

FILE

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DUPLICATE LETTER

Cleveland Museum of NATURAL HISTORY

RECEIVED

SEP 16 2008

Office of Chairman
PUCO

Alan Shriver, Chairman
PUCO
180 East Broad Street
Columbus, OH 43215

RE: Important forest/wetland corridor along Geauga County 138 kV Transmission Line Project

Dear Mr. Shriver,

Vertebrate Zoologist Dr. Timothy Matson and I surveyed four contiguous land parcels in Thompson Township, Geauga County, south of Thompson Road. The survey was conducted in response to a request to the Museum's Conservation Outreach Program by Mark and Kathleen Binnig. Any landowner, conservation organization, or city or county planner can request biological surveys of properties at no charge under our Conservation Outreach Program.


A corridor opening for a power line will likely have a negative impact on the forest birds currently utilizing the relatively intact canopy on the four properties. I would be grateful if First Energy placed the power line along an existing opening instead of fragmenting a very high quality wetland system. Several forest birds are present within the forest and many amphibians of conservation concern are present within the springs and vernal ponds on and adjacent to the proposed corridor opening.

Many forest birds only nest within contiguous unbroken forest tracts. Fragmentation of the forest currently present within the combined lands of Binnig, Noss, Zehe, and Sanzenbacher provide nesting habitats for forest birds. Wood Thrush, Scarlet Tanager, Red-eyed Vireo and Wood Peewee males were heard singing within the forest along the spring-fed creek corridor.

A very large vernal pond supporting healthy populations of Wood Frog and Spotted Salamander were found on the Zehe Tract, 175 feet west of the Sanzenbacher line and south of the golf course. Wood Frog and Spotted Salamander are sensitive to many herbicides. Drift from the herbicide in the proposed corridor could enter the pond. Wood Frogs are suffering a regional decline within the Cleveland region.

A report on animal species within the corridor completed by Dr. Timothy Matson is attached. My observations of native plants within the proposed power line opening is also enclosed. If anybody has further questions about our concerns, they can contact me by calling 1-800-317-9155 extension 3219.

Sincerely,


Dr. James K. Bissell
Director of Conservation

Enclosure: Animal Report from Dr. Timothy Matson
CC: Mark and Kathleen Binnig

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2008 SEP 18 AM 10:16
PUCO

Property of Kathleen and Mark Bennig, Thompson, OH

Second order stream with headwaters on the west side of Thompson Ledges and flowing NE; clear, very cool, flowing water with shallow pools to about 0.7 m deep; substrate of sand gravel with Berea Sandstone cobble and slabs.

Fishes 29 July 2008 [dip-netted only]
Semotilus atromaculatus Creek chub Uncommon—Common

14 August 2008 [seined]
Semotilus atromaculatus Creek chub Common
Rhinichthys atratulus Blacknose dace Abundant
Clinostomus elongatus Redside dace 4, none mature
Lepomis macrochirus Bluegill sunfish 1, 2nd year
Catostomus commersoni White sucker 1, subadult

Amphibians 29 July 2008
Eurycea bislineata Northern Two-lined Salamander Common
Desmognathus fuscus Northern Dusky Salamander Common
Desmognathus ochrophaeus Mountain Dusky Salamander Common
Lithobates clamitans Green Frog Common
Anaxyrus americanus American Toad Common

Crayfishes 29 July 2008 and 14 August 2008
Cambarus carinirostris Rock crayfish Common
Orconectes propinquus Northern clearwater crayfish Common—Abundant

Amphibians 14 August 2008
Eurycea bislineata Northern Two-lined Salamander Common,
larvae numerous
Desmognathus fuscus Northern Dusky Salamander Common
Desmognathus ochrophaeus Mountain Dusky Salamander Common
Pseudotriton ruber Northern Red Salamander Common
1st year larva, 2nd year larva
3 year old juvenile
4-5 year old juvenile
Lithobates clamitans Green Frog Common
Anaxyrus americanus American Toad Common

Pools in wooded creek valley and adjacent upland forest.

Amphibians 29 July 2008
Pseudacris crucifer Northern Spring Peeper 1 transforming
tadpole

<i>Lithobates sylvaticus</i>	Woodfrog	Numerous juveniles
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Birds 29 July 2008 Heard singing/calling

<i>Piranga olivacea</i>	Scarlet Tanager
<i>Cardinalis cardinalis</i>	Northern Cardinal
<i>Passerina cyanea</i>	Indigo Bunting
<i>Contopus virens</i>	Eastern Wood Pewee
<i>Vireo olivaceus</i>	Red-eyed Vireo
<i>Hylocichla mustelina</i>	Wood Thrush

Amphibians 14 August 2008

<i>Lithobates sylvaticus</i>	Woodfrog	Numerous juveniles
<i>Anaxyrus americanus</i>	American Toad	Common

Upland woodland pool SW of the southern terminus of the golf course.

Amphibians 29 July 2008

<i>Lithobates sylvaticus</i>	Woodfrog	Numerous tadpoles, transforming tadpoles, and metamorphs
<i>Ambystoma maculatum</i>	Spotted Salamander	Rare, captured only one larva.

Forested first order stream with headwaters on the west side of Thompson Ledges and flowing NE; clear, very cool, shallow flowing water.

<i>Lithobates sylvaticus</i>	Woodfrog	Numerous juveniles
<i>Orconectes propinquus</i>	Northern clearwater crayfish	Common

OBSERVATIONS OF PLANT COMMUNITIES AND PLANT SPECIES OF INTEREST ALONG
PROPOSED POWER LINE CORRIDOR ALONG BINNIG, NOSS, ZEHE AND SANZENBACKER
TRACTS BORDERING HIGH QUALITY HEADWATER STREAM:

The observations below are arranged in directional sequence from the northern section of the proposed power line corridor just south of Thompson Road south to the southern boundary of the Zehe and Sanzenbacher lines approximately four-tenths mile south of Thompson Road.

The stream flowing along and draining east within the proposed corridor one-tenth mile south of Thompson Road supports good populations of a local pondweed, Nuttall's pondweed (*Potamogeton epihydrus*) and narrow-leaf pondweed (*Potamogeton foliosus*). Nuttall's pondweed is a local species of glacial lakes and rivers and some man-made ponds. Nuttall's pondweed was tracked by the Ohio Natural Heritage Program as a rare species within Ohio when the first rare plant list was compiled because the species is relatively uncommon within Ohio. The Cleveland Museum of Natural History located enough populations to delist Nuttall's pondweed during the middle 1980s. However, the species has disappeared from several of the sites where the Museum mapped it in the late 1970s and early 1980s due to decline in water quality at some of its former sites. The populations in the stream along the Binnig/Noss line are exceptionally robust. The Museum Botany Department has considered recommending the relisting of the species at the 2010 Rare Plant Meeting due to disappearance of the plant from several lakes and streams where it thrived 25 to 30 years ago.

Brookside sedge (*Carex torta*) is frequent along the clear, cold spring fed creek flowing through the Noss property onto the Binnig property. This sedge is common along undisturbed, high quality headwater streams throughout northeastern Ohio. The sedge is frequent along both tributary streams flowing along the proposed power line corridor, the Binnig/Noss tributary just south of Thompson Road, and the Binnig/Noss/Zehe/Sanzenbacher tributary that is located along the power line corridor between .25 mile and .4 mile south of Thompson Road. Both tributaries join within open meadows on the Binnig property southwest of the junction of Sidley Road and Thompson Road.

A globally declining tree, butternut (*Juglans cineria*), is widely scattered on the Noss tract within wetlands adjacent to the spring fed stream about .12 mile south of Thompson Road. This tree is globally declining throughout its range due to an introduced fungus. The tree is still fairly secure within northeastern Ohio and northwestern Pennsylvania. However, many populations are represented by a single tree. Several live butternut trees are present within the wetlands on the Noss tract. Butternut was recently delisted by the Ohio Natural Heritage program because the Cleveland Museum of Natural History and other field researchers have documented

several dozen populations during the last couple decades. The butternut stand on the Noss tract is outstanding compared to many populations in northeastern Ohio.

Notable wetland species within forests adjacent to Creek on Noss property observed between .1 mile and .15 mile south of Thompson Road:

Swamp rose (*Rosa palustris*)

Prairie rose (*Rosa setigera*)

Swamp agrimony (*Agrimonia parviflora*)

Fringed loosestrife (*Lysimachia ciliata*)

Manna grass (*Glyceria striata*)

Spinulose wood fern (*Dryopteris carthusiana*)

Northern arrow-wood (*Viburnum recognitum*)

Rice cut-grass (*Leersia oryzoides*)

Elderberry (*Sambucus Canadensis*)

A very high quality vernal pond system fed by springs is located within the proposed transmission line corridor on the Noss tract .15 mile south of Thompson Road. Spring fed vernal ponds similar to the Noss vernal pond often support rare species in northeastern Ohio. Dr. Matson observed several Wood Frogs adjacent to the vernal ponds. Notable species within the Noss vernal pond include:

Seepage sedge (*Carex prasina*)

Witch hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*)

Marsh violet (*Viola cucullata*)

Wood anemone (*Anemone quinquefolia*)

Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*)

Turtlehead (*Chelone glabra*)

Seepage manna grass (*Glyceria melicaria*)

Cinnamon fern (*Osmunda cinnamomea*) – very common

Jewel weed (*Impatiens capensis*)

Royal fern (*Osmunda regalis*)

American beech (*Fagus grandifolia*)

Partridgeberry (*Mitchella repens*)

Weak sedge (*Carex debilis* var. *rudgei*) – a local and uncommon species formerly tracked by the Ohio Natural Heritage Program

Sessile bellwort (*Uvularia sessilifolia*)

Greenbriar (*Smilax rotundifolia*)

There is another high quality seepage wetland on the Binnig property along the east side of the proposed power line corridor along the west valley wall of the other tributary stream. Several interesting wetland plants are present within the seepage wetland:

Jewel weed (*Impatiens capensis*)

Seepage sedge (*Carex prasina*)

Scabrous sedge (*Carex scabrata*) – a species formerly tracked by the Ohio Natural Heritage Program

Marsh violet (*Viola cucullata*)

Manna grass (*Glyceria striata*)

Golden saxifrage (*Chrysosplenium americanum*)

Seepage manna grass (*Glyceria melicaria*)

The Binnig "Sugar Bush" along the east side of the proposed corridor to the east of the creek valley has some very high quality American Beech and Sugar Maple trees. Opening of the corridor through the creek will not only cause forest fragmentation and reduce the probability that the forest birds will continue to nest within the now connected forest canopies of the Binnig/Zehe/Noss and Sanzenbacker tracts but will likely cause the die back of the large beech trees. Large beech trees often die when an adjacent forest is removed. The deterioration of the beech bark is called sun scald.

The Zehe tract south of the golf course opening and west of the Sanzenbacker line has a continuous, unbroken canopy dominated by red maple, silver maple and red oak. Beech and black cherry are locally common within the canopy of the forest along the boundary between the Zehe tract and Sanzenbacker tract. Spicebush is abundant within the understory of the Zehe forest. The large vernal pond supporting a good population of Wood Frog and Spotted Salamander is located 175 feet west of the Sanzenbacker line and 250 feet south of the golf course opening.

Notable species observed on the Zehe tract:

New York fern (*Thelypteris noveboracensis*)

Hornbeam (*Carpinus caroliniana*)

Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*)

Sessile Bellwort (*Uvularia sessilifolia*)

Blackgum (*Nyssa sylvatica*)

Silver maple (*Acer saccharinum*)

Red maple (*Acer rubrum*)

Black cherry (*Prunus serotina*)

Partridgeberry (*Mitchella repens*)

Wood reed (*Cinna arundinacea*)

The canopy of the Sanzenbacher tract east of the Zehe tract has canopy dominants similar to the dominant trees on the Zehe tract. The majority of the Sanzenbacher tract is dominated by a secondary forest of red maple and red oak. Beech and Black Cherry are frequent within the canopy adjacent to the Zehe and Binnig property.