

## **Ohio Adds New State Forest and Wildlife Area thanks to public-private partnership**

*15,494 contiguous acres protected*

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On a beautiful November day, then Governor Ted Strickland and Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) Director Sean Logan announced the opening of Ohio's newest state forest, the 12,089-acre Vinton Furnace State Experimental Forest, as well as the neighboring 3,405-acre Vinton Furnace State Wildlife Area. Together, the two new conservation areas represent a rare, contiguous block of forestland, which is home to a wide array of native Ohio flora and fauna, including a number of endangered species. The site also hosts one of the most important forest research centers in the country.

"Today's opening of this great forest is an example of true private-public collaboration at its strongest," said Governor Ted Strickland at the November dedication ceremony. "And with today's dedication, Ohio now has more acres of public land available to more people in more places than ever before. The Vinton Furnace State Experimental Forest and Wildlife Area represents an innovative model for conservation that will play a vital role in improving southeast Ohio's economy while protecting wildlife and furthering educational research."

In addition to formally opening the new property, Governor Strickland and Director Logan applauded several companies and organizations which contributed the majority of the funding used to purchase the new forest.

"This is an exciting day for ODNR, our many partners, and all who benefit from and enjoy Ohio's forests," said ODNR Director Sean Logan. "For the past four years, we have worked with private and public entities to ensure this amazing forest and all of its features will bring great value, both economic and environmental, to Ohio. We could not have done this alone, so I offer my deep thanks to all those who worked so hard to make this possible."

The project's partners included American Electric Power (AEP), The Conservation Fund, The Nature Conservancy, Rockies Express Pipeline, U.S. Department of Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Park Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service, and ODNR's divisions of Forestry and Wildlife. Non-state sources comprise 70 percent of the funding needed to purchase the Vinton Furnace State Experimental Forest and Wildlife Area.

"For over a century, AEP has strongly believed in giving back to the communities where we live and work," said Bob Powers, president of AEP Utilities. "Today, we continue that tradition through our proud support of the Vinton Furnace Experimental Forest. Our continued partnership with ODNR and our ongoing environmental stewardship have helped to provide Ohioans a protected recreational area for generations to come."

"In keeping with The Conservation Fund's goal to preserve our nation's working forests, we're thrilled to support this terrific effort," said Dan Sakura, vice president of The Conservation Fund's government relations. "We commend Governor Strickland, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, American Electric Power, Ohio's bipartisan congressional delegation, USDA Forest Service, Rockies Express East, the Forestland Group and other partners for their vision and leadership to leave a lasting conservation legacy for future generations."

"We can heap accolades on this project all we want, and we should, because we've saved one of the last great swaths of Appalachian forests left in Ohio," said Josh Knights, executive director of The Nature Conservancy in Ohio. "But the most important songs of praise will come in spring, when the cerulean warbler returns from its winter in South America and sets up a nest here. Its song will be welcomed by all the other animals that live in this forest, and by the people who will come here, just to listen."

"The Vinton Furnace tract represents a major milestone in the protection of more than 2 million acres of working forest land in the United States through the Forest Legacy Program," said Robert Lueckel, field representative for the USDA Forest Service. "We in the Forest Service are proud to partner with the state of Ohio and others to ensure that working forests are a vital part of the Ohio landscape."

The Vinton Furnace Experimental Forest is one of the most biologically diverse woodlands in the country and has hosted on-going forest research for more than 50 years. Located 75 miles southeast of Columbus, the forest is home to the state's largest known population of bobcats, and is also home to black bears, timber rattlesnakes, cerulean warblers and several rare plant species.

*Thanks to ODNR for use of this news release and photo.*