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LOCAL NEWS

Jefferson Soil and Water District pursues recreation grants

By **LINDA HARRIS** September 11, 2026 3 min read



Linda Harris PROJECT – The Roosevelt Inn at Piney Fork is among the Jefferson Soil and Water Conservation District's proposed projects for which officials are seeking grant funding. The district hopes to develop a museum celebrating local history at the site.

STEUBENVILLE -- Jefferson Soil and Water Conservation District is hoping to tap into grant funds to expand and enhance existing recreation opportunities in the county.

Projects Director Aaron Dodds told commissioners Thursday he'll be submitting applications for the Abandoned Mine Land Economic Revitalization (AMLER) and the Clean Ohio Greenspace. Both are state-funded grant opportunities.

"We're going to be proactive this fall to go after grant funding opportunities that will better long-standing projects in the county that JSWCD and the county have been trying to develop to improve natural resources conservation, outdoor recreation, local revitalization and quality of life," Dodds said.

"We've had success with JSWCD's initiatives of The Preserves of Jefferson County, which include properties such as Hellbender Preserve and Piney Fork Trail and Preserve. Hellbender Preserve has been an overwhelming success for the citizens of the county and has brought a lot of tourism into the area as well. We are just getting our footing and are hoping to continue to improve (them) for the benefit of our citizens and our natural resources."

He said the district is seeking funding through the Ohio Public Works Commission's Clean Ohio Greenspace program to enhance proven attractions -- Hellbender Preserve and Piney Fork Trail. At Hellbender, they're seeking COG funding to incorporate pedestrian/bike bridges and underpasses, as well as more wildflower plantings and trail improvements. At Piney Fork, he said they're hoping to secure funding for land acquisition to the north, which will lead to trail expansion, wetland conservation and a viewing pier.

The district's AMLER application requests funding for improvements to the Roosevelt Inn at Piney Fork, where they hope to develop a museum to celebrate local history, as well as a mile-long boardwalk through the heart of Rush Run Wetlands Preserve's wetlands. Inspired by nature locations around the world that have seen "huge economic development returns," he said the boardwalk "would allow people to walk through and over beaver dams and open water and otherwise immerse themselves in nature." They're also hoping to obtain AMLER funding to turn back the clock at the Salineville Civil War Battlefield so visitors can see it as it would have looked back in 1863 and add new signage and monuments.

Commissioners approved letters of support for both grant applications, which must be submitted before the end of the month.

In other matters, commissioners reviewed quotes for gently used trucks for the county dog warden, ultimately opining the couple thousand dollars they might save likely doesn't override the warranty available with brand-new models. The dog warden, who wasn't available for Thursday's meeting, will be asked to attend Sept. 17 and state his preference.

Maintenance Supervisor Mitch Morelli also submitted a quote he'd received in the neighborhood of $40,000 for changes to the commission's conference room, including removing walls separating two offices from the main space, patching, painting, redoing electrical and a new suspended ceiling, lights and flooring.

Commissioners had requested pricing information during their Sept. 3 meeting, saying having individual offices opening into it ate up space that could be better used to accommodate larger groups. After hearing the potential price tag, commissioners indicated there was no need for him to seek additional estimates.

They also met behind closed doors to discuss the possible lease of county property with Toronto County Court Judge Lisa Ferguson and personnel matters with a Job & Family Services representative, and heard from representatives of Franciscan University of Steubenville.