



Bruns Beechflats Swamp

Acres: 60.0 \$253,500 LAND DONATION

Fort Hill boasts a stunning natural area 1600 acres in size, sheltering one of the largest and oldest contiguous forests in all of Ohio. Some of the woodlands may actually be considered authentic old growth - forests that have not been disturbed since the early days of European settlement. Fort Hill protects an estimated 800 species of plants within its borders, an outstanding representation of the rich temperate deciduous forest that once covered most of the Eastern United States. Roughly 400 of the 1600 acres making up the preserve region were acquired through the efforts of the Arc of Appalachia. The land within the traditional park boundaries of Fort Hill are owned by the Ohio History Connection, and managed by the Arc on their behalf.

The Baker Fork of Scioto Brush Creek winds through the heart of Fort Hill. Along its course through the park it traverses a breathtakingly beautiful karst landscape of vertical cliff walls, giant boulders, grottos, seeps, and stone arches. The character of Baker Fork upstream of the park, including the Brunses' property, is starkly different. At

one time the stream braided its way south over multiple channels through an area known as the Beechflats Swamp. The two-square mile swamp forest was characterized by water-tolerant Pin Oaks, Shellbark Hickories, Beech, and Swamp White Oak trees, and teemed with wildlife of all kinds. The swamp sheltered signature wetland birds, and during the spring and summer months the chorus of toads and frogs was deafening. To the Native American Indians, Beechflats was not only beautiful, it was nourishing and sustaining. Regretfully, we only know of one half-acre of Beechflats Swamp that remains in its original primeval grandeur. It is found at Redstone Farm, on which the Arc holds a conservation easement.

When Bill and Kathleen Bruns found a sixty-acre tract for sale in 2008 lying immediately north of Fort Hill on the banks of Baker Fork, they were immediately enamored. This land meant they were one step closer to achieving their dream of living closer to the land. They were attracted to the property's beautiful trees and its thick and vibrant growth of shrubs, and even more attracted to the thought



Kathleen and Bill Bruns in front of a Shellbark Hickory at Beechflats Swamp. The spirit of Beechflats Swamp is stirring and it wants to come back to life!

of buying land so close to the Highlands Nature Sanctuary and Fort Hill. Today the two confess with considerable humor that they started this endeavor as “green” as the forest they were determined to purchase. Soon after its acquisition, Bill and Kathleen hired a consulting forester to advise them on proper forest management. They were excited about their property, and they wanted to “do things right.” However, when the forester toured the property, instead of just focusing on the trees, he kept turning his attention to the masses of non-native shrubs that had colonized the understory. With his help, Bill and Kathleen began learning the individual species that “made up the green,” processing the reality that much of their forest’s shrub layer was made up of non-native plants. The forester encouraged them to work on invasive plant removal. They learned that their forest, like most forests in Ohio, came with a history.

After years of agricultural use and a round of recent logging, the young Box Elders, Sycamores, and Locusts pioneering the mineralized soils competed with large numbers of invasive Multiflora Rose, Autumn Olive, and Bush Honeysuckle. Bill and Kathleen poured themselves into the task of removing the intruders, all with their own hard

labor. Over the last 12 years, they removed an estimated 100 tons of plant material. Their labors made an immense difference in the recovery of the native plant understory on the property. In the sunlit openings they created, Pawpaws, Spicebush, and Arrowwood Viburnum rushed in, impeding re-colonization by the non-native plants. The Brunses have transformed this piece of land, and we consider the two of them heroes of the land restoration movement.

The Brunses figured out quickly that this property, as much as they loved it, was not calling to their hearts as a future home site. They wondered if their sharpened restoration skills might be better applied to a place closer to their Columbus home. In the fall of 2020, Bill and Kathleen Bruns asked the Arc if we would like to add their property to the Arc’s Fort Hill holdings. Our response was an enthusiastic yes, and the rest is history.

Bill and Kathleen now volunteer their time removing invasive plants from a small but beautiful nature preserve in Jefferson Township of Franklin County called the Boehnke Nature Preserve. The couple are also regular attendees of the Ridgeview Farm Biodiversity Brigade Volunteer Workdays at the Highlands Nature Sanctuary, just a few miles north of Bruns Beechflat Swamp.