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## **For Immediate Release**

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# **NEWS RELEASE**

## **Recovery Conservation Corps makes numerous improvements to parks, public property in Athens County**

Athens County's Recovery Conservation Corps (RCC) program made major improvements to parks and other public lands in Athens County over the summer while also giving nearly 40 young men and women valuable work experience, training and a steady salary.

The federal government's economic stimulus package provided the funding through the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) program for the RCC in Athens County and all across Ohio. Locally, Athens County Job and Family Services has been coordinating the program with Hocking College and the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR).

The RCC participants in Athens County were divided into work crews placed at Strouds Run State Park, Lake Snowden Park, Gifford State Forest, Waterloo Wildlife Area and Hocking College. The work crews also completed a few special projects at other sites in the county, such as putting in a canoe ramp for the Hocking River near The Plains.

"We've been doing a lot of invasive species control at Gifford State Forest," said Jim Batey, RCC coordinator for Hocking College. The RCC crew there also worked on projects such as clearing trails and improving the timber stand by cutting dead branches off the trees.

At the Waterloo Wildlife Area, the crew members cleared trails and picked up hundreds of tires that had been dumped throughout the property.

"Some of the trails, you couldn't tell where they were before," Batey said.

At Strouds Run State Park, the crew members cleared the spillway area for the dam and took down more than 20 trees in the process. The crew members also worked in other parts of the park, including renovating the restrooms and the bathhouse.

At Lake Snowden, the RCC members put up signs on the new horse trail system and made improvements to the trail, renovated the shelter houses, made improvements at the Sauber House facility, worked on the grounds at the fish hatchery and did general park maintenance.

At Hocking College, the crew members improved nature trails, replaced bridges on the trails, worked on the property around the reflection pond, and did general maintenance work such as weed eating and painting.

Along the Athens County Bikepath, the RCC members put in a new access point for canoes

to get into the Hocking River. The access point is near Lemaster Road and Hamley Run Road near The Plains. Hocking College's heavy equipment program did the site work, Rocky Boots donated materials for the project and the RCC members did much of the work.

"We formed and poured the concrete for the canoe access," Batey said. "It was real labor intensive...they did a great job."

At all of the work sites, the RCC members showed a lot of pride and worked very hard, Batey said.

"I think it's been a fantastic experience," Batey said. "It's putting people to work doing the public good, and it's also giving them some incentive and experience."

Sue Pepper-Warga, RCC coordinator for Athens County Job and Family Services, said that the crew members are using the supportive service funding they received for their work to pay for college tuition, rent, car repairs and many other vital expenses this summer. The participants are also benefiting tremendously from the work experience and the opportunity to add to their resumes.

"All of the participants seem pretty pleased with the program," Pepper-Warga said. "I think it has really helped them. I've seen a lot of growth in how they feel about themselves."

Brandan Cox, crew leader at Strouds Run State Park, said that the program has been a good experience for everyone on his crew. His crew included those who are experienced in working outdoors, along with those who were learning on the job. Some are studying natural resources, while others are majoring in other fields, such as accounting and education. For at least one of the members, it was a first job.

"We've all worked hard and we've all gotten along pretty well," Cox said. He added that it has been a good experience for him to be the leader and said his crew members finished their projects much more quickly than anyone anticipated.

Eric Platt, RCC crew leader at Hocking College, said that the program is a great opportunity for him, especially at a time when summer jobs can be scarce.

"Also, the pay is great and it really goes along with what I want to do after I graduate. It's like a resume builder to me, and it's giving me leadership experience," Platt said. He added that the college credit hours are also a big bonus.

"I also get to take pride in our work because we are fixing up the area and I am fixing up my school," Platt said. His favorite projects so far have included building a roost for a Red Tailed Hawk at the Nature Center and making improvements to the trails and boardwalks across campus.

"This experience has given me some challenges to help me advance as a leader," he said. Platt plans to use the leadership skills and other skills he learned when he graduates and enters the job market.

"I hope they keep doing this because I think it's a great program," Platt said.