

DISTRICT 19
NATURAL RESOURCE ASSISTANCE COUNCIL
OF STARK COUNTY
August 27, 2026

Members Present

Dan Moeglin, Stark Parks
Mark Cozy, Canal Fulton
William Gaberle, OPWC
Michael Rekstis, ODNR
Bob Sanderson, District 19

Others

Jacob Pries, WRLC
Jeff Brown, OPWC

RPC Staff

Bob Nau, Executive Director
Dan Slicker, SCATS Technical Director
Jennifer Bayer, Executive Assistant

1. Opening Remarks

A quorum was not present. No official business was conducted and no action was taken.

Moeglin began the meeting at 1:30 p.m. He introduced Nick Rose as the new OPWC liaison and thanked William Gaberle for all of his help.

2. Presentation of Submitted Project – Nimishillen Tributaries Preserve

Jacob Pries of the Western Reserve Land Conservancy (WRCL) presented an application on behalf of Plain Township for the proposed Nimishillen Tributaries Preserve. The property is approximately 70 acres in Plain Township, near the border of the City of North Canton. It was formerly part of a golf course but has been largely reclaimed by natural vegetation since the golf course closed approximately two years ago. The proposed preserve would complement the existing Plain Township Wetlands Reserve to the south and help create a larger conservation corridor in the area.

The property contains several significant natural resources, including the West Branch of Nimishillen Creek, Grub Ditch, and additional unnamed streams, totaling approximately 4,600 linear feet of streams. Natural resource surveys identified six wetlands, three of which were classified as Category 3 wetlands. The surveys also documented the state-endangered tricolored bat. Approximately 90% of the plant species identified on the property were native, despite the presence of some invasive species.

Another benefit of the property is that it already contains a network of paved and earthen trails that were originally golf cart paths. These trails provide an existing recreational access opportunity and make the property relatively “turnkey” as a future park or preserve. During the site visit, people were already using portions of the trail system. The property also provides habitat for wildlife, including monarch butterflies and indigo buntings.

Pries explained that the project is part of a larger effort to build a 120- to 150-acre conservation corridor connecting properties owned or potentially acquired by Plain Township and surrounding landowners. WRLC is in discussions with neighboring property owners about potential future acquisitions, although no specific future acquisitions were promised. The timing was considered particularly beneficial because there are substantial residential developments being proposed in the surrounding area. The preserve could provide a conservation and natural buffer as development occurs.

A portion of a neighboring property, expected to be developed by McKinley Development, will be used as a retention pond for a development, which WRLC expects to remain in place permanently.

Regarding public access, the current access is from Carmen Drive, although there is technically legal access from Pinecone Street that is impractical because of a large wetland. The proposed permanent access would be through a 30-foot-wide easement from Applegrove, generally following the paved path used during the site visit. WRLC indicated that the easement would be wide enough to accommodate larger vehicles, including school buses. There are no plans to provide access through the narrow, tree-lined strip on the eastern side of the property, in part because nearby residents have expressed opposition to that access point. The township is also expected to use barriers or other measures to discourage motorized traffic on the trails.

The total funding request is \$1,063,000, with 75% requested through Clean Ohio and a 25% local match. Plain Township is a certified match, but the Western Reserve Land Conservancy plans to fundraise to cover the township's matching share so that the township would not have to bear the transaction costs. The primary potential source for the match is the Muskingum Watershed Conservancy District's Partners in Watershed Management program. An application was being finalized with a September 1 deadline. If that funding is unsuccessful, WRLC will pursue other funding sources or Plain Township would provide the match.

Overall, the project was presented as an opportunity to preserve significant wetlands, streams, wildlife habitat and existing trails while creating a larger conservation corridor and natural buffer in an area experiencing increasing residential development. The presentation concluded with positive comments from the committee members regarding the quality and location of the proposed project.

3. Other Business

Moeglin noted the next meeting will be Thursday, September 10, 2026 at 1:30 p.m. Scores should be handed in to Slicker by September 8.

With no further business to discuss, the meeting adjourned at 2:18 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Jennifer Bayer, Executive Assistant