



Mike DeWine, Governor  
Jon Husted, Lt. Governor  
Laurie A. Stevenson, Director

**November 14, 2022**

**Limited Environmental Review and Finding of No Significant Impact**

**Appalachia Ohio Alliance – Hocking and Vinton Counties  
Bison Hollow Additions 3 – Jones, Stevens & Medford Project  
WRRSP loan number: WR391662-0019**

**Sponsor: Akron Lower NSI Lining Project  
WPCLF loan number: CS390095-0244**

The attached Limited Environmental Review (LER) is for a nonpoint source project in Hocking and Vinton counties which the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency intends to finance through its Water Resource Restoration Sponsor Program (WRRSP). The LER describes the project, its costs, and expected environmental benefits. Making available this LER fulfills Ohio EPA's environmental review and public notice requirements for this loan program.

Ohio EPA analyzes environmental effects of proposed projects as part of its WRRSP program review and approval process. We have concluded that the proposed project should not result in significant adverse environmental impacts. This project's relatively narrow scope and lack of environmental impacts qualifies it for the LER rather than a more comprehensive Environmental Assessment. More information can be obtained by calling or writing the person named at the end of the attached LER.

Upon issuance of this Finding of No Significant Impact (FNSI) determination, award of funds may proceed without further environmental review or public comment unless new information shows that environmental conditions of the proposed project have changed significantly.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kathleen Courtright".

Kathleen Courtright, Assistant Chief  
Division of Environmental and Financial Assistance

Attachment

## LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

### **Project Identification**

|                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| WRRSP Project:         | Bison Hollow Additions 3 – Jones, Stevens & Medford |
| WRRSP Applicant:       | Appalachia Ohio Alliance                            |
| WRRSP Loan:            | WR391662-0019                                       |
| Sponsoring Community:  | Akron   |
| Sponsoring Project:    | Lower NSI Lining                                    |
| Sponsoring WPCLF Loan: | CS390095-0244                                       |

### **Project Summary**

Appalachia Ohio Alliance (AOA) seeks \$1,415,000 in funding through Ohio EPA’s Water Resource Restoration Sponsor Program (WRRSP) to protect the Bison Hollow Additions 3 – Jones, Stevens & Medford properties (Bison Hollow Additions 3) by purchasing the entirety of four parcels for a total project area of 168.55 acres: two of the parcels make up the 42.75-acre Jones property plus the 21.8-acre Stevens property are located near County Road 18, Jackson Township, Vinton County. The other parcel is the 104-acre Medford property located near Walter Carpenter Road and Goose Creek Road in South Bloomingville, just east of Amerine Road in Benton Township, Hocking County (Figure 1 and Figure 2). With the combined parcels, the project will restore and protect over 7,914 linear feet of coldwater primary headwater habitat streams that flow into the South Branch East Fork Queer Creek.

Akron will sponsor the project through a Water Pollution Control Loan Fund (WPCLF) loan administered by Ohio EPA’s Division of Environmental and Financial Assistance (DEFA). Funds for the Bison Hollow Additions 3 project will be provided by advancing a portion of the interest to be paid by Akron on its \$5,400,000 Lower NSI Lining project. This project is scheduled to be awarded WPCLF funding in December 2022. By voluntarily agreeing to sponsor the Bison Hollow Additions 3 project, Akron is eligible for an up to 0.1% discount that will reduce its WPCLF loan rate.

The purpose of the WRRSP is to counteract the loss of ecological function and biological diversity that jeopardizes the health of many of Ohio’s water resources. In the program, entities such as park districts and land conservancies (implementers) undertake ecologically restorative and protective projects. Borrowers from the WPCLF voluntarily sponsor such projects in return for interest rate discounts. Ohio EPA foregoes a portion of the interest that borrowers would repay to the WPCLF and advances it to implementers to carry out the ecologically beneficial projects. Properties are acquired, restored, and managed in perpetuity under a management plan and an environmental covenant, which establishes use restrictions on the land.

## **History & Existing Conditions**

The Bison Hollow area of Vinton and Hocking counties is located just south of Ash Cave in the southern Hocking Hills region. It is very scenic as well as ecologically and geologically diverse. The Jones, Stevens, and Medford properties will add 168.55 acres to the existing 858.5-acre Bison Hollow Preserve, which is in the process of being dedicated as Ohio's newest nature preserve. It is typified by a black hand sandstone gorge that has steep walls, large boulders, high wet-weather waterfalls, rock overhangs, hemlock hardwood forest, and myriad other geological and natural features. The gorge was carved out by centuries of water action from the South Branch East Fork of Queer Creek, which is a Superior High Quality Water and a Class III Primary Headwater Habitat (PHWH) stream. In this area, the East Fork Queer Creek (EFQC) watershed is in attainment of its coldwater habitat aquatic life use designation due to the watershed being heavily forested with almost 90 percent forest cover.

Within the EFQC and its watershed, the land use has traditionally been dominated by a forested landscape. A primarily forest-dominated landscape is anticipated to continue well into the future; however, one alarming trend, which continues to accelerate, is the growing number of residential and cabin structures that have been and continue to be constructed within the watershed and region. Along with vacation cabin rentals comes forest clearing, the construction of access roads and on-site sewage treatment systems, and the addition of recreation areas, ATV trails, etc. Illicit ATV usage, which promotes erosion, destroys habitat, and introduces invasive species, is a problem that AOA has been actively combating within the Bison Hollow area through frequent monitoring, the installation of site access gates, and engagement with the ATV community. In addition to development impacts, fragmentation of property and the clear cutting of forest corridors is a significant and ongoing issue.

The Medford property is entirely forested. The forest composition is relatively evenly aged and primarily made up of a complex of Appalachian oak and oak-pine type forests, with minor amounts of hemlock-hardwood along the western boundary, as well as mixed floodplain and mixed mesophytic forest along streams and in moist valleys. The western boundary of the Medford property lies along the top of the cliff on the eastern side of the Bison Hollow gorge. Two small, unnamed upland headwater streams on the property feed waterfalls on the gorge walls that flow immediately into the South Branch of the East Fork of Queer Creek, which runs roughly parallel to the western property boundary. One of these streams feeds what is known as the "Triple Falls," one of the three largest and most significant of the many falls in the Bison Hollow gorge. The second feeds a smaller, but beautiful falls that is on the Medford property. Another smaller tributary contributes flow to the spectacular "High Falls."

The Jones property is almost entirely forested; however, portions of the property have been cut in the last 25 years. Like the Medford property, the Jones property's forest composition is primarily made up of a complex of Appalachian oak and oak-pine type forests, with minor amounts of hemlock-hardwood along the western boundary, as well as mixed floodplain and mixed mesophytic forest along streams and in moist valleys. The Jones property lies at the fork of a western tributary that is part of the Bison Hollow gorge system, a black hand sandstone geologic feature. One branch of the tributary crosses both of the two sections of the Jones property while a second runs along the southern boundary. The Stevens property is just upstream of the Jones along one of the tributaries.

The Stevens property's forested area is less mature and has been periodically selectively cut for timber. The most significant habitat modification related to this project is the 0.95-acre

impoundment on the Stevens' property. This pond was created by impounding a primary headwater habitat stream with an earthen dam.

### **Project Description**

The project includes the acquisition of four parcels in AOA's priority stream corridor protection and conservation area along Queer Creek and Salk Creek in the southern portion of the Hocking Hills drainage, which is part of the headwaters of the Scioto River watershed. The project will protect the four properties totaling 168.55 acres of riparian buffer including 2,250 linear feet of the South Branch East Fork Queer Creek (SBEFQC), a Superior High Quality Water stream and Class III Coldwater Primary Headwater stream system, and 7,614 linear feet of tributary streams.

The four properties will be incorporated into AOA's existing Bison Hollow Preserve. The 104-acre Medford property includes two Class III tributaries totaling 4,224 linear feet which flow into the SBEFQC and riparian buffer to 2,250 linear feet of mainstem of the SBEFQC adjacent to the property. The two Jones properties (Property 1 is 20.84 acres and Property 2 is 21.80 acres for a combined total of 42.62 acres) includes 1,290 linear feet of Class IIIB spring-fed, coldwater tributary and 1,620 linear feet of Class IIIA primary headwater habitat tributary which flows into SBEFQC. And the 21.8-acre Stevens property includes 780 linear feet of primary headwater habitat which flows into the SBEFQC.

AOA plans to conduct invasive species control and management on the properties. They will establish native grass prairie on the existing hay field on the Stevens property. They will demolish and remove a cabin on the Jones property and remove a dilapidated trailer and associated outbuildings on the Stevens property. They will remove a 0.95-acre impoundment on the Stevens property – which warms the spring-fed source waters and reduces the stream flow into the primary headwater habitat stream – and return the impoundment area to a functioning stream with a forested riparian corridor. AOA will also install new gates at the primary property access points to deter illicit access, poaching, and dumping. And an environmental covenant will be recorded on the properties.

### **Property Management and Maintenance**

The property will be managed as a conservation area by AOA. The site will be accessible to the public on a permission-only basis for passive recreation, research, and educational use. The property will be protected in perpetuity through use restrictions spelled out in an environmental covenant, which will be part of the deed. Above any other competing management objectives, the protection and preservation of the water resources, as specified in the environmental covenant, shall rule the management of the WRRSP-protected property.

These restrictions include:

- There shall be no agricultural, industrial commercial or residential activity undertaken or allowed.
- The property may not be divided, partitioned, subdivided or conveyed except in its current configurations.
- There shall be no buildings or other structures, including, but not limited to, billboards or advertising of any kind, camping accommodations, and mobile homes shall not be erected or placed.
- There shall be no mining, drilling, exploring for or removal of minerals, oil or gas.

- There shall be no ditching, draining diking, filling, excavating, or removal of topsoil, sand, gravel, rock or other materials, except as may be necessary for reasonable preservation, management and restoration purposes.
- There shall be no manipulation or alteration of wetlands, creeks, streams, surface or subsurface springs or other bodies of water. Reasonable alternations to surface water bodies and their associated riparian zones may be permitted for the purpose of protecting or improving water quality or aquatic habitat, upon the condition that prior to any such alterations, a plan for such activities shall be proposed in writing by the Owner or any Transferee and shall be approved by Ohio EPA or shall be approved as an amendment to the Project Management Plan.
- There shall be no open dumping.
- There shall be no building of new roads or other rights-of-way. Existing roads may be maintained but shall not be widened or improved.
- There shall be no operation of automobiles, trucks, snowmobiles, dune buggies, motorcycles, all-terrain vehicles or any other motorized recreational vehicles.
- In accordance with state regulations and as approved by Ohio EPA and authorized by the Owner, hunting and trapping may be permitted to maintain ecological balance or to protect human health and safety.
- Except in areas already identified in the Plan as being disturbed, and as may be necessary for reasonable preservation, management or restoration purposes, to protect human health and safety, or to maintain a diversity of naturally occurring habitat types and control of exotic non-native and exotic species of plants, there shall be no removal, destruction, cutting, trimming or mowing of any trees or other vegetation and no non-native species shall be introduced.

### **Implementation**

The WRRSP loan award for AOA's Bison Hollow Additions 3 project will be made possible through Akron's Lower NSI Lining project WPCLF loan award, which is scheduled for December 2022.

### **Public Participation**

AOA staff members will carry out public awareness and educational outreach for the Bison Hollow Additions 3 project. AOA used a range of materials and methods to communicate project awareness and benefits to the public. They maintain a website ([www.appalachiaohioalliance.org](http://www.appalachiaohioalliance.org)) where they post information about their projects, they provide informational brochures in the mail and email correspondence to members and friends, and they conduct presentations, education and outreach programs, and hands-on volunteer activities.

As part of its State Environmental Review Process, DEFA will post this LER and Finding of No Significant Impact to its web page located at:  
<https://epa.ohio.gov/divisions-and-offices/environmental-financial-assistance/announcements>.

### **Conclusion**

Ohio EPA conducts environmental reviews of all projects prior to awarding WPCLF financing. The proposed project meets the criteria for a Limited Environmental Review (LER); namely, it is a water quality protection project consisting of non-structural practices. Furthermore, the project meets the other qualifying criteria for an LER; specifically, the proposed project:

**Will have no significant environmental effect and will require no specific impact mitigation** as the planning activities for the project identified no potential adverse impacts to the quality of the human environment or to sensitive resources such as floodplains, wetlands, state or federally-designated wild, scenic or recreational rivers, riparian areas, prime or unique agricultural lands, aquifer recharge zones, archaeological or historically significant sites, air quality or threatened or endangered species. In fact, the proposed project will have beneficial environmental impacts by preserving high-quality headwater stream and forest habitat.

**Will have no effect on high-value environmental resources** since it will protect the quality of East Fork Queer Creek watershed by permanently protecting the streams and associated high-quality forested buffer.

**Is not a controversial action** as it will benefit the environment and no significant public opposition has been expressed.

**Does not create a new or relocate an existing discharge to surface or ground waters** since the proposed project does not involve a point source discharge.

**Will not provide capacity to serve a population substantially greater than the existing population** since the proposed project is not a publicly owned wastewater treatment works designed to serve a designated area. Instead, it is a protection project of high-quality aquatic resources.

#### **Contact information**

Rose McLean, Environmental Planner  
Water Resource Restoration Sponsor Program, DEFA  
Ohio EPA  
P.O. Box 1049  
Columbus, Ohio 43216-1049  
[Rose.McLean@epa.ohio.gov](mailto:Rose.McLean@epa.ohio.gov)

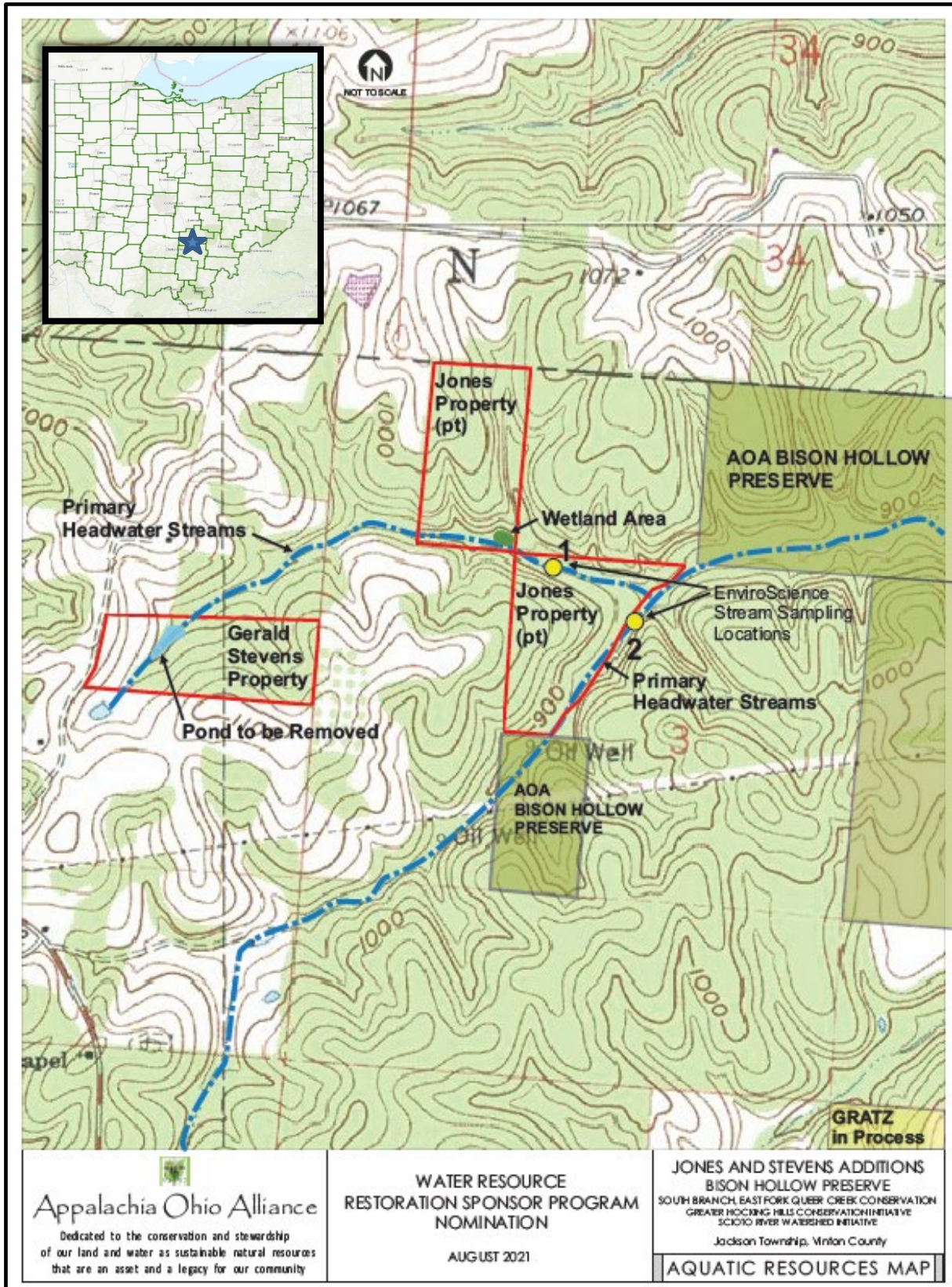


Figure 1. Project location map and the Jones and Stevens properties water resources

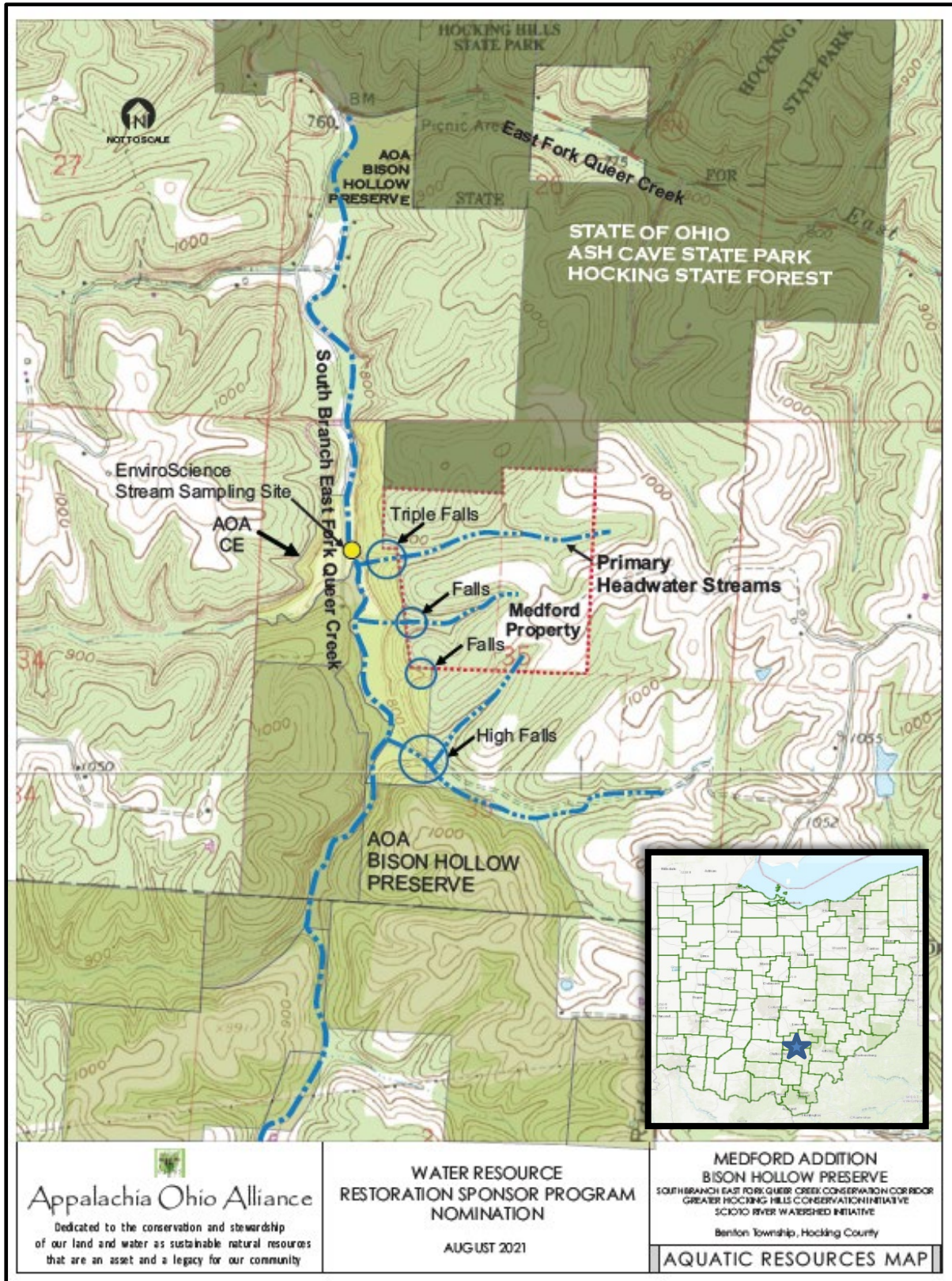


Figure 2. Project location map and the Medford property water resources