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Grant Funds Will Make Strouds Run Beach Area More Accessible

The Athens City-County Health Department's (ACCHD) Creating Healthy Communities (CHC) program and the Ohio State Parks Foundation (OSPF) have received funding to install an accessible beach walkway and an accessible kayak launch at Strouds Run State Park. The \$99,000 Appalachian Area Development Grant is from the Governor's Office of Appalachia with help from Buckeye Hills Regional Council. The funds support projects that preserve and expand Appalachia's natural resources to increase outdoor recreation opportunities for residents and visitors and support sustainable economic growth.

CHC and OSPF, along with a steering committee of local organizations and individuals, have been raising money for the project since last year. "We were successful in raising over \$30,000 locally from grants and contributions," said Meredith Erlewine, Creating Healthy Communities Coordinator at ACCHD. "It was having that local match on hand that allowed us to accept this opportunity when it came our way, because the ARC funds required at least a 20% match."

The local steering committee has been working to create an accessible beach entrance since early 2023, according to Erlewine. Once completed, entrance will include a concrete pathway from the parking lot to the beach and a permeable pathway across the sand to the water. The project also will include installing an accessible kayak launch at the existing boat dock area. Construction is expected to take place in 2025 and total project cost is estimated to be \$129,000.

The accessible beach entrance and accessible kayak launch will complement two more planned improvements that the Ohio Department of Natural Resources recently announced for the park: an inclusive playground at the north end of the beach and an ADA restroom.

"The outpouring of community support for this project made it clear to us that accessibility is very important to those that visit our great Ohio State Parks," said OSPF board member and Southeast Ohio resident Brian Blair. "We are proud to partner with the Athens City-County Health Department that envisioned this project to help make Strouds Run a destination for many more people – people of all abilities – that will be able to enjoy all that this park has to offer."

According to Erlewine, community members experiencing health inequities or social marginalization partner with CHC to amplify their collective power and create solutions. Health equity is achieved when

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all people in a community have access to affordable, inclusive, and quality infrastructure that allows them to reach their full health potential.

The project steering committee includes community members with lived experience and representatives of Friends of Strouds Run State Park, Athens County Board of Developmental Disabilities, the Athens City Commission on Disabilities, and United Seniors of Athens County.

Local organizations that contributed funds include the Athens County Foundation (\$7,500), the O'Bleness Foundation (\$5,500), ATCO Legacy Fund (\$5,000), Rocky Community Improvement Fund (\$5,000), DuPont Polymer Products (\$3,000), Athens Rotary Foundation (\$2,000), G&J Pepsi (\$1,000), Southeast Beverage (\$500), and Lulu's Casa El Camino Mexican Restaurant (\$500). Ohio Department of Health provided in-kind planning assistance through consulting firm Toole Design, whose engineers prepared a preliminary design and cost estimate. Additionally, community members made individual donations totaling \$1,408.06.

An accessible beach entrance is an environmental change that supports active living, one of the CHC program's goals. CHC is an Ohio Department of Health program that funds 22 local health departments throughout Ohio to implement policy, system and environmental changes that increase access to healthy foods and opportunities for active living.

Anyone with questions about the project can contact Erlewine at merlewine@athenspublichealth.org or by calling the health department at 740-592-4431. For more information about OSPF, contact Executive Director, Lisa Daris at lisa.daris@ohiostateparksfoundation.org or (866) 672-7533.

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Creating Healthy Communities Principles

Sustainable and Equitable Investments • Self-Awareness and Empathy • Community-Led Solutions
Organizational Partnership • Respect for All