Small but essential
Like the veins in your body, wetlands and streams are small players that do important work. Use this guide to explore Wolf Run and three distinct wetlands on BFEC trails. Visitors in May will also find spring wildflowers like may apple (left) and wild blue phlox (right), pictured below.

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The Brown Family Environmental Center is a 480-acre preserve that serves Kenyon College and the surrounding community through conserving natural diversity and engaging people of all ages with nature. Visit our Resource Center (see map) to learn more and find a calendar of public events, or visit us online at …

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Wolf Run Trail Guide

Follow the numbered stops on the next page for a self-guided tour of Wolf Run and three unique wetlands on Brown Family Environmental Center trails.

Welcome to Wolf Run!
Follow the route marked by white dots above to points of interest along Wolf Run and nearby wetlands. Each stop is marked with a numbered, brown post that corresponds to a description in this guide.

Spring is a wonderful time to enjoy this hike, though trails may be wet. Rain boots are recommended for the New Gambier Loop and Corridor Wetland Trails. See a complete BFEC trail map at our Resource Center (9781 Laymon Road) or bfec.kenyon.edu.

1) Wolf Run
Wolf Run is a creek that flows south into the Kokosing River. Just as your body requires a healthy network of veins to function, rivers like the Kokosing need a healthy network of tributary streams like this one to keep them vibrant.

Tributary streams with forested banks will deliver rain to rivers after storms slowly, helping reduce downstream flooding and erosion. Stream-side forests and wetlands also filter pollutants that rain picks up as it runs off of land towards waterways.

Wolf Run is home to fish and bugs that are sensitive to pollution and indicate that the creek is healthy. Look for belted kingfishers (pictured on cover) diving head-first to catch fish, and find salamanders hiding under rocks or logs on the creek’s banks.

Despite these good signs, Wolf Run suffers from bank erosion due in part to past efforts to make the creek’s route straight. Rivers are naturally curvy, and will erode their banks to reestablish their curves, resulting in land loss and harm to wildlife as eroded soil buries the stream bottom (see more on this topic on trail signage).

2) Givens’ Grove & Wet Meadow Wetland
This area was named in honor of Doug Givens, former Director of the Philander Chase Corporation (Kenyon College’s land trust), in 2011. The BFEC has planted 4,000 trees here, including swamp white oak and bald cypress in wet areas near the boardwalk, and sycamore, shagbark hickory and black oak further upslope and along the small creek to the south.

This boardwalk runs through the edge of a wet meadow wetland. Its main source of water is groundwater that emerges at the bottom of the hill to the east, which flows very slowly through the wetland before joining Wolf Run. If you visit in late summer, however, you may see dry ground and ask yourself “where’s the water?” Unlike some types of wetland that hold

Tree roots hold river banks in place and provide hiding places for red-back salamanders.

Freeze for 10 minutes before washing. Do not apply directly to vines, trees, lawns, or other susceptible plants.

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A clue that you are indeed in a wetland is the presence of specialized wetland plants like Frank's Sedge (Carex frankii). Feel this water-loving grass’s stem and you’ll notice its unique triangular shape. In contrast, you’ll also find wetlands grasses here with round stems called rushes (like common rush, Juncus effusus). Remember these plants with the saying “sedges have edges, but rushes are round.”

The boardwalk leads to an 150-year-old white oak tree with stout, low branches that are as wide as the tree is tall. This white oak’s branches.

Standing water—year-around, this one does so for just a part of the year, in late winter through early summer. The soils below may remain saturated for a longer duration. Insects form galls by laying eggs in its leaves or branches. Birds feed these insects to their chicks, hidden in nests deftly camouflaged by lichens plucked from the oak’s branches.

3) Wet Meadow Wetland

The wet meadow wetland described at stop #2 continues here along the Corridor Wetland Trail. This wetland was grazed until the BFEC installed a fence in 2000 to exclude cattle with the help of Kenyon College biologist Sobhna Fennessey. Since then, Fennessey and students have documented a climb in the number of plant species from just 10 to over 50, and have installed wells to study how water and nutrients move through the site.

Wetlands are known as the kidneys of the landscape, with plants and microbes that slowly break down pollutants as water percolates through the soil. In this valley, our wet meadow wetland intercepts rainwater flowing from the grazed hillside to the east, filtering manure before it is able to wreck havoc in the creek. Conservation such “green infrastructure” costs just a fraction of alternatives like building treatment plants and flood walls, plus makes our community a more inviting place to live and visit. Many amphibian species wouldn’t exist without the wetlands they require for breeding. A key feature of this habitat is that it periodically dries out, and therefore lacks fish that would happily eat amphibian eggs and young.

2) Flood Prevention

While wetlands like marshes or swamps hold water throughout the year, the wetlands here typically hold standing water only through mid-summer. Due to the constant saturation, wetlands contain unique soils that generally lack oxygen, plus specialized plants that are adapted to tolerate these difficult conditions. So what’s to love about these wet landforms?

1) Salamanders and Frogs

Many amphibian species wouldn’t exist without the wetlands they require for breeding. A key feature of this habitat is that it periodically dries out, and therefore lacks fish that would happily eat amphibian eggs and young. Bluebirds also require cavities, like hollow trees, for nesting, but competition for these sites soared when house sparrows and starlings were introduced to the U.S. from Europe in the 1800’s.

While "vernal" means "occurring in spring," which is when these wetlands come to life. Many species of amphibians, like the spotted salamander (below), require them for breeding, and will converge here in masse during the first warm nights of spring. After laying eggs they disperse back into the forest, where they live the majority of their reproductive lives tunneling under leaf litter.

In late summer and fall when rain is scarce, these pools may dry up. This puts pressure on the young amphibians to quickly ready for life on land, but also makes wetlands ideal breeding spots because they lack a primary egg predator - fish.

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3) Wetland Plants

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