Vernal Poloza

2026

AGENDA

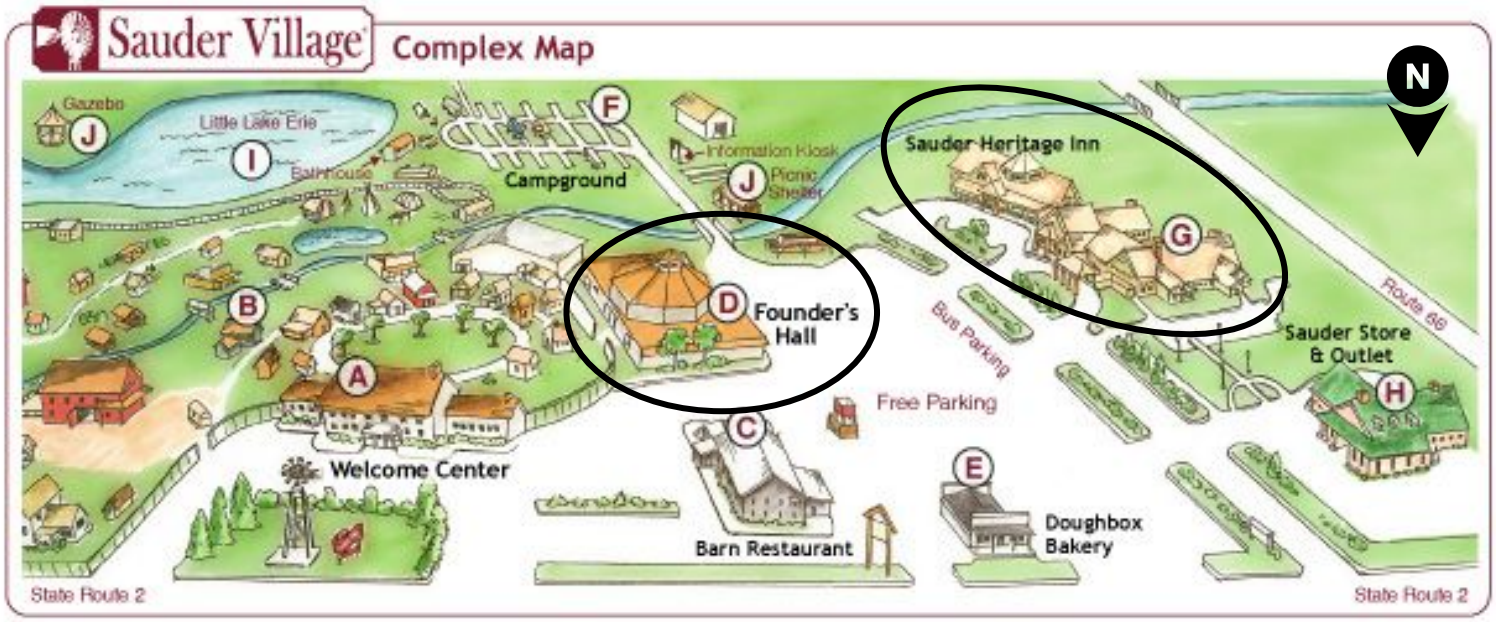
April 9th-11th
Sauder Village / Archbold, Ohio

Hosted By:

OHIO WETLANDS ASSOCIATION

CAMPUS MAPS

Founder's Hall at Sauder Village:
22611 State Rte 2, Archbold, OH 43502



THURSDAY

Vernal Poloza 2026

8:30-9:30AM
FOUNDER'S HALL
Registration check-in & exhibitor set-up.
Coffee & refreshments available.

9:30-9:50AM
FOUNDER'S HALL
Welcome- Matt Cochran, OWA President & Sheri Friesner, Sauder Village

	HOMESTEAD ROOM	GATHERING ROOM
10:00-11:00AM	**1a: The Once & Future Vernal Pool: Species Mix Before, During & After the Beaver Pond** Jay Heiser, Ohio Odonata Society	**1b: Branching into Branchiopods: Exploring Fairy Shrimp Diversity with Researchers & Citizen Scientists** Zeke Churchin, University of Akron
11:05-12:05PM	**2a: Venturing into Vernal Pools at the Metro Parks** Maria Bergman and Shannon Heist, Columbus & Franklin County Metro Parks	**2b: Filling the Gaps: Combining Remote Sensing & Community Science for Region Wide Conservation of Vernal Pools** Abby Pointer, Michigan Nature Association

12:15-1:15PM — LUNCH — **FOUNDER'S HALL**

1:15-2:00PM — **Animal Ambassadors**- Saul Bauer / Networking & Exhibitor Tables Open — **FOUNDER'S HALL**

	HOMESTEAD ROOM	GATHERING ROOM
2:00-3:00PM	**3a: Wetland Sedges & Where to Find Them** Jenny Adkins, MAD Scientist Associates	**3b: Muddy Boots: Environmental Education about Wetlands** Dr. Lara Roketenetz, The University of Akron Field Station
3:05-4:05PM	**4a: iNaturalist - Great for Species ID Yes... But Then What?** Aaron Laver, GEOACE	**4b: FrogWatch USA: Listening to the Songs of Nature** Carrie Bassett, Akron Zoo

4:15-5:00PM — Exhibitor Tables Open Networking — **FOUNDER'S HALL**

5:00-6:30PM — DINNER — **FOUNDER'S HALL**

Keynote: H2Ohio Funding & Project Overview with Black Swamp Conservancy
Rachel DeNoewer, ODNR, and Melanie Coulter, Black Swamp Conservancy

6:30-7:30PM — "HOPPY" HOUR — **FOUNDER'S HALL**
Poster Sessions, Networking & Socializing

7:30-9:00PM	GOLL WOODS EVENING EXPLORATION- VERNAL POOLS & WILDLIFE OBSERVATION DISPLAYS Guided exploration with Maureen Bogdanski (DNAP), Rowan Coburn-Griffis & Becky Donaldson	WILD AT HEART SHOWING Ohio Department of Natural Resources **FOUNDER'S HALL**

OHIO WETLANDS ASSOCIATION

PRESENTATION & SPEAKER DETAILS

Vernal Poloza 2026

THURSDAY HOMESTEAD ROOM SESSIONS

Session 1a: The Once and Future Vernal Pool – Jay Heiser, Ohio Odonata Society

In 2016, Jay discovered Fairy Shrimp, Spotted Salamanders, and Wood Frogs in a vernal pool. That was the start of an ongoing project to document the species inhabiting a diverse 4 acre wetland. Three years later, it was colonized by beavers, and their pond soon encompassed the vernal pools. As multiple species of fish arrived, the crustaceans disappeared, yet the amphibian population exploded. Then the beavers left, their pond drained, and the fairy shrimp returned. What began as a simple biosurvey turned into a fascinating natural experiment in hydration. This is the story of how every animal and plant category in this wetland responded to changing hydrology.

Jay Heiser recently retired as the Chief of Research for Gartner's cybersecurity practice, and has 35 years of experience entertaining and educating people through PowerPoint. He is a board member of the Ohio Odonata Society, responsible for maintaining their website, which provides detailed information on Ohio's dragonfly and damselfly populations. Jay has applied a lifetime interest in photography to natural history, becoming one of Ohio's most frequent iNaturalist contributors.

Session 2a: Venturing into Vernal Pools at the Metro Parks – Maria Bergman and Shannon Heist, Columbus & Franklin County Metro Parks (9:30am-noon)

Columbus & Franklin County Metro Parks are lucky enough to house a multitude of vernal pool habitats, some of which are primary nurseries to endangered and lesser seen species. Our naturalist staff across the district coordinate a volunteer monitoring program that uses biological assessments throughout the year that helps guide habitat preservation and conservation efforts. Additionally, to highlight and instill a respect for these sensitive ecosystems our program offers many educational programs to the public. Join us to learn more about our robust volunteer monitoring program as we explore the health and species diversity of these important habitats.

Meet two of the naturalists from the Columbus & Franklin County Metro Parks. Maria Bergman has been with the parks since 2015. She has a keen interest in all aquatic ecosystems, and works hard to connect visitors and staff with fun, educational experiences. Shannon Heist has been with the parks since 2021. She enjoys studying mycology, and leading public programs and surveys. Both of our naturalists coordinate surveys and programs in vernal pools focusing on macroinvertebrates and amphibians.

Session 3a: Wetland Sedges & Where to Find Them – Jenny Adkins, MAD Scientist Associates

Take the leap and become a Sedge Head! Learn about common wetland sedges from the Carex genus- where to find them and how to identify them.

Jenny Adkins works at MAD Scientist Associates as a field botanist, sedge enthusiast, and educator- in addition to managing business development for the firm. She received her degrees in biology and education from Wright State University and has been working professionally for 14 years.

Session 4a: iNaturalist - Great for Species ID Yes... But Then What? – Aaron Laver, GEOACE

iNaturalist needs no introduction for the Vernal Poolooza crowd—it's long been a favorite for nature lovers and professionals alike. Today it's used for quick species ID more than as a cataloging tool, thanks to how easy it is to snap and upload observations. But then what? You can actually use iNaturalist for research, insights, milestones, statistics, and even a wholesome kind of social media. This talk will focus on: "Now that you're home or back at the office, how can you take your iNaturalist game to the next level?"

Aaron is the CTO of GEOACE. He's an ecologist who started in the field and has since transitioned to geospatial-based ecological work within Ohio and surrounding states.

PRESENTATION & SPEAKER DETAILS

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THURSDAY GATHERING ROOM SESSIONS

Session 1b: Branching into Branchiopods: Exploring Fairy Shrimp Diversity with Researchers and Citizen Scientists - Zeke Churchin, University of Akron

Fairy shrimp (order Anostraca) are soft bodied crustaceans relegated to temporary aquatic habitats and hypersaline lakes. Anostracans are found worldwide in a variety of climates and habitats. Eubranchipus (Chirocephalidae) is a genus of fairy shrimp found throughout North America and Eurasia. Although many fairy shrimp specialize in arid habitats, the majority of Eubranchipus are found in temperate regions with a colder climate. The genus is currently represented by 21 described species worldwide: 11 from North America and 10 from Eurasia. Of these 21 recognized species, 4 have been described in the last decade. This leaves little room for doubt that further diversity awaits discovery. In 2025, a large-scale citizen science survey of Eubranchipus was undertaken across the known range of the genus in North America, securing specimens from 10 of the 11 known species, plus two undescribed species. Specimens were secured from 29 US states and 2 Canadian provinces. In addition to contemporary records, a compendium of all North American Eubranchipus records is being developed from the scientific literature, personal records, museum records, and “gray” literature to document the known distributions of the North American species. Besides locality and diversity data, a future genetic study is planned. A preliminary phylogeny based on the CO1 gene has been produced based on specimens collected in 2025. Going forward, the project will aim to construct a refined North American Eubranchipus phylogeny and potentially study the distribution wide genetic structure of some North American Eubranchipus.

Zeke Churchin is a multidisciplinary biologist from Northeastern Ohio. He is currently studying fairy shrimp at the University of Akron under Dr. Stephen Weeks. His project is a genetic study of the North American Eubranchipus, building a phylogeny for the genus and describing new diversity.

Session 2b: Filling the Gaps: Combining Remote Sensing & Community Science for Region Wide Conservation of Vernal Pools – Abby Pointer, Michigan Nature Association

Vernal pools are essential to maintaining healthy and resilient forest ecosystems. They provide vital breeding, feeding, and sheltering habitat to an incredible diversity of species and support biogeochemical and hydrological processes. However, due to their small size, seasonal hydrology, and variable characteristics, they are difficult to define, map, and conserve across a regional scale. Current vernal pool conservation efforts are highly inconsistent across the range, leaving many vernal pools vulnerable to destruction and degradation.

Beginning in 2024, collaborators across the Midwest and Northeast were awarded a grant from NASA to address these challenges by developing and implementing a framework for identifying, verifying, and monitoring vernal pools across the region. This project involves linking potential vernal pool location data generated by new radar-LiDAR mapping methods with on-the-ground citizen science data to verify and monitor vernal pool status in the field.

Another key outcome of this project is the establishment of a Northeast-Midwest Vernal Pools Collaborative, which currently includes the states of Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, Pennsylvania, New York, Vermont, and Maine.

This presentation will discuss the history of vernal pool conservation in the region, the objectives and methodology of the mapping project, the goals and long-term vision of the NE-MW Vernal Pool Collaborative, and share opportunities for involvement!

Abby works for a statewide land conservancy in Michigan (Michigan Nature Association) as the Associate Director of Partnership & Engagement. Part of her role is coordinating the Michigan Vernal Pools Partnership, a public-private partnership dedicated towards increased conservation and understanding of vernal pools across the state. She has been in this role since 2022, and earned her degree in Fisheries and Wildlife from Michigan State University in 2020.

PRESENTATION & SPEAKER DETAILS

Vernal Poloza 2026

THURSDAY GATHERING ROOM SESSIONS

Session 3b: Muddy Boots: Environmental Education about Wetlands – Dr. Lara Roketenetz, The University of Akron Field Station

The University of Akron Field Station is an award-winning environmental education organization that has had over 25,000 K-12 student interactions over the last decade. We focus on wetland education both in the classroom and on field trips to our field sites, Bath Nature Preserve and Panzner Wetland Wildlife Reserve. We will discuss some of our successes and challenges in teaching K-12 students about wetlands. We will highlight a wetland delineation game called "Wetland Detectives" that we created to fill a curriculum gap. We will also discuss opportunities for students at the college-level both in terms of relevant classes, community engaged courses, and available research opportunities.

Dr. Lara Roketenetz is the Director of the University of Akron Field Station (UAFS). She is responsible for the K-12 outreach program that has blossomed over the last ten years. She also co-teaches undergraduate biology classes through the EXL Center for Community Engaged Learning (i.e., UnClasses), as well as field courses in marine ecology in Virginia, Maine, and Alaska. She loves exploring Ohio's amazing natural resources.

Session 4b: FrogWatch USA: Listening to the Songs of Nature – Carrie Bassett, Akron Zoo

Vernal pools are one of the first places where we can hear spring come alive. The loudest of the chorus being our singing amphibian friends, frogs and toads. Learn about the community science project that focuses on listening to frogs and toads to evaluate wetland health: FrogWatch USA. We will discuss FrogWatch USA and listen to some of the beautiful calls of the vernal pools and other wetlands all while learning about our local anuran populations. Who will you recognize?

Carrie Bassett is the Education Mission Manager and FrogWatch USA National Coordinator at the Akron Zoo. She has worked at the Akron Zoo since 2005. She has a BA in Biology with an emphasis in Secondary Education. Growing up in NW Ohio, she had an early fondness for finding American toads in her yard, along with a love for all animals.

PRESENTATION & SPEAKER DETAILS

Vernal Polo Poloza 2026

THURSDAY FOUNDER'S HALL SPECIAL SESSIONS

Thursday After Lunch Program: Animal Ambassadors- Saul Bauer, All Pets Training & Consulting

Drawing on professional experience in animal care, training, and public education, this presentation emphasizes safe, ethical, and well-managed animal handling in a conference setting. Attendees will have the opportunity to observe and learn about a variety of species while enjoying a relaxed, entertaining environment that complements the conference's scientific and conservation-focused content.

Saul Bauer is a professional animal trainer, educator, and zookeeper with extensive experience working with a wide range of species. He has spent years designing and delivering live animal programs for public events, educational settings, and community outreach, with a focus on safe handling, animal welfare, and audience engagement. Through his work with All Pets Training & Consulting, Saul brings live educational animals to events to create memorable, interactive experiences that encourage curiosity and conversation. His background in animal husbandry and behavioral training allows him to present animals in a way that is both entertaining and responsible, while ensuring the highest standards of care.

Thursday Keynote: H2Ohio Funding and Project Overview with Black Swamp Conservancy – Rachel DeNoewer, ODNR, and Melanie Coulter, Black Swamp Conservancy

The H2Ohio program is Ohio's statewide water quality initiative designed to address complex issues impacting Ohio's waters. The Western Lake Erie Basin has a large agricultural drainage area and regularly experiences harmful algal blooms caused by excess nutrient runoff. In 2014, the City of Toledo issued a 'Do not Drink' order for several days after an algal bloom contaminated the city's water supply. Launched in 2019 to improve Ohio's drinking water, H2Ohio uses a comprehensive approach guided by science and data to reduce algal blooms, stop pollution, and improve access to clean drinking water. These goals are addressed through a collaboration between the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, Ohio Department of Agriculture, and Ohio Lake Erie Commission.

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources facilitates the H2Ohio Wetland Grant Program, a strategy to reduce harmful algal blooms by creating and restoring wetlands that store excess nutrient runoff. By restoring natural infrastructure like wetlands to the landscape, the H2Ohio program takes a cost effective and long-term solution to harmful algal blooms while creating additional benefits to wildlife and society.

The H2Ohio Wetlands Administrative team will provide an overview of H2Ohio funding and project selection. Black Swamp Conservancy has been awarded H2Ohio funding to complete several water quality projects. Black Swamp Conservancy will provide an overview of H2Ohio projects and discuss the habitats that has been created for wildlife. This presentation will be useful for organizations looking to gain insight into grant management and natural infrastructure restoration projects that improve water quality.

Melanie Coulter is the Conservation Manager at Black Swamp Conservancy and lives in Toledo, Ohio. Melanie earned a Masters in Biology at Bowling Green State University and a BS in Fisheries & Wildlife at Utah State University. Melanie started working in natural resources in high school in the mountains of New Mexico. She has 30 years of experience in wildlife conservation and habitat restoration and has held leadership roles in several conservation organizations: supervising field crews, managing preserves, monitoring birds and other wildlife, securing grant funds, and running many grant-funded restoration projects.

Rachel DeNoewer is an Assistant Program Manager for the H2Ohio program at the Ohio Department of Natural Resources. ODNR's H2Ohio program focuses on the restoration of wetland ecosystems for the purpose of improving water quality. Rachel has been working for ODNR since April of 2021 and previously worked for several different non-profit organizations in central Ohio. Rachel is an alum of The Ohio State University graduating with a degree in Natural Resource Management.

EVENING EXPLORATION

Vernal Polo Poloza 2026

THURSDAY

The Black Light Swamp: Discovering Hidden Wildlife in the Dark at Goll Woods
7:30-9:00pm
Maureen Bogdanski, Rowan Coburn-Griffis and Becky Donaldson (Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Natural Areas & Preserves)

Goll Woods State Nature Preserve is the least disturbed woodland known to remain in extreme northwestern Ohio. This preserve features some of the largest trees remaining in the state. Goll Woods exemplifies the Black Swamp forest which once covered a vast area of the flat post-glacial lake plains southwest of Lake Erie. An outstanding feature of these woods is the abundance of giant bur oaks and exceptionally large white oaks, chinquapin oaks, and cottonwoods. Many of these magnificent trees are 200–400 years old and measure 4 feet in diameter. A rich variety of native shrubs and wildflowers occur in the woods and along the Tiffin River.

Join the Division of Natural Areas & Preserves staff at the main parking lot. Discover nocturnal critters attracted to ultraviolet wavelengths! White sheets and UV lights will be stationed along the Bur Oak trail for lightsheeting (also known as mothing). Observe moths and other insects drawn to the black light glow of the white sheets. Some possible encounters could include various vernal pool insects such as fishflies, mayflies, or diving beetles. This unique program offers a rare opportunity for the public to experience the preserve after sunset and witness the forest's hidden nocturnal life. Bring a flashlight for navigation between sheets along the designated gravel trails and a blacklight to search for critters on nearby plants.

Observe Tiffin River macroinvertebrates, which thrive in the diverse aquatic habitat created by the river's connection to the preserve's rich, old-growth ecosystem. All fascinating aquatic specimens will be safely contained in display tanks near the parking lot at the trailhead kiosk. Please remember to stay on designated trails at all times to protect the fragile ecosystem and unique habitat of this rare old-growth forest.

Location: Goll Woods Parking, Archbold, OH 43502
GPS Coordinates: 41.554594, -84.361490
Estimated Drive Time from Sauder Village: 6 minutes west
Note: No off trail hiking; designated gravel trail is easily accessible from the main parking lot.

Biography: Maureen Bogdanski is the Northwest Region Preserve Manager for the Division of Natural Areas & Preserves, a role she assumed in 2020. She manages critical conservation efforts across the region, focusing on preserving biodiversity through strategic invasive species control and essential preserve maintenance. Maureen expertly balances ecological management with public engagement, utilizing interpretive programming to connect visitors with nature. A testament to her innovative approach to environmental education, she launched a popular monthly Moth Night program at Irwin Prairie State Nature Preserve in 2023, inviting the community to explore the hidden wonders of nocturnal wildlife during the warmer part of the year. She deeply values the essential support from dedicated volunteers, whose contributions are vital to the program's success.

FRIDAY

Vernal Poloza 2026

8:00-9:00AM **FOUNDER'S HALL** — Registration / Coffee & Refreshments

8:45-9:30AM **FOUNDER'S HALL** — **Wetlands & Wellness:** Gentle Yoga Stretch with Bodhi Nithyananda

9:30-9:50AM **FOUNDER'S HALL** — **Welcome**-OWA Board Presentation

	HOMESTEAD ROOM	GATHERING ROOM
10:00-11:00AM	**5a: Wetland Restoration & Water Quality Benefits in Grand Lake St. Marys Watershed** Dr. Stephen Jacquemin, Wright State University, Lake Campus	**5b: The Story of Chomper McLogs: an Eco Architect** Tammy O'Neil, Lake Metroparks
11:05-12:05PM	**6a: Post-Construction Stewardship: Ensuring Long-Term Landscape Success** Andrew MacKenzie & Seth Yoho, Williams Forestry & Associates	**6b: Scent Detection Dogs: Nature's Best Friends** Doug Wynn, The Ohio State University

12:15-1:15PM — LUNCH — **FOUNDER'S HALL**

1:15-2:00PM — **Round Table Discussions**/ Networking & Exhibitor Tables Open — **FOUNDER'S HALL**

	HOMESTEAD ROOM	GATHERING ROOM
2:00-3:00PM	**7a: Peepers aren't just for the Privileged** Beck Swab, Root & Spiral	**7b: Between Water & Wing: Conserving Great Lakes Wetlands for Birds** Nenita Lapitan, Nat. Audubon Society Ohio Centers
3:05-4:05PM	**8a: How I get the Shot – Vernal Poolooza Version** Jim Lane, Ohio Biological Survey	**8b: Citizen Qualitative Habitat Evaluation Index (cQHEI) Training** Jenna Roller-Knapp, MAD Scientist Associates

4:15-5:00PM — Exhibitor Tables Open Networking — **FOUNDER'S HALL**

5:00-6:30PM — DINNER — **FOUNDER'S HALL**

Keynote: Temporary Ponds, Eternal Fascination: The Magic of Vernal Pools
Mark Dilley, MAD Scientist Associates

6:30-7:30PM — "HOPPY" HOUR — **FOUNDER'S HALL**
Raffle Closing, Networking & Socializing

7:30-9:00PM	SAUDER VILLAGE WETLANDS EVENING EXPLORATION Linda Lauber & John Poulson, Sauder Village	WILD AT HEART SHOWING Ohio Department of Natural Resources **FOUNDER'S HALL**

OHIO WETLANDS ASSOCIATION

PRESENTATION & SPEAKER DETAILS

Vernal Polooza 2026

FRIDAY HOMESTEAD ROOM SESSIONS

Session 5a: Post-Construction Stewardship: Ensuring Long-Term Landscape Success – Andrew MacKenzie & Seth Yoho (Williams Forestry & Associates)

Post-construction stewardship is often overlooked in stream and wetland restoration; success is assumed once planting and construction end. In reality, long-term performance depends on informed management after installation. This presentation examines post-construction tree performance, highlighting how species selection, hydrology, soils, and environmental stressors such as drought, disease, and herbivory affect survival. It emphasizes tree protection, invasive species management, and ongoing maintenance as essential to preventing mortality, controlling invasives, and protecting project investments. Ultimately, long-term stewardship ensures resilient, functional, and successful restoration.

Andrew is a master's graduate from West Virginia University. Andrew researched the ecological impacts before, during, and after a wetland restoration, led woody vegetation installation efforts and maintenance at multiple sites, and published guidelines for streamline mitigation restoration efforts. Currently, Andrew is an environmental specialist at WFA. Andrew is involved in overseeing projects from initial planning, implementation, maintenance, and research efforts.

Session 6a: Wetland Restoration and Water Quality Benefits in Grand Lake St. Marys Watershed – Dr. Stephen Jacquemin, Wright State University, Lake Campus

Wetlands are becoming an increasingly important part of surface water quality improvement initiatives around the Midwest. This presentation summarizes a decade of long-term monitoring from restored wetlands in the Grand Lake St Marys (Ohio) Watershed. As part of this initiative, weekly samples have been collected year-round from streams (wetland inflows) as well as wetlands (wetland outflow) from Coldwater Creek, Prairie Creek, Beaver Creek, and Big Chickasaw Creek Wetlands. Most recently, a total of over 700 million gallons of water were treated by these systems in 2025, representing up to 20% of the annual stream flows. Nutrient reductions saw phosphorus, nitrogen, and sediment concentration reductions of up to 90%. These data provide encouraging information to help inform wetland restoration efforts and demonstrate their importance as a valuable natural resource.

Dr. Stephen Jacquemin has held a lifelong interest in nature and environmental conservation. He is particularly passionate about improving our understanding of freshwater ecosystems to foster their preservation. He holds a BS in Biology from Ohio Northern University as well as a MS and PhD in Biology and Environmental Science from Ball State University. He is currently a Professor of Biology at Wright State University Lake Campus.

PRESENTATION & SPEAKER DETAILS

Vernal Poolooza 2026

FRIDAY HOMESTEAD ROOM SESSIONS

Session 7a: Peepers aren't just for the Privileged- Beck Swab, Root & Spiral

While progress has been made in integrating environmental justice into wetland conservation work, improvements can still be made. To better address the needs of underserved and vulnerable populations when making decisions around wetland creation and restoration, we can integrate the sociological concept of the human's hierarchy of needs and the First Nations concept of cultural perpetuity into goals and decision making. Utilizing this framework will help wetland scientists simultaneously accomplish successful and enduring wetland conservation, achieve environmental justice goals, and further sustainable society.

Biography: Beck (they/them) is the founder of Root & Spiral, which offers workshops, consulting, and technical writing support to mission oriented organizations who want the future to feel different. As a non-binary neurodivergent queer who spent over a decade doing conservation work for non-profits of various sizes, Beck understands how unique perspectives are often drowned out within standard organizational cultures. Changing these perspectives is hard and requires curiosity and a commitment to change- but Beck envisions pathways to help organizations- and individuals- intertwine advancing their missions with creating a conscious culture of listening and inclusivity. To help organizations grow, Beck offers workshops, intensive sessions, and grant writing assistance, all of which support integrating inclusivity, environmental justice, and climate change planning into everyday goals to create lasting change. Beck is also co-founder of Plant Partners, a cooperatively owned Cleveland-area business which creates and maintains natural gardens promoting beauty and wildlife while supporting human needs by providing food and decorative products, adding to the circular local economy.

Session 8a: How I get the shot – Vernal Poolooza Version – Jim Lane, Ohio Biological Survey
Note: Participants planning to attend The Vernal Pool Specimen Photography Workshop on Saturday are encouraged, but not required, to attend this session.

Jim Lane will be talking about how he is making 500 photographs of 100 species for his upcoming Our Ohio Wildlife, Vernal Poolooza edition. His discussion will center on vernal pool species and the special challenges photographing them presents. Jim considers himself an "all taxa" wildlife photographer. He makes a point of getting the entire life cycle of species we know well, but often only see in one setting, one phase of life or one spot.

Jim Lane is an award-winning American wildlife photographer, published author and naturalist who has contributed to an appreciation of wildlife and the natural world immediately around us. The son of an amateur nature photographer Lane continues and deepens that tradition. His view of the world zooms out to sweeping natural sunrises and zooms in to reveal the detail on a bird's plumage or scales on a butterfly's wing. While he has been to remote islands in the Galapagos and Caribbean, he is also known for hundreds of photographic articles on wildlife you don't have to travel to appreciate. He offers an in-depth, detailed look at what is often right in front of us and overlooked. His art graces vacation destinations across the country and you can find it @jblane001 on Instagram.

PRESENTATION & SPEAKER DETAILS

Vernal Poloza 2026

FRIDAY GATHERING ROOM SESSIONS

Session 5b: The Story of Chomper McLogs: an Eco Architect – Tammy O'Neil, Lake Metroparks

Beavers as our “eco-architects” because of their remarkable ability to physically reshape landscapes in ways that benefit a wide range of species, including humans. Through the construction of dams, lodges, and canals, beavers dramatically alter water flow, vegetation patterns, soil conditions, and habitat availability. These changes are not random; they create complex, self-sustaining ecosystems that enhance biodiversity, improve water quality, and increase resilience to environmental stressors such as floods, droughts, and climate change. As environmental challenges intensify, beavers offer a compelling example of how working with natural processes-rather than against them-can lead to sustainable solutions for both nature and people.

Tammy has a bachelors degree in zoology, masters degree in environmental management. She has worked at Lake Metroparks Wildlife Center for 31 years as the Wildlife Care Manager. Raising beaver kits to rehabilitate adult beavers, she has gained quite a fondness for these fascinating creatures. Whether taking care of them or watching them in the wild, they are always teaching her something new. Helping animals is her life passion, whether at work or home. In her “spare” time, she also fosters dogs, volunteers with Ohio Bat Working Group, and creates native gardens for wildlife. Tammy loves kayaking, traveling, wildlife photography and spending time with her husband John, and their four fur babies Bob, Moxie, Pancho and Peppa.

Session 6b: Scent Detection Dogs: Nature’s Best Friends – Doug Wynn, The Ohio State University

Locating cryptic species can create a challenge for researchers. Some species of animals are especially difficult to locate and study due to their protective colorations. Some species of plants may be difficult to find due to their size. Others may be difficult to work with due to extreme or inaccessible habitats. To address these issues, biologists have been using dogs for decades to assist in locating target species. These workers most often use the dog’s scenting abilities. These projects include a myriad of species of both plants and animals and additional applications are occurring every year. In addition to dogs being used to locate target species, some have shown they are able to detect diseases such as lung, breast, and skin cancers. It has been estimated that dog’s sense of smell is 10,00 to 100,000 times more sensitive than that of humans due to having an estimated 300 million olfactory receptors compared to 5-6 million in humans. In 2006 inquiries were made with a number of professional dog trainers to determine whether dogs could be used in Timber Rattlesnake research. Plans were shelved until September 2023 when Ohio Division of Wildlife Officer Chris Gilkey, a dog trainer for the Division, was contacted. It was not known if a three-year-old Labrador retriever, who was trained as a hunting dog, would be a suitable “scent detection” dog. An “audition” was scheduled for River and several criteria were evaluated which included his toy drive, focus, desire to search, ability to work with a handler, ability to work in a variety of habitats, energy level, stamina, and ability to follow basic commands. River’s training began immediately and occurred about every other week. Formal training ended in April 2024 however weekly maintenance training has continued. The objective of this presentation is to briefly describe the methods that were used to train River and how he is used when working with Timber Rattlesnakes. Researchers who work with cryptic species are encouraged to consider these methods.

Doug Wynn is a retired high school ecology teacher. As a result of his fourth grade teacher, he has a special interest in snakes and has been studying them since his undergraduate years. Doug is especially interested in Ohio’s endangered snakes and has received over 250 grants and contracts. The Ohio Division of Parks presented Doug with their Naturalist Award in 1994. The same year he and fellow teachers developed a research class that focused on implementing species survival plans for endangered Ohio snakes. The students in that program worked with many of Doug’s projects and made significant contributions to our knowledge of Ohio reptiles. The Ohio Division of Wildlife presented them with a special award in 2000. In 2006, Doug and Scott Moody authored an “Ohio Turtle, Lizard, and Snake Atlas.” In 2008, he received a Visiting Scholar appointment from The Ohio State University. He also received the Ohio Biological Survey’s 2010 Naturalist Award, the Ohio Division of Wildlife’s 2011 Conservationist Award and a Division of Wildlife Cardinal award in 2020. Doug co-authored and co-edited the Reptiles of Ohio and Amphibians of Ohio books funded by the Ohio Division of Wildlife and published by the Ohio Biological Survey, Inc. It resulted in his receiving the Ohio Biological Survey’s 2022 Osborn Award. Doug’s work continues to focus on Timber Rattlesnakes, Plains Gartersnakes, and Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnakes.

PRESENTATION & SPEAKER DETAILS

Vernal Polo Poloza 2026

FRIDAY GATHERING ROOM SESSIONS

Session 7b: Between Water and Wing: Conserving Great Lakes Wetlands for Birds – Nenita Lapitan, National Audubon Society Ohio Centers

Explore the hidden world of secretive marshbirds—species whose quiet presence signals the health of our wetlands Concern for secretive marshbirds has increased across the Great Lakes region over the past decades. These cryptic species have declined largely due to the significant loss of wetland habitat once widespread across the region. This presentation highlights how Audubon Great Lakes and the Great Lakes Joint Venture are restoring and managing wetlands across the region, using science-driven monitoring to understand how marshbirds respond to conservation actions—and what their recovery can tell us about resilient wetlands for wildlife and people.

Nenita Lapitan is the Senior Conservation Manager for the Ohio Centers, which include Aullwood Audubon in Dayton, Ohio, and the Grange Insurance Audubon Center in Columbus, Ohio. She oversees conservation strategy and implementation across the Ohio Centers, including land management, farm operations, and community science, and works closely with Audubon Great Lakes staff and conservation action centers throughout the Audubon Network.

Nenita collaborates with the Ohio Centers Community Building team to implement programs and projects that connect people to stewardship, deepen understanding of local, regional, and hemispheric conservation issues, and inspire meaningful action.

During her 23 years with Audubon, Nenita has worn many hats—from birthing goats and lambs to baling hay and from executing special events and fundraisers to leading volunteer efforts that installed more than 10,000 native plants in just four hours. An avid gardener and birder, Nenita enjoys camping, reading, cooking, and spending cherished time with her four grandchildren.

Session 8b: Citizen Qualitative Habitat Evaluation Index (cQHEI) Training – Jenna Roller-Knapp, MAD Scientist Associates
Note: To be eligible for Level 1 Qualified Data Collector (QDC) certification through Ohio EPA, participants need to attend cQHEI Workshop on Saturday as well.

The citizen Qualitative Habitat Evaluation Index (cQHEI) is an Ohio EPA method to evaluate stream habitat, which is vital for the preservation of water quality. The cQHEI is useful for individuals from diverse environmental and conservation groups and organizations and/or entities focused on education and outreach to become trained, active citizens assessing streams in Ohio. This in-classroom presentation will cover background and methods of the cQHEI protocol, while a Saturday field trip to two streams near Sauder Village will provide hands-on experience with the cQHEI assessment form to aid in scoring streams in a consistent manner. The classroom presentation and Saturday field trip can be attended independently but are recommended to be paired together to gain certification as Ohio EPA Level 1 certified data collectors (QDC). This allows participants to be able to submit stream quality data to the Credible Data Program to be used for habitat protection efforts and habitat restoration opportunities.

PRESENTATION & SPEAKER DETAILS

Vernal Poloza 2026

FRIDAY FOUNDER'S HALL SPECIAL SESSIONS

Friday Keynote: Temporary Ponds, Eternal Fascination: The Magic of Vernal Pools – Mark Dilley, MAD Scientist Associates

Winter in Ohio is both a blessing and a curse. It's an exciting thing when we have a white Christmas: the stark, still softness of a fresh blanket of snow adds a unique quality to our landscape and helps one appreciate the beauty of the season. However, as winter drags along into February, continued cold temperatures and increasingly dirty snow and ice can make our shortest month of the year feel like the longest! Evapotranspiration is naturally suppressed during these cold, dark days of winter, and through snowmelt and drenching rain, our groundwater reserves begin to be replenished, causing vernal pools to reach their seasonal high stage in March and April. For our team of biologists and restoration ecologists at MAD Scientist Associates (and many other vernal pool enthusiasts), late winter is filled with the anticipation of the hopeful and mysterious transformation that occurs in vernal pools each year as winter releases its icy grip. When the temperatures climb (ever so slightly!) and we get a good rain shower, our native amphibians, especially the salamanders, begin to stir and make their seasonal migration to their breeding pools. Well before the first spring wildflowers appear, our vernal pools "come alive" and, for the keen observer, this is the first ecological sign that spring is near! This talk will be loaded with scientific details and examples of why vernal pools are such 'magical' habitats.

Mark Dilley earned a B.S. in Natural Resources (Fisheries Management) in 1991 and a M.S. in Environmental Science (specializing in wetlands) in 2003, both from The Ohio State University School of Environment and Natural Resources. He and his wife Christine are co-owners of a WBE, WOSB, and EDGE-certified environmental consulting firm, MAD Scientist Associates, specializing in ecological and wetland consulting. Their company mission is Making A Difference – through Science, Service and Education. Mark has over 30 years of experience as a field biologist, ecologist, and wetland scientist. He is a Certified Senior Ecologist, Certified Ecological Restoration Professional (CERP), and Senior Professional Wetland Scientist (PWS). Mark was also a lecturer at The Ohio State University, where he taught Wetland Ecology & Restoration for 13 years. He is the Past President of the Ohio Wetlands Association and currently serves as a Member-at-Large for the Ohio Ecological Restoration Association.

EVENING EXPLORATION

Vernal Polo Poloza 2026

FRIDAY

Sauder Village Mitigation Wetlands - Linda Lauber & John Poulson (Sauder Village)
7:30-9:00pm

Sauder Village has two wetlands, a lake, multiple ditches, grass waterways, an oak savannah, walnut grove, native grasses and forbs that have been developed over the years to help successfully mitigate part of the water drainage and flooding issues related to this area on the edge of the Black Swamp. In 2018, thirty acres of the area were developed by Sauder Village into wetland habitat in collaboration with six other entities. Flat Run Creek runs through this watershed and drains very slowly because it has very little fall.

During this session, Linda and John will share a map of the wetlands and discuss various watershed considerations, vernal pool type areas and wetland areas. The area is part of a research project on waterfowl and secretive marsh birds conducted by OSU as a comparison to wetlands built for the H2Ohio Projects. There is great biodiversity found in this thirty-acre site. How Sauder Village uses the area for recreation, education and water management will also be shared. After an introduction, participants will be encouraged to explore the various areas.

Location: East of pond at Sauder Village Campground
GPS coordinates: 41.539275°, -84.294362°
Estimated Drive Time from Sauder Village: 1 minute south
Notes: Sauder Village Lolly Trolley will be available to transport people if desired for the ~0.5 mile distance to the wetlands.

Biography: Linda has a BS in Biology from BGSU and has spent 40 years in the industry working with Campbell Institute for Research and Technology, OSU Extension – Nutrient Management Program, and Sauder Village Grounds Supervisor which includes care of the wetlands on the Village properties. She is also a certified Arborist with the ISA.

John has a BS and MS in Agriculture Education from OSU and has spent 45 years in the industry teaching high school agriculture, working for Farm Bureau and now being in charge of the Sauder Village Agricultural Nature Center. He has taught topics in soils, plants, natural resources and many other science and business subjects.

SATURDAY

FIELD TRIPS

Meet at destination at 9:00am
Wrap-up at 12:00pm unless otherwise noted

01 Wintergarden Nature Preserve: A mosaic of habitats located in what was once the heart of the Great Black Swamp

A diverse mosaic of habitats was once found in the heart of Wood County, where Bowling Green is located. Since the late 1990s, extensive work has transformed Wintergarden Nature Preserve. Its varied soils and hydrology have created a strong foundation for ecological restoration and educational opportunities. The restoration aims to enhance and recreate the region's historic habitats, including the Great Black Swamp, oak woodland, oak savanna, prairie, and vernal wetlands. Thanks to the proactive conservation efforts of Bowling Green residents, the community now enjoys a significant nature preserve that supports recreation, learning, and the celebration of local natural heritage. This tour will run from 9:00am-11:00am.

Led by: Cinda Stutzman, Bowling Green Parks & Recreation

Location: 615 South Wintergarden Road, Bowling Green, Ohio 43402
GPS Point: 41.365359°, -83.670486°
Estimated Drive Time from Sauder Village: 55 minutes, southeast
Notes: Trails are well groomed and restrooms are on site

02 H2Ohio Project Tour: Goll Woods Wetland Extension

Please join us for a field trip to the H2Ohio Goll Woods Extension project. DNR staff will describe the H2Ohio project funding, design, and construction and give a short tour on one of the trails after. This field trip will run 9-10:30am. The trails are open to the public so attendees are free to walk the trail at their own leisure after.

Led by: Ryan Schroeder, Ohio DNR

Location: Meet at 5800 County Road 26, Archbold parking lot. Carpool to site from there.
GPS Point: 41.554594, -84.361490
Estimated Drive Time from Sauder Village: 5 minutes, west
Note: Maximum of 20 people

OHIO WETLANDS ASSOCIATION

SATURDAY

FIELD TRIPS

03 Bell Woods Guided Tour

Spring is peak season in Bell Woods! Join Black Swamp Conservancy for a guided hike through this 80-acre remnant Great Black Swamp woods. Explore the vernal pools that cover almost the entire forest floor and can be over a meter deep in places. Salamanders migrate through the flooded edge habitat between Bell Woods and adjacent Pat & Clint's Prairie. We will have a few live traps set in the edge wetlands and in pools deeper in the woods, with the hopes of finding salamanders and other critters. We will also see the many spring ephemerals which blanket the forest floor, as well as the active heron rookery. With this variety of flora and fauna, participants can practice the iNaturalist skills learned at the iNaturalist talk if desired. We'll display the results of our iNaturalist records at the end of the tour.

The hike will take place through swampy terrain on rustic, unimproved paths. Knee-high waterproof boots are recommended. You *will* be walking through standing water and ankle deep (or deeper) mud. If needed, Black Swamp Conservancy has boots and binoculars to loan from our Learning Landscape outdoor equipment library.

Led by: Melanie Coulter, Black Swamp Conservancy & Aaron Laver, GEOACE

Location: 4825 Sugar Ridge Rd, Pemberville, OH 43450
GPS Point: 41.427195, -83.489071
Estimated Drive Time from Sauder Village: 1 hour, east
Notes: Rough terrain

04 Field Trip to the ODOT HAN/WAY - US 30 - Wetland Mitigation Area

The wetlands were constructed in 2006 to establish mitigation of the adjacent US 30 roadway project. The mitigation project constructed a total of 18.2 acres of wetland creation. This included 14.7 acres of emergent wetlands, 3.0 acres of forested wetlands, and 0.5 acre of woodland depressions/vernal pools. The site also preserves approximately 4.0 acres of wetlands and 25.0 acres of forested upland buffer. The field trip will tour the wetlands and sample some of the constructed woodland depressions for amphibians. The site supports both small-mouth salamanders and unisexual Ambystoma hybrid salamanders, as well as seven species of frogs/toads.

Led by: Matt Raymond, Ohio DOT

Location: Located on the south side of the eastbound lanes of US 30 in Hancock County, Ohio, between US 68 and SR 37.
GPS Point: 40.828494°, -83.593201°
Estimated Drive Time from Sauder Village: 1.5 hours, southeast
Note: Must be able to hike into areas of shallow inundation in emergent and forested wetlands. Appropriate footwear (such as knee boots or hip waders) and weather appropriate clothing will be needed. Liability waiver forms will be provided at the start of the field trip and will need to be completed by attendees to access the site.

OHIO WETLANDS ASSOCIATION

SATURDAY

FIELD TRIPS

05 Oak Openings Savanna and Vernal Pool Exploration

Come explore Oak Openings habitats including sand barrens, savanna, oak woodlands, and flatwoods, learning about the unique ecological aspects of this region of Northwest Ohio. This will be a 2km loop hike, with time for exploring a vernal pool complex halfway through the walk to search for amphibians, macroinvertebrates, and other creatures of the preserve. Walking conditions will be easy but possibly mucky in spots from horse usage. We will meet at the Oak Openings Lodge parking lot at 9am, and carpool to the trailhead.

Led by: Jay Wright, Metroparks Toledo

Location: 5230 Wilkins Road, Whitehouse, OH 43571
GPS Point: 41.544049, -83.839645
Estimated Drive Time from Sauder Village: 35 minutes, east

06 Citizen Qualitative Habitat Evaluation Index (cQHEI) Field Training

The citizen Qualitative Habitat Evaluation Index (cQHEI) is an Ohio EPA method to evaluate stream habitat, which is vital for the preservation of water quality. The cQHEI is useful for individuals from diverse environmental and conservation groups and organizations and/or entities focused on education and outreach to become trained, active citizens assessing streams in Ohio.

This Saturday field trip to two streams near Sauder Village will provide hands-on experience with the cQHEI assessment form to aid in scoring streams in a consistent manner. It is recommended to attend the Friday classroom cQHEI session which covers methods and protocol. Attending both of these sessions equips participants to become EPA Level 1 Qualified Data Collector (QDC) certified and allows participants to be able to submit stream quality data to the Credible Data Program to be used for habitat protection efforts and habitat restoration opportunities.

Note: To be eligible for Level 1 Qualified Data Collector (QDC) certification through Ohio EPA, participants must attend the cQHEI Friday classroom presentation and Saturday Workshop. For attendees not pursuing certification, the cQHEI presentation and workshop may be attended independently.

Led by: Dusty Kopp, Rural Action & Jenna Roller-Knapp, MAD Scientist Associates

Location: Flat Run 4 miles NW of Sauder Village at 26893 County Rd. E, Archbold, OH 43502 and unnamed stream south of Sauder Village
GPS Point: 41.542767°, -84.378743°; Unnamed tributary: 41.541336°, -84.301413°
Estimated Drive Time from Sauder Village: 5 minutes
Note: Wear waders if you have them otherwise boots at a minimum. The field component must be paired with the classroom portion for EPA L1 cQHEI certification.

OHIO WETLANDS ASSOCIATION

SATURDAY

FIELD TRIPS

07 Turtle Conservation in Northwest Ohio

Field visit to a long-term turtle research site in the Oak Openings Region.

The Toledo Zoo and Aquarium has been conducting long-term surveys for rare turtle species in northwest Ohio since 2005. Our continued monitoring provides the state with valuable information regarding population locations, sizes, and trends, habitat use, and conservation actions. This field trip will visit one of our sites to check aquatic turtle traps and collect data on any we catch. This event will involve off-trail hiking: participants are encouraged to wear appropriate field clothing and boots.

Led by: Matt Cross, Toledo Zoo & Aquarium

Location: TBD
GPS Point: TBD
Estimated Drive Time from Sauder Village: 30 minutes

08 Vernal Pool Site Selection & Construction

Join MAD Scientist Associates to learn about the important considerations that go into site selection, design development, and construction to create a vernal pool at Sauder Village! Sauder Village Maintenance will run a Bobcat to loosen the soil and create the roughly-shaped basin. Participants will then take part in finishing the construction of the vernal pool using hand tools and then apply native seed and spread straw in the depression after creation is complete.

Led by: Mark Dilley, MAD Scientist Associates

Location: Pin oak trio near pond at Sauder Village Campground
GPS Point: 41.538560, -84.296191
Estimated Drive Time from Sauder Village: Approximate ¼ mile walk from Heritage Inn at Sauder Village

OHIO WETLANDS ASSOCIATION

SATURDAY

INDOOR SESSIONS

09 The Vernal Pool Specimen Photography

We will be photographing wildlife in the laboratory. We will work with live specimens from the field and talking about how to “get the shot” while ensuring that, where possible, no specimens are harmed in the making of our images. Topics such as lighting, natural and otherwise, backgrounds and equipment choices will be discussed and explored hands on. Please bring a camera (iPhones are fine, or a camera with interchangeable lenses like a macro lens). Jim will also introduce advanced techniques that he uses in his books like focus stacking etc. You will be making your own images of specimens during the workshop, and you can take the photos home with you.

Led by: Jim Lane, The Ohio Biological Survey
Location: Sauder Village Gathering Room

10 Macroinvertebrate (and Amphibian) Lab

Learn collection and identification techniques of your Vernal Pool Biota. Hopefully, we'll get up-close view of vernal pool amphibians and macroinvertebrates from biotic samples collected during the week of the conference for this lab session. Construct funnel traps for collecting your own macroinvertebrate and amphibian samples! Many wetlands biota are large enough to use hand lenses for identification. Microscopes and identification keys will also be available to participants to examine specimens, gaining the ability to recognize common species and acquiring the skills necessary to independently continue the study of amphibians and macroinvertebrates. Additional information or presentations on wetland macroinvertebrate sensitivities and tolerances will also be available.

Led by: Marty Knapp, Midwest Biodiversity Institute & Kurt Keljo, Retired Franklin Co SWCD

Location: Sauder Village Homestead Room

OHIO WETLANDS ASSOCIATION

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THANK YOU!

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Vernal Poolooza 2026

Please complete this survey to let us know what went right and how we can improve things for future conferences.

Use your phone's camera to scan QR code for survey

OHIO WETLANDS ASSOCIATION

See you next time at Vernal Poolooza 2028!