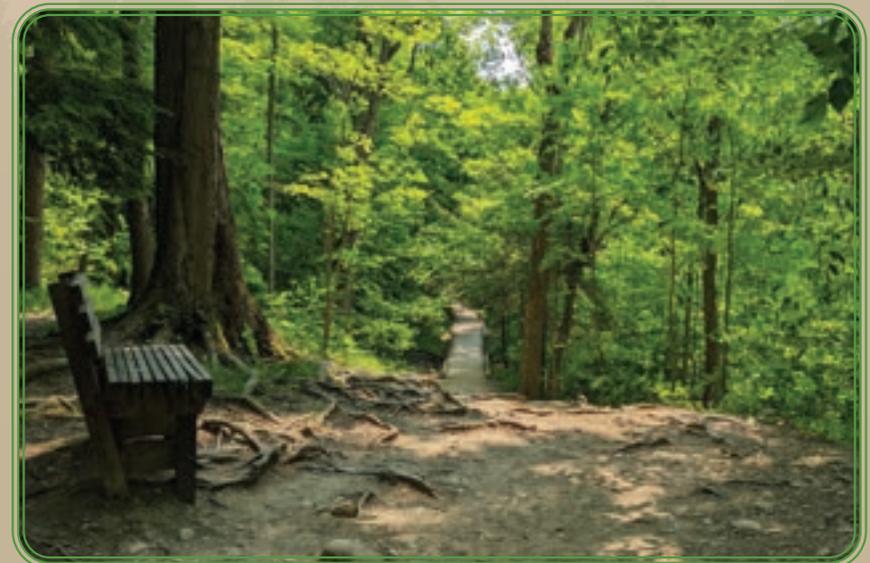
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